

vol. 2, No 1, June 2008

## BOOK REVIEW

**Joy Philip Kakkanattu, CMI, God's Enduring Love in the Book of Hosea: A Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis of Hosea 11:1-11 (Forschungen zum Alten Testament, 2 Reihe 14), Tübingen: Mohr Sicbeck, 2006, pages xv + 222, ISBN 3-16-14888-5.**

Bible is the recital of God-man encounter. It gives articulation to God's attempts to make the history of humans his own. Especially the Old Testament part of the Bible depicts the human face of the Deity, who, so to say, cannot continue to subsist without the humans. To use anthropomorphic language, he assumes the figure of husband, lover, father, mother, friend, and even that of an adversary. He speaks in emotional language, and acts with zeal and fury, passion and compassion. The Book of Hosea is perhaps the most fascinating account of a passionate and compassionate loverhusband and a tender mother.

It is indeed praiseworthy that Joy Philip Kakkanattu has chosen Hosea 11:1-11 as the theme of his doctoral dissertation under the direction of Prof. Dr Charles Conroy, an expert in the field of the Old Testament. It was defended at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome in May 2005. The book *God's Enduring Love in the Book of Hosea* is a modified version of the dissertation.

The theme is well researched and presented in a scholarly and scientific way as proper to a doctoral dissertation. The author approaches the text from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. This provides a comprehensive perfection to the study.

*God's Enduring Love in the Book of Hosea* begins with an Introduction and ends with Summary and Concluding Reflection. In his Introduction, Kakkanattu makes an overview of research on the book of Hosea and states clearly his methodology and provides a brief

survey of the study. Then we come to the First Part of the study which deals with the synchronic reading of Hosea 11:1-11. Chapter one offers a literal translation of the text with textual critical notes. This becomes necessary, since the Hebrew text is very corrupt and difficult to understand. The author provides a concise but precise translation. He has approached the text with an open mind. Thus the translation is not vitiated by pre-conceived positions as we can find in the works of even the authorities in this field.

Chapter two is devoted to an exegetical analysis of Hosea 11:1-11. First the author turns his attention to the delimitation of the text and its internal subdivisions. Then he proceeds to a detailed analysis of each verse from the exegetical point of view. Semantic and syntactical aspects are brought out. Key terminologies are studied. The author has taken great pains to dissect the opinions and arguments of scholars. His presentation is objective and balanced as he tries to tackle the issues from the objective level.

The major theological themes of Hosea 11:1-11 in relation to the entire book of the prophet is the topic of study of chapter three. It deals with three areas. The first is the historical retrospect by which the prophet explains the Yahweh-Israel relationship. The Exodus event served as the foundational reality of the election of Israel. Out of gracious love Yahweh made Israel his children. This election demanded reciprocity on the part of the Israelite people. Unfortunately Israel failed to respond positively. Indeed, they rejected him. Now the prophet reminds his contemporaries of their life of disloyalty and of the impending political and religious disaster. Although they merited punishment, Yahweh will not ultimately reject them since he is not a God of destruction, but a God of salvation. The second area deals with the sin of Israel, which consisted mainly in false worship and lack of knowledge. Thirdly the author focuses his attention on the Hosean portrayal of God. According to him, the prophet presents Yahweh as the loving parent and the Holy One among humans. In my opinion this third chapter on the triple theological themes is the most enriching contribution of this doctoral dissertation. Especially the presentation

of the God of Hosea is indeed fascinating. Some may find fault with the author's expression "Yahweh the loving parent" since the word parent cannot convey the idea of mother, and vv. 3-4 clearly refer to maternal actions.

Part Two of the study is set aside to a diachronic analysis of Hosea 11:1-11. The author makes us familiar with the process through which the text has reached its final form. Chapter four studies the history of redaction of Hosea 11 in the context of the whole book. He critically evaluates the various theories of redaction of the book of Hosea and finds the position of J. Jeremias a more plausible one. Jeremias holds that the disciples of the prophet organized the sayings of their master and made his overall message available to successive generations. For the sake of making Hosea's message relevant to newer situations, they seem to have added their interpretative comments and transitional phrases. However, they did not tamper with the basic perspective of the prophet that Yahweh is a God of enduring love who will not let Israel perish for ever and is ever ready to heal their faithlessness. I find the author's position more plausible than many other scholars.

In chapter five the author tries to situate the book of Hosea in relation to the book of the Twelve Prophets of the OT. One can find in all the prophetic books a unifying thread in the depiction of the character of Yahweh. Basically he is a God of love who cannot tolerate the unfaithfulness of his chosen ones. However, Hosea 11:1-11 poignantly depicts the picture of Yahweh as a loving, caring, disciplining, pardoning and mercifully and unconditionally reinstating father/ mother.

At the conclusion of the study the author summarizes the major aspects of the work and adds some final reflections. Let me cite from the last paragraph of the book: "The Yahweh Hosea 11:1-11 presents is a God, who is constant and faithful in his decision to love humanity. Ultimately God is love and has the final word in all human vicissitudes. The God of Israel is a God who is a holy presence in the midst of humanity."

The bibliography is almost exclusive. The triple index — source index, author index and subject index — will make the reading and referring of the book a pleasant task.

Let me conclude with an observation on the title of this study. Kakkanattu has entitled his work God's Enduring Love in the Book of Hosea. I think that the author was inspired by the Hebrew concept of *hesed* which pervades the whole thought of Hosea, although he had explicitly used the word only six times in his book (2:19; 4:1; 6:4; 6:6; 10:12; 12:6). The term cannot be translated by a single word. It is compassion as well as love, which is steadfast, enduring, faithful, forgiving and forbearing. I would prefer to translate *hesed* as the compassionate love, or better the passionate and compassionate love of Yahweh, just as a father/ mother has towards his/her child..

God's Enduring Love in the Book of Hosea is indeed a scholarly work. It will serve as a source book for those who want to do research on the book of Hosea.

**Paul Kalluveettil, CMI**