

Blue

VAIHARAI

(The Dawn)

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Book Review

Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible 104

ed. by James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA) Cambridge (UK) 2003, Hardcover, Pp xx+1629

- *Dr. Raymond Joseph*

Backgrounds of Early Christianity 105

Everett Ferguson, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA)/Cambridge (UK), 2003, Paperback, Pp xxii+648)

- *Dr. Raymond Joseph*

Heart of the World, Centre of the Church 107

David Schindler, William B. Eermans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996, Pp xvii+322

- *Dr. S. Devaraj*



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PRESBYTERATE: SERVICE OR DOMINATION?

Editorial

A phenomenological study of the state of priesthood, without doubt, will reveal that the church leadership, especially the leadership of the ordained ministers, has indeed been transformed into cultic from prophetic. Their ministry is conceived more in terms of being faithful to the demands of sacramental needs of the community than being faithful servants or pastors to the all-round needs of the community. The ordained ministers have become members of a privileged group forming a separate class, a clerical class, with its own way of life (clerical dress and celibate life add respectability to this way of life), way of thinking, way of seeing and perceiving the problems (this has a lot more to do with the long formation modeled on the outmoded monastic model proposed by the council of Trent), and with a well articulated and carefully defined theology to support their distinctive status.

The priestly image of the pre-Vatican times, as we are all well aware of, was predominantly, though not exclusively, cultic. A priest was an undisputed and prestigious religious leader of the community, exclusive provider of the spiritual needs and an indispensable mediator between God and the community. He enjoyed ready respect and obedience from the community. This priestly image has more or less disappeared, though some of the elements of this image still hangs on, with slight or no modification, in the images proposed by the official teachings of the church on priesthood. Priesthood, which was believed to be a well defined and a secure state, is no more so today. The clarity, intelligibility and un-ambiguity regarding the identity, role and nature of priesthood, which were presupposed and taken for granted

in the pre-conciliar times, have been called into question and an erosion of the above-said is being experienced by both the priests as well as the faithful. As a result priesthood itself is facing a crisis. That there is a crisis of priesthood is an undisputed truth. The crisis as such is known and perceived through the symptoms which continuously haunt the ministers.

Dr. Arockiadoss, s. j., is making a systematic, thorough, and detailed diagnosis of the symptoms of the crisis facing priesthood. The influence of the world-wide phenomenon of religionless secularism, on account of which a priest, who played the role of the sole provider of all the needs of the community is being reduced to a simple coordinator of the various competencies and charisms of the members of the community, is treated in the first place. Priest has fallen prey to the radical secularization, as he has unconsciously accepted the secular tendencies of seeking power, money, position, comfort and pleasure, which are in complete contradiction to the gospel values. Varying expectations of the different sections of people have made him a victim of the conflicting, competing and mutually opposing expectations. On account of the intrusion and invasion of casteism into the ministry and life of the priests, the *presbyterium* has become a divided house in danger of self-destruction. Lack of clarity in some of the basic theological elements, i.e., a right and proper understanding of himself, Christ and the church, the concept of "building the church," and of the notion of the common and ministerial priesthood, have added complexity to the phenomenon of the crisis of priesthood.

The crisis facing the priesthood cannot be resolved by some superficial sociological adjustments as by identifying the new and relevant expressions of the essence of the priestly ministry. The search for the essence of the priestly ministry demands a return to the roots or sources, i.e., to the scriptures. And so, the biblical basis of the "presbyteral ministry", to use the preferred term of the Council Fathers, a term which has conveniently been forgotten in the post-conciliar documents as well as in the writings of many of the theologians, is explored into by Dr. Hieronymus H. Cruz. The Old Testament concept of priesthood is analyzed by focusing on the three important periods of Israel's history. That the priestly ministry of the Old Testament period was multifunctional and not exclusively and

completely cultic is well established in the analysis. The analysis of the priestly ministry establishes the fact that the ministry of Jesus was not limited to the religious sphere alone, but it extended to the social, economic and political spheres too. Following the model of Jesus, their master and mentor, the Johannine, Pauline and the early Christian communities were involved not simply in cultic functions but also in other functions. And so one can conclude that their understanding of ministry was inclusive and not merely cultic.

Focusing on the priesthood of Jesus, Dr. Kulandaisamy makes an exegetical study of the letter to the Hebrews to bring out the significant difference between the priesthood of Jesus and that of the Old Testament. The Letter to the Hebrews, the only New Testament book, which attributes the title "priest" to Jesus, makes a Copernican revolution by proclaiming a non clerical lay person Jesus as the high priest and the utterly profane act of the crucifixion as the perfect sacrifice. The analysis brings to light the fact that the Old Testament priestly imagery is attributed to effectively emphasize the mediatory role of Jesus between God and the humans.

The new meaning of the priesthood, which emerges from the New Testament, especially from the ministry and life of Jesus, has not been faithfully lived in the life of the church. The all-inclusive ministry of Jesus, which was faithfully practiced in the early Christian communities, took a wrong direction and evolved more as a cultic and sacramental ministry. This one-sided development, by which the presbyteral ministry became purely a priestly ministry, is critically probed into by Dr. Paul, M. Consequences of this culticization process led to an increasing power consciousness, growing class consciousness and destructive segregation from the faithful.

A rediscovery of the forgotten dimensions of the presbyteral ministry, i.e., the kingly and the prophetic dimensions, is the need of the hour. The growing dehumanizing conditions in Indian society and the challenges posed by the forces that are anti-Kingdom compel us to think of the importance of the prophetic dimension of the presbyteral ministry. Dr. Selvaraj, X. D. probes into the ministry of the prophets of the Old Testament and proves that they were not simply intermediaries between God and human persons; neither were they

simply channels of communication between the human and the divine worlds. They were rather multifaceted persons, committed to the Word of God, to God's claims and promises and to the making of a just and humane society. Their proclamation of the Word of God was related to the actual situation of the people and revealed the historical events in their relation to God's plan. Their prophetic mission did not simply mean the function of proclaiming the Word, or teaching the Word of God. It meant much more than that. It involved the entire person. The whole person stood for God's claims, promises and against any form of evil that did not allow human person to realize the plan of God for him/her.

The central task of the presbyter, without any doubt, is the proclamation of the Word of God. According to the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, a document which contains the basic theological principles, the primary ministry of a presbyter is the proclamation of the Word of God. In LG 28 we read that, "in virtue of the sacrament of orders, after the image of Christ, the supreme and eternal priest, priests are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament." *The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, no. 4 affirms that it is the first task of priests as co-workers of the bishops to preach the Gospel of God to all men. The customary division of the presbyteral ministry into the triple office of Christ, though a useful framework to bring out and to spell out the three vital aspects or dimensions of the presbyteral ministry, needs to be transcended in a deeper unity so as to make it one ministry with many equally important and indispensable dimensions. It is our hope and desire that this issue on the ministry of presbyterate will contribute towards a right, correct and inclusive understanding of the presbyteral ministry.

- Dr. M. Paul