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**BOOK REVIEW**

**Arokiaraj Savarimuthu**, *A Study of Marriage Rites in the Roman, Chaldean and Indian Traditions*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2007. Pages: xxii+450. ISBN 8170864216

*A Study of Marriage Rites in the Roman, Chaldean and Indian Tradition* is the publication of the doctoral dissertation of Arokiaraj Savarimuthu, which was guided by Prof. Paul De Clerck and defended at the Catholic Institute of Paris.

The book investigates into the reality of marriage and attempts to make a synthesis of the theology of marriage through its seven chapters and the final chapter is on the proposals for the adaptation or creation of a new Christian rite or marriage in the Church of Tamil Nadu. While the author shares the accusation, "Christians are considered to be foreigners in their own soil" (p.1), he is also challenged to undertake a research to integrate the local, cultural, and traditional nuptial ceremonies into the ritual celebration of marriage in Tamil Nadu, the state from which the author hails.

The author considers inculturation, "as old as the Church itself" (p.339), as the key to the present research on marriage rites (p.3). Hence the present study on marriage rites concentrates on the inculturation of nuptial ceremonies. This study takes into account the response of the Church on matters of nuptial rites in reference to the marriage ceremonies in the Hindu and Tamil traditions. An investigation into the possible theological interpretation of the home celebration of the nuptial ceremonies is also provided in this work.

The study is made on the basis of two important religious traditions, namely, Christian and Hindu. Savarimuthu chooses the Roman (Western) and Chaldean (Eastern) nuptial traditions representing Christianity and the Brahmin (Aryan) and Tamil (Dravidian) nuptial traditions representing Hinduism. The author picks up eight important elements for his comparative and analytical study of marriage rites: 1) relationship between betrothal and marriage; (2) person involved; (3) family and liturgical

ceremonies; (4) place of celebration; (5) characteristics of marriage; (6) ends of marriage; (7) man-woman relationship and its images; and (8) theology of marriage. In order to prepare the ground for the proposals for inculturation, the author conducts a study on the influence of the local cultures in the development of Roman and Chaldean traditions.

*A Study of Marriage Rites in the Roman, Chaldean and Indian Tradition* is presented in eight chapters: Chapter 1: Marriage before Christian era; Chapter 2: Christian marriage in the first three centuries; Chapter 3: Evolution of marriage rite in the Roman tradition; Chapter 4: Development of the rite of marriage in the Chaldean tradition; Chapter 5: A comparison between the rites of marriage in the Roman and Chaldean traditions; Chapter 6: Marriage in the Hindu and Tamil traditions; Chapter 7: A synthesis of marriage rites in the Roman, Chaldean, Hindu and Tamil traditions; Chapter 8: Proposals for the adaptation or creation of a new Christian rite of marriage in the Church of Tamil Nadu. The historical and contextual approach of the author in the research project is vivid from the titles of the different chapters in the book.

In the opinion of the author, the process of inculturation “means dying to the old values contrary to the Christian faith and rising to the Christian ideals and values of marriage” (p.348). In a similar vein of caution the author emphasises that “inculturation has to be a natural process. It is not to be artificially imposed upon the people without preparing them sufficiently”(p.387).

In light of the research Savarimuthu makes a twelve-point project towards the adaptation of Tamil marriage rite. They are: (i) oath-taking to mark the final agreement to marry, (ii) worship of gods and goddesses to ask for blessings on marriage, (iii) gift of bride made by her father, (iv) the grasping of bride’s hand (*panigrahana*), (v) walking around the fire (*agnipranayana*), (vi) tying of *tali*, (vii) exchange of garlands, (viii) taking seven steps together (*saptapadi*), (ix) bridal procession, (x) worship (*puja*) performed in the house of husband, (xi) homage to elders who bless the couple, (xii) wedding feast (p.375).

The author is of the opinion that Christians do not seem to be fully satisfied with nuptial liturgy. He generalises it and states, “This is true of any Christian marriage in India” (p.1). It seems to me that this statement needs reconsideration, for Savarimuthu attests a lot of importance to the nuptial liturgy of the Syro-Malabar Church from the point of inculturaton. In

addition, the author draws inspiration and insight from the Syro-Malabar nuptial liturgy in making the proposals for new Tamil Christian marriage rite.

This book is a serious study on the rites of marriage exploring the cultural, ritual, symbolic, theological, ethical, and spiritual significance of marriage, a secular reality and a sacred mystery. The approach of the author is balanced and representative in nature, especially in the case of choosing Western and Eastern nuptial liturgies along with Brahmin (*Aryan*) and Tamil (*Dravidian*) nuptial rituals. Arokiaraj Savarimuthu has made a commendable study of marriage rites in diverse ecclesial and cultural ethos to illustrate the need to celebrate the faith of the Church freely and faithfully. This volume presents the significance and relevance of symbols and rituals in the life of human beings in general and the celebration of marriage in particular. The author deserves our appreciation and congratulations.

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