

Book Reviews

Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible. Ed. D.N. Freedman, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000. Pp. xxxiv + 1425 + 16 (colour maps). \$ 45.00.

Although there is no dearth of good Bible dictionaries, both multi-volume and one-volume, Eerdmans has come up with one more, perhaps the most comprehensive and up-to-date one-volume Bible dictionary now available. It contains nearly 5000 alphabetically arranged articles explaining all the books, persons, places and significant terms found in the Bible. It is not merely a revised edition of the already familiar Eerdmans Bible Dictionary (1987), but completely a new reference work edited by none other than D. N. Freedman, editor of the most recent and famous 6 volume Anchor Bible Dictionary (1992), with the assistance of 12 distinguished consulting editors.

About 600 leading Bible scholars have contributed to this volume and hence every page reflects clear, readable presentation of materials without going into too much of technicalities and details, while maintaining serious, latest scholarship and high standard. Especially the articles on the biblical books are quite good and solid, giving the readers lot of background information. For example, the articles on the 'Book of Job' (pp. 716-719) and the 'Song of Solomon' (pp. 1242-1244). Given the space, I did not expect the authors to refer to the Indian parallels: Job and Harischandra; the song of songs and several Indian songs like Gita and Govinda, Radha and Krishna, songs of bridal mysticism/bakthi literature and so on. However I was simply astounded and greatly thrilled to read in 'India' a long paragraph on Akam poetry.

Significant parallels may be seen between the Song of Solomon and the earliest surviving written literature of the Tamils, written in the Carnkam Age, perhaps before the 7th century. Carnkam poetry consists of both Akam, dealing with the interior, and Puram; focusing on the external world. The Akam love poetry involves a landscape, such as forest, mountain, cultivated lands, desert, or seashore; and the gods worshipped there and the fauna and flora. Mostly secular love poems, they exhibit deep insight into the psychology of love... (p. 636).

'Biblical Interpretation' (pp. 641-645) is well written, though one feels that 'contemporary approaches', especially contextual approaches should have been treated more elaborately. B. C. Ollenburger writes:

"African, Asian, and Latina/Latino interpreters have expanded the theoretical and moral-political issues that hermeneutics must engage" (p. 644). More about the 'liberationist approach' and the rich impact it has made on the third world readers of the Bible should have been dealt with. One can sense that by and large the book reflects Western, to be precise North-American, scholarship.

I was more than gratified to find a few new entries like 'Honor, Shame' (pp. 603-604) and 'Anti-Semitism and the New Testament' (pp. 70). I was amused to read short notes on 'Ash Wednesday' (p. 115), 'Maundy Thursday' (p. 874) etc. Apart from the 134 illustrations, the dictionary has also 16 attractive colour maps which will be quite useful to the readers.

Eerdmans deserves our appreciation for providing the Bible readers with a 'rapid-response reference work'.

Dr. J. Susaimanickam

The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices. Ed., Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, Geneva: World Council of Churches & Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. Pp. xiv + 548 (pbk).

The division and disunity in the Church of God founded by Jesus Christ and animated by the Holy Spirit has become a matter of grave concern for all the Christians, irrespective of their denominational affiliations, as it goes against the very nature of the Church as a community of love and fellowship and causes a great scandal to the entire human community. It is deplorable that the Church, the body of Christ, has been torn apart by the doctrinal differences, cultural hegemony, political domination and authoritative behaviour of some ecclesiastical leaders. Today the Christian Churches are called by the Triune God, the foundation of Christian unity, to enter into dialogue with one another with the spirit of openness with the view to foster koinonia among them so that all the Christians, brushing aside the rivalries and disputes of the past centuries, could join hands together in the mission of building up the Kingdom of God in a society replete with discriminative and dehumanising practices. Efforts are being made since the dawn of the 20th century both by the Catholics and Protestants to evolve a common understanding on various disputed issues through ecumenical dialogue and to explore new avenues for constructing mutual trust and collaboration among the various Churches. It is heartening to note that ecumenism has become a vibrant and dynamic movement of the Holy Spirit in which not only some

committed individuals, but also several ecclesiastical organisations are involved with utmost commitment and exuberant enthusiasm. At this juncture, the book *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, makes a singular and significant contribution to the new vision of ecumenism slowly budding forth today by presenting a collection of documents produced by assemblies, conferences and studies of the World Council of Churches and similar bodies.

