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## **BOOK REVIEW**

**Santiago Raja, *Mary and Ecumenism: Problems and Prospects*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2013. Pages: 206. ISBN: 9788184653021**

Santiago Raja is a young promising theologian teaching systematic theology at St Paul's Institute of Theology, Tiruchirapalli, Tamilnadu. This book is part of his doctorate dissertation defended at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. The book is written in six chapters. I shall briefly introduce the chapters and then offer some remarks.

The first chapter, "Mary in the Roman Catholic Church," presents the history of the teachings on Mary and devotion to her in the Roman Catholic Church. Marian doctrines and devotions got its momentum from the Council of Ephesus (431) which proclaimed Mary as *Theotokos* (mother of God, bearer of God). New Testament does not provide much knowledge on Mary as a historical person. The teachings on Mary and Marian devotions gradually developed in the Church. The Fathers of the Church were unanimous in the teachings on Mary as *Theotokos* and Ever-Virgin (*Aeiparthenos*). The "Perpetual Virginity of Mary" was promulgated in 649 by the Lateran Council. It was during the Post-Tridentine period that Mariology became a separate dogmatic treatise and a lot of Marian shrines were erected. In 1854 Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary as an infallible teaching. This led to increase in Marian devotions and claims of 'apparitions' of Mary in different places. The proclamation of the dogma of the "Assumption of Mary" by Pope Pius XII in 1950 was in a way the climax. It must be noted here that before the definitions of Immaculate Conception and Assumption the Popes enquired the opinion of the bishops, clergy and the laity in the Catholic world to ascertain the "sensus fidei" or "sensus fidelium". Vatican II was a water-shed in the Marian teachings and devotions. If in the pre-Vatican II period Mary was seen along with Christ and almost as parallel, Vatican II put Mary along with the Church as a preeminent member of the Church.

Council's approach was more biblical, Christocentric, ecclesiological, ecumenical and pastoral. In the post-Conciliar period, although there were demands from certain popular quarters to declare the dogmas of Mary as 'Mediator of God' and 'Co-redeemer', the Catholic Church followed a balanced approach of the Council and no further dogmatic announcements were made. Today the Roman Catholic Church is increasingly aware that certain Marian dogmas and exaggerated devotions to Mary are a hindrance to communion with the other Churches and ecumenism.

Chapter two, "Mary in the Reformation Churches," deals specifically with the teachings of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and the Anglicans in general on the subject. The author points out that originally the Reformers were not against most of the Marian dogmas and devotion to Mary, but their approach was thoroughly Christocentric. They accepted Mary as *Theotokos*, sinless and ever Virgin. Mary is venerated not due to her own qualities, but due to the grace granted to her on account of Christ. Gradually the Reformation Churches took a very negative stand over against many Marian dogmas and devotion due to their militant approach against Catholicism. They rejected the invocation to Mary and other saints, as it is against the centrality of the unique mediation of Christ. The Church of England was well known for Marian devotions. But with the Anglican reformation they more or less followed the views of European reformers. They abolished the name of Mary and other saints from the liturgy, although in principle they accepted the Marian doctrines of *Theotokos* and the Perpetual Virginity. They reject the doctrines of Immaculate Conception and Assumption, as they are not based on the Scriptures. But we must also note that a Catholic wing within Anglicanism called 'High Church' or 'Anglo-Catholics' always existed in the Church of England and they had a revival during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Oxford Movement.

Chapter three is on "Ecumenical Dialogues on Mary" where the author sums up the ecumenical dialogues on Mary between Orthodox-Old Catholics, Roman Catholic-Pentecostal, Baptist-Roman Catholic, Lutheran-Roman Catholic, British Methodist-Roman Catholic, dialogues of "Group des Dombes" in France, and especially that of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission. The author gives a reference to the view of famous Reformed theologian Karl Barth who saw Mariology "as the heresy of the Roman Catholic Church and as one of the major stumbling blocks in the process of the

unity of all Christians." It really conveys the tension and the hard reality of the problem in the ecumenical discussions. Precisely for this reason the ecumenical movement in its first period was reluctant to face this issue. Some of the points found in the statements are significant: (1) Mary may be better looked at "as an elder sister in faith, a model disciple" (Pope Francis recently called Mary as an "elder sister"). (2) Roman definitions of Immaculate Conception and Assumption were "unwarranted" and "without necessity". (3) Faith conviction of the early church expressed in the ecumenical councils and all liturgies, recognized unanimously by local churches before the 16<sup>th</sup> century break, must be taken seriously and not only Scriptural evidences. (4) Marian dogmas need not be an obstacle to Eucharistic sharing. (5) Catholic Church must check excessive Marian piety which places Mary along with Christ.

