

ASIAN

HO RIZO NS

Vol. 4, No. 2, December 2010

Book Review

Mathew Vellanickal, *Eucharist: Bread of Life for the World – An Exegetico-Hermeneutical Analysis of John Ch. 6*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2010. Pages: x+72. ISBN: 978-81-89958-23-7.

The Book *Eucharist: Bread of Life for the World – An Exegetico-Hermeneutical Analysis of John Ch.6* is the printed version of the lectures given by Dr. Mathew Vellanickal in his Bishop Jonas Thaliath CMI Endowment Lectures at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. That the author is a seasoned Biblical Scholar and Exegete is evident from the presentation and content of this book small in stature. Profundity of his erudition in the Gospel of John is well manifested in his analysis of John 6, which is the subject matter of the book. In analyzing John chapter 6, Dr. Vellanickal employs all necessary components of historical critical analysis, namely, structure and unity of the text, historical context of the events mentioned in the text and its redactional purpose etc. However, as the author himself mentions in the introduction “this is not an exhaustive study” of the theme of “Eucharist”, rather it looks into John Chapter 6 to understand the Eucharistic symbolism and the theme of Eucharist, which is the unifying thread of the various episodes and discourses, present in this chapter.

Dr. Vellanickal divides John 6:1-71 into six textual units: 6:1-15; 6:16-21; 6:22-34; 6:35-50; 6:51-58; 6:60-71. The six chapters of this book deal with each of these textual units.

John 6:1-15 is the account of the Multiplication of the Loaves. The fact that this miracle is narrated by all the four Gospels would imply that it was considered as having a special significance for all the ecclesial traditions. And in the opinion of the author this special significance was resulted from “a Eucharistic significance, since Eucharist was central to the life of the Church” (p.2). After having briefly considered the various possibilities of the relation between Johannine account with that of the Synoptics, Dr. Vellanickal comes to the conclusion that “John had an independent tradition of his own” (p.5). The peculiar details of John’s version of the multiplication of the loaves like ‘the Passover setting’, ‘feeding those who come to him’, ‘the identification of Philip and Andrew’, ‘the words of blessing’ etc. show its Eucharistic colouring. The Eucharistic nuance of this meal is well reflected in “The Discourse on the Bread of Life” (6:35-58).

Chapter Two of this book discusses the miracle of Jesus' walking on the sea of Galilee in 6:16-21. In this periscope, Dr. Vellanickal identifies yet another aspect of the Eucharistic theology, i.e., Eucharist as the redeeming Presence of God for the World. Whereas in the Synoptic tradition this miracle concludes the multiplication scene, in John it "serves as a transition between the multiplication and the scene that takes place the next day, when the crowd comes to Jesus and hears the discourse on the Bread of Life" (p.16). The author dwells on the Johannine use of '*ego eimi*' to highlight the unique Eucharistic significance of this miracle in John. John seems to depend on the Passover Haggadah, which associates the crossing of the sea and gift of the manna in giving a Eucharistic nuance to the miracle. Dr. Vellanickal recognizes here John's dependence on Exodus themes of crossing the sea and the journey through the desert to state "Jesus is really the Bread of Life which sustains the faithful in their onward journey, through the desert experience of this life, towards heavenly glory" (p.21). Jesus' coming to the disciples struggling to reach the shore, refers to Jesus' mysterious presence in the Eucharist.

In Chapter Three the author considers the Eucharistic implications of John 6:22-34, the preparation for and transition to the discourse on the Bread of life. Eucharist is presented here as the imperishable food for the world. This section can be further divided into vs.22-24 and 25-34. Vs. 22-24 are having many textual variants, may be caused by mixing up of two different textual traditions. In the opinion of Dr. Vellanickal, "whatever be the history of the textual variants and their present form, in the present context on the part of it has the role of a transition and introduction to the Discourse on the Bread of Life" (p.24). Verses 25-34 prepare the people for the Discourse on the Bread of Life by "describing the imperishable nature of the Bread of Life and the dispositions which are required on the part of those who receive this Bread of Life" (p.24).

Chapters four and five deal with the Discourse on the Bread of Life in two parts, i.e., John 6:35-50 and 51-58 respectively. After having considered various meanings given to the "Bread of Life" in the history of interpretation, Dr. Vellanickal suggest: "in my opinion, the first part of the discourse (vv.35-50) refers primarily to the Revelation and secondarily to the Eucharist while the second part (52-58) refer primarily to the Eucharist"

(p.35). According to the author, this discourse reflects the liturgical life of the Early church: The two parts imply "the juxtaposition of Jesus' twofold presence to believers in the Liturgy of the Word of God and the Liturgy of the Eucharist" (p.39). In these chapters he highlights the Johannine understanding of faith in Jesus as a necessary condition to receive the life-giving efficacy of the Eucharist, and the effects of the believing reception of the Eucharist: Life, mutual indwelling and resurrection.

Chapter six, the last chapter, studies the reaction of the hearers to the Discourse on Bread of life in 6:60-67. In this reaction, Dr. Vellanickal sees Eucharist as a "challenging sign for to those to whom it is offered" (p.57).

The responses of the disciples (vs. 60-66) and the Twelve (vs. 67-71) to the words of Jesus show the centrality of faith in the words of Jesus and assistance of the Spirit to understand the mystery of Eucharist.

This book is a well-written analysis of John Chapter 6 with special focus on its Eucharistic Significance. The Language is lucid, and the exposition is to the point. This book will be handy for those who engage in Johannine Gospel and theology as well as for those who are interested in the theology of Eucharist.

Dr. Joy Philip Kakkanattu, CMI (jpkakkanattu@gmail.com)

Associate Professor (Biblical Theol.), Faculty of Theology, DVK, Bangalore