

Book Review

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Devasiachan Mukulathu. *The Mystery of Trinity. The Relevance and Importance of the Most Holy Trinity in the Christian Arena based on the Writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar.* Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications (No 434), 2019, pp. xviii + 356.

This excellent work is the doctoral dissertation of the author Devasiachan Mukulathu, CMI, which he submitted to the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Athenaeum Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Benagluru, and successfully defended on August 2018. For Devasiachan, It must have been certainly an adventure to take the theme of the most Holy Trinity for his doctoral research, and that too based on the works of a profound and difficult theologian of the 20th century H. U. v. Balthasar, when you consider the depth and number of the writings of this eminent Swiss theologian in general and on this topic in particular! As we go through the pages of this dissertation, we can only admire the strenuous work of Devasiachan in having elucidated the theme so beautifully and effectively in five chapters!

The first chapter is an elaborate discussion on the significance and the scriptural understanding of the mystery of Trinity in nearly 60 pages. This chapter takes us through some important and relevant thoughts on the Trinitarian images and manifestation in history, human person as the image of the Trinity, the human family, the society, the church, and finally the world as the symbol of the Trinity, Trinity as the model of any human community, Trinity and inter-religious dialogue, Trinity in the holy Scriptures, Trinity and the liturgy, Trinitarian theology of the Fathers of the church, and the theology of the Trinity according to Thomas Aquinas. This chapter itself is a serious exploration and presentation.

Chapter two is devoted to the theology of God the Father and the Son according to Balthasar. In eighty pages the author gives us a detailed picture of the theme very clearly and makes visible

the Theo-Drama of Balthasar with the concept of drama. The poetic imagination of Balthasar envisages the Christ-event as the mutual dramatic involvement of the Father and the Son under the direction of the Holy Spirit! This is an aesthetic masterpiece in the field of drama as well as theology, or in other words, Theo-Drama. The theological insights of Balthasar become thus an object of enjoyable reading and visualized screen play! The subtitles - the Author and the Actor, the Director, Presentation, the Audience and Horizon - give us an inkling of the whole scenario. The creative elements in this presentation are expressed by the Kenosis of the Father and this kenosis of the Father is called "Super Kenosis". Here we have a novel theology of the Holy Saturday as an experience of suffering within Godhead on the one hand and the revelation of the Son's love for humanity on the other. Regarding Jesus Christ, the new understanding is that in him the beauty of God takes form (Gestalt). The cross is viewed as the event of Trinitarian surrender. In this context Jesus' cry of abandonment gets primacy over all other words of the Lord from the cross. This abandonment is for Balthasar a modality of the inner Trinitarian act, which is the mutual self-giving and self-yielding love. The cross is at the same time the full achievement of the divine judgement on sin. Devasiachan has also highlighted the mystical aspect of the theology of the Descent into Hell with Balthasar, in reference to the mystery of the Holy Saturday. This is traced back to the influence of the visionary Adrienne von Speyer.

Chapter three is on the Trinitarian revelation of God the Holy Spirit. Here we have a profound Pneumatology that has bearing on the mutual indwelling (perichoresis) of the divine Persons. The chapter offers a theology of personhood of the Holy Spirit. The role of the Spirit in the Christ-event such as Holy Spirit as the helper in self surrender and glory, his Passion and death, the descending of Jesus, economic mission of Son are splendidly discussed at length in this chapter. This is something marvellous about the whole topic. Because Balthasar understands the Spirit as God's ever-greater, ever-new and ever-surprising Spirit and the Christ event gains its vivid abundance, only through the

Holy Spirit, who also enables the entire human history to unfold itself as salvation history. Balthasar speaks also of a kenosis of the Spirit.

The special theological contribution of the author consists in having brought out and illustrated the relevance of the Trinity in ecclesiology and Mariology. This is the theme in chapter four. The most Holy Trinity guides and directs the Church. Church as the community of believers is the symbol of objective presence of the Holy Trinity. The 'kenotic love' of the trinitarian God is the model for the members of the Church, who are called for 'being-one-another.' Mary is at the centre of the Church because her faith represents all-inclusive protective and directive form of all ecclesial life. In Mary's virginal womb Christ was conceived through the Holy Spirit. So, in faith, in the Church the new Christ is conceived in the water through the Holy Spirit. A very interesting discussion indeed!

Equally informative and significant is the chapter five in which the author highlights the importance of the most holy Trinity on certain practical domains, such as religious vocation, vows, prayer, and gender discussion. For Balthasar, religious vocation means to love. The description of love that Balthasar commonly adopts is 'being-for-one-another' which is the basic characteristic of Trinitarian God. The religious vow of chastity is for the sharing the love of God with the fellow human beings. Virginity is the realization of the trinitarian fertility through the triple face of love: giving, receiving and communion. The Christian vocation is a sharing in the intra-divine self-giving mission. The vow of poverty and kenosis are very much related. By practicing poverty, one voluntarily shares in the sanctifying poverty of Christ that "being rich, became poor (2 Cor 8: 9) for love of us. The kenotic act involves participating in the radical obedience of Christ. According to Balthasar prayer is to be considered intra-trinitarian dialogue and truth is known through 'dialogue' which for him is the rhythm of expression and response, donation and receptivity, kenosis, and obedience. Balthasar identifies gender difference as a fundamental polarity of human existence. Giving and receiving are the constitutive

elements in Trinity and in the same way woman and man are complementary to each other for this giving and receiving.

The General Conclusion gives us a clear picture of the whole thesis in a very systematic manner. Balthasar's Theological Trilogy is based on "Theological Aesthetics," "Theo-Drama," and "Theo-Logic". Because the Trilogy is based on the three transcendentals of Being (beauty, goodness, and truth). God's beauty is not abstract, but personal, incarnate: in Jesus, the beauty of God 'takes form'. According to Balthasar the Trinity itself is a drama- it is a relation between persons. By quoting Hegel, Balthasar says the 'drama is unequivocally the high point of all art. The book provides the reader with a detailed bibliography of primary and secondary sources (38 pages) as well as a useful general index (10 pages).

It would have been better if Devasiachan adds more on the concept of descent into Sheol, which is the major theme of Balthasar, comparing with modern writers and Catholic Teachings for his further research.

The author Devasiachan deserves all praise and recognition for this achievement! The work is worthy of recommendation to students of theology and spirituality, especially to those who are interested in the theology of the most Holy Trinity. The work is distinguished for its lucid presentation, clear structuring, and systematic discussion. This thesis can be also a model for those who are engaged in theological scientific research work in systematic theology. I sincerely congratulate the author on his contribution and wish the work wide readership.

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