Chapter four is focused on the Ecumenical Discussions on the "Marian Dogmas". There are *four Marian dogmas* in the Catholic Church: Mary as *Theotokos*, Perpetual Virginity of Mary, Immaculate Conception, and Assumption of Mary. (1) All Churches accept the title *Theotokos*, though the Protestant Churches are reluctant to use the term as it may lead to misunderstanding that Mary is the Mother of Triune God. They prefer to call Mary as "sister" rather than "mother" to situate Mary with the Church rather than with Christ. (2) On the Perpetual Virginity of Mary most of the theologians dismiss the biological element and they see it as a "meaningful symbol". Mary's solidarity with all women should be emphasized, including the experience of birth pangs, physical changes, etc. Exegetical studies alone cannot affirm or deny the historical element involved in the question of Perpetual Virginity. (3) On the question of Immaculate Conception of Mary the Protestants and Catholics are clearly divided. In the Protestant thinking God alone is holy and Mary should not be isolated from the rest of humanity to a superhuman status. For Catholics this dogma is based on "the principle of fitness". If Mary was under the domain of Original Sin, then she would be unworthy to become the Mother of God. The dogma is dependent on the concept of Original Sin. But today the Original Sin is understood more as the sinful situation of humanity rather than the sin committed by one man, Adam. If Original sin is understood as the deprivation of grace, one may speak of Immaculate Conception as endowment with grace or preserved in the right relation to God. Hence ultimately it is an anthropological question which calls for a renewed understanding of

human nature. (4) Protestants and Anglicans as a whole reject the dogma of the Assumption of Mary, and they accuse that the Catholic Church by this dogma replaces Trinity with a doctrine of 'quarternity', Father, Son, Holy Spirit and Mary. For Catholics the dogma is derived from Immaculate Conception. Jesus died, but his body was not subjected to corruption as He was not subject to Original Sin. For the same reason, Mary's body should not be subjected to corruption, as she was redeemed from Original Sin. "Heavenly Glory" is not a place but a state, and resurrection is a supernatural transfiguration of the human body, which is beyond the object of natural experience or any scientific explanation.

Chapter five examines the "Basic Concerns of the Reformers over the Marian Teachings". It clarifies the basic Protestant Principles of *sola Scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, and soli Deo Gloria*. The chapter also highlights the problems of Papal Infallibility and the binding character of the 'dogmas'. Dogmas are divinely revealed truths that are necessary for salvation. Whenever the Church defines some truth as a dogma, it has to establish it from the Scripture and the Tradition. However, it is accepted that there is the development of dogma when something implicit in faith is made explicit when the context calls for. With regard to the binding character of Marian dogmas as a requirement for intercommunion of Churches, opinions of Churches and theologians differ.

In Chapter six, which is the concluding chapter, the author constructively proposes some theological tools and new approaches as proposed by various theologians in order to arrive at a possible ecumenical convergence on the Marian teachings and dogmas. "Hierarchy of Truths" is one of the keys contained in the *Decree on Ecumenism*. It means that all truths contained in the deposit of faith have to be understood in their relation, direct or indirect, to the central or foundational Christian truth which is centrality of Jesus Christ. Some truths are closer to the centre while others are at the periphery. How shall we understand the Marian dogmas? Some Churches and theologians do not think that acceptance of all the Marian dogmas are absolutely necessary for the communion among the Churches. Another key for understanding the official teachings of the Church is the *sensus fidei* or *sensus fidelium*, which is the ultimate basis for the teaching of the Magisterium. It is the 'supernatural sense of faith' of the believing community. Are the Marian dogmas based on it? In the communion of Churches which is the goal of the ecumenical movement, *sensus fidei* of

all the Christian Churches has to be taken into consideration. A third key is that in the light of the “historical critical method” both Scripture and Tradition have to be received and it is all the more necessary for Marian teachings and dogmas. Another key is the possibility of different interpretations of the Marian dogmas, historical, symbolic, typological or theological. Different approaches may be possible. It is also proposed that we should examine what type of Mariology we have. Is our Mariology going parallel to Christology, or is it Christocentric and ecclesiotypical? The last point the author proposes is to examine ecumenically the recent “Feminist Mariology”, which can offer new perspectives to reexamine the traditional Mariology and it may lead to some ecumenical convergence. Feminists accuse that present Mariology is ‘Patriarchal’ and it subordinates women. Mary is the model to recapture the liberation of women and to assert their equality. For lack of space I do not want to indicate the different views of theologians and their response.

In this book the author has beautifully summarized the ecumenical discussions on Mary and Marian dogmas. Reading the book for me personally was a very good ‘ecumenical exercise’, which made me refresh and it updated in a way my ecumenical specialization, especially on the question of Mary. In the review I included some of the details in the book to give a foretaste to the would-be readers. The book does not take a narrow approach. It covers the entire area of theology, Christology, anthropology, ecclesiology, eschatology, Scripture and Tradition, historical-critical methods, teaching authority, Liberation theology, Feminist theology, etc., etc. Above all, I congratulate the author for his clarity and brevity. I want to make only one remark: The book is limited to Catholic and Protestant traditions. It is a serious omission that the author has not included a chapter on the views, theology and traditions of the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches resplendent with sound and balanced Marian teachings, devotions, solemn liturgical festivals and prayers. While congratulating the author for this outstanding ecumenical contribution, I strongly and warmly recommend this book for the close perusal of all those who teach Mariology and to all theology students from all Churches. Deeper study and attentive reading of the book will be indeed a rewarding experience.

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