

**Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, ed., *Living the Joy of the Gospel Today: Challenges to the Family and to the Consecrated Life*, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2017, Pages: 5+256. ISBN: 978-93-84964-77-1**

The book, *Living the Joy of the Gospel Today: Challenges to the Family and to the Consecrated Life*, is an excellent collection of nineteen papers on the vocation and challenges to the family and to the consecrated life today. The articles in this book were originally presented at the seminar, "Living the Joy of the Gospel Today: Challenges to the Family and to the Consecrated Life," which was conducted at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram from August 12 to 14, 2015.

The first paper by George Kulangara, CMI presents the joy of the Gospel as the "result of a letting go and subsequent life of all around affirmation" (P. 20), and expounds how it can be experienced and lived in the changing and challenging context of today. As the editor of the book has rightly pointed out the following eight papers are on the various challenges that the Christian families face today and how they can live the joy of the Gospel even in the midst of the challenges. Lisa Sowle Cahill explains the social mission of the family as a domestic Church and she highlights the role of spirituality, prayer and liturgy in nurturing the presence of God in the family (p. 27). The true Christian vision of the family is as a gospel family and domestic Church, and as *Familiaris Cosortio* proclaims, the family becomes a domestic Church when it sees the face of Christ in every person, especially those who suffer (p. 25-28). Based on the writings of St Chavara, especially *Nalla Appante Chaavarul (The Testament of a Good Father)*, Sibichen K. Mathew presents the saint's vision of the family and its relevance (p. 32-33), and reiterates the teaching of Pope Francis that Christian marriage and family life are real vocations like priesthood and religious life (p. 30). Matthew Coutinho analyses and evaluates the emerging models of the family today (p. 44-52), principal features and current situation of the Indian family (p. 5260), and challenges the Church and the ministers to respond adequately with love, compassion and truth (p. 60).

Bishop Thomas Tharayil identifies and analyses the major factors like crisis of faith and values, loneliness, Cyber world, personality disorders, lack of emotional maturity and interference of third parties creating a pathological dependency (p. 65-68) leading to the growing number of marriage breakdowns in India. He also appeals the exigency

of new strategies in the pastoral care of the family. Emphasizing family as the cradle of faith and character formation (p. 74, 78), Joy Philip Kakkanattu, CMI discusses the vital issue of faith formation in the families and accentuates the biblical vision of faith formation and St Chavara's instructions on the formation of children. He invites the ministers of the Church to "help the family fulfil its role in faith formation through effective pastoral guidance and formation" (p. 82). Geevarghese Kaithavana underlines mercy as the core and nucleus of the mission of the Church (p. 96) and the need for the compassionate pastoral care in the context of the families that are wounded due to various life situations. Sebastian Payyappilly, CMI discusses the challenges to the families and points out the need to address them locally or contextually. Though there is no uniform and one time definitive solution for the issues, he suggests effective catechesis and redefining the doctrine or the teachings of the Church on marriage and family (p. 102-103). Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI reflects on the dowry system in India, "the major cause of the continuing degradation of women and discrimination against them" (p. 106). The author demonstrates the evils of dowry and how it contradicts the basic dignity of women (p. 110-111) and Christian meaning of marriage (p. 112), and the very basic principles of family life. Hence he urges the Church personnel to "take a clear stance against the dowry system and chalk out a concrete action plan to eradicate it" (p. 113).

The following ten papers are on the consecrated/religious life and in general they really pose challenges and call for awakening and renewal. Francis Gonsalves, SJ reflects on consecrated life today in terms of Pope Francis's three-point programme for the year of consecrated life or A-B-C for religious life, i.e., Anchoring and Awakening, Breaking Boundaries and Building Bridges, and Crosscultural Collaborating and Cosmic Communion (p. 125-128). According to the author it is a call to revise and evolve a new Christology, Ecclesiology and Missiology in consonance with the 'signs of the times' (p. 115). Joseph Xavier, SJ presents the biblical and historical background of religious vows and assesses their significance, relevance and challenges today. He reminds that the *raison d'être* of religious life is *sequela Christi* and hence to remain sensitive to the needs of the world around, especially the poor (p. 145). Virginia Saldanha cogitates on the challenges of religious life from the perspective of a lay theologian. She invites the religious to have the 'burning love' to serve God and indicates the challenges in the socio-political situations

of India. Sophy Rose, CMC portrays St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who effectively integrated prayer and action, as a model for religious life even today. According to the author, as 'a religious beyond times,' Chavara lived his consecrated life after the model and example of Jesus "the consecrated" *par excellence* (p. 159).

Saji Mathew Kanayankal, CST analyses the challenges and prospects in religious life and invites our attention to the words of Pope Francis that religious community has the mission of becoming a school of communion and that the religious are called to be 'experts in communion' (p. 171). He also proposes the Trinity, Holy Family, Jesus and Apostles and the first Christian Community as models for religious life (p. 173-174) and presents the contemporary challenges of this life. Varghese Koluthara, CMI ruminates on the relationship between the religious and hierarchy and he underscores that there should be conscious efforts from both sides to improve mutual relations on account of the "common mission of evangelization" (p. 203). Highlighting the declining number of vocations as a great challenge to religious life, Dona Sanctis, BS says that the "present day challenges invite us for a re-visioning of ourselves for a renewed commitment" (p. 204). The paper discusses the causes such as nonconductive family atmosphere, the paradigm shift in recruiting, lack of spiritual depth, and impact of secularism for the decline in religious vocations (p. 207-209) and explore the ways to face the challenges to develop appropriate perspectives to foster vocations in the postmodern world (p. 210-212). Bishop Antony Kariyil, CMI discusses the prospects and challenges in the ministry of education and underlines that the present day challenges "should effectively prevent us from sinking into complacency over our past achievements" (p. 225). Julie George, SSpS discusses the empowerment of women as they are discriminated in the Church. She rightly concludes that "giving rightful place for women in the Church is not a problem to be solved, it is a Divine mandate meant to be honoured (p. 238). Cherian Thunduparampil, CMI depicts the heroic virtues of St Chavara who with greater commitment integrated the prayer life and the apostolates.

The above mentioned authors reflect upon the family and consecrated life creatively and critically, and highlight the prospects and challenges. They also provide us with the profound meanings of these two vocations from varying perspectives that enable us to realize their significance and respond to the challenges leading to 'live the joy

of the Gospel today.' The index given at the end is extremely beneficial. Even though some of the grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and absence of punctuations hinder the flow of reading, they in no way diminish the quality of the edited work. It is a great contribution to delve deep into various dimensions of family and consecrated life, and therefore I heartily recommend this book to all the students of theology and all interested people who wish to respond to the challenges to the family and to the consecrated life.

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