

James H. Kroeger and Joseph D. Zaldivar, eds., *A Fiery Flame: Encountering God's Word* (Quezon City, Phils.: Claretian Publications, Insta Publications & Jesuit Communications, 2010), xii pp. + 120 pp., paperback, ISBN: 978-971-0511-56-3, PHP 200.00.

The importance of the Bible and its appropriate interpretation for the Filipinos is captured very well in *A Fiery Flame: Encountering God's Word*. Although the setting of the book is within the predominantly Roman Catholic Church population in the Philippines, the Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians in the country and elsewhere can benefit much from it. This is because of the deep sense of the role of the Spirit in encountering the Word of God that is well expressed in the pages of this volume. The reflections are perceptive. The impression that the Holy Spirit is still speaking to the people of the contemporary world through the Bible, Catholics or non-Catholics alike, is apparent. The spiritual approach to the Scriptures from a Catholic perspective is insightful. Maturity is notable. It is significant to observe that the place of the Bible at the center of the Catholic faith is clearly highlighted. Furthermore, the emphasis that the encounter with the Word of God through the Holy Spirit should bring a person face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ is such a delight to read.

A Fiery Flame is a collection of the reflections of Filipino Roman Catholic clergies about the Bible. The preface of Joseph D. Zaldivar, one of the editors, points out that the Word of God must be eaten like what Jeremiah, Ezekiel and John experienced. "To 'eat' God's word is an excellent image for how Christians should receive the Word. The Word is not just read or studied like required texts in an academic course; rather, it must be chewed, swallowed, digested; it becomes part of the individual." (vii) What a powerful metaphor to present an anthology of papers read for the occasion of *Josefino Forum: Verbum Dei* convened on 4th of October 2009. (viii) The introduction is given by the other editor, James H. Kroeger. His first sentence is captivating: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (St. Jerome). (ix) Kroeger's introduction is very helpful. He emphasizes the contribution of Vatican II in the renewed interest in reading the Bible. The outline of the presentations in this volume follows the outline of the "Nuntius or Message" issued by The Twelfth Synod of Bishops from their gathering in Rome from the 5th until the 26th of October 2008. The theme was "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." And this Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops received the support of Pope Benedict XVI who was visibly "present

for most of the twice-daily sessions and even commented on the topic of biblical exegesis.” (ix)

The volume is edited to have three parts. The first part is called “The Message to the People of God” by the World Synod of Bishops. (1-23) This is a reproduction of the complete, original twenty plus page document of the *Nuntius* in four sections that presents the Holy Scriptures in terms of “Voice, Face, House, and Roads of the Word of God.” (x) The *Nuntius* takes Deut. 30:14 as a divine challenge: “The word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to put into practice.” (3) The scope of the ideas concerning the Word of God is vast. The message of the Synod talks about the role of the Word of God from creation until the contemporary missionary work of the people of God. The full text is interpretatively outlined as follows: a. “The Voice of the Word: Revelation” (3-6); b. “The Face of the Word: Jesus Christ” (6-9); c. “The House of the Word: The Church” (9-14); and d. “The Roads of the Word: Mission” (14-22) with a concluding remark (22-23) that accents the eating of the Word of God and gives attention to those who teach it and suffer for its sake.

Part two of the volume is composed of four reflections. These four articles are theological considerations of the four aspects of the Word of God that are itemized by the *Nuntius*, albeit in a different sequence. The first one by Pablo Virgilio S. David undertakes “The House of the Word: The Church” that covers the human stewardship and the dynamic role of the Scriptures in the temple, the synagogue and the church. (27-46) The next presentation is that of Luis Antonio G. Tagle on “The Voice of the Word: Revelation” that articulates the form of God’s revelation in “creation,” “history” and “transmission” revealing its power. (47-61) The third, “The Roads of the Word: Mission” by Teodoro Bacani, Jr., is a profound and contemporary outlook on evangelistic endeavor and inculturation of the Gospel as well as fresh Christian witness and the motive of love as charity. (63-77) And finally, “Reflections on the Word of God: A Synthesis” by Catalino C. Arévalo provides a summation of and response to the earlier three presentations, which also highlights the face of the Word of God who is the Lord Jesus Christ, the person to whom everything points. (79-92)

The third part starts with Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales’ “The Word of God and Priestly Spirituality.” (95-100) He sees the worth of the incarnation of Christ as the Word to that of experiencing “brokenness.” The argument of Bienvenido F. Nebres about the “Academic Excellence in Ministerial Priesthood and Pastoral Work” is well expressed in helping victims of natural calamities, which is not only

“theoretical-analytical intelligence” but rather “practical-synthetic intelligence.” (101-110) He uses biblical patterns, charitable groups and exemplary people to show the pastoral challenge of meeting human needs. The contribution of Victor C. de Jesus is his exposition of “Encountering God through Words” wherein he appeals to sensitivity in understanding the use of words and their meanings. (111-116) In particular, his use of the story of Helen Keller and her teacher Annie Sullivan is astute. The last piece by Sir-lien Hugh Tadeo, “The *Verbum Dei* Story,” is about the journey of the organizers of the forum. (117-119) Their hunger for an academic understanding of the Word of God was satisfied with success.

The Pentecostal-Charismatic reader’s interest in *A Fiery Flame: Encountering God’s Word* is the acknowledgment of the character of the Holy Spirit in different aspects of the Word of God, the Holy Bible. The Roman Catholic clergy-theologians who contributed to this anthology are receptive to the dynamic role of the Spirit of God in the human encounter with the Word of God. The pairing of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit cannot be separated. For the authors of this volume, the Spirit is an important assumption to understand the Scriptures. Another interest for Protestants and Evangelicals that would read this book is the “contextualized” approaches of the articles to the Filipino setting. Protestants and Evangelicals are championing the importance of communicating the Word of God in a manner that can be understood by the audience in their own context. This work is well contextualized. It is a collection of articles that would touch the heart and mind of the Filipino. The materials contained in this anthology are readable. The presentations of the authors are witty. It is a book that is interesting to read because the reader can easily relate to the points made by the writers. Furthermore, the editing of the articles is well done. The order of articles is logically connected. The Catholic tradition and representation in this title is pretty obvious. Nevertheless, the non-Catholic reader would also receive much intellectual and spiritual gain from the articles in this fine book.

R. G. dela Cruz