

BOOK REVIEW

Naiju Jose Kalambukattu, ed., *Mystery of the Church: Models and Images*, (Samanvayam Contextual Theology Series - 13), Delhi: ISPCK Publications, 2022, pp. xii+378. ISBN: 978-93-90569-98-4.

The words of Pope Francis, “You have shown how the practice of synodality, traditional but always to be renewed, is the implementation in the history of the People of God on the way, of the Church as a mystery of communion, in the image of the Trinitarian communion,” convey the fact that based on the Tradition, the Church has to renew Herself to be real vehicle of salvation. Then she can prepare her children to receive the fullness of salvation in the *eschaton* through the sacraments.

The recently published book, *Mystery of the Church: Models and Images*, edited by Dr Naiju Jose Kalambukattu is really a handbook of Ecclesiology, especially in the Indian context. This book is very relevant today because Pope Francis visualizes synodality as the ecclesial style, a style appropriate for the Church of Christ. In his vision Church is synodal at every level that it may bring new vitality for the life and mission of the Church. Besides the Introduction given by the editor, the book contains twenty articles, written by eminent scholars of ecclesiology. The contributors of this edited book discuss different models and images of the Church in the Scripture, patristic sources and writings, magisterial teachings and papal documents to highlight the identity and mission of the Church.

The first two chapters base the concept of the Church in the Sacred Scripture. Christoph W. Stenschke in his article “The Blueprint of the Church and its Synodal Nature in the Acts of the Apostles” opines that according to the Book of Acts, synodality is an intrinsic aspect of ecclesiology. By beautifully narrating how the early Christians came to decisions and put into practice what was agreed on, even in difficult situations, the author affirms that the Christian community in the Book of Acts serves as a model of the present Church which is pursuing synodality. The paper “Paul’s Images of the Church” by George Kudilil illustrates the different images of Church in the Pauline writings. Paul uses images like Body of Christ, Temple, Household of

God, Letter from Christ, Olive Tree, God's Field, God's Building, Bride of Christ, Those who are clothed with Christ and Citizens with Saints, *etc.*, to express the unity, mutual relationship and support that exists in the community. The equality of the members in the Church is highlighted in this paper.

Pauline understanding of the image, 'bride and bridegroom' is studied in Naiju Jose Kalambakattu's article, "Church the Bride and Christ the Bridegroom." This chapter observes that the nature and significance of the Church, and her relation with Christ have been expounded through various images and models. The Church, the bride, comes into being from the side of her bridegroom and she is the continuation of Christ. Hence, she has the same mission of Christ in the world. Therefore, the author affirms that she has to be genuine in imbibing and interiorizing the vision and accomplishing and achieving the mission of her Groom.

There are three chapters in the book which deal with Ecclesiology in Syriac documents and Syriac Fathers. By analysing three ancient documents *viz.*, *Odes of Solomon*, *Acts of Judah Thomas*, and *Book of Steps* from the Syriac Semitic pole, Roselin Aravackal brings to light the imageries and types of the Mysteries the Church found in them, in the paper "Ecclesiological Underpinnings in the Ancient Syriac Sources." The author opines that the *Book of Steps* is unique among the Syriac Patristic writings as it provides a more systematic and developed ecclesiology than other Syriac Fathers. The article affirms that these Syriac sources have their roots in Sacred Scriptures and Midrashic traditions. The article "Syriac Christian Vision of the Mystery of the Church" by Thomas Kollamparampil highlights the importance of faith (eye of faith) to 'see' the metahistorical elements of the Church, basing on the writings of early Syriac Fathers like Aphrahat, Ephrem, *etc.* The vision of Syriac Fathers is proved to be quite holistic, universal and aptly inspiring for the concerns of world peace, religious harmony and human development, communion of Churches, ecumenical concerns of Christians, and wider ecumenical concerns that embrace the whole humanity and the whole creation. St Ephrem is the champion of using Marian imageries in his *madrāšē* and *memrē*, and Emidio Vergani, in his article "Mary as Mother and Model of the Church in Ephrem the Syrian," highlights the mariological motifs in the Ephremian writings. The author presents Mary as mother and model of the Church by means of images taken from Ephrem's texts. For Ephrem, Jesus was the same time Son, Brother, Bridegroom and

Lord. Many Marian images are ecclesiological too. Hence the author concludes that the Church is recognised in Mary.

From the Patristic age, the Ecclesiology of St Augustine is also dealt with in Gabriel Quicke's article, "The Concept of the Church according to Saint Augustine." The profound unity between Christ and the Church is expressed in the well-known doctrine of *Totus Christus*, the 'whole Christ.' Augustine extends the notion of the Church by referring to the righteous of the Old Testament who are made righteous by the Spirit who poured forth love in their hearts. As it is seen in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Augustine also says that the Church existed from the very beginning of humanity.

