

Book Reviews

Ecological Concerns: An Indian Christian Response, Edited by Joseph Mattam, S.J., and Jacob Kavunkal, S.V.D., Bangalore, N.B.C.L.C., 1998, pp.148, Rs 80.

This is a volume of the edited Papers, Minutes of the workshops and the Statement of the 20th Annual Meeting of the Indian Theological Association, Aluva, 26-30 April, 1997.

The main Papers address, quite unequivocally, the concerns of our age related to ecology and the habitat of the animate and inanimate beings. Their perspectives range from ecology, science and sustainable development to eco-feminism, ecosophy, ethics, social justice and theology with biblical interpretations and the vision of Jesus.

The main issues in ecological concerns are laid out briefly by Kunnumpuram. The United Nations' concept of sustainable development is explained succinctly by Prasad. Eco-feminism under various aspects is considered by Gajiwala and its Indian (Christian) critique by Nalunnakkal. He presents a view that women are main victims of ecological crisis. Vadakumcherry explores well the native wisdom and intuition of the Maria Gond tribe in Maharashtra related to the cosmos enshrined in their myths. Kocherry presents a simple reflection on ethics and social justice in the matter of ecology and development. In an applied sense the scope of the solutions to or the averting of the crisis is dealt with in ecosophy by Painadath, nature mysticism (eco-spirituality) by Manickam, and in the vision of Jesus that provides space for all by D'Lima. The often repeated theme that the western model of the exploitation of Nature is rooted in a particular understanding of the biblical text (Genesis 1:26-28) is given a fresh interpretation by Ceresko.

Given the variety of titles of the Papers one would expect that they enrich the reflection in a truly Indian context and address the alternatives that the Christians of India wish to suggest to change the alarming situation. Somehow, the final Statement gets overly focussed on 'seminary' compounds and ends up with a suggestion to create a Forum for Eco-theology. The papers dazzle occasionally with some new sparks, but glow rarely.

The editorial presentation is good. However, the Papers in themselves are of varying standards. Some present common reflections. Many repeat, explain again, the issues and terminology used in current discussions of the topic. Some offer sparse bibliography or footnotes. Some do enter into depth discussions. Most Papers have ample sub-headings, but the profundity of argument is hardly enhanced. The repetitious aspects could have been inserted into the initial Paper on Issues and Perspectives and deleted from the subsequent Papers where they occur.

Some tricky spellings and expressions have added a note of ingenuity, e.g. *Icavasya Upanishad*; (p.102); "Wómen in National Eco-system Mangament.." and "The Earth is One, But the World is Not" (p.68); An Interpretive Strategy for Genesis 1:26-28 (p.24); the values of justice (88).

The material can serve as a good general introduction to ecological concerns. It seems to be a good incentive for Indian Christians to widen their

awareness of the issues. When academia addresses itself to include courses on ecology, this neat volume, reasonably priced, could be listed in the Bibliography of resources.

Rosario Rocha, SJ

The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest in the Light of the North Indian Missionary Reality, by J. Ponnore, Raipur, Pastoral Centre, 1998, xxi + 417, Rs. 100/-.

This book is the author's doctoral thesis, presented to and approved by the Gregorian University, Rome. The first chapter gives a good synthesis of the present theology of inculturation. Since the author wishes to understand priestly spirituality "in a new way" (4), he rightly realises – and this is to be emphasized – the "need of critical theology so as to clarify, guide, broaden and deepen spirituality" (16). As the Church can only exist in a given historical situation can there be really "two basic *loci* [the Church and the prevailing historical present] where Christian spirituality can be experienced" (18)? The "ongoing nature of inculturation" (34) must take a serious note of "all socio-politico-economic conditions of human beings in their situations" (30). This is a very timely reminder, because some try to have a time-bound process, while others celebrate very Indian liturgies but follow a life-style reflecting the consumer West.

The second chapter provides us with a graphic picture of the North Indian missionary context. The description is supported by charts providing us the statistics of the different facets of the North Indian situation. But the concern for brevity sometimes leads to over-simplification (e.g. 112-114). An attempt to understand spirituality anew should have included an in-depth reflection as to why "a large number of Church personnel still consider success and meaningfulness in mission endeavour almost solely in terms of the number of baptisms" (132).

The third chapter makes a historical survey of the development of the theology of the diocesan priest, starting from the New Testament data. I have a feeling that at times the author has based himself on studies which lead to contradictory conclusions. For instance, he quotes A. Vanhoye, who contrasting the Old Testament understanding of sacrifice and priesthood with that of Jesus, says "With Christ all this changes. His perfect personal offering removes all barriers... Taken away, finally, is the separation between priest and people..." (156-157). This is followed by quotes from J. Galot who defends the traditional essential distinction between the priesthood of the laity and the ministerial priesthood (165-166). If I understand Galot correctly, the difference is that the ministerial priest has certain authority and pastoral function. But today's pastoral reality in different parts of the world necessitates nuns taking over parishes, and lay people animating basic Christian communities, and these I presume have some authority and definitely a pastoral function. Further, in a doctoral thesis, one would expect at least a reference to contemporary New Testament scholars and systematic theologians who question the traditional position. I do not know whether Vanhoye has discussed this question himself, but in his book – cited by our author: *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989), this is

what he says: "Here is the reason why we are all now invited to draw near to God (10,22). All believers possess this right which previously was the prerogative of the high priest alone (9,7). They even enjoy a greater privilege still, for it is into the true sanctuary that they are now authorized to enter, and not into a human construction (8,5; 9,24). And their right is not limited as was that of the high priest to once each year (9,7), it is always valid." (71) Consequently the question would arise whether clericalisation begins only in the third century (179) or even earlier. Tracing the development of the Christian priesthood and the impact of monasticism on it, the author concludes: "Three main consequences of this monastic influence on the priesthood are the priestly habit, breviary and celibacy" 187). But though the thesis in an attempt to understand priestly spirituality "in a new way" (4), it does not carry a critical reflection on this phenomenon.

The last two chapters discuss the spirituality of the diocesan priest and its contextualisation in the North Indian missionary reality. The chapters are quite comprehensive and succeed in the task the author gives himself. In this context the author rightly notes that "there is a real human problem involved in the case of obedience of the diocesan priest to his bishop. If a bishop happens to be less considerate..." (248). Lack of consideration would not be a major problem had the priest and the bishop not been bound to each other for better and for worse till death do them part. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that today we have priests who are in their early forties being appointed bishops! Hence a serious reflection on the spirituality of the diocesan priest is intimately bound up with a discussion on the term of office of bishops. While discussing the obedience of the priest, a greater emphasis ought to have been given to discernment in which both the priest and the bishop are honest and open partners, more so since the "bishops are to regard their priests as brothers and friends" (259) and because Vatican II calls for active and responsible obedience. To emphasize the need of prayer, the author quotes Pope John Paul II (297), but he could have brought in another much more powerful text: "My contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation." (*Redemptoris Missio*, no. 91. English translation, Bombay: St. Paul Pbs., 1991, p. 150)

The book has a fairly comprehensive bibliography, though some important texts dealing with priestly ministry in India have been left out: *All India Seminar: Church in India Today* (1969), *Programme for Priestly Formation For India* (1970), *Charter for Priestly Formation for India* (1988). While *Priestly Formation in North India: Problems, Challenges, Hopes* (1982) finds a place in the bibliography, and while it already anticipates much of what the author has to say, it is not referred to anywhere in the thesis. At times we have quotations in languages other than English. These could be in the footnotes, and their gist in the text. A little more attention ought to have been given to the use of diacritical marks. A suitable index would add to the value of the book.

Subhash Anand