

## Book Reviews

***Radical Reforms for Third Millenium Church***, by Avito Pottukulam, Copyright 1999 by Avito Pottukulam, published by C.C. Communications, Pharma Apts., Plot No. 88, I.P Extn, Patparganj, Delhi 110092. Pages 224, Price: Rs. 120/-.

The author's aim is stated in his Preface: "a humble attempt to assess the present day Church and suggest certain remedial measures for a radical reform to be brought about for the Church in the third millenium." For him, "triumphalism seems to be the root cause of all the evils in the Church." The rest of the book is divided into 16 sections with a very short conclusion. Each of the 16 sections takes up an issue in the Church and suggests remedies.

The author's call for "a radical return to the primitive evangelical humility and simplicity on the part of the Catholic Church" could perhaps be welcomed by all who have the interest of the Church at heart. The first section considers the fact that the Catholic population in the world is decreasing and calls for a radical change in the concept of Mission and Mission work (p. 18). Direct evangelization is the remedy for increasing numbers and should alone be termed 'Mission'; all other works should be termed Ministry. This suggestion claims Ephesians (4:11,12) and William Barclay in support. The author also asserts that priests or sisters or brothers working in colleges or elite schools want to be called missionaries "due to a kind of mission glamour." "These people can be called arm chair missionaries." In the same section, on page 24, the author states that "the Holy See should give a call to the Congregations of Religious Women to take up the direct Mission work." For this, they should leave the "majority of their Institute work." In the end, only those who evangelize by baptizing are "real Missionaries, as their Gospel proclamation is Baptism oriented." (p. 26) The rest are Mission workers and Mission helpers. (p. 25) And mission funding is to be applied to direct evangelization.

The author finds support for his thinking in Redemptoris Missio and Ad Gentes no. 6, but the ecclesial reality of today's Church must be moulded by a Vatican II theology that also has Lumen Gentium, Nostra Aetate, Dignitatis Humanae and Gaudium et Spes as its points of reference. Secondly, the mission of the Church is shaped not only by the gospel imperative but also by the context in which that imperative is to be realized. No serious attempt to understand the context appears in this section. The author adduces no evidence to support his contention that priests, sisters and brothers want to be called missionaries because of glamour. Such unsupported generalization is unfortunate!

If section one is considered in some detail, it is to illustrate the mode of arguing his case that the author follows in many of the following sections. In section eleven "Asceticism was not in God's First Plan," the author wants to describe the correct way of understanding and practising asceticism, and this is laudable. But the elaboration of a theology of what would have been had there been no fall (p. 147, 3. Asceticism was not in God's original plan) is pointless in the light of the one plan of salvation. A lack of cogent and persuasive development of argument mars the worthy aim of this book.

At times, the author makes useful and pointed suggestions, e.g. "an obligation of charity also must be added to the precept of hearing Mass." (p. 135) However, more solid investigation of situations and painstaking editing need to be done before this book can be recommended as a prophetic contribution to the Church of the Third Millenium.

*Errol D'Lima SJ*

***Doing Theology with Tribal Resources:*** Context and Perspectives: Edited by Wati Longchar and Larry E. Davis, Tribal Study Centre, Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, 1999, Pp. 142. Price: Not Mentioned.

The present volume is the outcome of a three-day national seminar at the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, on the theme “Doing theology with Tribal Resources”. The ten papers of the volume attempt to explore contextual theology relevant to the North East Indian context. They reflect on the emerging people’s theology in the Third World countries and see its relevance in a tribal context. They explore resources for articulation of a theology for the tribal people. They assess critically the impact of Christianity on the life of the tribal people.

James Massey in his article “Minorities in India with particular reference to the Specific Christian Issues” observes that though India has Constitutional provisions to safeguard the interests of the minorities, the manifesto of the majority-run political parties like Bharatiya Janata Party (1966) are still based upon mono-religion, mono-culture and mono-language. The Indian Christians as a minority is the second largest group with several denominations. There is discrimination not only of the minority Christians but also of the Dalit and Tribal Christians. The constitutional rights are important to Dalit and Tribal Christians because the right to freedom of conscience and to profess any religion (Article 15), the right to protect personal life (Article 21), and change of religion do not alter one’s social and economic conditions. Another issue concerns the increasing atrocities on the minorities in the country. The author suggests that these issues be considered as ‘Christian issues’ and not issues belonging to different groups within the Church.

