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BOOK REVIEWS

Johny Thachuparamban CMI, *Jesus and the Law in the Matthean Community. A Source – and Redaction – Critical Study of Mt.5, 38-48*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2011, Pages: xxv+376. ISBN 978-81-8465-158-4

This is a slightly revised and updated version of the Ph.D. dissertation, defended at the faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium on November 6, 2008. The author holds MSc and STL, STD, PhD degrees. At present he serves as lecturer in New Testament at Hekima College, Nairobi, Kenya.

We are indebted to Johny Thachuparamban (henceforth JT) for making available to the scholarly world by publishing this scientific research work. In his preface he hopes that this book will be useful for those who are interested in Gospel studies in general. With all modesty JT acknowledges that “Important issues remain unsolved and individual verses still baffle the readers” (p.xiii). In fact, this work seems to me a major contribution to Matthean scholarship. Those who are interested in the final section of the evangelist’s antithesis will appreciate this scientific investigation. The author finds that the Matthean community was shaped from the Jewish roots; at the same time the Gospel presents a critique of the religious leaders and constructs a new perspective on the community as opening towards the gentile mission.

After general introduction, JT divides the book into three parts: reconstructing Q6, 27-36, looking for Matthew's community, and an exegetical study of Mt. 5, 38-48. In the general conclusion (pp. 318-323) the author sums up his findings. Then an appendix on reconstructions of Q6, 2736 is given. The bibliography consists of 14 pages. Three kinds of indexes will help the serious readers.

It is practically impossible to do justice to the work in a short review article. I invite the scholars to make an in depth study of this important investigation. Part one provides a critical reconstruction of Q6, 27-36, in which JT goes through all the variations and differences in order to reconstruct the Q text lying behind it. This is the more technical part of the study, which tries to identify possible features of Matthew's redaction. At the end the author presents the reconstructed Q text.

Part two is a critical survey of the important works of the scholars on the setting of Matthean community. JT finds that all scholars agree about the crisis situation that existed between Judaism and Christianity. If one looks at the Gospel as a whole, it can be noted that there are both anti-Jewish and anti-gentile elements. These tensions reflect the social and historical context of the Matthean community, which opposed the emerging Pharisaic group. Yet Matthew shows respect for Jewish heritage and tradition. Still the evangelist shows that the Jewish interpretation of the law was inadequate. Jesus appears as the definitive interpreter of the Law. For him the heart of the law is justice, mercy and faithfulness. Thus it features division and exclusiveness. This way the evangelist tried to build up a strong and selfsufficient community of the followers of Jesus. He paved the way for incorporating Gentiles into the community. This is made explicit in the final commission in 28, 16-20.

Part three is devoted to an exegetical study of the final section of Matthean antithesis in 5, 38-48. The author analyses the old and new laws of nonretaliation and of love of enemies. First, the author exposes the OT teachings and then Jesus' interpretations. On the first law JT studies the Matthean redaction on the turning of the other cheek, lawsuit over clothing, going a second mile, and giving/lending freely. On the second law he explains the themes of love of enemy, children of the heavenly Father, examples on reciprocal love and friendship, as well as the call to perfection. As a conclusion the author claims that Matthew has reworked and adapted Q in order to reflect and adapt to his existential situation. The evangelist has created "a contrast between what Jesus said to his followers and what Pharisees made of the Torah...Through this interpretative technique of antithetical formulation he emphasises Jesus' authority...The authority of the Matthean community is based solely on the person of Jesus...who demands his followers to suffer injustice from those evil ones, which indeed goes beyond the *lex talionis*"(p.316). The Christians have to hold a higher value of ethics (love of enemy), and they are labelled as the children of God, who even participate in the character of God, who does not make any distinction between the good and the bad (p.317).

In the general conclusion (p.318-323) JT summarizes the results of his study of the three sections. Unfortunately the author has limited his theological reflection only to point out the decisive break of the Matthean community from Synagogue-based Judaism. Precious theological gems lie hidden especially in the third part of the dissertation, which would have enriched the biblical reflections on the Sermon on the Mount. I hope that JP may dive deeper into the golden

mine of his research. Every well-wisher may request the young scholar to remain more and more active in the biblical and theological field, and produce invaluable contributions.

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