

Book Reviews

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The Christian Programme: A Theological and Pastoral Study of the Sermon on the Mount, by Joseph Pathrapankal, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1999 (pp. xii + 380; US \$ 19).

Dr. J. Pathrapankal CMI seeks an adequate response to two interconnected questions: (1) What is the essence of a healthy Christian spirituality? (2) How to distinguish a true Christian spirituality from spurious ones? (cf. p. ix). In answering these two very important and extremely relevant questions, Pathrapankal (= P.) has recourse to the Bible, particularly the teachings of Jesus (cf. p. x). Among Jesus' various teachings, the Sermon on the Mount has a unique place "because it presents a basic and radical programme of life to all the followers of Jesus who want to hold on to an authentic source of Christian spirituality" (p. xi).

The purpose of the work, as the subtitle indicates, is theological and pastoral. In realizing this purpose P. employs three steps in his study: (1) a brief investigation into the Old Testament background of the text; (2) a detailed study of the Matthean text (when required other New Testament writings are also taken into consideration); and (3) the teachings of the Church, notably that of Vat. II.

The work consists of a lengthy introduction (pp. 1-34) and ten chapters — the last chapter is some sort of a conclusion in the context of a pluralistic world.

The introduction commences with the question: "What does it mean to be a Christian in our times?" (p. 1). The relevance of this question is brought to light by focusing on threefold challenges: (1) challenges of the world religions; (2) problems emerging from secular humanism; and (3) the proposal of a "religionless Christianity". A study of the Sermon on the Mount, P. claims, would offer an adequate response to these threefold challenges.

As a preamble to the study P. establishes that discourses form an integral part of the scriptures of all major world religions. In the Gospel of Matthew there are five discourses; of these the Sermon on the Mount is the most important one in which the evangelist spells out the Christian programme.

Having offered the Matthean rationale for the study in the second chapter, P. focuses on the inner dispositions Jesus demanded from his disciples (Mt 5:3-16) in the third chapter. In the fourth chapter, probably the most important one too, P. dwells upon Mt 5:17-20 in which Jesus unequivocally affirms that he has come not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfil them.

In the fifth chapter the attention is centered on various dimensions of the dharma in the form of six antitheses (5:21-42) while in the sixth chapter the focus is "the faithful practice of the three major religious exercises of Judaism, known as the 'Three Pillars', on which the good and pious life of a Jew was to be based" (p. 213).

In the seventh chapter P. spells out the attitudes required in the practice of the new dharma (Mt 6:19-7:12). The general principle that controls this section (= 6:19-7:12), P. opines, is "the sound eye" in 6:22-23 by which is meant the correct vision of life (cf. pp. 253-259).

In the eighth chapter P. focuses on Mt 7:13-23 from an eschatological perspective while in the ninth chapter the last two pericopes (7:24-27 and 7:28-29) are studied. The

first is a short but evocative parable whereas the second highlights Jesus' extraordinary authority in his teaching.

The last chapter sheds light on the significance of the Sermon on the Mount in a pluralistic world. Pluralistic perspectives are discernible in the Old Testament as well as in the New. This chapter is concluded by extending an invitation to people of all religions to personally experience God as the loving Parent and to respect and love all humans as one's brothers and sisters, for all are children of God, the ever loving Parent.

As far as I know the first Indian exegete to interpret the Sermon on the Mount as Dharma of Jesus was the late Prof. George M. Soares-Prabhu, SJ (1929-1995). He published the article, "The Dharma of Jesus: An Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount", Bible Bhashyam 6 (1980), 358-381. Since then he published at least four articles and studies on this theme. Those who are sufficiently familiar with the writings of G. M. Soares-Prabhu on Dharma of Jesus and related topics will find the content of this book repetitious to some extent. This reviewer considers the following as the merits of this work. (1) There are some personal insights into the Matthean text (5:1-7:29); (2) an extensive treatment of the Old Testament background of the Matthean text is provided; (3) one does find a healthy dialogue with some of the key problems of the world in which we live; and (4) in particular, the thoughts of the Matthean text is further developed in the light of the documents of Vat. II.

Yet I do find some drawbacks (a few of them major ones) in P.'s work: (1) the format of the book fails to have international standard; (2) lack of precision and accuracy in languages whether classical languages (Sanskrit, Hebrew or Greek) or English (in the use of orthographic signs, grammar and spelling); (3) because the thought-pattern is on the whole very abstract and some of the sentences too long, the reading (and understanding too) becomes rather difficult; and (4) there are mistakes in biblical references.

A few points in the content are seriously questionable: (a) according to the Marcan usage, "disciples' are exclusively the inner group of the Twelve who had left all things and followed Jesus" (p. 91). This is true of Matthew (cf. 10:1-4) but not applicable to Mark, for according to Mark Jesus appoints the Twelve from those whom he wanted (cf. 3:13-14); so Levi whom Jesus had called to be his disciple (2:14) does not figure in the list of the Twelve (cf. 3:16-19). (b) Parables of Salt and Light (pp. 130-138): these are not parables but metaphors. (c) I am of the opinion that a Christian programme, according to Matthew, should include other discourses as well, particularly, the Community Discourse (ch. 18).

