

KRZYSZTOF MIELCAREK

***Nowy Testament a religie*, red. Ireneusz Ledwoń OFM, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2009, 583 pp.**

The book is the second volume of the collective study on the biblical origins of the theology of religion¹. The work consists of twenty-two articles, which either discuss particular pericopes of the New Testament or present observations on its fundamental theological dimensions. This innovative project is a step ahead in the process of shaping the research field in this area of theology. Its breadth leads to a conclusion that the work has a chance of becoming an important source text both for theologians trying to determine the position of Christianity among other religions and the readers wanting to understand the attitudes to these religions presented in the New Testament. The material is ordered in accordance with the following key: “religious and historical context – revelation – salvation – Jesus Christ – Church mission – universalism of salvation in eschatologic times”.

The study begins with an article which points to new challenges facing Christianity, especially the widespread view on the equality of all religions. Inalienable claim of Jesus Christ himself and the definitive Revelation and Salvation realised by Him are not necessarily connected with the salvific exclusivism, since in the Bible we can find proof that God’s salvific works had various forms, sometimes differing from the main stream approach.

¹ Cf. *Stary Testament a religie*, red. I. S. Ledwoń, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2009 (Biblioteka Teologii Religii).

Rev. A. Zawadzki analyses the terminology of the New Testament concerning Gentiles, and then presents three reasons why the mission of evangelisation was directed at this particular group: the logic of God's plan of salvation (Acts 13: 13–52), knowledge (1 Cor 8: 1–13) and truth of the Gospel (Gal 2: 2–5. 14). The last criterion is the truth of the Gospel, which is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, God's faithfulness and Jesus Christ himself.

In his article Ł. Tobała touches on the religious and philosophical context of early Christianity. The author presents the religious image of Palestine in the Roman period, the intellectual circles of ancient Palestine and the overall characteristics of the religious and philosophical context of early Christianity. The article forms a valuable ancient historical background for the rising Christianity.

Rev. J. Kręciło discusses the problem of the inculturation of Christianity in the Roman – Hellenistic world in the biblical period. The dynamic growth of Christianity had its origins in Judaism, and then turned to broadly understood Roman-Hellenistic culture. The ideals of the New Testament as well as the organisation of the community and teaching in the context of philosophical schools and cultural and social dimensions of Christianity sum up the author's analysis. Despite the obvious correlation between Christianity and the Roman-Hellenistic world, the Old Testament and Judaism in the 1st century AD should always be the fundamental reference points.

A. Kuśmirek focused on the status of a foreigner in the Roman-Hellenistic world. According to the writer, Hellenistic Judaism was torn between complete rejection of foreigners and accepting them as fellow citizens (diaspora). Although Judaism in the times of Christ accepted proselytes more easily, it was Christianity that brought the new quality of openness, in which a "foreigner" is a friend (Lk 17: 18), and ultimately represents Jesus himself (Mt 25: 35. 43).

In his article, rev. M. Wróbel draws the readers' attention to the great linguistic variety of terminology referring to revelation, salvation and faith. As far as the revelation is concerned the terminology is connected with different stages of its fulfilment: in the person of Jesus, in his disciples and in eternal times. Salvation is mostly associated with the Greek word

sodzo, which can be used with reference to both physical rescue, as well as the spiritual gift of the renewed bond with God, in both cases related to Christ. The notions of faith are associated with the way in which man should answer to God through his trust and personal bond.

Under a short and a slightly enigmatic title *Jesus and the Gentiles*, E. Zajac elaborates on the subject of the salvation of the Gentiles in the light of the promises given to God's chosen people. The author compares the attitude to the Gentiles in the Old Testament with the attitude of Jesus and his disciples to non-Jews. The account of the situation in the New Testament is not uniform (the Gospel of Matthew in comparison with other Synoptic Gospels), however, the universal hope of salvation is deeply rooted in the teachings of Christ himself.

Rev. A. Paciorek analyses Rom 1–2 in terms of getting to know God and the internal law of God showing the positive aspects of the non-Jewish world. First he focuses on the interpretation of Rom 1 : 19: "for what can be known about God is evident to them", next he moves on to Rom 2 : 15, which talks about the demands of the law which are written in the hearts of the Gentiles. According to the author, the way in which the Apostle proves his point shows that the Greek idea of the natural law was his inspiration, although with the influence of the appropriate biblical context.

Rev. J. Stefański touches on similar issues. Starting with the analysis of Vaticanum II, he presents the issue of the Gentiles getting to know God through the world created in *Corpus Paulinum*, the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Then he goes on to talk about conscience and natural law. A broader view is presented by the reference to the love of your neighbour (Rom 13 : 8–10).

Baptism as a necessary means of salvation was presented in the article of rev. S. Ormanty. In the four-part study he analyses the context of Mk 16 : 11–16 and the key expressions showing the unbelief of the post-Paschal community, discussing possible interpretations of the analysed fragment and its theological message. Unfortunately, the excessive number of analysed issues, as well as lack of order and cohesion in the last part of the text, make this article the weakest link of the book.

