

BOOK REVIEWS

Jose Kuriyath, *Authority in the Catholic Community in Kerala*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1989, pp. xx + 341.

Researches and publications on the Catholic Community in Kerala are in abundance. Most of them are, however, from the point of view of history or religious worship. In *Authority in the Catholic Community in Kerala* we have a sociological study of the Syro Malabar Catholic Community (SMCC) of Kerala which claims its origin to the first century A.D. itself. A special feature of this study is its theoretical orientation and the sociological analysis of an ecclesiastical reality. Within the Weberian concepts of stratification and bureaucratisation, Kuriyath analyses authority in the SMCC of Kerala. He has convincingly proved that even though stratification and bureaucratisation are normal in any society, influence of group interest is of particular importance in the formation of a specific structure of a given society.

Towards the beginning of the present century the German sociologist Max Weber had made headlines by introducing new ways for the analysis and study of society. He introduced concepts of stratification and bureaucratisation as useful tools in the study of any society. Weber's conclusions were mainly based on his study of the Western society. Though many of the issues raised by Weber are applicable to the Indian Society too, it looks strange that nobody has upto now made any serious attempt to examine these concepts in the Indian context. Kuriyath who took up this challenge, therefore, deserves our special congratulations.

The book under review is a slightly modified version of the author's doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Kerala. The author has distinguished three periods in the evolution of authority in the SMCC of Kerala. These are the Pre-Portuguese period (upto 1500), Portuguese Period (1500-1965) and the Post Vatican II period. In the Pre-Portuguese period authority was comparatively decentralised as there was a participative form of Church administration through three offices of Arch-deacon, *Yogam* and Bishop. It was also more traditional as the Church leadership was vested in some priestly families and was hereditary in nature. Since it was not very much based on standardised roles, authority during the Pre-Portuguese period was less bureaucratic too.

Kuriyath's brilliant analysis shows how, over a period of many years, such a participative form of Church administration gradually disappeared

and how, during the Portuguese period, authority became centralised in the person of Bishop ; Authority became predominantly bureaucratic too. The author has cogently presented evidence to show that all these changes took place mainly due to the imposition of Western structure of Church administration.

Speaking about the post Vatican II Church, Kuriedath maintains that though there are a few minor decentralising elements like parish council, pastoral council, priests' senate etc., authority is still centralised. This authority structure, argues the author, is liable to change because owing to the conflict of interests and values, the legitimacy of some specific aspects of the authority structure has come under strong challenge and consequently there is a clear decline in power. This conclusion has been arrived at on the basis of the field study which he conducted among 150 priests and 600 laymen of 30 parishes in 5 SMCC dioceses of Kerala.

Organization of the thesis as well as its clarity and flow of presentation go to prove the author's thorough knowledge of the subject. His contribution to the knowledge of the topic analysed is considerable. This work is a good example of masterly analysis and synthesis. Very little, indeed, can be added to what has been said. Both the historical study and the empirical analysis are excellent. Methodology adopted is perfect. Bibliography reveals that the author has made use of everything available for consultation. The reviewer strongly recommends this book to anyone who is seriously interested in General Sociology and in particular the Sociology of Religion.

Antony Kariyil

Emefie Ikenga Metuh; *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, Onitsha, Nigeria: IMICO Publishers, 1987. pp. xii + 283

In *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, Ikenga Metuh focuses on the disparate African world-views to determine their similarities and dissimilarities. The book falls thematically into two parts. The first part – which has been prefaced with a review of the different methodologies so far used in the study of African Traditional Religions, definition and sources of African Traditional Religions – studies in detail the African world-views. The author noted that in African world-views, all beings belong to either of two worlds: the visible or invisible, although the beings interact. Metuh examines E.W. Smith's triangular model of the structure of the invisible world as it is conceived by the Bantu speaking areas of East and Central Africa: "At the apex was the supreme God, on one side of the triangle were the nature gods and on the other side the ancestors while at the base were the lower magical powers" (p. 65).

While the Bantu speaking areas of East and Central Africa have four categories of divine beings, the West African peoples recognize five categories: the Supreme Being, the deities, spirit forces, magical powers and the ancestors.

Metuh further argues that the structure of the organization of the world-views of the Africans is modelled on the patterns drawn from the world around them or some of their cultural experiences; hence the influence of ecology and socio-political institutions on African world-views. African world-views, he observes, are essentially religious and anthropocentric. All beings in African world-views interact. A man's well-being lies in his maintaining a harmonious relationship with the cosmic totality. Although the spiritual beings exist to help man to realize his fulfilment, they also lay some moral claims on him in order to maintain the integration and harmony of the ontological order.

