

Book Review

The Seven Last Words from the Cross, Fleming Rutledge, (Revised Edition), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA/ Cambridge, U.K., 2005, Paperback, Pp x + 81

Good Friday is not only an unique day for Christians all over the globe but also to the whole humanity that believes that the death is not an end in itself, but a pathway to something greater. Fleming Rutledge, this renowned American Pastor, approaches Good Friday in a different way in his book “The Seven Last Words from the Cross”. He introduces seven meditations in this book that are based on the seven words or sayings of Jesus spoken just before his death on the cross. These seven sayings that are recorded here in a chronological manner are all taken from the three gospels (three each from Luke and John and one from Mark).

This book contains not mere religious, devotional and spiritual exhortations on Good Friday but also the explanations based on sound pastoral, biblical and theological background. In the third page of the book we find a word play that explains that Good Friday is a “crucial day”. With this word “crucial” the author is able to bring the connection between the holy cross of Jesus and the uniqueness of Good Friday. The cross of Good Friday according to him points not only to “the suffering of Jesus on the cross” but also it implies the act of Jesus, which became a “decisive turning point for all the ages of the created universe”. The idea he would like to roam home through this reflection is that Good Friday is not a mere day of memorial but a day that moves us to take decisions that should turn the world and the humanity upside down.

He is also able to bring in lot of simple and meaningful anecdotes, sketches, stories and memoirs all through his book and with the help of all these examples he is able to instil in the reader the meaning of suffering, pain and death of Jesus: Mel Gibson’s the Passion of the Christ (pa 4); the homily of the military Chaplin in southern Iraq desert (pp 9-10); travel

in the trains of New York (pp 15-16); the life sketch of Virginia Durr (p 18); the life sketch of an Ukrainian young woman (p 27); the lunches in a Greenwich village (p 28); St. Mathew Passion of J.S. Bach (p 37); the narration of the writer Nicholson Baker about a girl called Nory from Ely, in England (p 38); the wounded Kurdish man in Iraq hospital (p 40); the film Saving Private Ryan (p 63); the confession of the bishop who was a veteran of Vietnam war (p 64); the confession of the corporal from Chicago on Iraq war (p 64).

The way he reasons out the pathetic situation of the sufferings and the crucifixion of Jesus with the help of the Old Testament passages and the arguments of the scholars confirms his in depth and biblical rooted theology: the crucifixion of Jesus between two bandits is well founded by the references from the Old Testament passages (pp 16-17).

Another interesting aspect of the book is the innovative approach of the author to conclude each Reflection on the sayings of Jesus with a fitting hymn (pp 12, 22-23, 34, 47-48, 58, 68-69, 80-81) all taken from the hymnbook "the Episcopal Hymnal 1982". These hymns remain in the book neither as quotations nor as extra fittings but they themselves turn into to be the appropriate commentaries to each saying.

In fine, the book from Fleming Rutledge, which has 81 valuable pages, is one with sound theology, rich spirituality and appropriate biblical references. It is true that this handy book takes us meditatively along the last three-hour painful journey of Jesus in this world. But when you complete these Meditations you not only feel like understanding the entire meaning of the coming of the Messiah into this world, but we are also able to sharpen the purpose and the aim of our future life and mission.

DR. Raymond Joseph I.

Department of Biblical Theology

St. Paul's Seminary

Trichy

Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition, William Loader, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA/ Cambridge, U.K., 2005, Paperback, Pp viii+288.

'Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition' authored by William Loader is a book of high standard for both academics and educated lay people. This is a scholarly work. The author has done enormous exegetical work going to the Greek texts. The sources are abundant. Loader has referred as many books and articles as possible to substantiate the subject matter. He has given a list of books that have been written in recent times on this topic. His previous book was also on sexuality: *The Septuagint, Sexuality and the New Testament: Case Studies on the Impact of the LXX on Philo and the NT*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

The author articulates the purpose of writing this book. Human beings are sexual beings. Exploring and experiencing sexuality have been matters of serious discussion to accentuate the truth and meaning of sexuality. At a particular time of history sexuality was considered to be a taboo and other times it was thought to be meant for reproduction. In the post-modern society human reproduction is detached from human sexuality as the result of biotechnological advancements. Discussions on homosexuality and homosexual behaviours are aplenty. These discussions at times are not at their depth but superficial. Therefore this work is an effort to give a solid basis for sound argument on sexuality by listening to the texts of the Jesus tradition with their own context and terms. It is neither a systematic treatment on the ethics of sexuality nor biology but an effort to explore "the attitude towards sexual behaviour in the Jesus Tradition."

