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Book Review

A. Pushparajan & X.D. Selvaraj, ed., *Laity in the Church: Identity and Mission in India Today*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010. Pages: viii+243. ISBN: 81-7086-544-1.

The Catholic Church, immediately after Second Vatican Council, witnessed an attempt to actualize the divinely inspired and well articulated paradigm shift in the self understanding of the Church as 'People of God'. Correspondingly the laity cherished a renewed self-understanding as the people of God. But gradually the new paradigm was side lined and not much attention was given to actualize the proposals of the council.

Every Year the Indian Theological Association (ITA) takes up relevant and appropriate themes and schemes for their theological updating and appropriation inspired by the Spirit and implemented by the theologians in India. To give flesh and blood to their concerns ITA's 29th annual seminar in 2006 selected the theme, *Laity in the Church: Identity and Mission in India Today*. This volume is an attempt to present in words their concerns, hopes, desires and aspirations in the concrete context of present day India. This volume contains eight well researched and articulated papers presented and discussed in the annual seminar, the ITA statement and reports and minutes. A. Pushparajan and X. D. Selvaraj have made a commendable work in editing the papers and presenting them for our consideration and appropriation.

The first article, "Biblical Perspective of the People of God: Identity and Mission" authored by the well known biblical scholar and preacher, Dr Augustine Mulloor, surveys both the Old and New Testaments thoroughly to present a strong foundation for the use and practice of the concept 'People of God.' He first raises a few fundamental questions about our situation in the society and then re-reads the biblical traditions, including their vocabulary and thus arrives at a clear redefinition of the identity and mission of the people of God in the context of India today.

Errol D'Lima, an acclaimed theologian from JDV, Pune, attempts to evaluate the vocation, life and mission of the lay faithful in his article "Laity in the Post-Vatican Church ...". In the light of his insightful and critical reviewing of the documents of Vatican II, post Vatican and those of FABC, he establishes doctrinally that the laity's call today is not merely to animate the world with the spirit of Christianity but also to participate actively in the whole life of the Church.

In the next two articles, enquiry is made to evaluate how far the biblical and doctrinal notion of people of God is lived out in history. Dr Selvester Ponnunmuthan makes a historical appraisal of the various efforts of lay participation, like pious associations in liberation, ecumenical and interreligious orientations. Dr Scaria Zacharia makes a study on ‘Palliyogam’ of the St Thomas Christian Church as an indigenous model of lay participation in the spiritual and material aspects of the Church.

“Lay Participation at Grassroots – Reality and Challenges: A Subaltern Perspective,” by A. Pushparajan is a concrete study of the present day contextual application of laity’s role from a subaltern perspective. The author notes that within the church participative values are rarely valued, fostered or promoted. Dr P. T. Mathew’s paper on “Sociological perspectives of the Charism and Structures in the Church and the Place of the Laity,” evaluates the efforts from the part of the Church to realize the teaching authority of the Church. He concludes that there has been the publication of enormous amount of literature in the Church on the theme of laity. But the discourse has remained by and large, theological and speculative, with little attention being paid to the underlying sociological factors. The author suggests some of the diverse models of religious leadership that could be taken up by the laity in the Church.

Lay spirituality is an important concern of the Church today. The last two papers are trying to focus on this concern and attempt to present a way for the laity to follow. In the light of his experience and expertise D.X. Selvaraj deals elaborately with the role the laity played in the past and analyses the triple mission of Christ and its relevance to the contemporary understanding of the vocation and mission of the laity. Thorough the analysis of the experience and practices of lay endeavours in the Church, in the fields of sacred and secular arenas, the author derives the type of spirituality most relevant and appropriate for the laity. In the last article, Dr Valarie D’Souza explores laity spirituality and touches upon the crucial foundations of a traditional spirituality of the laity. In this article special care is taken to analyze the Indian context of plurality of spirituality, with reference to women’s perspective.

This volume is an amalgamation of all the necessary ingredients for a fruitful existence, growth and fruitfulness of lay people in the life and mission of the Church. The articles in the book attempt to present a holistic vision for the integral growth and nourishment of the laity. The research that the contributors have done is praiseworthy and they have incorporated in it biblical, doctrinal, historical, contextual, sociological and spiritual aspects very judiciously. There are minor typographical and methodological errors which could be corrected for the perfection of the book. The order of the articles also could be rearranged according to the overall framework of the volume.

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