

James Thoppil, *Towards an Asian Ecclesiology: The Understanding of the Church in the Documents of the FABC (1970-2000)*, Bangalore: Orient Publication, 2005, pages: xx + 364, ISBN: 81-7086-363-5.

The understanding of the church in the documents of the FABC (1970-200) highlights the understanding of the documents of the federation of Asian Bishops' conference (FABC). This book consists of the systematic study on the emerging Asian ecclesiology as found in the FABC documents. There are five parts for this book. In each part we see the systematic study on the Asian context. James Thoppil, the author of this book, has worked his best to put up this book in a systematic way. A very extensive bibliography in this book is a fine example for his hard work.

The first part deals with the Asian context and its challenges. We see the challenges and problems that the Asian Churches face. It begins by giving information about the present situations, geographical, political, social, and cultural contexts and the challenges faced by the Asian church in these spheres. After a brief examination of what "Asian-ness" and Asian identity mean, the general Asian context in which the church finds itself and the multiple challenges it face, the author delves deep into their causes and the ways and means that are to be adopted to respond to these challenges. He writes: "For most Asians colonization was an experience of oppression, bondage and exploitation. They looked up on Christianity and Christian missionaries as agents of oppression, bondage and alienation and as closely linked to western powers." At present, according to the author, this is the one of the greatest crises that Asian church faces.

The second part deals with the Asian ecclesial context and the FABC. In this part we are introduced to the origin of Christianity in the Asian soil. The author insists: "The church in Asia is as old as Christianity." There is an elaborate description of various churches, their growth, and activities. Here also we see the functions of the FABC, the origin of which dates back to the historic gathering of 180 Asian Bishops in Manila in November 1970, on the occasion of the visit of Pope Paul VI.

Part three deals with the understanding of the church in the FABC statements. In the *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican Council II, we come across with an explanation of two inseparable aspects (the visible and invisible) of the church. It deals with the community life, community of God (Trinitarian God), and church as a community. This, according to the author, is a basic idea that underlies the foundation and functions of the FABC.

In the fourth part we see the emerging Asian ecclesiological trends. There is no church without Christ. Christ is the centre of our every activity. The author analyzes the post-Vatican belief and understanding of in salvation. The author explains well the exclusivist, absolutist, normative and inclusive approaches to this problem. Vatican Council II has opened up the avenues of salvation even outside the church. This thinking has made the Asian theologian to make the Asian Church more open, and to be an incultured community, a lacerative community, a dialogue community, a kingdom-centred community, and a community of harmony.

Part five, entitled “Towards an Asian Ecclesiology,” highlights the contribution of FABC towards the development of an Asian ecclesiology. This part provides an evaluation of the address of Pope John Paul II to the delegates of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC. “The thrust of the FABC has centred around the mission of the church.” The discussion in this part points to the need for the inculturated Christian community in Asia and the author opines that, in Asian attempts, developing a Christology that is Asian would be very essential.

At end, the author provides up-to-date information and statistics about the politico-ethnic, socio-economic and catholic hierarchy in Asia. So, we can say that this book enriches us with a lot of information. The author has convincingly shown that the Christian community in Asia is a community, centred on the values of “God’s kingdom” and “universal harmony.” Indeed, the systematic and scientific style that is followed all through the book makes it more attractive to the theologians as well as lay readers who are interested in the organic development of an Asiatic Church.

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