

ASIAN
HORIZONS

Vol. 4, No. 1, June 2010

Book Review

Paul Kalluveetil, *Word as Metaphor: Towards a Poetic Hermeneutics*, Dharmaram Publications: Bangalore, 2009, pp. 122, Rs. 100-/-

This is an enlarged edition of Mar. Jonas Thaliyath Endowment Lectures conducted at the Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore (DVK) in 2008. The author is an emeritus Professor of Sacred Scripture, who taught at DVK for 22 years, and now gives lectures for MTh students as a visiting Professor. At present he resides and serves as an Ordinary Professor at Marymatha Major Seminary, Thrissur, Kerala. He holds MA Degrees in both philosophy and theology from Pontifical Athenaeum, Pune, as well as a Doctorate in Sacred Scripture from Biblical Institute, Rome.

This book summarises the author's views, convictions and orientations regarding teaching the Bible in the Indian Context drawing conclusions from his own 28 years long teaching experience.

He is making in these endowment lectures an attempt to provide certain orientations and directives concerning the methodology for teaching the Scriptures, which can make the Word of God an Indian Word.

In the Introduction the author explains what is meant by the title and the subtitle. He affirms that the Bible, a poem written by the most creative artist, God, can be enjoyed and interiorized only by those who have poetic hearts. "The language of the Bible is, so to say, a 'flesh and blood' language. It is not the language of philosophers or theologians. Jesus the Word, Incarnate communicated the mystery of the Kingdom of God by telling stories and parables. Such pedagogy was indeed the overflow of the saving plan of incarnation" (p.12). In his view, the Church needs to learn more and more to employ Jesus's methodology of teaching and preaching the good of the Kingdom. Fr. Kalluveetil illustrates this methodology through the metaphoric and symbolic reading of some of the pivotal themes of the Bible: the Word, Light, Exodus, land.

The book follows the style of the lectures, and the author uses an informal form of presentation.

In Chapter I on the Word of God Kalluveetil first presents the traits of the Word of God. The biblical *dâbâr* is a provoking and penetrating word like a twoedged sword. Then he points to the basic principles of hermeneutics, as expression, explanation and translation. This chapter is intended as an introduction to the topics of the lectures.

Chapters II – VI are devoted to the study of the concept of light as metaphor in both Old and New Testaments. “Let there be light” (yhî ‘ôr) – this is the first word uttered by God in the Bible. Before creation there existed darkness, which is a symbol of disorder, chaos and evil in every realm. Light is the anti-type of the concept of evil. Thus light as metaphor stands for truth, happiness, love, peace, affability, friendliness, sincerity, serenity, meekness, harmony, justice, compassion and holiness. The author identifies various models for the symbols of darkness and light in the various books of the Bible. His attempt to find an overarching symbol that covers both the Old and New Testaments is laudable and would serve in providing continuity between the OT and NT.

The author finds the prayer of the Indian sages (“from non-being lead me to being; from darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to immortality”) as an appropriate expression of the biblical Word. According to him the first word of the Bible yhî ‘ôr encapsulates the whole Indian aspiration. This provides a very valuable contribution in the field of Hindu-Christian dialogue. Unfortunately the author does not develop the metaphor of light in the whole New Testament. He limits his study to the person of Jesus in the Gospels.

“The Paradigm, Let My People Go” (shallah ’et ‘ammî) is the second theme. The author finds in the command of Yahweh to Pharaoh the paradigm of God’s liberating word. Following the same interpretative pattern with ‘light’, Kalluveetil tires to apply this phrase too to various aspects of human life, especially situations of oppression, misery and confinement. The author gives us only a sketchy exposition. He does not try to read the whole history of Israel from this perspective.

The next theme is entitled “Land as Metaphor”. For the author land is a religious symbol. He makes a study of the Indian socio-political situation. In that light he turns to the biblical symbol. According to Kalluveetil land is God’s word for India. He invites us to make an Indian reading of the Bible from the perspective of the land metaphor. The author presents a thematic outline of the books of the Bible (103-106). He challenges the teachers and leaders of the Church to express, explain and ‘translate’ the message of the Bible and make it an Indian Word. For him Indian land is the land of God.

In the last lecture Kalluveetil asks us a question: “What should be the face of Jesus for the Asian folk?” Many scholars had tried to draw different portraits of Jesus, none of which, in the opinion of the author, is satisfactory. For him Jesus should be presented in Asia as a prophet in order to make the continent Jesus’ continent. The title of the chapter “Asian Jesus in Jesus’ Church” puts this reality in a provoking and evoking way. He tries, in a concise way, to prove that the incarnated Son of God totally fulfilled and completely realized the call of the Old Testament prophets (pp 111-118).

To conclude, *Word as Metaphor* challenges and provokes the followers of Jesus. The author, with his forceful and poetic language, introduces us into a new world of biblical hermeneutics. His attempt to find a new model for interpreting the Bible in a meaningful way is creative and original. However, such a new approach should not discard the fruits of historical-critical methodology. Kalluveetil, who speaks with the zeal of a prophet, deserves our wholehearted commendation.

Dr Joy Philip Kakkanattu, CMI
Associate Professor
Biblical Theology and Director Post-Graduate Board, DVK
Bangalore, India.