The author studies in detail the categories of the divine beings (the Supreme Being, deities, the living-dead, spirits and magical forces) that inhabit the invisible world (pp. 85–180). Man, the main inhabitant of the visible world and an enigma in African religious thought, is also studied with special reference to his origin and destiny and his ontological and social dimensions.

The comparative study of the different African world-views in the first part of the book provides a solid background for the author's treatment of the rites of passage, sacred functionaries, rituals, worship responses, sacred institutions, the after-life and values of African Traditional Religions in the second part of the book. Metuh concludes his comparative studies of the different African cosmologies with a chapter on the impact of the forces of change on African world-views. Christianity, Islam and modernization are identified as the forces of change which have affected African world-views. He argues that although the organized traditional religion is crumbling in the face of the agents of change, "many African religious beliefs still survive in the minds of many African Christians."

In terms of input, Methu's work does not add much new fieldwork data because he relied heavily on the existing works on African Traditional Religions. But by adopting the comparative study approach to the study of the different African cosmologies, Metuh has added a new dimension to the study of African Traditional Religions. His methodology, in line with Evans Pritchards' recommendation, "counter-balances the particularism / functionalism which has bedeviled the anthropological study of African Religions with a comparative/quest for meaning stance of phenomenological studies" (p. x).

I highly recommend this book to undergraduate and postgraduate students of African Traditional Religions. Anthropologists and those who have interest in African culture will also derive immense benefit from the book.

Felix N. Nwahaghi

Christopher I. Ejizu, *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol*, Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1987, pp. xxii + 190.

Ejizu's book, *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol*, grew out of the doctoral thesis which he presented to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1984. The book focuses on the meaning and significance of *Ofo*, Igbo dominant ritual symbol.

Ofo ritual symbol is constructed with the tiny branch of *Ofo* sacred tree botanically called *Detarium Elastica*. When the twig becomes dry, it falls off the parent tree in various sizes, between 15 and 30 centimeters in length, and $\frac{1}{2}$ and 2 centimeters in diameter (p. 32).

A detailed theoretical exposition of ritual symbolism provides the background of the treatment of *Ofo* as Igbo ritual symbol.

As research on *Ofo* is not the first in this area, the author reviews comprehensively the existing literature on *Ofo* under the following four broad headings: references and early ethnographic accounts, research essays of field officers on *Ofo*, the writings of government and sponsored anthropologists, and the writings of some Igbo scholars on *Ofo*.

The author investigates in detail the phenomenology of *Ofo* ritual symbol bringing out its structure, taxonomy, typology and ritual uses in the four subcultural areas of Igboland delineated for the study. He examined the ritual presence of *Ofo* in Igboland and discovered that although the ritual symbol is found in all Igboland, "the conceptualization, the structural designs and functions are fully developed in three out of the four sub-cultural areas studied" (p. 60).

As *Ofo* ritual symbol features prominently in traditional Igbo socio-religious life, the author has spared no pains in exploring the ritual texts for different events and occasions which involve the use of the symbol.

Using Victor Turner's analytical tools, C. Ejizu interprets the meaning and significance of *Ofo* among the Igbo. He maintains that *Ofo* ritual symbol, which has its basis in the supernatural, is inextricably linked with the Igbo world-view and relates predominantly with the religious, socio-political and socio-ethical life of the Igbo. Thus *Ofo* means "truth, justice, righteousness, power, authority, wholeness and moral innocence"

(p. 165). He argues that the significance of *Ofo* can be better appreciated in the light of its role of integrating the totality of Igbo experience and translating such experience into cosmological terms which make existence for the Igbo more meaningful.

The author presents a historical process of change in Igbo traditional society as it affects *Ofo* ritual symbol. He identifies colonialism, Christianity and western culture as agents of change which have greatly affected the Igbo society and reduced the use of *Ofo* as a ritual symbol. He observed that in spite of the agents of change, there are a few adherents of the traditional religion who still preserve the ritual content of *Ofo*. The Godian Religion, *Uka Ofo na Ogu*, the revivalist movement of Igbo Traditional Religion, champions the revival of the ritual use of *Ofo*.

The author has carried out an indepth and systematic study of *Ofo* ritual symbol which has revealed its religious, socio-political and socio-ethical meaning in Igbo traditional life.

Even though the anthropological categories which the author has used in unearthing the underlying meaning of *Ofo* ritual symbol are not be familiar to an ordinary reader, I recommend the book highly not only to the students of African Traditional Religion and the Igbo whose key-symbol is studied, but also to social anthropologists and administrators. The knowledge of the meaning and significance of *Ofo* ritual symbol which the book elucidates will lead to a better understanding of Igbo society.

Felix N. Nwahaghi

Donald K. McKim (Editor), *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986, pp. 385.

