

Book Review

River or the Ocean? A Call for Togetherness

Dr. S.Arulsamy

ATC Publications, 2017

Pp. XVIII+139: price Rs. 160

River or the Ocean? A Call for Togetherness written by Rev. Dr. S. Arulsamy was published by ATC Publications. The author of this book is an octogenarian with rich experiences and greater visions. The cause of publishing this book as he says, is “a service done to Mother Church during the past 52 years of my priestly life”, and thanking God for the gift of 80 beautiful years. He is proud to say that as he matured in age, his reflections too matured in the field of inter religious dialogue.

The title of the book itself is an indicator of his in depth and meritorious reflections on the need for deeper understanding of religions and their positive role in a period of improper understanding, shallowness prevailing among religious leaders, leading to chaos, and social unrest in the society.

This book is divided into two parts, namely Reflections on Mission – Evangelisation and Issues related to Mission. He begins his argument from God who is the source of everything and everything leads to God who is the teleos of all things. He compares this understanding of God the source and summit of everything with the Ocean which is the source of rain which all rivers eventually carry the water back to the Ocean. He substantiates all his

arguments from the Bible, Church documents. His treatment on this topic is quite historical.

The approach of Jesus is the basis for the author's understanding of mission. Jesus carried out his "mission faithfully by his presence, teachings and miracles (his *esse, dicta et acta*)." Jesus mandated his disciples to continue his mission which eventually has become the mission of the Church. The author tries to expound the true understanding of mission by exploring the negative and positive perspectives of mission. In the history of the Church the understanding of mission has undergone various changes. In its negative meaning it was merely baptising considered to be the mission. "*Cujus region, ejus religio*" was the dictum until the new understanding of mission was emphasised. The Decree on the "Church's Missionary Activity" in the Second Vatican Council gave the incarnational dimension of mission. As Jesus emptied himself (*kenosis*) and identified with the people so also the mission of the Church is not merely ritual baptisms but identifying herself with the cultures of the people and building up of the communities with kingdom values. (cf. AG 5)

The author rightly highlights the shift from Christo-centric approach to theo-centric approach to mission which is traced to Ignatian spiritual experience of "the activity of God in creation". Dr. Arulsamy elucidates the advantages of theocentric approach. This approach according to him, can revolutionize a Church centred and a one-sidedly Jesus-centred theology of mission. Therefore, he calls for an introspection whether the Asian Church has worked out a strategy to be more effective in its mission to reach out to the pluralistic context of our society.

Fr. Arulsamy asserts the paradigm shift within the Church on various issues related to interreligious dialogues, inculturation, method of theologizing . It reveals the openness and humility of the Church to understand the signs of time where God intervenes. This reveals the openness of the Church.

The author continues to focus on the new understanding of evangelisation in the context of India. Quoting the FABC (1979) affirms the paradigm shift of the Church in Asia in the field of evangelisation. Evangelisation is "*the building up of the local Church and that it could be realized only in a threefold dialogue with the cultures, the religions and with the poor of Asia.*" Therefore, he justly says that salvation is not simply saving of 'souls' but it is liberation and fulfilment for the whole human person-in-community.

The author has not failed to bring in Jesus for a better understanding of evangelisation in the multi -religious context. Christ the core of Christian faith does not become a cause of division among religions but revelation of God. He wisely puts this in the following words "*this Christ ceases to be an exclusive possession of a particular religion but becomes the personification of the divine power behind all religious process of creative transformation.*" Therefore without downplaying the importance and the particular role of each religion, Christianity should find out its own uniqueness in bringing persons to its flock to witness Christ. He quotes Hillman to speak about the role of the Church in the pluralistic context. "The Church must be raised up among enough of the people to symbolize adequately the real presence of Christ among all men in every part of the world".

Dialogue in the context of evangelisation is a great instrument for mutual understanding and healthy criticism. His explanation of dialogue is quite enriching. "Dialogue is sharing of ourselves with our partners where the Logos that separates us is pierced open and genuine disclosure is made possible." And the spirit has a special place in dialogue. "It is the mystery of the presence of the Spirit that makes dialogue part of God's mission."

Inter-religious dialogue is not an impediment for proclamation. Fr. Arulsamy deals quite sufficiently on the duty to proclaiming the Gospel. Citing *Evangelii Nuntiandi* he says proclamation is "the foundation, centre

and at the same time the summit of evangelising mission of the Church.” (No27) He also speaks about the various forms of proclamation especially in the context of India.

“*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*” (*Outside the Church no Salvation*) is technically a tough area to discuss and explain. But, Fr. Arul samy with his expertise explains the theme from a pre/post Vatican perspective. Finally he winds up by saying “outside the Church there is no eschatological salvation”.

Culture that of the West and the East is the expression of the values of groups at different region and time. The evangelisation should address the culture of domination, discrimination in order to establish freedom, justice, solidarity and love, the four pillars of the society. He also gives many practical suggestions to bring faith and justice together for the honour of the one humanity.

The author allots one full chapter on New Evangelisation and Popes from Paul VI to Pope Francis. This is quite impressive to see how different popes emphasised on various key elements of New Evangelisation taking into consideration the signs of the time.

Part two of the book is about the concrete issues in India related to Mission. He answers to practical questions confronted by Christian communities and the mentality of some Hindu fundamentalists.

To sum up, this book is quite precise, theological and progressive in the way it understands the New Evangelisation. I also thank Rev. Dr. S. Arulsamy for his dedicated service to the Church by writing this wonderful book, even at this age when he is supposed to have good rest.

Dr. A.S. John Peter.

Sammanasur.