It is to be noted that this book is primarily designed to provide a resource for those engaged in teaching ecumenism in seminaries and theological institutes and a reference tool for those involved in various forms of ecumenical activity in the Christian communities. It is indeed a mine of valuable resources on ecumenism bringing together in a single volume all the important documents published from the inception of the ecumenical movement to the present day. Needless to say, only those who are conversant with these documents can have a glimpse of the historical journey of the ecumenical movement, emerging theological vision of ecumenism, consensus arrived at on some crucial doctrinal issues, efforts taken for the building up of ecumenical fellowship among the Churches and the steps adopted for the promotion of ecumenical collaboration at the local, regional, national and international levels.

Another noteworthy feature of this book is that it is divided thematically into ten chapters, each one furnished with an introduction principally intended to highlight the important issues and themes treated in the documents selected. The thematic division of the documents with the chronological order would surely render the study of this book easy, systematic and comprehensive. One could notice, at the same time, an overlapping of themes in some chapters. It is to be acknowledged with appreciation that the documents have adequate cross-references and a comprehensive bibliography at the end.

It would be a gross mistake if anyone is under the impression that the ecumenical movement thrives mainly on the international assemblies, consultations and conferences. Even though such meetings are highly important for their valuable contributions, we should not, at the same time, underrate or sideline the regional efforts and endeavours, which have made the ecumenical movement more vibrant and dynamic. Keeping this fact in mind, the authors of this book, in addition to the widely influential texts, have included a section of regional voices drawn from the various corners of the global Church. It would not be an exaggeration, if we call this book a milestone in the history of ecumenism. It is highly recommended as a textbook for the students of

theology and a guidebook for the promoters of ecumenism at various levels.

Dr. S. Devaraj

The Marvel and the Mystery of Pain: A New Interpretation of the Book of Job. K.B. Sitaramayya. Bangalore: MCC Publications, 2001. Pp. xvi + 164. Rs. 150.00.

The long history of interpretation of the Bible shows that different readers in different contexts have read and re-read it in totally different ways, bringing to the biblical text their own pre-text, namely their interests and concerns, presuppositions and perspectives. Such perspectival readings have now more than ever before become commonplace. *The Marvel and the Mystery of Pain* offers one such reading - "another of the infinite possible meanings the text lends itself to" (p.1).

It is not surprising that Mr. K.B. Sitaramayya, professor of English literature, got interested in the book of Job which is widely acclaimed as a classic not only of biblical literature but also of world literature. Having taught the book to postgraduates for several years, he makes a close study of it as a literary critic.

The author's approach is original in so far as he reads and interprets it as a devout Hindu and devotee of Sri Aurobindo. He finds a little thematic similarity between Job and Harischandra whom commentators usually depict as the 'Indian Job' (p.158). However D.C. Scott ("Arjuna and Job as Human Exemplars," *Arasaradi Journal of Theological Reflection*, April-Sept. 1986, pp. 21-25) views Arjuna of the Bhagavad Gita as the character most comparable to the biblical Job. Interestingly Sitaramayya takes up a full-length study of these two heroes. He focuses on the three Gunas (Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas) of Job and how he moves through the Gunas forward and backward and finally transcends them only to have a direct vision of the Lord:

When he weeps and wails, shouts and screams, when he pities himself for his miserable condition, when he happens to prefer death to life at whatever stage in the debate we may say he is steeped in Tamas. When he attacks his friends, argues forcefully or passionately, when he seeks vindication from God he is Rajasic. At any moment he calms down, expresses his faith and trust in God whenever he tries to think and understand he is Sattwic. As has been noted often his shift from one state to another is swift and sudden till the very last. The swift and sudden shift from one state to another helps him unconsciously to

go deeper and move towards the state beyond the Gunas. Also the desire to see God to vindicate himself intensifies into an aspiration for the Darshan of the Lord (p.5).

In the commentary that follows the introduction, the evolution of the character and personality of Job in and through his suffering is beautifully brought out. For the benefit of the common readers the Sanskrit terms are explained in the body of the commentary itself, in addition to a detailed glossary at the end.

Above all, as one who "has 'lived' in close intimacy with Job for two full decades sharing his agony and ecstasy" (p. xiii), Sitaramayya has brought fresh insights. Hence he could convincingly state, "The fact of suffering is purposive and creative and that it has no relation to one's so-called 'sins' is never lost sight of. Suffering itself is seen as Job's reward for his goodness since it leads him to a higher state of consciousness" (p. 13).

What is amazing is the way the author is at home with Hebrew terms and discusses the views of many of the important, modern commentators like D.J.A. Clines and N.C. Habel with whom he has established personal contact!

A welcome addition to Jobian literature, one regrets to find in it a number of typographical errors. As acknowledged by T.N. Swanson in his foreword, this volume will be "a resource not only for students of literature and theological students who are studying Job, but for thoughtful general readers of many faiths who want to ponder the important questions of life", and as such "a substantial contribution to inter-faith dialogue" (p. xii).

Dr. J. Susaimanickam