Book Reviews

History of the Anglican Church in North Tirunelveli 1854-1877 Part I (Tamil), *by John Dhanasekaran, Sivakasi: Ragland Memorial Church, 1996. Pp. xviii+175, price Rs. 25.*

More than 30 years ago Roman Catholics were urged by the Second Vatican Council to "acquire a more adequate understanding" of the *history* of other Christian Churches (Decree on Ecumenism, art 9). It is in the spirit of the above recommendation that this 'review' is being included in *Vaiharai*.

The author of the book under review has done what all graduate students of theology in India ought to do - render into Indian languages the findings of their dissertations. After all, not more than one percent of the people of India read books in English.

This book is an abridged Tamil version of Part I of the author's M.Th. thesis submitted to the U.T.C. at Bangalore. Here he takes us to that part of the erstwhile Tirunelveli district which had not received adequate attention from researchers. Tirunelveli region holds a preeminent position in the history of Indian Christianity. It was here that the large-scale conversion of the whole Parava community took place in the 16th Century. Later, when thanks to the Evangelical Awakening and political ambitions of the West, missionery activity in the 18th and 19th centuries was enkindled, such a solid and wide foundation was laid here that by the year of India's First War of Independence (1857) more than half of the Christians of the Tamil region came to be concentrated in this one district alone!

But then the focus has often been on such Protestant Christian locations in the southeastern part of the district as Palayamkottai, Mudalur, Nazareth, Mukuperi, Mengnanapuram and Idayankudi. Now through this book we are

being introduced to the beginnings of Protestant Christianity in such centres as Sivakasi, Rajapalayam, Virudunagar and Thiruvilliputhur of the northern region. Though the centre of attention is largely the activities of Thomas Gajetan Ragland who was the foremost missionary in the region, the book also contains succinct biodata on such CMS pioneers as David Fenn, Robert Meadows, Charles Evry, W.T. Sathianathan, Joseph Corneliu and V. Vedhanayagam.

Unlike in the south and southeast regions of the then Tirunelveli district where conversion to Christianity was effected by SPG, CMS and independent missionaries by way of large scale caste movements, in North Tirunelveli the method was through "itinerancy" contacts and preaching to individuals and smaller groups. The author highlights in Chapter IV the various dimensions of this itinerancy method, such as evangelization through dialogue and responding to the theological questions in the minds of individuals. Quite interesting is the list of reasons the author discovers in the primary sources for the relative failure of this method (pp. 111-119).

Chapters VI and VII narrate briefly the post-Ragland developments in the region while Chapter II is an excellent resume of the pre-Ragland socio-political and religious situation in the region. It is to be noted that the author brings together here his findings in the archives with the Cambridge Mission at Delhi, U.T.C. at Bangalore and the Government Archives at Madras. The book is certainly a valuable addition to the historigraphy of the Churches in Tamil Nadu.

J. Rosario Narchison

The Stories of Pasumalai History (Tamil), *by D. Devaraj Athisayaraj, Madurai : Horeb, 1996. Pp. iv + 80, Rs. 10.*

Tucked away into the arms of ancient hillocks in the vicinity of Madurai, overlooking the famed Murugan temple

at Thiruparankuntram, lies a tiny hamlet called Pasumalai which literally means Cow Mountain. About 150 years ago this sleepy village was suddenly awakened to feverish missionery activity by the arrival of the pioneers of the American Reformed Church (ARC).

The book under review recounts the beginnings and the progress of this Pasumalai venture which eventually became the base for a wide variety of pioneering activities in several parts of Tamil Nadu and elsewhere. Two among them are historically significant : One, a seminary to train the ministers of the Church through theological education in Tamil, and the other, the "Madurai Native College" which was originally located in Pasumalai and later renamed as The American College in the heart of the city. The Seminary provided the early impetus to the creation of the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary at Arasaradi, Madurai which has the unique distinction of imparting theological education for the first time in history through an Indian Language (Tamil).

The book is not a lineal narration of Pasumalai history. The vignettes, stories and anecdotes are all the more fascinating, based as they are on records or oral traditions. One instance is the story of how a Church bell came to chime in the Murugan temple at Thiruparamkuntram. The 12 chapters recall to mind the interaction between the Hindus of Madurai and the members of the American Reformed Church, the changes that initially puzzled the latter Church in the wake of the union of four divergent traditions into one Church of South India (CSI), and the influence of the Roman Catholic tradition of religious dramas on the evolution of the annual *son et lumiere* performance on the Life of Christ for which Pasumalai has become famous. The author acknowledges the earlier dramatic enterprises in such Catholic parishes around Madurai as Rayappanpatti and Panchampatti.

