Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian: a Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelicalism, Especially its Elites, in North America - Book Review

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that Westerners have contributed a great deal in articulating Christian dogmas. Although one can never underestimate the contributions of these great theologians, in view of taking up a theological task for India, it would have been more relevant if Indian theologians, who are already in the struggle of developing theology in India, were selected.

An Indian counterpart to John Hick, such as Stanley Samartha, would have enriched the author’s Christological perspectives in the context of religious pluralism. Similarly, it may be difficult for an Indian reader to understand why Moltmann’s theology of the Cross is more significant than that of an Indian theologian such as M. M. Thomas, to whom the author briefly refers. No doubt, Moltmann’s theology of suffering could have a huge impact on the suffering masses in India of all faith orientations, but matters such as centering the cross as a common symbol for all faiths could be problematic in the pluralistic context. Instead of a symbol, one may rather consider drawing “symbols” together in dialogue for their common struggle against the oppressive structures that enslave them.

Meanwhile, regarding the use of liberation theology and its Marxist social analysis for India, the warning of theologians such as A. P. Nirmal cannot be ignored. He argues that the context of the caste system, which is the primary cause for economic hardship and exploitative structure in India, according to Marxist analysis of the society, is not an adequate option, although it is not totally irrelevant. It is also important in a book such as this to explain why one person is studied instead of the other within the same school of theology. For example, although the author made an initial description of Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff, who were also very significant in the formulation of liberation theology, why was Sobrino taken up while leaving behind those stalwarts? Similarly, the reader needs to know what role Indian theologians described in chapter three play in the author’s construction of a relevant Indian Christology. Despite some remaining questions, this book is an important addition to the literature, because it enables readers to become familiar with various debates in Christology in the contemporary world.

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As the title of this provocative book suggests, Robert Gundry here attempts to pry American evangelicals loose from their infatuation with worldly status and comforts, calling them back to the fundamentals of the Gospel—
the purported center of the movement's existence. In doing so, he seizes upon an appropriate text—the Gospel of John—which calls both for unfettered devotion to Christ the Logos and for the willingness to be "in" the world but not "of" it. In developing his exhortation, Gundry argues for the willingness to embrace a sectarian existence rather than to sacrifice one's faith commitments upon the pagan altars of affluence, social acceptability, and intellectual compromise. In that sense, this book presents itself as markedly distinct from predictably urbane and tempered treatments of biblical themes. It consults the best of a broad spectrum of biblical and religious literature with a sharp interest in making a real difference in the world today, and it does so with passion and verve.

Gundry introduces his task with a "foreword," distinguishing the particular interest of this work from other biblical studies. In an attempt to rescue propositional truth from movements toward personalistic appraisals of it, he devotes his first chapter, then nearly half of the book, to accounting for the many ways Jesus' discourse with humanity through his teachings and dialogues "exeges" the truth of God to the world (Jn 1:18). In so doing, Gundry shows with remarkable clarity the extent to which Jesus, his works, and his teachings all play a central role in God's redemptive communication with humanity, substantiating a Logos-centered reform. Attempting to fit Jesus' dialogical activity into doctrinal propositions, however (Gundry translates it: in the beginning was the Proposition), may be contrary to the very structure of Johannine epistemology. In the beginning of his book, Gundry declares his aversion to "the living truth," or a view of truth as a "living reality," but this inclination seems countered by the very evidence he marshals. After all, the emphasis of Johannine Christology is that the Word became flesh—a subject, not an object or a propositionalistic notion.

Gundry's second chapter appropriates recent sectarian appraisals of Johannine Christianity toward asking whether we have become too smug in our worldly ways rather than being willing to challenge the cosmos and its empty lore in the name of the truth. Here Gundry appropriately draws in also the situation of the Johannine Epistles, and he calls for a renewed commitment to a life of sacrifice if required by the truth. In taking seriously recent sectarian appraisals of the Johannine situation, however, Gundry's image of Johannine sectarianism appears overly isolationist. Separation from "the world" as a consequence of faithfulness is different from its being a goal. Johannine Christianity itself was far more permeable in its boundaries and multilateral in its struggles than a strictly sectarian perspective would allow, so this reader comes away from Gundry's book feeling that strict or iso-
tionalist sectarianism probably misrepresents the early Christian world—
even the Johannine sector of it.

