

Book Review

Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible, James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (eds.), Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA)/Cambridge (UK), 2003, Hardcover, Pp xx + 1629

The Eerdmans, known for its publication of the theological encyclopaedia, commentaries and dictionaries in volumes, has produced yet another masterpiece. The 'Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible' edited by James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson cannot be regarded as a mere one volume commentary to the books of the Bible. It is an up-to-date, an exemplary, and a monumental work of its sort. It is to be considered the commentary of neither Jews, Christians, - Catholics or Protestant. It is all-inclusive and is interconfessional as well as ecumenical. It contains commentary not only for the sixty six books of the Hebrew Bible, but also for the seven deuterocanonical books of the Catholic Christians, for the books like, 1-2 Esdras, 3-4 Maccabees, prayer of Manasseh and Psalm 151, which are accepted as canonical by one or other Christian Churches and for 1

Enoch of the Pseudepigrapha. In this way the reader is introduced not only to some of the rich biblical texts, but he also has the chance of having detailed information about the above-mentioned texts. The speciality of the book is the thirteen articles, which give wide-ranging details and information like the context, and archaeological evidences of the various sections of the books of the Bible.

The book stands unique among the other one-volume commentaries in the following ways: 1) it does not give verse-by-verse explanation of the biblical books; 2) the main objective of the book is to focus on the background setting, nature and form, and the central message of each pericope of the books of the Bible; 3) it approaches the biblical books in its literary, historical and theological dimensions; 4) it is an unimaginable resource book for those students who have not studied the biblical languages, since the contributors of both, the articles and the commentaries, use the English transliteration of Greek and Hebrew words in the entire book; 5) the introductory

articles are well supported by numerous bibliographies. In the case of the books of the Bible, the bibliographies are found mostly after the entire commentary of each book and sometimes also between the sections of each book; 6) in the abbreviations' section a list of all the ancient works like, the books of Pseudepigrapha, early Patristic books, the Dead Sea Scrolls and related texts, the Rabbinic works and other ancient writings are enumerated.

All the sixty-seven contributors involved in the work are acknowledged renowned scholars on biblical studies. Even though New Revised Standard Version was chosen as the official English translation of the Bible in

this commentary, the contributors do have a free hand in making their own translation of Greek or Hebrew text whenever it is necessary. Such translation gives richness to the commentary. By mentioning the sources involved in each passage of the book of Genesis the reader is able to identify the different sources responsible for the formation of the first book of the Bible. As per the interpretation of the biblical text, it is concise, stimulating and some times provocative. Above all it is a reader friendly reference book and would surely be a treasure chest of each and every English speaking biblical scholar, theological student and pastor.

Dr. Raymond Joseph.

Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Everett Ferguson, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA)/Cambridge (UK), 2003³, Paperback, Pp xxii + 648

No one will deny the fact that the book, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, written by Everett Ferguson, a distinguished scholar in residence at Abilene Christian University, Abilene, in

Texas, is one of the classics among the books on the background history of the New Testament time. It is a good news to every reader who has interest in the biblical history and the Greco-Roman period that the author revised his book for the second time by adding new materials and information, updated the bibliographies, authenticated with photographing evidences, added fresh discussions concerning the life

situations of the people of Palestine and their neighbours during early Christian era because of the recent availability of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish literatures. The author with his wide spectrum of knowledge and information of the Mediterranean history gives a clear picture of the Greco-Roman-Judaic political, sociological, religious, cultural, and philosophical milieu of the Hellenistic and the early Roman periods.

"The book is intended as a textbook, not as a history of the ancient world nor an interpretive synthesis of culture, philosophy, and religion", points out the author in the preface (p xvi) of the book. In fact the author's approach in arranging the subject matter and themes in this book certainly confirms his above statement. The compartmentalisation of all the three societies (Hellenistic, Roman, Jewish) during the early Christian era in his analysis shows that the author has the students of theology and the biblical history in his mind. His aim is that each student of theology and biblical history gets a periscopic understanding of each culture of the New Testament time in spite of these

cultures being interwoven among themselves in many spheres and in reality these cultures cannot be split as if each one is an independent entity. It shows clearly the mind of the author that the understanding of the background history is essential for any kind of interpretation of the books of the Bible.

The author's importance on the study of Judaism (pp 396 - 573 - almost 198 pages), shows that he is convinced that the backgrounds of the early Christianity cannot be complete without knowing the minute details of Jewish religion. The Hellenistic world of Jesus' time was known for its philosophy than for its politics. In his study on the background history of the Hellenistic world of early Christian era the author also includes the thought world of the Greeks and goes into the details of each philosophical system that determined both the Hellenistic and Jewish cultural thinking of that time. The author uses all through the book plenty of literary support (p 9, p 17, p 170, pp 225-226, p 242 and more), archaeological proofs (pp 503-512, pp 585-592), photographic evidences (ninety five photographs) and hundreds of

biographical resources in support of his arguments. Any scholarly work on New Testament studies cannot sidestep this book of Everett Ferguson. The plain and the comprehensive presentation of

the various themes concerning the environmental setting of the early Christianity in this book will be of great help to every student of New Testament study.

