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BOOK REVIEWS

Francis Gonsalves, *Saint Romero and Pope Francis: Revolutionaries of Tender Love*, Mumbai: The Pauline Sisters, 2019. Pages: 216. ISBN: 978-8193730461

Newly-elected popes without fail give rise to a cottage industry of papal publications. Between Jorge Bergoglio's election to the office of Bishop of Rome on 13 March 2013 and the eve of Pentecost 2019, when Francis Gonsalves, currently President of Jnana Deepa Institute of Philosophy & Theology, Pune, India, penned the final lines of his book, a plethora of works, both hagiographic and critical, has been published, and the author has made good use of them. Gonsalves did not want to add just one more book to this already huge collection. His is a very different kind of book, one that pairs the two famous archbishops of South America, Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez (15 August, 1917–24 March 1980), archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador and Jorge Mario Bergoglio (17 December 1936–), cardinal archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, the first Jesuit and the first Latin American elected to the papacy; the former declared a martyr and saint by the latter on 14 October 2018.

What is unique about this book is the intricate and insightful way its author weaves the biographies and spiritualities of his two heroes to offer a rich tapestry of anthropology, ecclesiology, and missiology, the tripod upon which he builds his narrative. For Gonsalves, Romero and Bergoglio were not remote and unfamiliar figures. On March 24 in 2011, 2012, and 2013, as Principal of Vidyajyoti College of Theology, Delhi, Gonsalves had organized the celebration of the "Romero Day." On March 22-30, 2014, he made his way to San Salvador to participate in the celebration of the 34th anniversary of Romero's martyrdom. There he obtained more intimate knowledge of Romero through his interviews with several of his close friends, especially Monseñor Ricardo Urioste, Romero's vicar-general, and discussed theology with Jon Sobrino, Romero's theological advisor. On 24 October 2016, Gonsalves met Pope Francis during the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, at which he served as

moderator of the Commission on the Renewal of Jesuit Life and Mission.

The subtitle of the book, *Revolutionaries of Tender Love*, points to the link that unites the martyr and the pope. Before expounding the meaning of this arresting phrase, Gonsalves revisits the biblical scene where after Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ (the Anointed One), Jesus gives Peter a new name and a mission, namely, Rock. The term “rock,” also referred to as the foundation stone or cornerstone, is used for God and Jesus himself in the Bible and bespeaks solidity and trustworthiness. Gonsalves also warns that Peter, who is the foundation stone of the church, is also the “stumbling-block,” as Jesus called him “Satan” when he tries to dissuade Jesus from accepting the way of death on the cross. Similarly, the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” that Jesus gives to Peter symbolizes power and authority over the church, but the keys can also be used to lock others out of the church or be thrown away to prevent others from knowing God. Gonsalves notes that Peter can only fulfil his mission of being the cornerstone and the key by loving and serving Jesus, as the story of his threefold response to Jesus’ triple question to him after the resurrection: “Do you love me more than these?” demonstrates. Love of Jesus flows into the service of “feeding” his lambs and sheep. As Gonsalves puts it beautifully: “Without love, service is mercantile; without service, love is sterile” (56). In the remaining chapters of the book (chapters 6-15), Gonsalves unfolds the rich meaning of the title “*Revolutionaries of Tender Love*” that he applies to Romero and Bergoglio under three theological categories: identity (anthropology), church (ecclesiology), and mission (missiology).

First, regarding self-identity, Gonsalves notes that every person has multiple identities and that these evolve and change. The deepest identity, however, is the spiritual identity, which is “a God-given gift to be used for the greater good and eventually gifted back to God” (61-62). Romero’s spiritual identity was rooted in his love for Jesus, the incarnated, crucified, and risen Lord. This love is manifested in Romero’s solidarity with the poor, a facet of Romero’s life that was powerfully remembered by his friends in Gonsalves’s interviews with them. Romero modified St Irenaeus’s celebrated maxim, “*Gloria Dei, vivens homo*” [the glory of God is all humans alive] to fit the socio-political situation of his fellow Salvadorians: “*Gloria Dei, vivens pauper*” [the glory of God is all the poor alive]. For Pope Francis’s self-identity, Gonsalves finds it encapsulated in two facts. First, the pope’s choice of Francis, the *poverello* of Assisi, as his new name (sadly, not Francis Xavier, Gonsalves’s patron saint!). St Francis of