In his third chapter, Gundry throws down the gauntlet hard, declaring that
the "scandal of the evangelical mind pales before the scandal of evangelical
acculturation." What Gundry has in mind here is no small critique of a
particular group; he is challenging directly the subversion of the Christian
calling of many an emerging evangelical leader, who, in the interest of
obtaining academic credentials or intellectual respectability, has in the pro-
cess muted his or her commitment to the Gospel, or even abandoned it
altogether. The way forward, according to Gundry, is a recommitment to
what he believes is the foundational Johannine Christology of the Word—
calling believers to be critically engaged with the world, seeking to transform
it with divine love and right thinking rather than being conformed to it,
subverted by something lesser.

Despite the passion of its appeal, however, the book has several problems.
One impression is that although Gundry cites a vast spectrum of first-rate
Johannine secondary literature, his citing of a monograph at times serves only
as a means of pointing to a view with which he disagrees, that point often
being not the main argument of the piece being engaged but a tangential one.
More constructive uses of secondary literature rather than combative ones
would also have strengthened the piece. On the prizing of truth over prestige,
this calling is relevant to liberals as well as conservatives, so one would hope
that evangelicals—and liberals—could unite around seeking the truth, where-
ever it might lead.

More problematic, Gundry appears to have overlooked the most distinc-
tive feature of John's Christology: its dialectical and tension-filled character
(Barrett's important essay on the dialectical theology of St. John, for instance,
is neither cited nor included in the bibliography). Church history is replete
with examples of individuals or groups who emphasized one aspect of a
Johannine christological duality, and their monological approaches (yes, and
even propositionally so) became regarded as heretical. Time after time, the
remedy has been to restore the other side of the Johannine witness on a
particular matter, and these conjunctive moves restore the dynamic character
of the Fourth Evangelist's dialectical Christology. But here, Johannine Chris-
tology, if understood rightly, becomes a striking corrective to fundamentalism
rather than a bolsterer of it. As the Revealer challenges—in the name of the
living God—all that is of human origin, not only does the Johannine Jesus
become an affront to entrenched Judaism two millennia ago; he becomes a
challenge to Christian dogmatism, as well. While fundamentalism may have
indeed bowed the knee to modernism in coveting the materialistic spoils of
socioreligious triumph, it may have sinned further in confining understandings of truth to categories of objectivism and empirically ascertained knowledge, when the revealing truth of the living God—as revealed in the Johannine Logos—also encompasses subjective categories of being, essence, and existence.

Gundry’s book closes with a cluster of engaging endnote essays, each of which draws contemporary meaning from interesting Johannine themes. In conclusion, if a new evangelicalism (or even a new liberalism) could emerge as a result of Gundry’s critique and its ensuing discussions, this will have been an important book! What is needed is a genuinely good-news movement that embraces the dynamism of living truth without being subjectivist, and that embraces the power of worthy beliefs without becoming propositionalist. Such would bring a new day for all seekers of truth, not just evangelicals. If that were to take place, however, sectarian isolation, although genuinely risked, might not be the result after all. Indeed, the dynamism of the Gospel—authentically represented, and incarnationally so—might yet have a winsome effect upon the world rather than an alienating one. So, thanks, Bob, for the provocative book! In considering it, one is reminded of the counsel of James Parnell, that 19-year-old Quaker martyr: “Be willing that self shall suffer for Truth, and not the Truth for self.”

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The author of this new commentary on the gospel of Mark is well known and esteemed by many of his colleagues at Princeton Seminary and by a large number of former students at Princeton to whom he taught Greek and who studied in Biblical courses under his direction. In his more than thirty years of teaching he offered three times a course on Mark, and the new commentary is the fruit of an intensive study of this gospel that extended over many decades. The book, illustrated with drawings by Anne Baumgartner, is clearly organized, with a 34-page introduction, 283 pages of commentary on Mark’s text, and 79 pages of endnotes and a general index.

The title of Dr. Story’s work provides the clue for the understanding of Mark’s Gospel that dominates the entire commentary. The very first word of this Gospel, “beginning,” so Dr. Story insists, covers the entire account of Jesus’ life and work, down to the women’s discovery of the empty tomb. “The