

BOOK REVIEWS

Donald K. Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 2004, pages: xviii + 332, ISBN: 978-81-208-3109-4.

In his book, *Becoming the Buddha*, Donald K. Swearer, illuminates the reader by his powerful, compelling, and comprehensive study of the cult of Buddhist images. Though the focus is on the 'consecration of Buddha image' or 'new Buddha' in Northern Thailand, this book goes beyond this ethnographic limitation and delves into the Buddhist world as a whole. *Becoming the Buddha* stands out of the torrent of books relating to the intellectual and textual traditions. The author re-lives the living tradition of the Buddhists in Asia for the readers, thereby stressing on the need to acknowledge the common man's attempt and thirst to reach out to God. This reaching out to God is characterized through the image consecration tradition known as "opening the eyes of the Buddha." The book contains a variety of topics ranging from scriptural accounts of the making of the first Buddha image, debates over the ritual's historical origin, Buddhological insights received, the hermeneutics of absence and presence, and provides a thematic comparison of several Buddhist traditions.

By going into the minute details of the complex rituals of the Buddha image consecration ceremony, the author narrates a wide range of meaning of the person of Buddha, both explicit and implicit, in this ritual. The consecration ceremony is seen as contextualizing and contemporising the life story of Buddha and it establishes a common thread of meaning inherent in most Buddhist rituals. The book, which is spread across three parts, clearly outlines the complex multivalent set of meaning ascribed to the absent founder of a religious tradition and its saints made present in material signs. While the first part of the book prepares the way to equip the reader to get into the groove in understanding Buddha image consecration ritual, the second part begins with an extended ethnography of *buddhabhisheka*, a ritual performed in North Thailand, which supplemented by an analysis of the hermeneutic presence in recent Buddhological studies followed by a descriptive analysis of rituals. The final part brings out two different interpretive perspectives to bear on the meaning of *buddhabhisheka* ritual and the Buddha image.

Before getting into the thick of things in the first chapter, the author examines the scriptural accounts and the historical evidence to lay the

foundation for considering why and how the first Buddha images came into being in order to understand the nature of images better and its relationship to the person of Buddha. This is followed by the study of the Buddha image consecration ritual where it belongs contextually along with the institutional and ceremonial tradition of Northern Thai Buddhism. The description of temple monastery (*wat*), the most common physical and ritual setting for larger than life size free standing images of Buddha with special attention to the relationship between reliquary and image, is also discussed. Having created a good background, the reader is led to the details regarding the construction of image itself.

The second part gives an in-depth access to the rituals of the Buddha image consecration ceremony. Chanting, preaching, meditation, and the presentation of gifts of the *Sanga* that constitute four basic components of this ritual are emphasized here. Though the specific details of the *buddhabhisheka* ceremony vary, the author stresses the fact that the ritual represents a mimetic re-enactment of the night of the Buddha's enlightenment. Giving importance to the pious devotees, the author says that though intellectuals vary in the opinion regarding the *buddhabhisheka* ritual, the pious devotees who experience this ritual from sunset to sunrise are well clear of the fact that Buddha has been made fully present, hypostasized in an image. The *buddhabhisheka* ritual is treated in detail in terms of two most prominent components – programming the image with the story of Buddha and the ritual empowerment of the image in which the supernal qualities of the Buddha are re-infused into the image.

The final part analyzes the *buddhabhisheka* for its rich Buddhological potential and thematic commonalities among consecration rituals in several Buddhist traditions and the most distinctive features of this ritual in northern Thailand. Here, the author brings two different interpretative perspectives on the meaning of the *buddhabhisheka* ritual and the Buddha image. With an epilogue, the author concludes the book quoting from *Mahāparinibbāna Sétta*. It says: “From its outset the Buddhist tradition has accommodated both those who venerate the person of the Buddha in a material form and those who exclaim, ‘If you meet the Buddha, kill him’.”

Becoming the Buddha captures the *buddhabhisheka* ritual in northern Thailand and presents the readers with a compelling and scholarly read. The reader is bound to give a standing ovation to the author for the perfect blend of the history behind the ritual, the act of the ritual, the essence of

the ritual, and debates with regard to the rituals, thereby enabling the reader to reach a perfect conclusion to respect and hound the deeper meaning that lies dormant in the common man's rituals along with the views of the intellectuals. As the eye of the Buddha is opened, towards the end of the *buddhabhisheka* ceremony, *Becoming the Buddha* opens the eye of the reader, equipping him/her to look at the Buddhist rituals from new perspective.

Jeff Shawn Jose

John Berchmans and James Puthuparampil, eds., *The Liturgy of St. James: Its Impact on Theologizing in India*, Pune: BVP Publications, 2009, pages 497, ISBN: 978-81-904332-2-8.

Liturgy is a celebration and proclamation of Christian existence and identity in the Church. It is the central and fundamental activity of the Church, in which she expresses, manifests, and proclaims her true nature as the mystical body of Christ and it is the summit towards which Christian spirituality inevitably tends. Thus, the celebration of the liturgy has the primary position in the Church.

Different liturgies of the Church are the manifold expressions of the faith of the early Church, handed down to their posterity through tradition. The Christ event based on the apostolic and patristic teachings is the centre of all liturgies. Hence, each liturgy with its unique theology, ecclesiology, and spirituality is the common patrimony of the Church. It expresses the faith and theology of a particular Church and is a means of safeguarding its tradition.

The Liturgy of St. James: Its Impact in Theologizing in India is an attempt to make an in-depth study of the central Eucharistic Anaphora for all the Churches of West Syrian liturgical tradition. It is a stupendous achievement in exploring the great wealth and richness of the ancient liturgy of St. James. This book contains papers presented in a conference on the liturgy of St. James conducted at Bethany Vedavinjnana Peeth, Pune, from December 4-6, 2008. A wide variety of themes are discussed ranging from historical and theological aspects to practical and contemporary matters. As the subtitle suggests, the Indian context of the Malankara Catholic Church also is brought out in it.