Donald K. McKim's book on Contemporary Hermeneutics is indeed a unique contribution to those who are interested in this field. This volume of 385 pages comprises essays by seventeen authors. He has undertaken the challenging task of locating essays on different aspects of the subject and grouped them in a very useful way. This volume presents a landscape and contemporary hermeneutical thoughts.

Four major divisions are found in this book. Part one surveys the basic hermeneutical perspectives of biblical scholars. The variety of perspectives and procedures represented here show the great diversity among those who exegete scripture, a diversity in both fundamental orientation and methodology. Differing approaches to the nature of scripture are reflected in this multiplicity and, in specific instances, lead to widely disparate interpretations of scripture.

The interplay among biblical scholars, philosophers and theologians in the area of hermeneutics is the focus of the second part. Discussions on theological attitudes and how they relate to the hermeneutical task are given here.

Part three of this volume presents three current assessments of the shape of contemporary hermeneutics. As such these essays provide an overview of some of the major figures and movements that influence the way hermeneutics is understood and consequently the biblical interpretations being given in the present-day.

Part five presents a number of different contemporary approaches. Essays by eminent scholars offer analyses and give examples of methods employed by today's principal hermeneutical movements.

This book offers a guide to contemporary trends in hermeneutics. Drawn from a variety of sources and written by a diverse group of contributors, these essays describe methods of biblical hermeneutics and offer viewpoints from contemporary biblical interpreters.

Sr. Thaijasa, S.D.

Cárdenas Pallares, José, *A Poor Man Called Jesus*, Maryknoll, New York : Orbis Books, 1988, pp. 136.

This work, which is the author's reflections on the Gospel of Mark, offers a challenge to every Christian to re-read and re-interpret the Gospel and to rededicate his life for the liberation of the little ones of Jesus. Committed to the poorest of the poor, Jesus identified with them in all aspects and even shared their destiny. Jesus stood then, as he stands today, in stark opposition to those who control the conscience and the lives of the peoples. He proclaimed a God who is the joy of the suffering and the strength of the poor and the oppressed. For Jesus, every human being is a member of his Kingdom and even a woman becomes a full-fledged citizen of the Kingdom of God. Faith is the very opposite of cowardice, and it is the determination to be with Jesus at any cost. To follow Jesus means to become a brother or sister to the deprived and the exploited. This book will serve as an inspiration to those who bear the crosses everyday with Jesus, and a challenge to the biblical scholars who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel.

Paul Kurian, CMI

Cyris H.S. Moon, *A Korean Minjung Theology – An Old Testament Perspective*. Orbis Books: Plough Publications, pp. vii + 83.

Every thing should have a purpose and at the same time that purpose should be useful to the people. If a new theory has something to give with the back up of the past it will be appreciated more. The book *A Korean Minjung Theology – An Old Testament Perspective* has made a good attempt to convince the reader the suffering and struggle of people of Korea with the help of the Old Testament. The Old Testament and the New Testament fulfill not only a spiritual need of the people but a kind of liberation from socio-political adultration and duplications.

Koreans are aware of their identity which has been crushed for a long time by the secular as well as religious authorities. It is quite interesting to realize that the Old Testament and the Modern Korean situations are similar in nature. By and large, it clearly shows that history is repeated in every century through different events.

The author expounds a clear cut relationship between the present Korean life and Old Testament situation of the past. Yahweh was with the OT people during the Exodus to lead them to the goal. The ultimate aim of the Lord was nothing but to protect them from other oppressing rulers. In the OT we read the extreme sufferings and existential problems of the chosen people. Cyris Moon undoubtedly explains the affinity between the Israelites and the Koreans. He scratches to the roots of inequality during OT and he is convinced that Solomon had a powerful influence to introduce inequality in the society. It is true that in Korea also has the same problem of inequality and the church now tries to shun it through Minjung Theology with the help of the Mass. Now, as every where, in Korea also there are oppressed ones who are the victims of neo-colonialism and all kinds of social evils. It is from this situation that the theology of Minjung, which is an indigenous, grassroots theology, has been emerged with a biblical Foundation.

The Book is very important to have an existential picture of the Korean mass. It gives the reader the ordinary people's indisposed situation of discriminations, poor life situations and lack of socio-political security. This situation is emerged only because of the rapaciousness of the rich and the Govt. As a result, the Minjung Theology has got relevance among the people and they have crystal clear idea about the gulf between their rights and their actual inert circumstances.

Peter Kochalumkal

The author shows his ability of observation that he emphasises the need for the regional theology which should not be influenced by any other culture or norms. As a matter of fact, in Korea also there are obstacles for inculturation because of the conservative christians and authorities. Still, the author computes that this is the apt time for the real change in Korea because the people have natural clan and ideas on their real situation.