

BOOK REVIEW

Madathikandathil, Bp George, *CBCI: An Inter Ecclesial Assembly of Catholic Bishops of India*, Dharmaram Canoncial Studies - 31, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2023, pp. XII + 162.

CBCI: An Inter-Ecclesial Assembly of Catholic Bishops of India is a book that analyses the principles, needs, and relevance of the Catholic Bishop Conference of India (CBCI) as the governing body of the Catholic Church in India from a historical, theological and canonical perspectives. Besides a preface and conclusion, the book is divided into six chapters. It is an adaptation of the six lectures delivered at the *Institute of Oriental Canon Law* of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, in 2022 on the occasion of its prestigious Endowment Lectures instituted in the name of Fr Placid J. Podipara CMI, a *Malpan*, visionary and an erudite scholar.

The relevance of this book is that it may be one of the best commentaries on CCEO canon 322. To give a comprehensive commentary on the smallest title of CCEO- "Assemblies of Hierarchs of several Churches *sui iuris*," the author, bishop George, has designed three chapters parading its historical and theological backgrounds. Then, in the fourth chapter, he introduces the nucleus of this book, the central theme of his lectures, i.e., "Assembly of Hierarchs of Several *sui iuris* Churches. In the fifth and sixth chapters he offers the practical application of the theme in the context of various Churches *sui iuris* in India and the pastoral challenges of the Syro-Malabar Church in particular.

In the preface, the author provides a clear background of this work, which is the scenario of immigration of people irrespective of religion and nationality. Such a situation throws up various challenges in socio-religious realms. In the ecclesiastical realm, we find the co-existence of faithful belonging to different Churches *sui iuris* in the same place (xi). There arises a necessity to coordinate the activities of these different Churches, and to address the supra-ritual, national and common issues in the territory. Thus, this book delves into the study of the CBCI as the inter-ecclesial assembly of three Churches *sui iuris* in India.

The first chapter is dedicated to treating the communion of churches and collegiality of bishops, and the ecclesiological principles behind synodality. The Second Vatican Council's doctrines of the communion of Churches and the collegiality of the bishops serve as the ecclesiological and theological foundation of synodality and it has also influenced the institution of the Synod of Bishops in the Catholic Church. In this chapter, the author elaborately speaks of the

communion of Churches, the collegiality of bishops and the most important forms or expressions of episcopal collegiality with special reference to the Synod of Bishops. He rightly comments that synodality should not be limited to the existing institutions in the Church like ecumenical councils, the synod of bishops, diocesan synods etc. Further, he adds that it should be the walking together of people of God seeking God's will and pursuing the pathways to which God calls his people.

The second chapter "The Traditional Principle 'One City One Bishop' in the Present Ecclesiastical Scenario" addresses the issue of migration and its consequences in the ecclesiastical realm especially the situation in which the bishops of different Churches *sui iuris* exist in the same territory contrary to the principle of 'one city one bishop', preserving the heritage of the Churches *sui iuris* in the diaspora.

The third chapter titled "The Beauty of *Varietas Ecclesiarum*: An Analysis of the Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Bishops of India" provides a valuable exploration of the historical letters of Pope Francis and Pope John Paul II to the bishops of India. The author skilfully analyses the significance of these letters in addressing the *varietas ecclesiarum*, the diverse churches that coexist in India. The chapter highlights the importance of cooperation and communion among these churches in navigating the new pastoral situations and challenges they face.

The fourth chapter "Assembly of Hierarchs of Several Churches *Sui Iuris*" probes into the importance of inter-ecclesial assemblies and their role in coordinating the activities of different Churches within the Catholic Church. The *iter* of the CCEO canon 322 (pp.107-114) is well presented in this chapter. It adds colour, originality, academic strength, and profundity to his work. The chapter begins by highlighting the unity in diversity that exists within the Catholic Church and the need for effective coordination to prevent discord and disputes. In this chapter, the author traces back to the Inter-ecclesial cooperation that existed in the pre-conciliar period and takes us to the second Vatican council period which promotes the inter ecclesial cooperation through its teachings. Then the author deals in this chapter the problem of multiple jurisdictions. To overcome the difficulties from multiple jurisdiction he suggests the solutions as unification of the jurisdictions and syodalism. He also tries to emphasize the importance of inter-ecclesial collaboration in the Church. After indicating us the provisions that existed in LEF, he develops the *iter* of the canon 322 and gives a substantial commentary on the

canon. It analyses the obligations of patriarchs and eparchial bishops in convening the inter-ecclesial assemblies. Finally, in this chapter he explains the content of canon 322, namely, members of the assemblies, their periodicity, presidents, their juridical character, goal, subject matter, and the statutes of the assemblies. The author also indicates about the inter-ecclesial assemblies existing in the Catholic Church.

The fifth chapter "The Role of CBCI in the Pastoral Necessities of Various Churches *Sui Iuris* in India" depicts presents an in-depth exploration of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) and its significance in addressing the pastoral needs of the Latin, Syro-Malabar, and Syro-Malankara Churches in India. It traces the historical development of the CBCI, starting with its establishment as a voluntary body in 1944, through subsequent revisions and amendments to its statutes. The chapter also discusses the provisions for episcopal conferences and inter-ritual consultative bodies as outlined in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the purpose and functions of the CBCI, which include expressing the common standpoint of the hierarchy, coordinating discussions on matters of common concern, defending the Church's rights, and fostering the overall growth of the faithful.

The sixth chapter brings out the pastoral challenges faced by the Syro Malabar Church with the restoration of her All-India Jurisdiction. It emphasizes the need for liturgical renewal and unifying the mode of celebrating the Holy Qurbana. Evangelization and inculturation of faith are also discussed, highlighting the importance of adapting Christian principles to different cultures while preserving indigenous traditions. The chapter also explores the challenges of pastoral care in an inter-ritual context, growing migration, and socio-political challenges that hinder evangelization efforts. It also addresses the need for formulating a mission policy, missionary formation, translation of sacred texts, and ecumenical endeavours.

One of the inconsistencies we noticed in this book is that instead of using the expression 'Churches *sui iuris*' often in the book we find the style of using '*sui iuris* Churches' different from that of the style of CCEO. Rich Bibliography and well documented footnotes add depth to this work. The author himself has acknowledged the sources of this book as his own doctoral thesis and that of Dominic Muriyankavil. CCEO addresses its title IX as 'Assemblies of Hierarchs of Several Churches *sui iuris*,' but the author Bp George uses the title of the chapter

IV in his book slightly different as 'Assembly of Hierarchs of Several *sui iuris* Churches.' Here, too the author could have been consistent with the style of CCEO. But these shortcomings do not reduce the merit of this work.

Finally, "CBCI: An Inter-Ecclesial Assembly of Catholic Bishops of India" serves as a valuable resource for understanding the CBCI's role in the Indian Catholic Church. With its meticulous analysis, the book contributes to a deeper appreciation of the communion, coordination, and pastoral responsibilities within the diverse ecclesial landscapes of India. It is an essential handbook for scholars, clergy, and individuals interested in the canonical aspects of the Catholic Church in India and its inter-ecclesial dynamics. Moreover, it is a commendable comprehensive commentary on CCEO title IX.

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