The axiom '*lex orandi lex credendi*' has inspired the authors of the articles to delve deep into the liturgy of St. James. The mystery of Christ

and the true picture of the Church ensue from the liturgy, especially the Eucharistic liturgy. It also becomes the source of life and faith for the community. The rule of prayer determines the rule of belief. Thus, there is a correlation of '*lex orandi*' and '*lex credendi*'. It has been very true with the Malankara Catholic Church.

Among the Eastern Churches, the West Syrians have the largest number of *anaphoras*. Maintaining the basic unity of the themes, the West Syrian *anaphoras* show diversity in the articulation of the prayers. In the study of the *anaphora* of St. James, the other ancient West Syrian *anaphoras* are pertinent, as they might have influenced St. James. We see a Trinitarian ambience in all of them.

The liturgy of St. James is a celebration of salvation history beginning from creation to the culmination of it in the second coming of Jesus. The liturgy celebrated should produce a right response among the participants leading to a renewed life and that should revamp the value system of the worshipper.

The plan of God to incorporate human beings into the Godhead was lost in the first 'Fall'. It was restored by the incarnation and completed in the Eucharist. In the context of the Eucharistic teachings of Ephrem, the main thrust is on the incorporation of humanity in Christ. Salvation history finds its fulfilment in the incorporation of humanity into the Paschal Mystery of Christ and now in the Eucharist in the Church.

The patristic introduction to the Lord's Prayer spells out its importance in liturgy. It exposes some of the main ideas of Jacob of Saroug on this prayer as a unique and lovely one as the Son of God himself taught it.

The 'Thrice-Holy Hymn', or Sanctus, has been a feature common to the Eucharistic prayers of both East and West ever since the fourth century. In the Sanctus, we are presented with a movement from transcendence to immanence. This movement from God to creation always invites a response, a movement back from humanity to God. In the biblical understanding, this movement, back from humanity to God, is also associated with the idea of holiness. In the Eucharistic Liturgy, above all, we encounter this double movement, from God to humanity and from humanity to God, where the meeting point of the two movements is Christ. The wonder at the manifestation of God's holiness leading to the sense of unworthiness is followed by forgiveness and sanctification which results in mission. In the Eucharistic Liturgy, communion brings forth both

forgiveness and sanctification, after which we too are sent out to be 'apostles'.

The liturgical *aggiornamento* of the Vatican Council II stressed the need of contextualization, community participation, and a clearer recognition of the Spirit's role. How these needs are met in the Latin liturgy is also discussed.

Mar Ivanios, who succeeded in bringing the Malankara Church into the communion of the Catholic flock, had a deep Eucharistic piety. The sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist in the Malankara Church is examined from the background of rituals practised in the Indian Church of Saint Thomas Christians and also based on the Eucharistic Liturgy practised in the Malankara Church. Analyzing the preparatory services (Mystery Disclosed), their theological significances are brought out: Christocentric, Trinitarian, and Communitarian.

The roles of the deacon and the people in the liturgy of St. James are discussed. The deacon is the leader of the worshipping community to maintain the proper order, essentially in the ecclesial celebrations. Since it is a communitarian activity, role of the people in it is of great significance.

The most fundamental God experience that is articulated in the liturgy of St. James is the Trinitarian experience of God. The Trinitarian God experience in the liturgy must empower the believers to overcome all divisions and discriminations among human beings, as they are created in the image of the triune God. The Trinity is an absolute communion because it is absolute love.

The participation in the Holy *Qurbono* should lead us to the union with Christ as expressed in the allegory of the vine and the branches. The participant is called to have the experience of mutual indwelling. In this, Mary is set as a model as she is the woman of Eucharist. Just as she never separated herself either from the person of Jesus or from his mystical body, she cannot be separated from the Eucharistic body of Jesus.

The penitential dimension in the liturgy of St. James is very clear throughout the *Qurbono*, where one experiences the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation. The entire economy of salvation is well integrated in the Eucharistic Liturgy through the scripture readings of the seven seasons of the liturgical year. It is in the context of Eucharistic celebration that our knowledge of God through the Word becomes an experience. Just as the Emmaus story indicates, the 'broken Word' should burn our hearts and the 'broken Bread' should open our eyes. Throughout the *Qurbono* the

common expression of the benefits of the Eucharist is the “forgiveness of sins and remission of debts and eternal life in the world to come.”

Eucharist is the heart of the Church and the heart of the Eucharist is unity. The ecclesial dimension of Eucharist is manifested in the Eucharist-Church relationship. By revealing its intimate relationship, Eucharist manifests the mystery of ecclesial communion and mission of the Church. Holy Eucharist invites us to respect and cherish the *koinonia* and challenges us to regain the lost harmony in the cosmos. The celebration of the Eucharist should awaken in us a sense of the divine presence in the cosmos.

The other units of the liturgy of St. James discussed are the intercessions and the epiclesis in the *Anaphora*. The Syrian tradition attaches much importance to the action of the Spirit in the Eucharist and thereby the Eucharist itself is conceived as an effective means to receive the Spirit. Finally, the last article highlights the Vedic flow of life running through the liturgy of St. James.

As a whole, this book throws light on different units and themes of the liturgy of St. James and invites the reader to make further researches on this ‘goldmine’. It was an enriching experience for me to go through this work. Appreciating the grandeur and splendour of this ancient liturgy, I wish wider readership to the book and congratulate the authors of different articles and the editors of this volume, *Liturgy of St. James*.

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