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BOOK REVIEW

Kuncheria Pathil, ed., *Church on Pilgrimage: Trajectories of Intercultural Encounter*, Bengaluru, Dharmaram Publications, 2016, Pages: xii+587; ISBN: 978-93-84964-35-1

Church on Pilgrimage: Trajectories of Intercultural Encounter is a luminous work methodically edited by Prof. Dr Kuncheria Pathil, CMI, the veteran teacher of ecclesiology and ecumenism. The work is a collection of twenty-four well-researched articles and a general conclusion contributed, besides by Prof. Pathil, a galaxy of twentythree experts. The scholars have systematically worked together to portray the *past* trajectory of the pilgrim Church which got sprouted in Jerusalem and spread to the peripheries of the earth, and the Church of the *future* has been looked at by Dr Michael Amaladoss through a critical retrospection which comes as the conclusion of the work. Prof. Pathil, marking fifty years of his meaningful life as a Catholic priest, offers this precious volume to all believers in Jesus Christ, irrespective of the Churches or ecclesial communities.

The Church journeys not for herself but for the sake of all peoples in the whole world. The editor writes: "It must be underlined that the pilgrimage of the Church is not yet over, the journey will be continued and new horizons will emerge one after the other until the end of history... naturally this volume on the Pilgrimage of the Church does not have any conclusion. All conclusions made by the authors, writers and the editor are just provisional, tentative and subject to further revisions and corrections." As we know, the Holy Bible is not just a collection of some abstract religious truths, but the history of struggling believers, the pilgrim people. The Church as an aggregation of believers on pilgrimage is constantly challenged by her own history. This work invites us to inspire ourselves to reviewing our past in shaping our future presence as a credible Church especially in the context of Asia. The entire work is systematically divided into three parts.

Part One, *Diachronic Trajectories*, covers the main historical phases of this pilgrimage. It contains eleven articles in eleven chapters. In Chapter one, the author Joseph Pathrapankal, the well-known scholar of the New Testament, narrates the story of the beginning of the Church in the context of the call of the Apostles and the mission given to them. The early Christian community was thoroughly Jewish in its faith and praxis except for its faith in the Risen Lord and its life in accordance with that faith. The

author also marks several moments of crises in the early Church and a convergence of divine assistance and able human leadership. In Chapter two, Jacob Parappally sketches the progressive development of the encounter between Christian faith and the Greek world and how it transformed Christian theology as well as Greek thought. The story of the Christianity's encounter with the Roman cultural and political world is another major feature of its history and development. In Chapter three, Errol D'Lima highlights the characteristics of the early Church in Rome as well as in the Roman Empire in its cultural and political context. Imposing their norms on other Churches, Papal and Roman authorities stunted the legitimate growth and freedom of the other local Churches and their identities and it was the main factor behind the historical divisions in the Church. In Chapter four, Francis Thonippara takes the readers from Rome to Constantinople, from the Western Churches to the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The author with his extensive knowledge of the history of the Church tries to sum up the main trends of the Byzantine Orthodox Church.

Syriac Christianity is another distinctive trajectory in Eastern Christianity and in Chapter five K.M. George, a well-known Eastern Orthodox theologian, presents in a summary way the story of this unique Christian Church. The Syriac Christianity went through untold sufferings of persecution by the Byzantine, Roman and Islamic conquerors and invaders in different periods. The author also mentions its glorious missionary period in the early centuries, and its present tragedies in its own home country. In Chapter six, Dominic Veliath highlights the two approaches of Augustine and Aquinas. For Augustine the Heavenly City and the Earthly City are totally different and not interrelated. It was mainly in the theology of Aquinas we find the epitome of the medieval attempt of theological synthesis, of course, with its merits and inherent limitations.

In Chapter seven, Indian Protestant theologian Israel Selvanayagam in a masterly way narrates the story of Protestant Movements in the Church from the 16th century till today, highlighting the dynamism, the dynamics and the enormous diversity within those reform movements. Though the explosion started with Martin Luther, the cry for reform was in the heart of the Church ever since the Church became more and more institutionalized, and political at the expense of the spiritual and prophetic element in the church. The author also hints at the distortions and exaggerations of some of the reform movements. In Chapter eight, Anto Karokaran continues the story of the Western Christianity during the Colonial period. The Author outlines the Colonial Mission and highlights its defects by comparing it with the early Church's mission. He points out that the mission policy of the Colonial period was transplanting the Western cultural and institutional model of the Church

with forced conversions and a total disregard for the cultural and religious heritage and identities of the people of the colonies.