Jesus tradition, the author indicates, is what gospels and pauline letters tell us. Loader chooses a few passages from the four gospels and some important texts from the letters of St. Paul. Both of these are not alluding directly to the subject of sexuality but they are spoken in different contexts as an answer to some of the pastoral issues such as divorce, adultery, and celibacy. Therefore, Loader presents that the Biblical study

on human sexuality and marriage could only be derivative not descriptive or analytical.

Loader after careful selection of the key texts from the four Gospels and letters of St. Paul concerning sexuality and marriage, makes a thorough exegetical study to present various themes interrelated with sexuality and marriage. Each chapter of his book contains a study on the text and context through which Loader delivers the message to the readers.

There are three chapters in this book with a general conclusion. One of the most influential texts on the topic of marriage and sexuality, (Mt 5:27-28) is dealt with in the first chapter. The author deliberates the fundamental reason of Jesus' condemnation of looking at women with lust. He critically looks into the matter whether Jesus condemns planning adulterous acts, deliberate lustful looks or any positive sexual response at all to visual stimuli. He tries to find out the mind of Jesus by looking into the related verses (29-30) in Matthew and the text of Mark (Chapter 9). He is faithful to the text and consistent in his methodology.

The second chapter is a study on sexuality. This study is based on two sets of gospel texts which deal with divorce (Mt 5:31-32; 19:9) and (Mk 10:2-9; Mt 19:3-9). Here the author applies a methodology different from the first chapter. He finds out the common source for the texts and presents the understanding of sexuality by Jesus tradition. He neither super-imposes the theme by reading the texts from today's context nor attributes them to Jesus, instead reads them in their own original context. Thus he is faithful to the Jesus tradition rather than Jesus. He is sincere in presenting the fact that we cannot speak of the tradition of Jesus as there is a great difficulty of going behind the gospels to make historical claims about Jesus.

In the third chapter, Loader helps the readers to understand sexuality through a detailed study on some key texts (Mk 12:18-27; Mt 22:23-33; Lk 20:27-38; Mt 19:12). These texts deal with celibacy and they do not devalue sexuality. But, Loader says that those texts are to be read in the context of resurrection. Thus, they are not speaking of sexual life

in the context of present life but life after death where procreation is not needed as we become either angels or where death will not prevail over us. Loader's main thrust is that Jesus tradition deals with celibacy not to present sexuality as profane or taboo but to highlight the role of individuals with their particular ministries for the kingdom of God as that of Moses in the OT, Jesus, John and Paul in NT.

The concluding section is an effort of the author to correlate the study of the Jesus tradition to the present day issues. Postmodern issues on sexuality need to be analyzed and answered in the light of Jesus tradition. The author is open and not prejudiced in his presentation. Therefore, this book is a praiseworthy contribution to the study of sexuality from the Biblical and moral point of view. This book is a fabulous handbook for the bible scholars and for those who are interested to know the mind and attitude of the Jesus tradition regarding sexuality and marriage.

Dr. A. S. John Peter

Professor of Moral Theology

St. Paul's Seminary

Trichy

The Psalms in Israel's Worship, Sigmund Mowincke, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 2004, Grand Rapids, USA/ Cambridge, U.K., Pp.xliv+246 in Vol.I and Pp.VIII+303 in Vol.II.

The book "The psalms in Israel's worship" is a treasure that has been opened to the biblical scholarship, especially for the students of Theology.

The exhaustive bibliography of 19 pages and 8 pages of selected bibliography show author's thorough study on the book of Psalms. The indexes of subject, scripture passages and authors list add beauty to the depth of the his hard work.

There are many books in the field of the Psalms, which are treasured by Judaism and Christianity. Many authors have contributed their writings in different perspectives. Mowinckel has arranged his two

volumes in such a way that they cover different headings. These headings are linked properly with proceeding and succeeding chapters. There is a logical flow in his arrangement of the chapters.

The author shows competence in the field. His numerous earlier writings and serious reflection have helped him to focus creatively on the issue of Psalms in the Jewish worship.

The book consists of two volumes. The first volume has seven chapters. In the first two chapters, the author focuses his attention on the cultic use of the Psalms and interpretation, in which he discusses about the historicity of the origin of the Psalms and tries to prove the cultic setting of the Psalms. Here he does not fail to categorize the purpose of the psalms (cf. p. 8). He quotes from different life situations and festivals and relate the Psalms with the cultic situations and classifies the different forms and styles, thoughts and moods of the Psalms which are more or less alike in all respects (cf. p. 24). To enrich and to clarify his opinion the author discusses the various authors who have already dealt with this area.

The third and the following chapters deal with the Royal Psalms, Hymns of Praise, Enthronement Psalms and the Psalms of Lamentation. The corporate view of reality and society in ancient Israel is described and it is shown how it determines the relation between 'We' – Psalms and I – Psalms. To capture the attention of the reader the author raises questions and answers them.