The article “Bible and Social Transformation” by Bastina Wielenga, highlights the way the complex process of change affects different walks of life. He presents and overview of the social transformation in the light of the Bible. Reading the Bible in the light of the present crises may help our search for a life-sustaining, eco-friendly and people-friendly, inclusive society based on human kinship and solidarity, the way for God’s kingdom on earth.

Archie C. C. Lee in “The Plurality of Asian Religio-Cultural Tradition and Its Implications for Asian Biblical Studies” writes that the Bible has its social location, cultural background, economic environment and political situation. The historical critical method with its own limitations elucidates the history of the text. Social contexts, political orientation and socio-economic status of the reader have immense impact on the perspective of interpretation. The Asian biblical scholars need to search for and develop principles and methods of biblical interpretation relevant to their contexts of the plurality of scriptures. A cross-textual interpretation may consolidate the foundation of Asian contextual theology.

Theology of development is concerned with the translation of the Christian vision of the Reign of God into reality. That is what K. Thanzuva writes in his article “A Theology of development in the Context of Hill Tribes in North East India”. Though the theology of development has been with them since the inception of Christianity, it has not been theologically articulated. The paper discusses the development scenario with its policies and structures to identify the theological agenda to be addressed in the construction of a theology of development for North East India.

A.Wati Longchar in “A Critique of the Christian Theology of Creation” gives three different views of creation, namely, mechanistic, i.e, human perception of the physical

world merely as the sum total of many material components and energies; hierarchical, i.e., understanding of creation within a hierarchical order with angels at the highest peak among spiritual beings and humans as the highest among the created material beings; and anthropocentric, i.e., a world view in which humanity is the point of reference and the norm for all co-existence, which has been maintained throughout the history of Christianity. The author highlights the difference in the perception of reality between the tribal worldview and the dominant Christian traditions. In the dominant Christian traditions, humanity is the central point of reference and norm, but in the tribal world-view it is creation. In the present ecological crisis the tribal view of creation as the central focus will make creation theology dynamic, authentic and relevant.

N. Limatla Longkumer in “Rediscovering Women’s Role and Status in Society” draws our attention to three Ao stories portraying women who have played a significant role in their society and yet their roles were distorted by the patriarchal culture. The author suggests the following points to rediscover and reclaim the lost rights of women: one, to work out a fresh historiography of women’s stories from an inclusive perspective taking justice and equality of men and women into consideration; two, to change the old oppressive and dominant patriarchal structure of society; three to highlight the traditional myths, folktales, songs, poems and proverbs whereby women leaders, heroines and saints play significant roles in society, and, four, participation of both men and women in women’s liberation as a social issue involving all humans.

David C. Scott in his “Karam Raja”: A Defining Myth and Festival in Chotanagpur” looks at the Karam mythic narration and the ritual enactments as a mechanism to strengthen tribal cultural traditions – thereby elevating people, giving them renewed social and psychic energy by tracing them back to higher, better, divine and supernatural reality. Scott highlights the significance of myth as story-telling in explaining the discovery of human beings and their existence, their search for meaning in life.

Takatemjen in his article “Theology of Reconciliation: A Naga Perspective” writes that in a Naga context of the culture of violence, bloodshed, corruption, mistrust, injustice, tribalism and ethnic clashes, reconciliation is possible. The paper points out that certain socio-religious values from their traditional life and culture could be useful for developing a theology of reconciliation which the author hopes will help to build a better society, a new brotherhood, and neighbourliness in Nagaland in particular and our world in general. One of the resources for theologising from a Naga perspective is found in the practice of AKSU, i.e., the giving of pigs as present to develop friendly relationships and peace between villagers, protection of the tributary village by the principal village, establishment of brotherhood among the members of the same clan living in different villages, extending help during wartime, building up cordial relations between villages, establishing friendship during peace time, etc.. The author feels the abandonment of AKSU by Christianity was rather unfortunate as it has resulted in breaking down of relationships, peace and harmony among people.

