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BOOK REVIEWS

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Varghese Theckanath, S.G, & Raynah Braganza Passanha, ed., *Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Wholeness and Equal Discipleship*, Delhi: Media House (Jointly published by Streevani, Pune and Montfort Social Institute, Hyderabad), 2012. ISBN:978-81-7495-469-0. Pages 248.

The book brings together the papers presented at a seminar organized by Streevani, Pune, on 15 August 2010. The sub-title of the book reflects the two related concerns the book deals with: sexual abuse and the unequal power distribution within the church that is intimately linked with sexual abuse. The unequal power distribution is the result of a patriarchal mentality and the non-collegial understanding of leadership, both so much prevalent in the church and deeply interiorized by the victims of abuse.

The first two papers (Theckanath & Joseph) situate the seminar, while Da Silva reflects on the significance of human sexuality in the lives of consecrated people. In his presentation, Kochuthara explains how faulty structures within the Church make it easier for people to sexually abuse others, legitimize their behaviour, and even be protected by a church that is more concerned about its image. There are two observations that should disturb our bishops – if they read this book. First, child abuse is more prevalent among diocesan priests, and over 80 percent of the victims are males (p.60). Are the bishops, eager to get workers for their institutions accepting people without proper screening? Is mandatory celibacy providing an honourable escape for homosexuals? In her summary of Margaret Kennedy's doctoral dissertation "The well from which we drink is poisoned," Saldanha shows the importance of right language when dealing with sexual abuse: sin can be dealt with in the confessional, while crime is a public concern and if not handled with justice destroys the credibility of the church and her leaders. Sexual abuse is a crime. Mulackal reminds us that all humans are equal and we have our dignity because we are created in God's image, endowed with freedom and called to find our fulfilment in God. Then she spells out the norms for just sex: sex is meaningful only within love and commitment; when both the partners are adequately aware of the ethical boundaries, are on a 'level playing ground', enter into sex with real

freedom, and experience enrichment. Basing herself on insights gathered from experience, D'Souza lists some features of persons who indulge in sexual abuse: refusal to accept responsibility, experience of sexual abuse in childhood, deviant sexual tendencies, self-indulgence, arrogance, ability to manipulate others, willingness to help, etc. She emphasizes the need for proper psychological assistance for people preparing for the ministry, and this can be given not by some good old priests, but by trained counsellors.

Parappally categorically states: "The hierarchical structure in the Church... does not flow organically from the fundamental Christian experience of God as an Absolute communion of equals where there is no higher or lower, no superior or inferior. This core experience of God revealed through Jesus Christ nullifies any power structure organized hierarchically" (pp. 137-8). Anticipating an objection from traditional Catholic theologians who defend the hierarchical structure by appealing to the principle of the development of dogma, he adds: "This evolution of leadership or the unfolding of the leadership into a hierarchical structure cannot be attributed purely to the working of the Holy Spirit as it is generally held in the Church" (p. 138). Parappally has the backing of historians of the early Church, modern systematic theologians, and above all of contemporary New Testament scholars. When this is forgotten, "the mission entrusted to the Church is hampered by its own ministers" (p. 139). He concludes the paper with a clarion call: "It is our hope that the *kairos* or a graceful time would come for the Church to realize that its inclusion and exclusion of its members from its ministerial service on the basis of God given identity to be human as man or woman cannot be justified" (p. 148). Let us all hope that the moment of grace comes soon.

In her presentation John examines the psychological characteristics of the dominant and the subordinate groups in an unequal society. The dominant group sees itself as omniscient, always correct and very important. The subordinate group has internalized the claims of the dominant group and hence sees itself as depending on them. They tend to be submissive and indulge in sycophancy. Women and men need to re-educate themselves if we wish to move towards a just society. Abraham draws our attention to the agency-communion dialectic that can help us towards growth. We are responsible for ourselves but only in communion with others. Women and men need each other as equal partners, not as dominants and subordinates. The panel of Lobo-Gajiwala, Joseph, Pinto and Raj stress some of the points already noted in the earlier papers. Fortune spells out the difficulties some clergymen face with regard to mandatory reporting of abuse. It is an infringement on their religious profession by the state, and it may harm their relationship with their people. She then suggests some practical ways out.

In his message Bishop Agnelo Gracias hopes that the book becomes the voice of women: Stree-vani (p. 21). This will happen only if many bishops

read this book and take it to heart. Otherwise it may become one more *aranya-vani*: somebody shouting in an uninhabited forest, another voice crying out in the wilderness.

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