Finally, the question of readership: Is the book meant for biblical scholars? If 'yes', they may not find many new and striking ideas or seminal insights in it. Is it meant for educated lay persons? Certain technical aspects (for instance, the two source theory that is presupposed, foreign expressions like *Redaktionsgeschichte* [p. 55], abundant use of Greek script, etc.) may confuse and confound an average reader.

Scaria Kuthirakkattel SVD

History of the Pondicherry Mission: An Outline Jean Lafranez mep English version by P.A. Sampathkumar & André Carof mep.

The volume under review is the English version of the *Précis d'histoire de la mission de Pondichéry* by Jean Lafranez, 1953. It was a summary of Fr. Launay's famous 4 volume *Histoire des Missions de l'Inde* (*The History of the Missions of India: Pondicherry-Mysore-Coimbatore*) published from 1895-1998 and some additions of his own. An English translation of it was prepared for private use and the present volume is a revised and

reedited text of the same, prepared by P.A. Sampathkumar and Andre Carof mep published by the Department of Christian Studies, Chennai.

Historical studies have never been the strength of the Indian Churches. If such studies were undertaken at all, they were done mostly by foreign missionaries. So for example, most of the historical records we have about the indigenous Thomas Christian community have been those left behind by the Portuguese missionaries. Only in 1972, was the first serious attempt to write an ecumenical history of Christianity in India undertaken which fortunately has done an outstanding work by publishing three solid volumes of history and two part-volumes. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned this history is complete with E.R. Hambey's volume on the 18th century having been released recently, and Hugald Grafe's volume on the 19th and 20th centuries published already in 1990. Of course both authors have referred to the volumes of Launay and Lafranez but as can be expected, it is a very sketchy reference. Therefore, works such as these are always a welcome addition and as a historian one is pleased to see that such attempts are being made. At a time in our country history is being written to serve the purpose of the majority community or the ruling class and a lot of falsehood is being circulated in the name of history, attempts to show the past with as much objectivity as possible is an urgent task.

As the title indicates, the book deals with an outline of the Pondicherry mission with a short note on the situation before 1776, and the transition from the Jesuits to the MEP missionaries (1773-76). From chapter III onwards it traces the situation of the mission under the MEP missionaries under its outstanding leaders such as Pierre Brigot, Champenois, Hébert, Bonnand, Godelle, bishop Laouenan, archbishop Gandy, archbishop Morel etc., and concludes with an epilogue by archbishop Colas. There is a chronology of events from 1673 to 1992, a few maps, a bibliography, and, fortunately, an index. Although the book covers primarily the period of the MEP missionaries, the story of the Pondicherry mission begins with the Jesuits and the famous Carnatic mission. The book provides valuable information, about people, places, and events. For example, it mentions the arrival of the Ursulines in Pondicherry in 1738, the first foreign women missionaries to arrive in India, and their unsuccessful attempt to settle down in India because of the unsympathetic attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities (In 1827 the sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, the next group of foreign women missionaries did manage to set foot in India, in Pondicherry). There are references to the Malabar Rites controversy, the *Padroado*-Propaganda muddle and the clashes over jurisdiction in general, the wars between the French and the British, the growth and division of the Pondicherry mission and the formation of different ecclesiastical units, the efforts at bringing up a native clergy, the famous synod of Pondicherry of 1844, etc. A number of persons and places come alive in the detailed descriptions in the book. Each chapter has a structure which unfolds the history in systematic way, giving attention to all the important activities of the missionaries.

Some of the details in the book are obviously wrong like the date 1592 which is given as the date of the arrival of the Portuguese. I do not know what the author has in mind. The Portuguese arrived at the western coast of India much earlier. Another historically wrong date is the one on page 4 where it is said: "Father Aries de Sa SJ died in 1613 at Tranquebar before the Lutherans could arrive there in 1618." The traditional date for the arrival of the Lutherans in India is 1706. I haven't examined all the dates. Hopefully they are more accurate. In spite of such mistakes, I consider the book valuable for the information it contains. The only way to write a complete history of Christianity in India is to begin with regional histories and this book is a good beginning in this.

Isaac Padinjarekuttu

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sd/- Kurien Kunnumpuram

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We humans have a hunger for peace. And yet, we live in a world marked by discord, dissension, hatred, violence and war. What are the causes of this lack of peace? What steps can we take to usher in an era of peace on earth? What contribution can different traditions and different disciplines make towards the establishment of peace? These are some of the questions which the next issue, January 2001, of *Jnanadeepa* seeks to answer.

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