A.Wati Longchar in his article “Dancing with the Land: Significance of Land for Doing Tribal Theology” examines the tribal people’s understanding of land and its theological significance. By analysing a few sayings and two genesis myths among the Kashi-Jaintia tribe in North East India. The starting point of theology for them is their affirmation of the land as the creation of the Supreme Being. Land is central to understand their worldview in terms of human selfhood, the Supreme Being, the Spirit, history and ethics.

“Doing Theology with Tribal Resources: Cautionary Remarks” by Roger Gaikwad records some cautionary remarks that the tribal heritage should not lead to romanticising the tribal world view. Whilst doing theology with tribal resources, there is a danger of giving priority to some given conceptual theology rather than seeking to indigenously express the existential experience of the life, power, and purpose of Christ which the people have had in North East India; two, if we want Christianity to be meaningful and effective, there is need of revitalizing and reconditioning of cultural categories. The existential contemporary tribal worldview is a life of integrated or conflicting opposites. At times, contemporary tribal life seems to be a compound of inseparable opposites such as natural joys and sorrows of life. At other times, contemporary tribal life seems to be permeated with incompatible opposites such as materialism versus charismatic spiritualism. The challenge confronting us today is how to use such complex tribal worldviews of integrated or incompatible dichotomies in doing theology in North East India.

*Joseph Marianus Kujur SJ*

***The Book of Wisdom 6:22-10:21: An Encomium of Wisdom, And Its Inculturation in the Indian Wisdom Tradition*** by Amruthanandan Joseph Thallapalli, s.g (An excerpt of a Doctorate Dissertation) Rome : Faculty of Theology – Pontifical Gregorian University, 1998, pp. 145. Pr. N.P.

The Book includes select excerpts from the dissertation for the doctorate in the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome published in 1998. In fact it contains only the following: of Chapter I: The Introduction of the fourth section - “Wisdom in Other Biblical Wisdom Books” is omitted. Of Chapter III: “Exegetico-Theological Study of the Text”, the last section: “The Inculturated Theologizing Process of Pseudo-Solomon”, is available to the reader. Of Chapter IV: Interpretation of Wis 6:22-10:21. However, Chapter II: “The Challenge of the Context of the Book of Wisdom. The Response of the Author”, is wholly left out. Fortunately the Table of Contents of the original dissertation is given at the end of the volume in addition to the Table of Contents for the present work at the beginning. Unfortunately the Excursus: “Feminist Interpretation of Wisdom” on pp. 28-30 does not appear in either Table of Contents.

The layout of the book and the printing are excellent. Printing mistakes are indeed negligible. These are capital ‘R’ for the small ‘r’ on p. 44; on p. 47 “1 Cor” is given in italics. Finally on p. 97 instead of “to be termed” we have “to termed”, which is the only serious mistake. Acknowledgements are out of proportion and could be drastically curtailed in a work of this type.

The Bibliography as is to be expected in a doctoral dissertation is extensive. Commendable is the number of Indian authors that is made available. What one misses in the Bibliography are works on the Hellenistic religion of Isis, (since the author of the Book of Wisdom, according to the present author, interprets Wisdom in terms of this saviour goddess) and on Stoicism. Only two works of Plato are mentioned but no quotations from these are to be found in the book. E. Trinity’s article on p. 100 is left out in the Bibliography.