The author brings to the book a touch of deep respect for the past. He blends in himself the best of his own Anglican heritage with that of the Congregationalism of Pasumalai tradition. It is quite refreshing to recall how the Congregationist churches based in Pasumalai (ARC) and in Nagercoil (LMS) spearheaded the church union movement in the South.

This small book is an ideal introduction to the history of an important Protestant missionery movement in India. Brief biodata of prominent missionaries both Indian and foreign, are available here. Some of them are unforunately very brief. On Vetham Santiago, for example, the contri-ution of his original Roman Catholic upbringing at Siluku-rpatti to his ability to compose and sing Tamil hymns uld have been highlighted. The "Christian Tamil" in this rration of history could have been avoided. The merits the book, however, prompt me to recommend it to a wider readership among students of history.

J. Rosario Narchison

Treasury of Women Saints, *by Ronda De Sola CHERVIN, Mumbai : St. Paul's, 1996. Pp. 407. Rs. 100.*

Originally published in the USA in 1991, this book contains brief life sketches of 221 women saints, some well-known as Monica, Catherine of Siena and Clare and many others somewhat obscure. This latter category contains names such as Nonna, Zoe, Macrina, Helen of Skovda and many more. The author mentions that she is a convert from an atheistic background and that she found spiritual nou-rishment from reading the lives of saints. She believes that a separate book about women saints is of special value "in our times when so many Catholic women are undergoing identity crises about their role in the church and society" (p. 17).

Defining a saint as "one who loves God passionately and is ready to do anything that seems to be God's will regardless of personal sacrifice", C. describes the steps of canonization and explains why beside the lives of canonized saints and those who have been declared blessed and venerable she has included a list of "holy ladies in waiting" whose causes for canonization have been introduced.

C. has made an arrangement of saints by categories : young saints (those who died at twenty-five or younger); motherly saints (those whose hearts were touched by others' misery); martyrs (those who died because of their "insistence on not betraying the creed"); prophetic saints (those with a charism of creatively initiating new things in the church); and interior women of the Spirit (those with a contemplative vocation, whether they be cloistered, married or single). Following a brief sketch of the life of each saint there is a section called "For Your Life" and another "Prayer - Meditation". Besides an alphabetical list of entries there is also an interesting section titled "Special Sufferings" in which saints are listed according to the particular sufferings they endured : divorced, rejected by religious orders, ridiculed for their piety, widowed, etc.

Historical accuracy does not seem to be a main concern for the author. Of course, she has relied on *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, *Lives of the Saints* by Joseph Vann and *Modern Saints* by Ann Ball. However, she does not indicate when it is a question of a legend and when a sure historical event is mentioned. The obscure saint Ulphia, for example, is said to have spoken to the frogs and told them to cease their croaking which had disturbed her sleep and "it is said that frogs in her region of France are silent at night even to this day!" (p. 287). If this is not a legend, what is?

C. hopes that readers would use this book "as a daily devotional, reading an entry each day. The life applications and the prayers and meditations, which have been

provided in the 'For Your Life' and 'Prayer-Meditation' sections, are ideally suited to such an approach" (p. 20).

There is in general a 'spiritualizing' tendency in this book. The hard reality of life in its awesome social and political dimensions is often overlooked and saintliness is presented more as an interior reality than as a dynamic force for the transformation of the world. After reading the book one is left wondering how genuine could 'personal devotion' be which remains simply at the level of the 'personal'!

V. Paul Leon

Mission and Conversion: A Reappraisal, Ed. *by Joseph MATTAM and Sebastian KIM. Fellowship of Indian Missiologists (FOIM) IV. Mumbai : St Paul's. 1996. Pp. 234. Rs. 85.*

In January 1994 the well-known Indian journalist Arun Shourie delivered an address at the consultation organized by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India on the theme "Paths of Mission". He presented a 'Hindu perception' of the work of Christian missionaries in India. Later, this address was expanded and published as a book *Missionaries in India : Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas* (New Delhi : ASA Publications, 1994). Shourie's book was provocative indeed. He proposed the conspiracy theory according to which administrators, missionaries and indologists formed a team and worked as one to subvert Hinduism and Hindustan by converting the Indians to Christianity. He also accepted uncritically the heavily biased *Niyogi Committee Report (1956)* whose unwarranted conclusions had been challenged long ago (See, for example, A. Soares and others, *Truth Shall Prevail : Reply to Niyogi Committee*, Bombay: Catholic Association of Bombay, 1957).

The provocation caused by Shourie's book could not go unanswered and the book under review is a reply. Yet this book (hereafter referred to as *Mission*) is not simply a

rejoinder but it tries to take up in earnest the issues raised by Shourie. It contains the papers, responses and group discussions of the fourth annual meeting of the Fellowship of Indian Missiologists (FOIM) held in 1995.