Rev. Z. Pawłowski reached for the exegesis and theology of Mt 25 : 31–46 as the subject of his presentation. Narrative analysis of three episodes (the

last judgement, the dialogue of the king with his subjects, the works of mercy) shows a wide range of borrowings from and allusions to earlier biblical scenes. The author explains key notions and expressions, taking their narrative functions into account. In his opinion, the last judgement scene is an appeal for mercy towards every man in need, which will result in the the gift of salvation in eternity.

Rev. H. Witczyk devoted his article to the analysis of the biblical fragment: “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (Jn 1:9). The text consists of six parts in which the author presents Jn 1:9 in a wide range of the prologue’s interpretations. The patterns of the prologue’s interpretation were presented, with emphasis put on the possibility of salvation. The study finishes with the presentation of the meaning of v. 9 in the context of the prologue, the Gospel and a number of Old Testament traditions.

Taking into account the Letters of the Apostle (Rom) and the so-called Deutero-Pauline Letters (Eph, Col), rev. J. Wilk presented the concept of an “old man” as being under the influence of sin (Adam), who, with no salvific intervention of God, would have been condemned. Its positive alternative is a “new man”, who is the image of mankind initiated thanks to the salvific work of Jesus Christ, the fullness of which is yet to come in eternity.

B. Urbanek compares two Pauline concepts on the basis of 1 Tim 2:4–6. God’s plan for the whole mankind is presented as having a strong connection with the unique role of Christ. After the historical and critical analysis of the fragment and its thorough exegesis, the author concludes that there is a strong link between the salvific mediation of Christ and universalism.

The paradigmatic character of Paul’s speech at the Aeropagus (Acts 17:22–31) was presented by rev. W. Rakocy. Emphasising the structural strength of the text, the author reveals the missionary strategy of the speech, which aims at befriending the listeners in order to appeal for conversion and call them to accept the Resurrected Christ. It is accompanied by the critical view on the cult practices among the Gentiles.

The Acts of the Apostles and the salvific universalism in the pericope of centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:1–11.18) were studied by rev. S. Hareźga.

As a theologian, Luke focused on the dichotomy of history: announcement-fulfilment, which is also visible in the description of the meeting of Peter and Cornelius. Both turn out to be tools in the works of God's Providence reaching out to every man.

The understanding of universalism presented in Isa 45:23, which is directly referred to in Pauline Letters (Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10–11), was the topic of the work by rev. W. Pikor. The universalist manifest from Isa 45:14–25 is a perfect match with similar prophetic texts, at the same time being the best means of presentation of the Deutero-Isaiah theology. The analysis of the texts shows that Paul's interpretation is purely Christological and concerns the faithful themselves.

Rev. J. Bocian focuses on the interpretation of two synoptic pericopes (Mt 10:5 and Lk 2:32) in the light of the Great Commission of Christianity from the Gospel according to Matthew (28:19). Restricting the mission to Jews only (Mt 10) is in contrast with the universalist command of the Resurrected Christ (Mt 28). Having analysed the texts, the author concludes that there are two versions of the Great Commission of Christ: Mk and Mt include the distinction between different ethnic groups, whilst Lk and Acts gradually broaden the circle of addressees of the Good News.

Rev. W. Linke discussed the eschatological dimension of the expression "nations" in the New Testament. Early Christianity, similarly to Judaism, treats salvation as a privilege for the faithful only. The New Testament contains very few texts which present a slightly broader perceptions of the ultimate decisions. Among them we can find the last judgement scene from Mt 25:32 and the invitation for the nations to participate in the cult in 1 Pet 2:12.

The issue of hostility of the Gentiles towards Christ's followers based on 1 Pet is presented in the article of rev. Z. Niemirski. After the general presentation of the Letter and the missionary significance of the phrase about good works (1 Pet 2:12) the author elaborates on the meaning of vv. 13–15, focusing on their social dimension.

Rev. J. Nawrot discusses eschatological issues in his study on false messiahs, prophets and the Antichrist. Together with the descriptions of the negative New Testament characters, the author presents the Antichrist in other religions. The second part of the study has a patristically-dogmatic

character and presents the Antichrist in three possible dimensions: as a man through whom the devil is acting, the devil himself or the opponent of God in a collective sense.

In the last article of the collection Ł. Toboła reached for the study of sects (texts from *haireisis*). Analysing the Acts of the Apostles and some fragments of the Revelation the author concludes that Christianity was one of the streams of Judaism, and the only text which directly mentions the unorthodox group within Christianity is Rev 2: 6. 14–15, 19–20 about the Nicolaitans.

The summary of the most important theses of the articles forming the collective work edited by prof. S. Ledwoń clearly shows that the book entitled *The New Testament and Religions* is a valuable academic compendium concerning the biblical background of the theology of religion in the context of the New Testament. The book will definitely be appreciated by specialists in the field and other readers as well.

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