

Elmar Mitterstieler, SJ, *Our Lives in Wonderful Light: Equality, Dignity and Priesthood of all the Members of the Church*, Bengaluru: Asian Trading Corporation, 2016. ISBN: 978-81-7086-774-9. Pages: xi+127.

The book, *Our Lives in Wonderful Light: Equality, Dignity and Priesthood of all the Members of the Church*, was originally published in German under the title *Das Wunderbare Licht, in dem wir leben: Gleichheit, Würde und Priesterum aller in der Kirche* from Echter Verlag GmbH, Würzburg, Germany (2015). Dr Elmar Mitterstieler, SJ, the author, states in the preface that the present edition is a revised and considerably extended one of the German edition (p. xi). As the author clearly spells out the purpose, the book is to remedy the *great ignorance* of very many Christians of their significance and dignity (p. 117). He states, “We are all sons and daughters; we are all kings and priests; we have all received the dignity of royal priesthood, which does not affect the dignity of the episcopacy and the presbyterate in any way” (p. 95).

The Introduction (p. 1-13) is elaborative and very precious as it speaks of the collective priesthood of all believers of which many Christians are unaware of and is given so little prominence and attention. It unites all the faithful as equals in the Lord, for all believers are priests, kings and prophets in their communion with Christ. The author succeeds in explaining the equality, dignity and priesthood of all the members of the Church. The vision is encapsulated in the title itself.

Let me now whet the reader’s appetite by selecting a few notable features of Dr Mitterstieler’s work. Apart from the Introduction, the book consists of six chapters: Priest in the New Testament, Consecrated as Priests by Water and Spirit, Christian Priesthood, Kings and Prophets, Responsibility, and Presbyters in the Priestly People. With the support of the Scripture and Vatican II, Mitterstieler has brought back convincingly into focus the promise of the inalienable equality, dignity and the collective priesthood shared by all those who are baptized believers.

The image of the priest in the New Testament is expounded based on the insights from the epistle to the Hebrews, which highlights the self-sacrifice of Jesus by which he gives us access to the Father (p. 1516). According to the author, the metaphorical images of *priesthood/holy, royal priesthood* in the first epistle of Peter are not to be interpreted in a cultic sense. The spiritual sacrifice that the Christians offer is their own existence and lives inspired by Jesus Christ and his self-sacrifice (p. 19). The chapter also deals with the cultic-priestly images in other New Testament texts. The cultic image of the priest in the Revelation is used to describe and interpret the dignity and the new, final reality that all the Christians have received through the blood of Jesus in his self-sacrifice.

Jesus in his baptism revealed the reality that was in him from the very beginning and the believers experience the same original and existential love of their lives in baptism (p. 28). The baptismal consecration acknowledges their shared and fundamental consecration in God. In its unity with confirmation, baptism is the sacramental source of the one Christian priesthood. Through baptisms, we are members of Christ in the people of God (p. 32). The author discusses the characteristics of collective priesthood in our communion with Jesus: We are given free access and personal relationship to God not only just for ourselves but also for many others through our mediation (p. 44). God offers Himself with us and the summit of His self-offering is the redeeming self-offering of Jesus (p. 47). Exercising the collective priesthood of all believers, we are to make our self-offering together with the self-sacrifice of Jesus, for the priestly sacrifice of Jesus is re-enacted and fully expressed in the self-offering of the believers (p. 57). God the source of all reconciliation invites us to accept the reconciliation offered to us and to be the agents of the ministry of reconciliation letting others experience God's forgiveness (p. 59-62). All are invited to take the mission of proclamation to heart and make it a priority in daily lives. The author also stresses the mediation or intercessions and care for others that have sacramental-priestly element, a significant way of exercising the collective priesthood (p. 83).

The baptized ones are prophets who are to interpret the present in God's spirit and light (p. 90). They are also rulers and the ruling is to be in the sense of God's rule over His creation and over all humankind. The reign of God's self-offering in Jesus sets the example and it is an indispensable part of the collective priesthood (p. 94). The last chapter reiterates that the ministry of the presbyters is built on the collective priesthood shared by the entire people of God (p. 98), and this chapter is inspired by St Augustine's much-cited words: "What I am for you terrifies me; what I am with you consoles me. For you I am a bishop; but with you I am a Christian. The former is a duty; the latter a grace. The former is a danger; the latter, salvation."

The book is scholarly. While explaining the Scriptural passages, the author examines the original texts in Greek in order to highlight the first meaning (p. 51). He effectively brings out the themes related to the collective priesthood of the faithful and the reader can easily follow the common thread of thought that flows through the entire work. The author has succeeded in retaining the interest of the reader in the subject, and hence it is a praiseworthy contribution. The insights are relevant and extremely beneficial. However, a moderate discussion, if not a detailed one, which exceeds the scope of the work, on the topic of the

responsibility of the baptized, would have conjured up better awareness among the believers. The abbreviations and the endnotes given are valuable; still a bibliography and an index would have helped to make better sense of the appendix. I heartily recommend this book as a *must-read* to all students of theology and all who wish to deepen their knowledge on the collective priesthood of the entire people of God.

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