The second volume (8-23 chapters) deals with personal Psalms of Lamentation, Personal and public thanksgiving Psalms, Psalms of blessing and cursing and the prophetic words in the Psalms. The second half of the second volume deals mostly with Psalmography.

Here he speaks of the evolution of the use of psalms in the cultic system. Here he analyses the antiquity of Psalmography. And he finds that the origin of Psalms goes back to the origin of the cult itself (cf. p. 150). He compares the Arabian meter with Babylonian poetry and tries

to find the basis for the Hebrew poetry, by referring back to ancient Near East Psalmography.

The depth in handling the subjects with simple English, is to be highly appreciated. It is very useful to know and appreciate the inner meaning of each Psalm and its context. It remains as a master piece of Sigmund Mowinckel to the Biblical scholarship and it will be for centuries.

Fr.Thiruthuva Doss

Department of Biblical Theology

St. Paul's Seminary

Trichy

2 Samuel, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature (FOTL - Vol.III), Antony F. Campbell, S.J., William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA/ Cambridge, U.K., 2005, Paperback, Pp xiv + 242.

The FOTL series in general aim at the form-critical analysis of every book and each unit in the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible). Fundamentally exegetical in nature they analyse the structure, genre, setting, and meaning of every division of a chapter. Antony F. Campbell, an Australian Jesuit and a biblical Scholar, has brought out yet another volume on the book of Samuel (2 Samuel) in the FOTL series, besides his first volume on the same book (1 Samuel).

The great German Biblical scholar, Norbert Lohfink S.J., while complimenting Antony F. Campbell's commentary on 1 Samuel, said "it is such a pleasure to read that I devoured it like a novel". The form critical commentary on 2 Samuel by Antony F. Campbell should certainly get a similar tribute from every Bible research student.

For the precise interpretation of the Biblical passages, a proper understanding of the type and form of the Biblical passages is very fundamental. If we were not able to identify the different forms of literatures and literary structures involved in various units of the Bible then our interpretation to the Biblical passages would be incomplete. Whether we

use the Historical-Critical methods such as Historical criticism, Textual criticism and Redaction criticism or the Literary-Critical Methods rooted in the contemporary philosophy such as Grammatical Criticism, Structural Criticism, Reader - Response Criticism, Narrative and Rhetorical Criticism or the Contextual Theological approaches such as Liberationist approach and Feminist approach, in interpreting the Biblical books or the passages, all such methods will bear fruits only if we were able to identify the different settings, genres and structures of the concerned Biblical books or passages. The form critical commentary of 2 Samuel by Campbell serves such purpose.

He has divided all the 24 chapters of the second book of Samuel, into different sections. For example, 2 Sam 1:1-2:7 forms one section, namely, *David's grieving and his kingship over Judah* (See page 16). The sections are divided into different units. For example, the first section of the book is divided into three units, namely: 1) 2 Sam 1:1-16 - *The announcement to David of the death of Saul*; 2) 2 Sam 1:17-27 - *David's lamentation for Saul and Jonathan*; 3) 2 Sam 2:1-7 - *David's establishment as king of Judah* (See pages 16, 22 and 25-26). He analyses each unit from the point of view of its textual problems, genre and setting.

As far as the textual problem is concerned the author is able to substantiate not only with variant readings of the same version, but also with the text of Hebrew and Greek versions (See page 71). The special contributions of the author in his book are the discussions that he initiates and the interpretations that he gives to each unit of this book of Israelite history. In the discussions he is able to bring the various arguments of different biblical scholars concerning the second book of Samuel. His reference literatures consist of even the recent scholarly works (see the Bibliography in page 222). He also analyses important Hebrew words whose meanings are very essential for the right interpretation of a particular unit of this book on the kings of Israel. Interestingly the primary aim of Campbell in unfolding the literary nuances and the form critical

analysis is not to confirm the historical and the literary aspects of 2 Samuel, but to reveal the diversity of views and traditions that existed in the Israelite kingdom regarding monarchy and to highlight the importance of theology over history in the day to day life of the people of Israel.

Another important feature in his book is the 12th chapter, in which the author discusses a few topics like, Ark narrative, Stories of David achieving power, Stories of David's Middle years, Josianic Deuteronomic History, from the point of view of the diachronic dimension. Such study helps the readers to identify the chronological developments of the narration of above-mentioned themes and subjects in 2 Samuel.

In short, the form critical commentary of Campbell on 2 Samuel is a scholarly work from the point of view of the Old Testament commentary series.

DR. Raymond Joseph I.
Department of Biblical Theology
St. Paul's Seminary
Trichy