Assisi was known for his love of the poor, peace, and creation. Bergoglio's identity is accordingly marked by three selves: poor, peacemaker, and protector of Mother Earth. The second fact is Bergoglio's reply to Antonio Spadaro, editor of *Civiltà Cattolica*, who asked: "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?": "I am a sinner ... who is looked upon by the Lord." Gonsalves contends that Bergoglio arrived at this realization of his spiritual identity through the process known among the Jesuits as "discernment," a practice Pope Francis strongly recommends to all Christians.

Second, regarding the church, Romero emphasizes four characteristics: the church that opts for the poor; the church that is rooted in Easter and is its sacrament and instrument; the church that is the Body of Christ living in history; and the church that is protected by Mary, its mother. In this church, Romero saw himself and the whole church as "God's microphone" proclaiming God's word incarnated in Jesus. He declared: "All of you before me are Christ! Even the humblest peasant, you are Christ! For your baptism is one with the death and resurrection of the Lord" (107). For Pope Francis, the church is the family of God and mother; the church as poor, for the poor, and at the periphery; and the field-hospital, merciful and forgiving (110). Gonsalves is deeply aware that both Romero's and Pope Francis's "revolution of love," "revolution of tenderness," and "violence of love" have met with fierce opposition, the former by the right-wing military government of El Salvador, the latter by some high officials of the Roman Curia, but both moved forward without fear and at the same time promoting "a culture of dialogue" (133).

Third, regarding mission, Romero rejected false dichotomies between sacred and secular, soul and body, temporal and spiritual, otherworldly and this-worldly in understanding the tasks of the church. His missiology is incarnational, paschal, and liberational-salvific. He saw the mission of the Salvadorian church as "preaching love": "Let us not tire of preaching love; it is the force that will overcome the world" (150). Pope Francis sees the church as not *having* mission but *being* mission. With his trademark clarity, Gonsalves summarizes Pope Francis's missiology in five words: anchoring, bridging, conversion, discernment, ecology, and family (154-163). For both Romero and Bergoglio, the basic characteristic of the church's mission is movement, "to go forth," and its foundational celebration is the Eucharist/Mass. In brief, the church's mission is movement from Mass to Mass.

Gonsalves concludes his book with “Wanted Revolutionaries of Tender Love.” Like the psalmist of old who loved to write in acrostic form, Gonsalves the poet suggests that his book can be summarized in three syllables, C-I-M (182): C stands for the church as the Body of Christ, spiritual house, and motherhouse of mercy; I for identity as anointed and uniquely ‘me’; and M for mission of being a revolutionary of tender love.

The book is sandwiched between the foreword of the Father General Arturo Sosa and the afterword of the theologian Jon Sobrino. There can be no more eloquent and powerful words of praise for the book than these, and I humbly join them in thanking Rev. Dr Francis Gonsalves for giving us this beautiful gift of deep spirituality and theological wisdom.

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Isis Ibrahim / Shaji Kochuthara / Klaus Vellguth (eds.), *In der Schöpfung Heimat finden. Asiatische Schöpfungsspiritualitäten im Dialog, (Finding a Home in Creation. Asian Creation Spiritualities in Dialogue)*, Ostfildern: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 2020. Pages: 330. ISBN: 978-3-7867-3227-3.

How can humans and other creatures live together in this world? How can a sense of responsibility for the earth be promoted? What is the specific contribution that the religions of the world can make in protecting the planet? In view of the threat that human activity is posing to the environment, the religions of the world are called upon to give their contribution to preserve life on earth. It is high time that such burning ecological issues as climate change are addressed in a concerted effort of various religious traditions and belief systems. The book *Finding a Home in Creation. Asian Creation Spiritualities in Dialogue* meets this challenge from an academic perspective: It aims to bring the major Asian religions into dialogue with each other in order to develop their religious potential for the benefit of our shared habitat, the earth. Representatives of Indigenous Indian Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity present their specific creation narratives, their respective spiritual worldviews and the ethical principles that further a sustainable lifestyle.

