

Julian Saldanha, SJ, *Exploring Frontiers*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2016, Pages: 239

The book, *Exploring Frontiers*, is basically a compilation of articles written by the author at different periods and for varied readership, but they are revised and updated in this book as the author himself acknowledges. They are divided into seventeen chapters with a brief general introduction that accentuates the role of theology in assisting the Church to become relevant to the times. The book is a great contribution in doing the theology and the very vision is encapsulated in the title itself. Michael Amaladoss, SJ furnishes the book with an enriching foreword that highlights the exigency of an on-going dialogue of the Gospel with the cultures and religions. As pointed out in the foreword by the author, while developing the themes, various “writings of theologians, provisions of Canon law, official documents and the pastoral practice of the Church are all consulted and interpreted” (p. 9).

The first article calls for a participative model of Church communion (p. 25) in which ‘the *entire People of God* with the help of the Holy Spirit, hear, distinguish and interpret the many and different voices of the age to judge them in the light of the divine Word.’ The author admires Pope Francis who set an example in this direction by allowing free discussion of topics such as divorce and reception of sacraments for (civilly) re-married divorcees in the Synod of bishops in Rome in October 2015. The “primary task of the magisterium is not to punish, but to provide guidance to the faithful” (p. 18-19), and the role of the theologian is “critical assimilation of magisterium” in freedom and free from suspicion, for “if error enters into the teaching of the magisterium, it can only be corrected if there are some persons who critique it” (p. 23).

The author is clear that the Church, as in the case of the sins of the past, needs to acknowledge also the errors in some past teachings as they have caused great harm, and it would be a revolutionary step in the history of the Church (p. 28). The author deals in detail with one such axiom: “Outside the Church no salvation” (*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*). Further the author analyzes the address, which Pope Benedict XVI delivered at the University of Regensburg on 12 September 2006 and tries to understand the pope’s controversial comments in their context, and offers observations and reflections with frankness,

honesty and respect as part of the dialogue of cultures and religions (p. 56).

In order to facilitate the growth of an Indian Christian Theology, Saldanha explains, compares and contrasts transubstantiation and *Prānapratisthā*. Here what is more interesting is the link between worship and service in relation to the Eucharist which may not be found in the *Prānapratisthā* (p. 65). The following essay reminds that “many of the problems in the Church today are only symptoms of a deeper malaise” (p. 90). Hence the author calls for a thorough renewal of the Church. What is important is to identify the essential or basic structure of the Church, i.e., “the continuation of the apostolic ministry” (p. 74). The author, while defining the office of the Bishop, reminds that ‘as part of their responsibility towards the universal Church they are required to imitate St Paul who “opposed Cephas to his face, because he stood condemned” (Gal 2:11) (p.76). Above all, ‘transparency should characterize the functioning of Church structures’ (p. 86).

The cultural diversity is to be taken seriously when ‘developing an ethics and orienting it in the light of Christian faith’ (p. 94), because even the values that are accepted as fixed reference points are expressed differently in varying cultures (p. 97). The author concludes that “moral theology in India has the double task of confronting *local questions* and problems through *inculturated systems* and *categories of thought*” (p. 100). The paper on ‘East is East’ tries to explain the difference of perspective and approach towards other religions between Asian and Roman mentalities. “To be fully religious, one needs to be inter-religious” (p. 118). The paper concludes with a call for proper exercise of collegiality and subsidiarity from the part of Rome because it facilitates better consultation and collaboration (p. 118). The author proceeds to explore how the Gentile background of Jesus affected his approach to the Gentiles. Just as Jesus’ closer contact with them contributed to his having a much more receptive attitudes towards followers of other religions, a better collaboration between the central Magisterium and Asian Churches and due respect accorded to the different contexts and experiences of the Asian Churches (p. 129) make the mission of the Church more relevant to the times.

In Jesus, we find the originality of the priesthood, for he did not fit into the established priesthood of his time (p. 132). In him we find the integration of both the sacred and secular (Jn 1:1, 14), for he appears to

the disciples in “secular” contexts of life like fishing, travelling, etc. After the model of Christ who wanted to find him in the ordinary events and based on the teachings of the Church (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 30; *Ecclesia in Asia*, 24), the author argues that the scope of the ministry of the priest is far beyond the limits of ministering only to the laity.

The article ‘Issues Related to Conversion’ is to draw attention to certain issues related to conversion. It is necessary to be sensitive to the present highly communalized context of evangelization (p. 152). Therefore the author recommends the Churches and the groups to engage in both inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue. The human beings are called to participate in the divine governance of creation (p. 155) and they must find God both in the nature and in the history, in the garden and in the city (p. 156). If the humans fail in their stewardship they will bring disaster both upon themselves and the creation (p. 157), for the “stewardship respects the right order which must exist in nature and in society” (p. 163). The key to peace and happiness lies in harmony of humans themselves and with God and nature (p. 159). It necessitates a life-style marked by sobriety and solidarity (p. 160). The article on ‘What’s in a Name?’ as it spells out is a study of the biblical and historical background of giving of a name (p. 167-170). As the author points out “a person’s name primarily confers an identity on him/her and only secondarily *may* express a meaning” (p. 173). The paper on ‘Solidarity with Ancestors’ highlights the needed reverence for ancestors and it concludes with a note based on the genealogy of Jesus that, “God can write straight with crooked lines” (p. 181).

Jesus taught a new way of living and the mode of the life of Christians was described as “the Way (*Mārga*). The author envisages an Indian way of being Christian and a few salient measures he indicates are: Catechesis, Pedagogy, Spirituality, Liturgy, Ethics, Canon Law, Life Style, Formation, Pastoral Methods, Art, etc. The paper, ‘A Hindu Encounters Christ,’ sheds light on the life and teachings of Jesus that inspires many to come to the new way. While emphasizing the missionary nature of the Church (p. 212-215) the article on ‘Missionaries Abroad’ presents some relevant and crucial challenges in missionary activity (p. 217-218). The final paper namely, ‘A Sad Chapter of Church History,’ deals with the epic struggle of the Albigensians or Cathars to retain their faith against the Church that considered their doctrines heretical and called for their elimination (p. 222) in the thirteenth Century. The executions and the tortures done on

Cathars are discussed that are in contrast with the earlier tradition of the Church (p. 232).

What is most interesting about the book is that the author with an inquisitive mind reflects on the relevant questions exploring theology, history, experience and common sense. What attract a reader are the profound thoughts expressed in a simple language with examples, incidents, anecdotes, etc. The author deserves appreciation for providing the building blocks for an in-depth research into the field of theology. As the book is a compilation of the articles written at different periods and for varied readership there are a few repetitions, for example, the paragraph in the paper 'A New Religion or the Way?' (p. 188-189) is put as the conclusion of the paper 'A Hindu Encounters Christ' (p. 208). An index at the end would have helped to make better sense of the appendix. It is beyond any argument or doubt that the book draws attention to certain issues related to the life and mission of the Church, which require further discussion and deeper reflection. Therefore it is inspirational and I suggest this book as a "must-read" to the students of theology and all those who wish to deepen the knowledge in contextual theology.

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