The introductory chapter which gives the motivations for this study shows the striking similarity between the age of Pseudo-Solomon (as the author of the Book of Wisdom is here called) and ours. Both find themselves at the dawn of a new era. Two other things that

are in common between Pseudo-Solomon and the Church in India are his openness to other faiths and philosophies like the Egyptian Hellenistic cult of Isis, the philosophy of Plato and the Stoics. The comparison between Wisdom (Sophia) and Indian Jnana which occupies the author towards the end of the book are already hinted at here. As the author belongs to the Religious family of Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, he takes time out to deal with the latter's main theological work *Love of the Eternal Wisdom*. Finally the contents of all the chapters of the original dissertation are given even though only excerpts from the original are here printed. This of course helps the reader to fill in the gaps in the break of the narrative. Unfortunately on p. 19 the unit which the author comments upon is affirmed as Wis 6:22-10:21, but its justification is nowhere to be found. This is all the more problematic because as the author himself agrees on p. 16 "there is no unanimity regarding the exact boundaries" of the three parts of the Book of Wisdom. According to the author, the literary form of this unit is an encomium. As this is a rare form a word by way of its definition would be most helpful specially to the non scholarly reader. It is to be kept in mind that though we are told that the method followed in the thesis is the Hermeneutical Method, as the author himself confesses on p. 20, the Historical Critical Method is also followed specially in Chapter II.

Chapter III, in fact only one of its sections, which immediately follows upon the Introduction, merely exposes "the inculturated theologizing process of Pseudo-Solomon", that is, how he not only re-reads but also re-writes ancient Hebrew biblical traditions, in particular those from 1 Kgs 3-10 regarding king Solomon and the Patriarchal and Exodus traditions from the Books of Genesis and Exodus. The author faithfully adheres to the norms laid down by the Pontifical Biblical Commission's Document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993). The author makes it more than clear that though Pseudo-Solomon to all practical purposes identifies Wisdom with God and with Spirit thus presaging the later Christian trinity, he clearly upholds the distinction between God and Wisdom. For Wisdom is always God's gift to humans. When we come to the personification of Wisdom as the Spouse of God which according to Thallapalli is drawn from Egyptian Maat and Isis, we look in vain for references to primary or secondary sources on p. 26. The author draws our attention to the salvific function of Wisdom as is available in the case of Isis. When he comes to the four cardinal virtues once again he merely tells us that they are from the Stoics but no reference to their writings is made on p. 32.

In Chapter IV the author dwells at length on the actualization of Wis 6:22-10:21 made by his spiritual mentor Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort. He makes references to two authors, M. Gilbert and J.-P Prevost who have treated of this subject. See footnotes 12 and 13 on p. 43. The author then passes on to its actualization in our context. Interesting in this chapter is the section on Wisdom Christology on p. 52 which Christologists would do well to take note of. The next section is the most important for our author, that is, the inculturation of Wisdom in the Indian context. He addresses the problem from two angles, that is, social life and religion. First he deals but only in passing with the former, that is, with the caste system, and then treats at length on what we would call inter-religious dialogue. Interesting is his insight that not only Christians but also Hindus have engaged themselves in this dialogue. Among the Hindus he mentions in particular the reformers like Mahatma Gandhi and S. Radhakrishnan. From among the Christians he highlights Abhishiktananda (Dom Henri Le Saux). Finally he comes to the Jnana Marga of Hinduism. He pays attention to its treatment both in the Upanishads and in the Bhagvadgita. He also shows how the attainment of Wisdom in the Indian tradition is not something speculative but experiential and

has a bearing on our daily life. The author also warns us not to be one-sided in our efforts at inculturation by addressing ourselves exclusively to the Brahminical literature, what he calls Sanskritization, but to also pay attention to the popular religion of the Dalits, which by the way is not done here.

In conclusion we can say that the attempt is a very praiseworthy one, written lucidly. A revised edition of the work (which should also include some exegetical material), and which should shed the shackles imposed by the requirements of a doctoral dissertation, would be of great help to all Christians in our country in particular who believe in inculturation precisely at the threshold of the new millennium.

*Rui de Menezes, SJ*

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For years religious *conversion* has been a hot topic of discussion in India. Historically, the followers of practically all religions have been engaged in the work of propagating their faith and winning new adherents. And yet, there has not been an adequate reflection on the meaning and implications of conversion. Hence, *Jnanadeepa* has chosen to devote the next issue, January 2000, to this theme. It will deal with *conversion* from an interdisciplinary perspective.

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