Vincent Kundukulam, in Chapter nine, introduces the impacts of Postmodernity on Western Christianity today. The author highlights the theoretical framework of Postmodernity and its practical implications by introducing some of its main proponents. He underlines the deconstructive approach of Jesus, the narrative character of Christian faith and a new Christian 'Lifestyle' of listening and accompanying the people. Coming to Chapter ten, Thomas Manninezhath writes the story of Christianity in Africa with an emphasis on the recent emergence of indigenous Churches. The continent has its own religious and spiritual ethos expressed in worship, veneration of ancestors, etc. The issue is whether the Churches in Africa are adopting themselves to the authentic African cultural beliefs and practices into their teachings and practices as against the Colonial Christianity of the past. In Chapter eleven, Mathew Paikada in a similar way focuses on the Latin American Christianity and its present challenges and the impact of Liberation Theology there and on the Universal Church today. The author observes that Marxist materialism and atheism never played any role in Liberation Theology, though the Marxian method of social analysis and the tools of social sciences were used by it.

Part Two, *Encounter with Asian/Indian Culture and Peoples*, presents the storey of Christianity's meeting with Asian cultures and peoples. This part is a collection of eight articles in eight chapters. In the first chapter in this section (Chapter 12), Shaji George Kochuthara looks at the Asian Churches, their problems and prospects today in the postcolonial context. The author starts with the Asian situation, which is so varied, and examines the postcolonial situation and the responses of the Asian Churches to rediscover their Asian and Christian identities. In Chapter thirteen, Davis Varayilan introduces FABC and the challenges Asian countries and the Asian Churches face today, and outlines that Asian Churches are today at the crossroads of two stories: the story of the peoples of Asia and the story of the Gospel. The future of the Asian Churches depends on their quality to be mystical, prophetic and participatory, especially by becoming a church of the poor and for the poor. Felix Wilfred, in Chapter fourteen, raises certain critical questions to the Asian Churches with regard to their identity and legitimate autonomy. He challenges the misconception that Asian Christianity has its beginnings in the Colonial mission. According to him, the flocking of people to Pentecostal and charismatic movements in Asia is an expression of their freedom, agency and autonomy. He concludes that the enemy is often "within" represented by some leaders of the Churches who want to tow the Churches exactly according to the lines of universal

directives rather than responding creatively to the pastoral needs of their Churches.

In chapter fifteen, Kuncheria Pathil, the editor of this volume, outlines the Christian presence in India which is the story of two thousand years of the history of Christianity in India and its missionary enterprises. First, a history of the ancient Church of St Thomas, the Apostle, is introduced; secondly, the arrival of the Western Latin Church in India and its growth in the different parts of India is outlined; thirdly, the presence of Protestant Christianity in India under various denominations is briefly surveyed. In Chapter sixteen, D. Alphonse highlights the prophetic task of the little flock of the disciples of Jesus to become an avant-garde of both pluralism and democracy, so that it becomes a transformative force. Maria Arul Raja, in Chapter seventeen, highlights the problems, challenges and hopes of the Dalits in India and the approach of the churches towards the Dalits. He points out three vital strategic moral priorities: (1) The needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich. (2) The freedom of the dominated takes the priority over the liberty of the powerful. (3) The participation of marginalized groups takes priority over the preservation of an order which excludes them. In Chapter eighteen Pathil focuses on some of the theological challenges Christianity is facing in India today. The basic underlying theological and ecclesiological issue is the relationship between Christian Gospel and culture of the nation. Saju Chackalackal, in Chapter nineteen discusses the questions raised by Kuncheria Pathil in chapter eighteen. According to the author the Church should consciously take new and bold initiatives to integrate into languages and cultures of India and this God-given golden opportunity should not be missed.

Part Three, *Emerging Trajectories*, containing five chapters, discusses some of the emerging cultural and theological trajectories of the contemporary pilgrimage of Christianity. In Chapter twenty, T.K. John highlights one of the contemporary ecclesial thrusts emphasized by Pope Francis, 'a Church of the Poor and for the Poor.' The author proposes that this could be a major resource for renewal and reshaping of the Church of the future. Shalini Mulackal, in Chapter twenty-one, presents the problems and prospects of women, starting with scanning through the earliest history of the Church to see the various roles women played in the birth, nurturance and growth of the infant Church and identifies the factors responsible for the gradual exclusion of women from these roles. The author hopes that women shall be gradually restored to their rightful place in the Church once again. In Chapter twenty-two, Sebastian Painadath highlights Christianity's relationship with other religions and the emerging new paradigms. The author examines some of the paradigms of the relationship between religions. According to him Asian theologians with their *advaitic* sensitivity dwell on the unity of

spirituality. In Chapter Twenty-three, Antony Kalliath proposes a reconstruction of Christian identity in the scenario of harmony of religions. He points out that openness to the World Religions with a proactive mind-set has been one of the crucial trajectories of Christianity's growth ever since the Second Vatican Council.

Patrick Gnanapragasam, in Chapter twenty-four, explains the new context of a Public Mission and Public Theology for Christianity. The author recommends to empower the subalterns to participate in the contemporary public sphere, especially with their sensitivity for social justice, and thus to bring faith to the heart of the public are some important tasks in the public mission of Christianity.

In conclusion, Michael Amaladoss taking the cues from the various articles of this volume projects the future of the Church in constructing a new identity in dialogue with all cultures and religions as they are developing today.

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