

Rafael Aguirre, *La fuerza de la semilla. Jesús y los orígenes cristianos en contexto* (Estella, España: Editorial Verbo Divino 2021). 512 pp. 16 x 24 cm. ISBN 978-84-9073-666-1.

This book is the second volume of the *Selected Articles series*, endorsed by the Spanish Biblical Association and published by the Verbo Divino publishing house. The objective of this series is both to gather articles made by recognized authors throughout their academic career and to facilitate its reading, since, many times, some of these articles are difficult to obtain. These collections also allow a better appreciation of the author's intellectual trajectory.

The title of the book, *La fuerza de la semilla* (The strength of the seed) alludes to the life of Jesus, "brief, very intense"; also refers "to his precipitous and infamous death, which nevertheless generated an enthusiastic movement, with enormous expansive capacity, with strength and vitality, and, for that very reason, full of tensions and conflicts. A force (of the seed) that is expressed in several versions and that the New Testament (book – codex) gathers together so as not to separate "the seed from its first shoots so unexpected, so full of life", as Aguirre says (p.10). This idea already explains the approach of the book.

The author divides the book into four parts that represent four fundamental fields in the academic and intellectual trajectory of Rafael Aguirre during more than forty years: 1) *The critical interpretation of the New Testament*; 2) *Jesus in context*; 3) *Origins of Christianity*; 4) *The Gospel of Matthew*. Each of these sections contains a different number of articles (18 total). The book ends with a generous bibliography.

In the first part, *The Critical Interpretation of the New Testament*, the author has brought together four works that present methodological and hermeneutical aspects, which are decisive and debated in the exegetical work. They have constituted one of the axes of the author's work. Although the first of them ("The sociological method in biblical studies") was published several

years ago, it has become a classical one. It testifies his pioneering work in socio-scientific exegesis within the Spanish exegetical field. Two others are dedicated to various aspects of the socio-scientific criticism and its importance for hermeneutics and theology. The fourth article of this first part deals with a decisive topic for the interpretation of Scripture: the senses of Scripture (“The literal sense and other senses of Scripture”). In this part of the book, the author shows his commitment to the participation of the Bible in the social and cultural debate.

The second part, *Jesus in context*, consists of seven articles that deal with different aspects of the life and message of Jesus of Nazareth in relation to social reality: time, power, peace, tolerance and inclusion; the study of the meaning of his person and his message in the context of his time, in relation to the Roman Empire or to the philosophical-existential schools of his time, such as Cynicism. This second part ends with an important article that deals with a controversial topic: “The theological sense of the historical Jesus.”

In the third part, *Origins of Christianity*, Rafael Aguirre addresses “a key aspect of the fruits of the seed: the expansive dynamism of the movement that claimed his memory” (pg. 12), and it presents another of the fundamental fields of his intellectual work. Out of his many articles on this topic, he has chosen two that address the topic of the first evangelization and the mission in the formative years of Christianity. The third article is more specific and it addresses a frequently visited theme by Aguirre: the importance of the house as a base structure in this formation process. In this article, the author explores a crucial moment in the evolution of the movement and the ideas about authority within the assemblies. He addresses this topic studying the relationship between home and city in the First letter of Clement. With this article, he also highlights the importance of studying other contemporary documents to the New Testament because, although they remain outside it, must be known to understand in a better way the process of formation of Christianity.

The Gospel of Matthew is the title of the fourth part. The study of this Gospel has accompanied the author since his doctoral dissertation and he never abandoned this important field of research. For this section, he has chosen four articles. One that deals with the infancy gospels; another which studies the figure of Peter in Matthew Gospel; a third one which focuses on the community as a family; and the fourth one that studies the name of Jesus-Emmanuel and the face of God.

In short, this selection of articles offers an interesting, albeit limited, vision of Rafael Aguirre’s exegetical work, which undoubtedly constitutes an important reference in Spanish New Testament studies panorama of the last fifty years.

Carmen Bernabé
Facultad de Teología. Universidad de Deusto.
bernabecarmen2020@gmail.com