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Jesu-Kristo: Ang Ebanghelyo sa Bawat Linggo at Dakilang Kapistahan

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JESU-KRISTO: ANG EBANGHELYO SA BAWAT LINGGO AT DAKI-LANG KAPISTAHAN, I. Taon A. By Sabino A. Vengco. Makati, Metro Manila: St. Paul Publications, 1980. xvi + 576 pages.

Fr. Vengco's book is the first modern Pilipino commentary on the Gospel readings on the Sundays and Feastdays for Liturgical Year A. Each passage is translated into Pilipino from the original Greek text, and then followed by exposition and finally a reflection. Through this simple structure, the author organizes a wealth of biblical material which could easily become unwieldy, and puts it in a form useful in preparing for a bible-sharing session or a Sunday homily.

To illustrate, one can take the section dealing with the Gospel reading for the Christmas day liturgy – the Prologue of John's Gospel (John 1:1-18), which is exegetically involved and hard to explain. This section opens with Fr. Vengco's translation of the Prologue. It is quite literal and close to the Greek structure, but in certain parts, it is difficult to read.

The following exposition divides itself into three parts: (a) an introduction, (b) verse-by-verse exegesis, and (c) a conclusion. The introduction briefly explains the historical background of the Johannine Gospel (authorship and date), the literary composition of the Prologue (its division into the liturgical hymn to the Logos and the explanatory verses), and finally the significance of the Prologue for the early church. Then the meaning of each verse is discussed. Here Fr. Vengco draws the necessary information from both Old and New Testaments, and gives specific historical detail whenever necessary. For example, in explaining verse fourteen ("At ang Verbo ay nagkatawang-tao at nakipanayam sa atin . . .") he refers to Gnosticism and its rejection of the Incarnation. The third part is not so much a summary of the detailed exegesis as a statement of its over-all implication. In this particular case, it shows how the Prologue as a hymn to the Incarnate Word is a development of the faith of the early church.

Fr. Vengco closes this section with a reflection consisting of three main points: (1) the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ provide the correct perspective for viewing his entire life, including the Incarnation; (2) Christ as Logos is the definitive Word of the Father in history; and (3) inasmuch as Christ is the Word of life, light and truth, he is both a challenge and a question for man.

The preceding example gives an idea of what one can hope to find in the rest of *Jesu-Kristo*, and thus indicates the service that Fr. Vengco has done for the local church. The commentary makes the results of recent biblical scholarship available in Pilipino and in a way understandable to a wider Christian audience. On this point alone, it proves itself valuable for both pastoral and theological reasons. In spite of the inevitable uneven quality of different

sections, it is certainly handy for a lay person who has to facilitate bible-reflections but is learning to read the Bible for the first time, or for a parish priest who wishes to give more solidly-based homilies but has little time to do research. Being the first modern biblical commentary in Pilipino, it is also of considerable value for anyone interested in developing a theological vocabulary in the vernacular.

Given the unquestionable worth of the commentary, one should mention some areas for improvement, especially in reference to the succeeding volumes. Perhaps the most important one lies in the area of writing style. While guidelines for formal writing in Pilipino in fields like theology have not yet developed, and while Fr. Vengco is a native Tagalog speaker, his style makes for difficult reading. In some instances, it is because of his Bulakeño Tagalog; in others, his frequent use of *ay* which is not the usual vernacular practice; still in others, his convoluted syntax. For example, consider the structure of the following sentence: "Ang matayog at pumapailanlang na diwa ng prologo ay inihalalintulad ni Juan sa isang agila (ang kanyang sagisag sa ating takip), na mula sa kaitaasan ay binibigyan tayo ng pananaw at pag-unawa sa hiwaga ni Jesu-Kristo" (p. 64). It is certainly tragic if many, particularly non-native Tagalog speakers, stay away from the commentary, simply because it is tedious to read.

The second area has to do with the question of which Bible translation would be better to use. Fr. Vengco uses his own, which is generally closer to the original but less readable. The recently published *Magandang Balita Biblia*, may be preferable as a standard text (though it is by no means perfect). First of all, it is likely to be the text used by the lay leader or parish priest. Secondly, the verse-by-verse exegesis could clarify whatever ambiguities exist in the translation. Finally, at this stage the use of a standard text would be most helpful in promoting the value of the Bible in the local church.

Fr. Vengco's *Jesu-Kristo* is a very useful book. By being practical, it has exceeded its value as a mere tool for bible-reflections and homilies. It is a step towards inculturation, towards the growth of local reflection on Christian faith and praxis. By making the meaning of the Gospel *then* available in the vernacular, it challenges the local church to express the meaning of the Gospel *today*. One hopes that the challenge is not answered by mere parroting.

Jose Mario C. Francisco, S.J.