Finding a Home in Creation is part of a series of conferences on the spirituality of creation conducted by the Pontifical Mission Society *missio* in Aachen on three continents (Latin America, Asia, and Africa) and includes the papers of scholars who got together at Dharmaram College in Bangalore to discuss the contribution their religions could provide in ecological matters. At a time, where

religious conflicts shape the face of the world, it is good to see that theologians from various traditions are ready to engage profoundly and seriously in interreligious dialogue, striving to gain common ground in the basic matters that concern the human species and all other creatures.

The volume on Asian religions discussed in this review shows that all the religions represented in it offer an abundance of wisdom traditions, sacred rituals, and eco-ethical guidelines, the most remarkable of which can be found among the Adivasi, the indigenous people of India. With their complex system of food taboos, often connected with the totem system, they preserve biodiversity and support principles of sustainability. Their lifestyles counter a worldview whose main concern is the accumulation of goods and serves as a reminder that the virtue of self-restraint has its place in many religious traditions. The three articles assembled in the book give unique insights into the customs of the peoples in the hills of the North-East of India, and the peoples in rainforests of Central India. The Gandas from Eastern Central India, for example, express their connection to their natural habitat by referring to themselves as “worms of the soil” and call the hills their “doorless temples”, as the research by the Dalit and Adivasi activist Goldy M. George reveals. Reading the articles, one realizes that in their intricate interrelatedness with their natural habitats these indigenous populations in a way represent humankind’s general interdependence with the natural environment, a fact of which populations living in highly industrialized regions tend to be less aware.

The essays on Hinduism give a comprehensive overview over Hindu mythology, philosophy, spirituality and ethics and shed light on the doctrine of *Ahimsa* or non-violence which, as the prominent Hindu scholar Nanditha Krishna points out, is “India’s unique contribution to world philosophy.” Although Hinduism, according to Krishna, is not an earth-centric religion, it shares many aspects of the worldview maintained by many indigenous groups as they regard hills, trees, water bodies, and most importantly, sacred groves as the dwelling place of the Gods and nature as a manifestation of the divine.

This principle of non-violence is also reflected in the pervasive Buddhist belief that the suffering of all life forms must be avoided, as Junghee Min, the South Korean secretary-general of the Interreligious Climate and Ecology (ICE) Network elaborates in her article on Buddhist ecospirituality. Another highly interesting article on Buddhism has been contributed by Rey-Sheng Her, the Director of

the Tzu Chi Foundation, the largest faith-based NGO in Taiwan and the Chinese region. He describes how the work people do in the Tzu Chi garbage recycling centres not only benefits the environment, but also has positive spiritual, social, psychological, and even healing effects on the workers. Most remarkably, this ecologically and socially profitable work is classified as religious practice and the workplaces are considered as “new kinds of Buddhist temples.” This certainly provides food for thought for Christians in so far as it offers a wider perspective on the concept of religious practice by adding an ecological dimension to it.

Apart from that, the volume includes contributions from Muslim theologians from India and Turkey and of Christian theologians from India, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Despite their differences, it springs to the eye that Christianity and Islam share three ecologically relevant concepts, namely that of stewardship respectively *Khalifah*, that of the unity of all beings respectively *Tawid* and that of a Last Judgement by God respectively *al-Akhira*. According to these principles Christians and Muslims alike, are called to see it as their responsibility—ultimately before God—to protect the earth and to respect all creatures as part of a greater whole, namely God’s creation.

What is challenging about the approach taken by the editors of this volume is the idea to view religious traditions, including one’s own, as ‘mere’ resources among others for the sake of a greater good. If this self-image could be adopted by the main religions and other belief systems in human societies, threats like global warming could even have their positive aspect: Instead of pursuing their exclusive claims to truth, religions could give their specific contribution to protect life on earth. It will be one of our future challenges to continue with the kind of interreligious dialogue initiated by the conference documented in this volume and to strengthen the exchange about different models and cosmologies on the contested question what ‘life on earth’ means in the 21st century, hopefully being able to negotiate adequate transcultural solutions for urgent ecological problems.

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