The title of the papers are : Conversion in the Bible: A Dialogical Process *(Lucien Legrand)*, Kingdom, Mission and Conversion *(Michael Amaladoss)*, Baptism in the New Testament *(Jacob Kavunkal)*, Patterns of Conversion in Indian Mission History *(Julian Saldanha)*, Indian Attempts Towards a Solution to the Problems of Conversion *(Joseph Mattam)*, Conversion in Indian Religions *(Joseph Valiamangalam)*, Cultural Alienation of Converts and Radical Inculturation of Faith *(Anto Karokaran)*, Missionaries in India : An Appraisal of Arun Shourie's Book *(J. Rosario Narchison)*.

It is a pity that there is no Statement emanating from FOIM IV which could serve as a platform for further study. This lacuna is somewhat filled by the three group reports given at the end of *Mission*.

Although the book is rather loosely organized, its contributors have attempted to examine the place and meaning of conversion and baptism in mission. Since Vatican II explicitly rejected the equation of the Catholic Church with the Body of Christ (LG 8) and recognized that God's salvific purposes are also advanced through the different religions of the world (NA 2), the question of 'mission' has never been the same as saving the souls of 'heretics and infidels' through the true Church. Proclamation leading to conversion and baptism is increasingly being seen as only one aspect of evangelization, the other aspects being dialogue, liberation and inculturation (cf. Michael Amaladoss, *Making All Things New: Dialogue, Pluralism, and Evangelization in Asia*, Maryknoll, NY : Orbis, 1990).

The issue of mission *and* dialogue, and mission *as* dialogue, still remains to be clarified in the context of India and this is amply borne out by the contributors of *Mission*.

V. Paul Leon

Evangelization in India Through Basic Communities. *By Gilbert DE LIMA. Mumbai: St. Paul's, 1996. Pp. 111. Rs. 35.*

There has been a steady flow of writings on Basic Communities ever since the first such communities were formed in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America in the early sixties. That the *comunidades de base* were intimately linked to the emergence and growth of liberation theology does not need recounting here. The first major official recognition of the new phenomenon came from Paul VI who in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of 1975 acknowledged that 'small communities' in solidarity with the Church can become effective proclaimers of the Gospel.

In the book under review Gilbert de Lima, a priest of the Archdiocese of Bombay, reflects on Basic Communities as bearers of the Good News and as agents of evangelization in a predominantly non-Christian country like India. After listing the many names which have been used in Church documents to indicate the new phenomenon such as 'Basic Christian Communities', 'Basic Ecclesial Communties', 'Small Christian Communities' and 'Small Ecclesial Communities', de Lima points out how the word 'basic' is employed to bring out the contextual reality. In fact, from a sociological point of view 'basic' means not only popular, grass-roots and closest to the people but also brings into focus the marginalized and the oppressed. In a multi-religious context like India "it might seem preferable to call them Basic Communities (BCs) or Basic Human Communities (BHCs)" (p. 36).

After a brief exploration of the anthropological and the theological reasons for the need of BCs, the author browses through Church documents to present a brief historico-theological overview of BCs. Ch. 3 explains how BCs may be organized. In the following chapter the author attempts to present BCs as the centres and means of evangelization in India. Inclturation, inter-religious dialogue and struggle for justice would be central concerns. A final chapter takes up a discussion on the role of the laity in the Church and the issue of lay ministries. "BCs are not ends in themselves. They are meant to flower into the exercise of lay ministries, offices, roles based on the capacity, the gifts and the charisms of each member" (p. 103).

De Lima has done a commendable job in drawing the attention of the Church in India to the vast potential of BCs in the field of evangelization. He has appropriately integrated the three dialogues (with the poor, with cultures, and with religions) in his comprehensive understanding of evangelization. However, this reviewer feels that de Lima is overly influenced by the 'urban' Mumbai milieu. There is scarcely any mention of experiments elsewhere in India in building up BCs and BHCs, although such initiatives are not very many. Perhaps this limitation is due to the fact that the book was originally a doctoral dissertation presented in Rome.

A second remark pertains to the author's appreciation of the *communidades de base* in Latin America and their relevance to a third world country like India. BCs in their origin and early growth are a general expression of liberation theology in practice. Liberation theology and BCs grew together out of the same impetus to reach to the poor. BCs' fundamental orientations of "a new way of seeing reality", "a new way of being Church", "a new way of approaching scripture", and "a new way of understanding

mission" have not been discussed in depth in the socio-cultural-religious context of India.

De Lima's book comes as a very useful guide to those who in some way are involved in the work of building up basic communities.

V. Paul Leon