

Book Reviews

The Bible and The New York Times. Fleming Rutledge. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998. pp. xv + 228. Hard Cover \$20.00

Proclamation of the Good News is the primary task of every Christian, more so of the ordained minister of the Church. In this divine mission all the preachers encounter difficulties of various grades in putting the Word across the congregations, in linking the past (the gospel) with the present (the post modern audience). Fleming Rutledge, a woman priest of the Episcopal Church, in her book, **The Bible and The New York Times**, shows us the way to re-present the past in the preaching apostolate.

Rutledge's **The Bible and The New York Times** is an anthology of sermons preached by her on different occasions in different places. The collection almost completes the cycle of the Church's liturgical calendar covering the important seasons - Advent, Christmas, Lent, Paschal and ordinary times; many ordinary Sundays of the year have found no entry, though.

At the very outset the author affirms that preaching which is the proclamation of the Word of God is entirely different from any other kind of public address in that the former has the character of an event. Every homily is a proof of the dictum that preaching is an event. This speech-event which one could see profusely in the sermons especially in those meant for solemn occasions like Christmas, Resurrection, Pentecost etc. feasts the minds and hearts of the readers. In this respect the book invites every preacher to make an analysis of his/her homily and to find out whether each of his/her homilies is really a proclamation and therefore a speech-event, or a mere instruction or exhortation.

Karl Barth once said that sermons should be preached with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. The book under review exhibits Rutledge's proficiency in weaving the changing events of the daily news (the warp) with the unchanging rhythms of the living Word (the weft) to bring out the beautiful sermons (the texture). She begins with the citation of the events from the newspaper and lets the Word of God confront it and the incidents therein, and finally sees to it that the Bible has the last word in the events.

In her sermons Rutledge does not want just to speak to the world but aims at changing it. The proclamation of the Word of God, the speech-event becomes a transforming event in the lives of the listeners who are burdened with and wrapped in the daily events of joy and pain, hope and despair, exuberant thrills and bitter disappointments of this mortal life.

The ecclesiastical year begins with the first Sunday of Advent which is a preparatory period for the great feast of the Nativity of Christ. But according to the order of the homilies in the book, Rutledge's liturgical calendar begins with the feast of St. Michael and All Angels (Michaelmas) on Sept. 29. The reason advanced by her to justify this rearrangement is not convincing enough to satisfactorily resolve the question of such an important change. The book would be comprehensive, had it comprised the homilies for all the Sundays of the ordinary time of the year. Nevertheless, these minor shortcomings do not minimize the value of the book which lies in the message proclaimed and the manner in which it is proclaimed. **The Bible and The New York Times** is indeed an example for effective biblical preaching.

Dr. T. Victor

God's Final Envoy : Early Christology and Jesus' Own View of His Mission. Marinus de Jonge. Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998. PP.X + 166.\$18.00/£11.99 (pbk).

There is undeniably a resurgence of interest in the study of the historical Jesus. The large number of scholars involved in doing research in this field and the myriad of articles and books on the subject published during the past two decades provide ample evidence to this renewed interest. Analysts have also recognized this and named it as 'the third quest', 'renewed quest' and 'Jesus research'.

This third quest shares many of the features of the earlier two quests. Its conclusions also, not unlike those of the earlier quests, range from the utmost conservative positions to the most outlandish interpretations of the figure of the historical Jesus. At times, some of the earlier proposals are resurrected, couched in more fashionable new terminology and paraded as novel ones.

Despite such common features, the third quest significantly differs from the earlier ones. The most noticeable difference is that its findings are presented and discussed not only in the fora of the learned

but also in those of the mass media. The third quest also differs from the previous ones in its methodology. There is a greater openness to the non-canonical sources, a broader interest in the socio-cultural world of the first century Palestine and the surrounding Mediterranean world and a concern to situate Jesus in contemporary Judaism. Another noticeable feature of the third quest is that the majority and the most daring of the scholars in this field of research are from the U.S.A. The European scholars are not only fewer in number but also more cautious and guarded in their conclusions.

Marinus de Jonge, the author of the book herein reviewed is not only an eminent scholar of the New Testament but also is typical of the European researchers, critical but constructive, cautious but confident, and meticulous but methodic. He is the professor emeritus of the New Testament and early Christian literature at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. The present work is his third book on the subject of the historical Jesus and it carries further the argumentation of the previous ones (*Christology in Context: The Earliest Christian Responses to Jesus* and *Jesus, the Servant-Messiah*) and contains his latest findings on the subject. In fact, this latest book brings together some parts of the previous book and the relevant sections from his more recent articles though suitably modified.