The relation of Ecclesiology with other theological disciplines is a matter of study of this book and it is beautifully done in the following articles. Sophy Rose highlights the bond between the Holy Trinity and the Church in her article "Intrinsic Relation between the Trinity and the Church." She expounds that the Church originates from the divine economy of the Holy Trinity. The economy of God has a three-dimensional actualization process: the planning by the Father, realization through the Son and the completion in the Spirit; yet it is one holistic act of God. The article "Holy Spirit and the Church: Pneumatocentric Church" by Peter Neuner explains how in early Christianity, the Church was seen primarily as the work of the Holy Spirit. Even though this conception was replaced by increasingly institutional thinking because of hierarchization and clericalization, the author hopes that in the synodal process initiated by Pope Francis, by listening to all the members of the Church, the frankness of speech, freedom of the Spirit, signs of the Spirit's action shall be found new relevance. "Pilgrim and Eschatological Nature of the Church with its Four Marks" by Davis Varayilan looks at the Marks of the Church from a pilgrim and eschatological perspective. The attributes of the Church, such as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, emphasize her journey towards the eschaton. This eschatological perspective makes the Church inclusive, dynamic and dialogical.

Church as a communion of Churches is an important teaching of *Unitatis Redintegratio* and this book gives particular interest with regard to it. Isaac Arickappallil in his article, "Communion Ecclesiology: Church as Communion of Individual Churches" posits that the Second Vatican Council instilled a re-awareness of its own reality and the particular Churches, their own identities in the universal communion, as lived in the first millennium. However, unless and until the tripolar (Syriac-Greek-Latin) truth is given due

recognition in the universal scenario, it remains an incomplete ecclesial task and a misnomer. "The Developing Church: Reflections on the Ecclesial Model, People of God" of Jacob Marangattu opines that title, 'People of God' given by the Second Vatican Council highlights members' equality and mutual communion. Marangattu recommends to consider the Church as a Collective of Disciples. It will serve to restore the tradition of the early Church in which all the believers were involved in the mission of the Church. The article "Vision for a Tribal Church" by Naiju Jose Kalambukattu presents a vision for a tribal Church. He says that the tribal Church with incarnational approach must be a 'Church from Below which is sensitive to and fully immersed in the tribal context: an open Church' without walls that breaks down the barriers found on the way to the Kingdom of God.

The book helps the reader to understand the Ecclesiology of the Syro-Malabar Church based on its Mar Thoma Margam and liturgy. Paulachan Kochappilly describes the ecclesiology of the Syro-Malabar Church as an epiphany of the celebration of life in Christ, witnessing to the *margam* of Jesus shared by Mar Toma Sliha, crystallized into Mar Toma Margam, and characterised by the Mar Toma Sliba. Ecclesial life is the celebration of life in Christ—celebration of the Qurbana—compels them from within to share the joy of Christian life with others, beginning with family and going beyond the borders. Pauly Maniyattu in his article "Ecclesiological Musings in Sacred Liturgy: A Study with Special Reference to the Holy Qurbana in the Syro-Malabar Tradition" makes a survey of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana to examine the vision of the Church reflected in the prayers of the Qurbana. As the axiom *lex orandi lex credendi* upholds, the ecclesiological vision of the Syro-Malabar Church is very well manifested in her liturgical celebration.

Church's relation with monasticism and families are studies in the two articles: Naiju Jose Kalambukattu attempts at the "Ecclesial dimension of monasticism" that has always remained very lively in the Eastern Churches for true monasticism was considered the ideal of Christian life and was described as the flowering of baptismal life.

Pope Francis's vision on Church and synodality is a matter of discussion in the work and three chapters are dedicated for it. Francis Thonippara in the article presents the multi-dimensional "Ecclesial Vision of Pope Francis." By analysing the writings of Pope Francis, Thonippara underlines the pilgrim character of the Church, a Church that is always on the move, not stagnant but open and shares the joys and sorrows of the people. Cyril Kuttiyanickal, in his article "Church

as the Family of Families” explains the Church in essence as a family of families because family is the primary place where the Gospel is lived, transmitted and radiated. It is where a child is introduced to the family of God, which is the Church. It is the place where one experiences the ecclesial communion and the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In the article “Rediscovering Synodal Church for the Third Millennium” by Joseph Scaria Palakeel affirms that Pope Francis picks up the ‘unfinished agenda of ecclesial reform’ with the words, “We must walk together: the people, the bishops and the pope. Synodality should be lived at various levels.” He is convinced that “it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” Archbishop Thomas Menampampil reflects on the teachings of Pope Francis who urges us to come out of our ‘comfort zones’ and reach out to the ‘periphery’ in the paper, “Reaching Out to the Periphery: Pope Francis’ Vision of the Church as a Field Hospital.” The Pope exhorts the people to work for the culturally excluded, socially marginalized, psychologically complex-ridden, and religiously guilt-laden. Pope criticizes the “arrogance of the enlightened,” and contrasts it with the “special wisdom” of the people of God, which alone can ensure a future for the Church and humanity.

In short, the book, *Mystery of the Church: Models and Images*, is a well edited and analytically arranged one. It deals with almost all the realms of ecclesiology in the context of Synodality with and Syriac and Indian perspective. The sequence of the book is very logical. The concept of the Church in the age of Scripture, Patristic age and modern age is systematically ordered with good connections and cross-references. Since the book is the result of a long and disciplined study of many scholars, is reading will surely profit its readers with an experience of comprehensive understanding of the theme, ecclesiology.

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