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BOOK REVIEW

John Ponnore, *Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest*, Raipur, 2016. ISBN: 978-93-5258-757-5. Pages: xxxii+284.

This book is the revised second edition of *The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest in the Light of the North Indian Missionary Reality*, first published in 1998. The present edition is significant as it offers and deepens the awareness of the identify, vocation, ministry and the specific spirituality of the diocesan priests. As the author John Ponnore states, it “reaffirms the spirituality of the diocesan priest” (p. 5). It is a clarion call to renew the pastoral commitment and to live out the pastoral charity of Christ.

Besides a General Introduction and a General Conclusion, the book contains five chapters. The first chapter establishes the origin and development of spirituality. The total mystery of Christ is the most fundamental and sole criterion to Christian Spirituality (p. 17). The etymological study of the word spirituality prompts the author to arrive at the conclusion that the key to the spirituality of the diocesan priest is detachment from the world under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (p. 26). The variety of spiritualities spring forth from the “multiplicity of the gifts of the Spirit” (1 Cor 12:4-5) and “the Trinitarian diversity in perfect communion validates the existence of a variety in Christian spirituality” (p. 20). The socio-cultural context is the *locus* in and through which the spirituality emerges and develops (p. 23-24).

The second chapter throws light on the theological identity of the diocesan priest. The theological identity comprises the understanding of the Christian priesthood that is a participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The diocesan priest participates in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ, and the ministerial priest shares the threefold office of Christ – teaching, sanctifying and governing – in an intensified manner (p. 64-65). Therefore the ordained ministers have a special responsibility to “guide the faithful in fulfilling their task as Christians so as to manifest the social efficacy of the Good News of the Kingdom” (p. 68).

The third chapter describes the historical identity of the diocesan priest and see the various events, currents and persons that have influenced the diocesan priesthood in the course of history to present times. In other words, it is a study of the gradual development of the ministerial priesthood in the Church to comprehend the evolution of the specific identity of the diocesan priest. The development is scrutinized in the history dividing it into four parts, i.e., in the early Church, from the early

Church to the Council of Trent, Tridentine and Post Tridentine Period, and Vatican II and Post Vatican II Period. The third chapter concludes presenting Pope Francis as a prophetic challenge to the contemporary priests (p. 122-123).

The fourth chapter clarifies the Christian Spirituality and supplies a broader outline of the same. It deals with the common Christian spirituality in the light of the universal call of all Christians to holiness which consists in union with God and His people (p. 133).

Love which is the core of Christian message is the only way to holiness and the evangelical counsels of virginity or celibacy, poverty and obedience or even martyrdom cannot lead one to holiness unless through love (p. 140-141). Prayer is a necessary condition to respond to the call to holiness (p. 143).

The fifth chapter clearly spells out the specific spirituality of the diocesan priest within the framework of the Christian Spirituality. The priestly ordination, through which one is consecrated to God in *a new* way, makes the call of the diocesan priest significant and special (p. 163). The application of the common means, i.e., the evangelical counsels for attaining holiness of the diocesan priest is remarkable and worthy of attention. The evangelical counsels are significant in the life of a diocesan priest because of their Christological foundation (p. 166). The author has clarity and conviction in presenting Christ's pastoral charity as the sum and substance of the spirituality of the diocesan priest. He also highlights the pastoral charity as a gift and a task: a gratuitous gift of the Father's love and a commitment of selfgiving to the brethren. Hence there are both vertical and horizontal dimension (p. 176). The diocesan priest experiences the Father's love in Christ as a gift and shares that gift to his brethren as a self-gift (p. 177). Further the author presents the pastoral charity as the "distinctive mark of the spirituality of the diocesan priest" and "the sole focus and core of his spirituality" nourished by the Holy Eucharist, the expression and manifestation of the pastoral charity of Christ (p. 178-179).

This book, *Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest*, inspires every priest to lead a more authentic priestly life. I believe that it provides the correct sense of the spirituality of the diocesan priest and helps to understand the call to holiness in a better way and to respond to the call by being more and more committed in their effort to live and grow in it. It will help every priest to deepen his knowledge of his vocation, understanding of his identity and the awareness of his obligation to strive for the holiness of life which will help the flock entrusted to him to live their Christian life in close conformity with the Kingdom values, for "as the priests, so the people" goes the adage.

A number of Messages of different prelates at the beginning show the relevance of the work and the Table of Contents helps the reader to identify the different themes presented. The ecclesial and personal tasks presented in the General Conclusion are practical suggestions (p. 244-258) for the right understanding and integration of both the seminarians and the priests to form themselves as the ones who have the 'smell of the sheep.' The rich bibliography at the end testifies to the fact that the book is well grounded on the Church documents and other important works. An index at the end could have helped a researcher better. In all there are 537 footnotes in the entire work, though footnote no. 220 puts the year of the publication wrongly. While certain pages employ inclusive language (p. 198, 199) most of the pages fail to do the same (p. 19, 23, 27, 152, 154, 155, 170). There are also a few pages with minor language errors (eg., p. 35, 44, 51, 142). Though there are some such limitations, the book deserves special attention of the seminarians and the priests. I wish wider readership to the book which can be considered a "scholarly handbook for the diocesan priests" (p. xi) and congratulate the author of this volume.

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, CMI (kalambukattunaiju@gmail.com)
Samanvaya Theology College, Kolchur