

BOOK REVIEWS

Roger Burggraeve, *Proximity with the Other: A Multidimensional Ethic of Responsibility in Levinas*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2009, pages vi + 152, ISBN: 978-81-89958-26-8.

The prolific Leuven Levinas scholar Roger Burggraeve's Dharma Endowment Lectures at the Faculty of Philosophy of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, in September 2009, appear in this volume, together with Levinas' 1987 paper 'Sociality and Money' and Burggraeve's own personal reminiscences of the philosopher. Burggraeve's decades long single minded pondering over Levinas' thought, personal associations with the thinker, and copious output in Levinasian scholarship are manifestly reflected in the lucidity of the exposition in the lectures. Clarity – not a small problem in coming to terms with Levinas' writings – is created very consciously through neat paraphrasing and coherent interpretation of Levinas' thought, attested with a series of right quotes in the right places. The referencing style gives the research-oriented reader accessibility to the philosopher's original writings in French and their English translations, whenever available. Though the reader might wonder why 'Sociality and Money' is included in this volume, this short and splendid piece of Levinas, which was first translated only in 2007, is thus quietly made accessible to the readers of Levinas in English. Moreover, as this review will show, there seems to be a definite logic which will allow the placing of this essay below Burggraeve's exposition. The personal testimonial does more than testifying, for it tells us about the extension of Levinas' ethics to the area of environmental ethics. This is important since the reader of Levinas today struggles to extend his relentless humanism of the other to nature and the non-human species. We get an opening on this matter from Levinas himself, although in the reported speech.

The lectures are primarily titled as *Proximity with the Other*. However, the thoughtful reader will not miss the import of the subtitle, 'A Multidimensional Ethic of Responsibility in Levinas', as the underlying theme of the explosion is a sympathetic reading of Levinas' political thought. The three lectures which form the first three chapters of the book are arranged in a rising order from subjectivity as freedom, the subject's response to the other as responsibility, to the subject's response to the third as political ethics. Levinas' attempt at decentring equality and liberty as the pillars of modern societies, and re-establishing its core as fraternity, is

treated as a dangerous alternative by Howard Caygill in his *Levinas and the Political* (2002). For him, privileging fraternity over liberty and equality is actually to play with the most violently inflammable of the revolutionary triangle. In contrast to such interpretations, Burggraeve advances a most generous reading of Levinasian politics. The book opens with Levinas' dissatisfaction with the politics of being and identity that grips western political morality, based on the idea of individuality as the ground for the attempt at being, and proposes an escape from being, an embrace of the other and an attempt at building community with foundation on fraternity. This fraternity is not based on common humanity from which flows equality and liberty, but on the alterity of the other person and the justice that comes to play in the community of the self, the other and the third. Burggraeve asserts the need to go beyond the utopian Levinas, who insists on the non-reciprocal infinite responsibility of the self toward the other, because "his view on society and politics actually elevates his ethics to the level of the real" (74). Levinas' political philosophy is not an addendum to his philosophy of ethics; rather, it is the essential concretization of the ethics of the face-to-face and an integral part of his struggle to express the otherwise than being.

Burggraeve rightly spots the fundamental worry of Levinas as a victim of the most gruesome violence of the twentieth century: "to prevent the establishment of any one ethical good in the socio-political as an 'end term', so that the ethical good does not coagulate into a horrifying shape of evil" (92). Levinas was always awake to the fact that morality, especially in its political expression, can be defeated by moral fundamentalism – the disturbing fact that there can be a morally and religiously justifiable genocide, the 'terror of ethics', 'the perversion of the good'. Thus, the lectures of Burggraeve end by calling on the 'small goodness' and 'the modesty of ethics'. If ethics is the primary event (the first philosophy, the primal human encounter), social, economic, or political order cannot have the final word. Institutions, however just they are, cannot do everything, and so one needs to do one's small bit in one's own place and context. That is the modesty and tininess of ethics. "The small goodness opts for a partial, temporary, but real act of mercy towards the unique other. This relativity of goodness, which is not nothing but also not everything, is the antidote against the absolutising of goodness without thereby denying the importance of ethical goodness itself" (110).