The author acknowledges at the very outset that he does not present "a startling new picture of Jesus" (p. ix). The first chapter deals with the sources and methods. As for the sources his basic conviction is that all we can know about the historical Jesus comes from the first three gospels of the New Testament and he does not attach much historical value, independent of the Synoptics, to the *Gospel of Thomas* to which the scholars of the *Jesus Seminar* accord priority. Even regarding the Synoptic Gospels his claims are modest. It is possible to retrieve from them only "a picture of what was characteristic of Jesus" (p. x) and not his exact words and actions. His method of arriving at this picture of the historical Jesus is also just the reverse of what most other scholars follow. Instead of starting with the earliest stratum of the historical sources and working one's way up to the later traditions M. de Jonge follows a process similar to archeological digging. He starts with the belief of the disciples regarding Jesus after his resurrection and tries to arrive at their belief before the resurrection and thus to Jesus' own belief about himself.

The central thesis of the book is that the disciples of Jesus believed him to be "a prophet, a righteous one, and a martyr who by his death and vindication brought about a definitive change in the

history of the world" (p. 34). Such a conviction existed in their minds, at least in a rudimentary form, already before his death and derives its origin from Jesus' own conviction about himself.

M. de Jonge's arguments are lucid and quite persuasive. He is also quite fair to the N.T. evidence and never falls into the danger of concluding to more than what the textual evidence warrants. Though he is quite careful to denote what is only possible or likely, he does not hesitate to draw definite conclusions. The book is really an example of serene and subtle argumentation and is a challenge to the sceptic as well as those who tend to read their fanciful theories into the meagre biblical evidence.

The book, admirable as it is in its argumentation and rather guarded in its conclusions, leaves quite a few questions unanswered. Can we not retrieve anything of historical value regarding Jesus from the fourth gospel? If Jesus expected his vindication after his death, what kind of vindication was it? If his expectation of the vindication did not include a central role for himself (to which the author hesitates to give a positive answer) how to explain the fact that the disciples started associating his coming with the final realization of the kingdom? Is not de Jonge's Christology, based on as it is on a very few and selected texts from the N.T., too lean to provide us with a sufficiently meaningful picture of the historical Jesus? These are the questions one would expect the author to take it up in his future publications. Despite such questions, the book is a masterly work and is a 'must-be-read' book for any student of Christology.

Dr. D. Alphonse

Divine Revolution: Salvation and Liberation in Catholic Thought. Dean Brackley. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996. pp. xxvi + 197.

One of the challenges of modern theology is the relation between transcendent "salvation" and temporal "liberation". In other words, the relation between salvation and justice continues to remain a fundamental issue in theology. This has been the *quaestio disputata*. In the **Divine Revolution** Dean Brackley makes a very successful attempt to answer this debate: the cry of the poor and the marginalized for justice and the Church's cry of salvation; the salvation the Churches announce and the just community the people long for.

DB opens the book with the exposition of an instructive ambivalence about salvation i.e., the kingdom of God and social

justice, ambivalence which pervades many a magisterial document beginning with *Gaudium et Spes*. From the fundamental historical figures like Augustine, Irenaeus and Thomas Aquinas (Catholics), and Luther and Calvin (Protestants) the author elaborates the general meaning of salvation and its relation with common good.

He then moves to the contemporary Catholic thinking about salvation and society and underlines the historic paradigm shift in Catholic thought. He critically analyses the traditional paradigm of the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, the *aggiornamento* paradigm of the German theologian Karl Rahner and the liberation paradigm of the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez. By closely examining the three paradigms Brackley is inching towards his goal - bridging the chasm between the theological notion of salvation and its realization in the concrete life of the oppressed people. With a geniality of his own he illustrates one paradigm as an improvement and enrichment on the other in the chronological order and at the same time points out the deficiency of each model to give a complete and comprehensive answer to the dispute. It is interesting to note the fact that in the serenity of Brackley's thinking the gap between salvation as a pie in the sky and poverty and oppression in reality is becoming increasingly narrower from Maritain to Gutiérrez.

The manner in which he moulds the concept of salvation into a matter of right social relations - relationship between God and the humans, relationship among the humans and relationship between humans and the concrete situations, nature, environments etc. is remarkable. In this new society of right relations, the human personhood should free itself from dehumanization and blossom to its full. That is salvation which is integral liberation. "Liberation, new persons in new social relations, a new community: This is salvation. In this integral sense, social justice, however "secular" in its tactics and strategy, is the quintessential religious question..." Brackley also strikes a note of caution that "new communities threaten old ones."

Lucidity of expression, cogent argumentation, recourse to the source, the Scripture, for a fresh look at the question of salvation and social justice, focus on the meaning of the "kingdom of God" add to the depth and beauty of the book. This book can be read by all academicians with great benefit. Why not think of an Indian edition of such a valuable book!

Dr. T. Victor