Dr. Raymond Joseph.

Heart of the World, Centre of the Church, David Schindler, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996, Pp xvii +322.

It is a matter of fact that the concept of communion was at the heart of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. Shifting the emphasis from the intuitional, authoritative and juridical character of the Church, it underscored the communitarian dimension of the people of God. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops held in 1985, marking the 20th anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, observed, "the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents." In the ecclesial vision of the Council, communion is the very nature and fundamental character of the Church. The Church is a sacrament of the unity and communion communion of believers with God and among themselves

under the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Communion is basically a participation or sharing in the life of God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit a divine life that is fostered by the Spirit of God. All the members share in "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13:14).

David Schindler, a professor of Fundamental Theology at John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family Life in Washington, candidly demonstrates in his book *Heart of the World, Centre of the Church*, that communion is the basic character of the Church, as envisaged by Vatican II and reiterated by the recent papal documents. He points out that unfortunately communion is often perceived and interpreted as pertaining exclusively to the inner life of the people of God. Arguing forcefully with a number of citations from the Church documents, he establishes that the ecclesiology

of communion, as developed by the Council, indicates "a new sense of the Church's relation to the world, and thereby a new sense of the world itself" (p. 9). Transforming the entire world, which is replete with so many divisions and discriminations, into a community, marked by love and fellowship, justice and equality, fraternity and brotherhood, should be the mission of the Church to be carried out with utmost commitment and full earnestness. According to him, communion experienced and lived by the members of the disciples of Jesus Christ forcefully impels them to establish the same kind of communion and fellowship in the society at large by transforming the deep-rooted unjust and oppressive social structures and making the human living more dignified and honourable.

Drawing inspiration from the clarion call of Pope John Paul II for 'a New Evangelization,' David Schindler contributes to what the Pope himself has strongly reaffirmed as, "the positive value of an authentic theology of integral human liberation" (*Centesimus Annus*, 26). The integral human

liberation is the salvific plan of God for the entire humanity. The author underscores that the creation of a new humanity in collaboration with God is an indispensable task of each Christian who has been called to get himself fully involved in the liberative mission of Jesus Christ by virtue of his baptism. He observes that, "the first question that each Christian needs to ask is rather more concrete and direct: not <will I be successful?> but <to what mission am I called by my baptism?> The question is how I, concretely, day by day, can penetrate with the love of Jesus Christ the social, economic and political and educational institutions with which I am most directly involved. In short, how can I make holiness the *form* of my whole life?" (p 136).

Despite the fact that this book has been written keeping in mind primarily the challenges posed by the western capitalism and civilization, it would undoubtedly be a source of inspiration to every Christian who is determined to carry on the liberative mission of Jesus Christ in the contemporary context. It is an excellent theological study which has to be read and reread by anyone wishing to discover the meaning and relevance of

Christian life today. As it is a mine of thoughtful reflections on the new vision of Church and her mission, it would be a useful

resource to the students of theology and to all those who are actively engaged in the mission of Jesus Christ.

Dr. S. Devaraj

**The list of books received
for Review:**

- 1) *James B. Nickoloff (ed.)*, *Gustavo Gutiérrez-Essential Writings*, Maryknoll, New York, 1996, Pb, viii + 336 pp.
- 2) *Hans Küng*, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, Continuum, New York, 1996, Pb, xxvi + 936 pp., Price \$ 29.95
- 3) *Dale T. Irvin and Akintunde E. Akinade (eds.)*, *The Agitated Mind of God - The Theology of Kosuke Koyama*, Maryknoll, New York, 1996, Hc, xvi + 239 pp.
- 4) *Gregory Baum (ed.)*, *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, Maryknoll, New York London-Ottawa, 1999, Pb, vii + 263 pp.
- 5) *John E. Hare*, *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands, & Human Autonomy*, Eerdmans, Michigan Cambridge, 2001, Hc, x + 122 pp.
- 6) *Dale T. Irvin & Scott W. Sunquist*, *History of the World Christian Movement (vol.1):*

Earliest Christianity to 1453, Maryknoll, New York, 2001, Pb, xvi + 517 pp., Price \$ 30

7) *Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds.)*, *The Strange New Word of the Gospel: Re-Evangelizing in the Postmodern World*, Eerdmans, Michigan / Cambridge, 2002, Pb, viii + 176 pp., Price \$ 23 (£16.99)

8) *Oliver O'Donovan*, *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community*, Eerdmans, Michigan / Cambridge, 2002, Hc, viii + 72 pp., Price \$ 15 (£10.95)

9) *David Bentley Hart*, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, Eerdmans, Michigan / Cambridge, 2003, Hc, xii + 448 pp., Price \$ 55 (£39.99)

Note: We regret to inform you that the reviews of the above listed books are unable to be published in this issue for various reasons. They will surely be available in the coming issues.

Book Review Editor