Is Levinas' political ethics so benign that there is no place for revolution or violence in it? Those who think so have been surprised by

some of Levinas' public pronouncements. Without any reference to those pronouncements, Burggraeve brings into his painting of essential Levinas the ethical call to 'permanent revolution'. Being continuously awake to the evil hidden in the socio-political good that societies seek, we need to constantly challenge these structures "in order to see whether they still respond to their unconditional ethical task, namely the structural realisation of justice for everyone, both those who are near *and* far, in the present *and* the future" (90). Permanent revolution is the countering of 'the transformation of the good into evil'. In this process, violence is not altogether avoidable. Burggraeve notes that in the Levinasian ideal society 'certain objective and structural violence' (107) are not only unavoidable but also legitimate, because without them social justice cannot be made possible for all. He adds that such violence is to be avoided to the extent possible and should be surpassed by the single individual who stands for the unique other. In the moral universe, politics, which is the calculation of justice for everyone, is to be superseded by ethics that is born within one-to-one encounter. It is the individual's response to alterity. Hence, Levinas, according to Burggraeve, does not move one step away from Kantian ethical individualism.

I want to briefly refer to the conclusions of each of these three lectures. The first lecture, which analyses subjectivity, ends with the glum possibility that looms large on pushing freedom of the self too far: a Hobbesian society founded on mutual self-interest, maximum individual freedom and benefit, and the prospect of the power of the state that could check, restrict, and violate freedom for the sake of freedom. The next lecture begins with the alternative social vision of restriction of freedom on the basis of the ethics of alterity and the ideal of fraternity. But, this lecture ends with a suggestive look at 'dialogical personalism'. Burggraeve sees Levinas' personalism as multi-vocal – the person as 'I', as other, and as the third. The 'I' enters the analysis as being responsible for the other. In the conclusion of the last lecture, Burggraeve reads Levinas' ethics as a contribution to social personalism, the extension of the one-for-the-other to universal responsibility for all others, which is the foundation for community, society, state and politics. Hence, in this reading of Burggraeve's lectures, there is actually no reason why the essay of Levinas, 'Society and Money', should not be included below the lectures.

The personal testimonial, besides eulogizing the philosopher as if to justify the ethics that flows from his pen, gives us a glimpse into Levinas'

views on how his humanism of the other could apply to the non-human other. "Out of the analogy with the vulnerable human face, that forbids us to kill the other and appeals to us to do justice to the other, can we speak of an ethical relationship towards animals that does not make them suffer or kill them needlessly but treats them with respect and care" (134). Levinas' environmentalism is neither 'deep' nor post-human. At the same time, it is not mastery over creation that is proposed but stewardship and care for non-human reality based on the humanism of the other. Levinas' belief in technology for alleviating human suffering does not question, for example, the technological subjugation and oppression of nature.

Burggraeve's belief in the Levinasian ethical solution is overwhelming. He successfully makes clear the line of thought leading from the birth of ethics in the face-to-face to the role of this originary ethics in challenging and perfecting the search for the good in the socio-political sphere. Burggraeve, as an authentic Levinasian, fills in and organizes Levinasian ethics in such a way as to give it a sense of completion. His aim is to constantly extend and apply Levinas in various ways, and never to challenge, engage, or critique him.

The book is a very lucid presentation of Levinas' ethical and socio-political thinking. The splendid essay of Levinas included in the book confirms what the author argues, and the personal testimony opens up further vistas of Levinas' thought. It is warmly recommended to all interested in contemporary moral and political debates.

Siby K. George

Prema Vakayil, *Women Shall Prophecy (Joel 2:28): Anna, The Prophetess (Lk. 2:36-38) – A Study in Luke's Feminine Perspective*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2007, pages: xv + 259, ISBN: 81-7086-417-8.

Just three verses from the Gospel of Luke (Lk. 2:36-38) and a book is born, which has the power to shake the foundation of the male dominated theology. Prema Vakayil's *Women Shall Prophecy* is a study of Anna, the prophetess, in Luke's feminine perspective. The author writes with a vision and conviction to portray Anna as a paradigm for the prophetic ministry of both women and men: for exercising their prophetic role by searching for and living according to God's word, as spoken with the realities of contemporary life, and to be spirit filled commentators of God's deed set in motion in Jesus. Though the promise of Prophet Joel that

“women shall prophecy” (Joel 2:28) finds full expression in the Acts of the Apostles during the Pentecost, the author emphasizes Anna as the prototype in whom the new gift of prophecy is emphasized. The book also outlines the fact that Anna, a woman prophesying in the temple, also makes a converging of large aspects of Lukan and New Testament theology.

This scholarly work by the author brings to light the biblical strategy of bringing about change of identity and transfiguration of a sociologically insignificant widow into a prophetess. The author has made a daring attempt to decode Anna from the three artistically woven words of St. Luke. The two main thrusts of this book are the theological concern and feminist concern.

