

George Kaniarakath, cmi, Person and Faith of Apostle Thomas in the Gospels, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 2000, pp. xviii+200. Rs 250, - ISBN 81-85574-42-1.

This book is a scholarly study that strongly challenges the traditional portrait of St. Thomas, the Apostle, as "the doubter" and the "incredulous". Thomas is "the most misunderstood and misrepresented" of the Apostles "in patristic interpretations, biblical commentaries and Christian art representations throughout the ages". It is the literal understanding of the Gospel texts that paved way to propagate a rather negative picture of Thomas, who has become in popular parlance a synonym for "disbelief and skepticism". With the help of the modern historical-critical studies on the subject, the author approaches the relevant Gospel passages in the context of the total framework of the literary-theological construction of the Evangelists, especially of John, taking note of the kerygmatic character of each passage.

The author divides his work into five chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. In the introduction he presents the importance of the theme and the scope and method of the study. The scope of the study is "to understand the person and faith of Thomas" as presented in the Canonical Gospels, with special emphasis on the Fourth Gospel. With Fr. D. Mollat, the author asks the question: is the "incredulity" of Thomas not "a literary presentation" of the Fourth Evangelist to communicate an important lesson to the reader?

In the first chapter the author gives the present state of research on the Gospel passages concerning Apostle Thomas, especially on Jn 11:16; 14:5 and 20:24-29. The author comes to the conclusion that so far "no proper attempt has been made to understand the faith of Thomas critically", though he does not deny the fact that there has "a considerable reversal of this trend in modern times" (pp. 17-18). In the second chapter the author deals with "the synoptic account of the faith expressions of the Twelve during the public ministry of Jesus". He

makes a rather detailed analysis of the important texts of the Synoptics in which the Twelve responded to the deeds and words of Jesus. Thomas, one of the Twelve, "is to be understood in the total context of the role and behaviour of the disciples" who are presented in all the Synoptics as very slow to believe and as failing to understand the real significance of the miracles and teaching of Jesus, especially his thrice repeated predictions of the passion. In the third chapter the author studies "the Johannine account of the faith expressia_nsof the Twelve during the public ministry of Jesus" as presented in In 2:1-11; 6:67-71; 11:7-16; and 14:1-7 and comes to the conclusion that in at least two texts, namely, In 11:7-16 and 14:1-7, the Evangelist makes Thomas a prominent figure and gives him the important role of making known to the reader the soteriological significance of the mystery of Jesus' person and mission.

In the fourth chapter the author deals with the "post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and the faith-response of the disciples in the Synoptics" by making a redactional study of Mk 16:1-20; Mt 28:16-20; and Lk 24:13-35 and concludes that "in all the Synoptic narratives, the disciples fail to believe in the risen Jesus who appeared to them" (p. 114) and therefore "the motif of doubt" that is present in all the three accounts, is "not a mere creation of the Evangelists" (p. 113). Hence it would be an exaggeration to attribute "incredulity" to a particular disciple.

In the fifth chapter the author deals with the "post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and the faith-response of the Apostles in John" by making a redactional-critical study of In 20:1-29 with special emphasis on the crucial text of In 20:24-29. The author also "takes a close look at" Jn 21:1-14. The main thrust of the Evangelist in chapter 20 is faith - life-giving faith in the risen Lord (cf. Jn 20:31). All the four scenes (20:1-2,11-18; 3-10; 19-23; and 24-29) in this chapter emphasize the fact that the disciples and Mary Magdalene (in whom the women characters of the Synoptic Gospels are exemplified) "believe" in Jesus

(as the risen Lord) only after they have "seen" him (cf. 20:8,18,20, 25). "Thomas wanted what others got without demanding" (p. 126).

In JI1 20:24-29 "the general theme of the doubt of the disciples in the Synoptics is "concentrated on and personalized in Thomas" who was already prepared by the Evangelist (In 11:1-16; 14:1-7) for the same. The author agrees with what R. E .Brown has said: "Thomas' doubt is an acted-out misunderstanding, even as Mary Magdalene's failure to recognize Jesus was an acted-out misunderstanding" (p. 132). "John's interest in giving representative roles to historical persons is notable" (p. 131). If the Fourth Evangelist "spotlighted" Thomas "as a doubter", he has also brought out from his mouth the most sublime proclamation of faith in the divinity of Jesus (In 20:28). Thomas' confession, "My Lord and my God", which are the last words of a disciple in the Fourth Gospel, is to be seen as its Christological climax. The double use of "my" gives the confession a highly personal touch. Thomas has found his Lord and his God in the risen One. It is true that Thomas believed in the risen Lord after 'seeing' him, as other disciples did; but he "did not touch the wound of Jesus and he did not need such a proof for his belief" (p. 126). Jesus accepts Thomas' confession as valid: "You have believed because you have seen me". The second part of Jesus' statement, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" On 20:29b), applies to Thomas and certainly "to all future generations who cannot see the historical Jesus" (p. 141). The author endorses the position of G. Maier and says, "the Johannine presentation does not authorize anybody to call Thomas an 'unbelieving disciple'" (p. 153).

In the conclusion the author touches some related themes that are very useful for the reader to appreciate the great personality of Thomas the Apostle, such as "The Thomas tradition in India", "The Historical Thomas and the Johannine Thomas", "The Johannine and the Popular Thomas" etc. The author feels that "the popular picture of Thomas is not Johannine and requires rectification" (p.167). The Fourth Evangelist "has given us a picture of Thomas, which is genuinely

Book Review

historical and meaningfully symbolical" (p. 166). And this is what the author painstakingly and scholarly tries to present in his book. Fr. George Kaniarakath has certainly brought out an excellent critical study on one of the most controversial themes of the Fourth Gospel.

Paul S. Pudussery, cmi