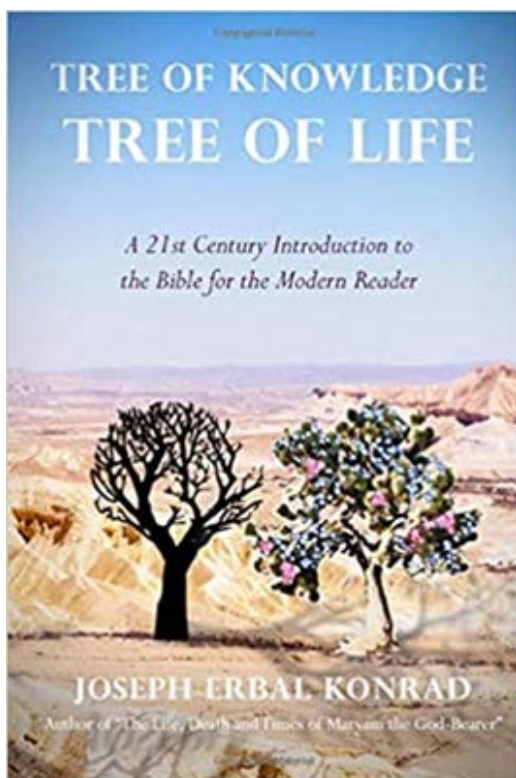


Joseph Erbal Konrad, *Tree of Knowledge Tree of Life: A 21st Century Introduction to the Bible for the Modern Reader.*

CreateSpace, 2016.

614 pages. ISBN 978-1530978373



Reviewed by:

Priest Stephen Sharman, PhD

Joseph Konrad's book is a commentary on the whole of the Bible and designed, as he tells us, for contemporary readers. It begins rather abruptly with a question which bothers some modern readers, that of "the mass slaughter of innocents" (p. 2). This question grates harshly on the ears of those of us who have heard of such mass slaughters as the Holodomor, the holocaust, the massacres in Rwanda and many other slaughters of our times. He has an answer. It is not God's doing; it is the fault of humanity. He writes, "And to that point there is an answer. This book relies unashamedly upon it. It is that humanity has fallen so far, so hard, so low into forgetfulness and darkness, into a blindness to its beautiful, intended destiny so profound, and to a deafness to its moral calling so intense that it had ceased even to know its own abject condition" (p. 2). The book then is an *apologia* for the ways of God with men. At the end of the book the author concludes, "I firmly hope and believe that there is nothing in this book that a centred, reasonable opened minded inquirer could not at least consider (even if eventually rejected) and that does not also comport with the common core, the *kerugma* and teaching about the cosmos, its Maker, and our place in it, that has been held by most Christians at

most times throughout history” (p. 595). Has Joseph Konrad succeeded in this modest ambition? This reviewer believes that he has. He recommends that a “centered, reasonable and open minded inquirers’ read the book and decide for themselves.

The book’s length (more than 600 pages) can be a challenge for most readers. Much of the length is composed of long quotations from the Bible. The quotations support the various stages of his argument and rescue the reader from the task of reading his book with a Bible close to hand. The author uses a variety of English translations for his quotations from the Bible: New English Bible, Jerusalem Bible, New American Bible, American Standard Version, Authorised Version, Douay Version, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, and ISV. He helpfully identifies the version which he uses in each quotation. For the Old Testament he uses both the Greek Septuagint and the Hebrew and carefully explains the importance of each.

This book, however, is well worth the effort of reading it. The author begins with Genesis and works his way through to Revelation. Konrad describes the times in which humanity has fallen away from God and the ways in which God has recalled humanity to His service. He writes about the patriarchs, the prophets and the kings of Israel. Konrad laments the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple and rejoices in the rebuilding of the city and Temple after the return from the Babylonian Captivity. Further, the author discusses the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, His death and Resurrection. He addresses Christology and Creeds. This is a comprehensive book; it covers almost everything that may interest lay readers. In the later chapters there is also an account of early Christian history. The author is fair minded in his assessments of various important points. This is evident in his assessment of St. Paul’s teaching, and of the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Konrad is interested in the sidelights of the story, a trait which this reviewer finds delightful. As an example, he devotes several pages to the story of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel (pp. 284-287). As he read Konrad’s book, this reviewer was reminded of many things that he had once known and learned many new things. He repeats his own assessment that the book is worth reading.

Having said all that, the book has some serious weaknesses. We are told nothing about the author other than he is the author of another book. We learn

nothing about his education and life. It would be useful to know these things because they would help us to understand his work better. The book lacks an index, a bibliography and suggestions for further reading. Most seriously it lacks footnotes. He refers in places to other authors such as Cardinal Ratzinger and C. S. Lewis but does not give us the necessary information which would enable us to read more (p. 561). He refers briefly to an intriguing theory promoted by a British author, Graham Hancock, that the Ark of the Covenant was removed from the Temple in Jerusalem to the Nile island of Elephantine in Upper Egypt well before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, but fails to give us the information which would enable us to explore the theory further (p. 291). A footnote with the name of Hancock's book would fill that gap. Footnotes are essential to any scholarly book, and this book does qualify as a scholarly work.

With the addition of an index, bibliography and footnotes, this book could be useful for parish Bible study groups, and as a text for an introductory course on the Scriptures in seminaries.

About the reviewer: Father Stephen Sharman is a priest at St. Nicholas parish in Narol, Manitoba. He received his PhD from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2013. The title of his dissertation was *Visions of Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.