Keeping in mind the three status symbols attributed to Anna by Luke, namely, women, widow, and prophetess, the author starts with the pairing technique based on the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of Apostles. The author pairs women with men, widows and prophetesses, and comes to significant conclusions which open up the way for further inquiry.

The second chapter tries to assess the place and significance of Anna in the social world of Luke-Acts. The author makes a study into the stratification of society in the Greco-Roman world and says that, in comparison with Jewish world, the position of women in both is rather positive. Though the position of widow in the social strata was nil, the author makes an interesting point by focusing on the Lukan stratification in which he makes a paradigm shift by giving importance to Anna, the widow. Thus, a new social stratification model is created by Luke and, then, we are led to the third chapter.

In the third chapter, the author carefully analyzes the key literary and thematic elements which Luke brings into this short narrative regarding Anna. It contains two models, namely, the widow model and prophetess model, which converge into the temple model depicting Anna as the model of the embodiment of the focal position of the temple in Luke.

In the fourth chapter, the author asks two important questions: “How did Luke devise the title of ‘prophetic widow’ to designate Anna? Has Luke combined two traditions: one prophetic and the other ‘widow’, leading to the milieu of the origin of Luke 2:36-38? These questions are discussed convincingly that any one who comes across this would come to the conclusion that Luke seems to have combined two milieus, one prophetic and the other Christian widowhood in the episode of Anna.

Focusing on the theological significance of Anna as a prophet widow, the author sets herself to the search of background of the mysterious figure of Anna and her functions. This discussion revolves around two main factors, namely, Anna's identity and her acknowledgment and proclamation regarding child Jesus.

The divine strategy of planning out great things to be done through simple and insignificant whom he empowers and strengthens is applied in the case of Anna by Luke. This chapter focus on Anna as the widow prophetess and is divided into two parts, the first dealing with little tradition in Luke and their theological convergence and second from widowhood to prophetic role. Clearly, that is a Lukan strategy from the feminine perspective.

Women shall Prophecy is a prophetic work by Prema Vakayil. The book is, indeed, a groundbreaking endeavour which can add more thrust and thirst to feminist theology. In a market driven economy, where the great and the extraordinary are considered great, by portraying Anna as playing a significant role, the author flashes the Christian message loud and clear. The ripples created by this book will remain not only in the present but also in the years to come, especially with regard to feminist theology.

Jeff Shawn Jose

S. K. Chakraborty and Debangshu Chakraborty, *Spirituality in Management: Means or End?* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008, ISBN: 978-0-19-569223-5.

The Combined work of S. K. Chakraborty and Debangshu Chakraborty *Spirituality in Management: Means or Ends?* is a unique and authentic work on management on the basis of Indian spirituality. Spirituality pervades every sphere, be it business, management, governance, healthcare, or any other secular engagement. This book explores and analyses how spirituality can stall degenerative trends in these areas.

Spirituality in Management provides us with deep insights into some of the authentic versus pseudo concerns in recent engagements with spirituality. The authors provide glimpses of the deep-structure relationship between ethically healthy performance and spirituality. As for the contents of the book, the chapters are largely independent pieces. However, the connecting thread of spirituality strings them together. The one unique lesson from Bharatvarsha's tryst with spiritual religion is first

to discover the divine within and then to manifest it without. Likewise, the content of the book can be distinguished between the directions to a leader and to the leader to lead.

The book presents the topic in a logical manner. It starts by justifying the need of spirituality by discussing some of the common doubts and problems on the importance of spirituality in organization. The volume is enriched with illustration from the long history of spirituality and great personalities. The authors take a holistic approach to management by including all the aspects of leadership.

This work is made on the basis of ethics, human and business values, and spirituality. It stresses on human relationships in the workplace. The book is very relevant in this century, as the overriding mantra of the day seems to be "If character is lost, nothing is lost; if wealth is lost everything is lost." Here the authors place the ball *niskama karma* and its priority. The authors develop a sustainable economics by holding fast to these values.

The book provides detailed information about different sources that are used for the study of spirituality in management. Throughout the text numerous real-life and contemporary examples of spirituality-in-action illustrate the principles highlighted in the volume. This book is, first and foremost, an experimental journey for the sacred in a secular world.

The approach of the book is well referred and authentic. It offers critical insights in spirituality-in-action that will be useful for leaders and managers of enterprises, scholars, and researchers in management, sociology, and psychology, and post-graduate students in this area.

Spirituality in Management: Means or End? is, indeed, a praiseworthy attempt to link spirituality and management. The simple language and the interesting way of presenting the principles make this dearer to the readers.

Jestin Cheeramvelil