

## A BOOK REVIEW

**Abraham M. ANTONY, *Apologetically Yours: Towards a Persuasive Defence of the Christian Faith. An Orientation for Students of Theology* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 2015) pp. 192. Pb. ₹ 200.00**

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In *Apologetically Yours*, Abraham M. Antony – who is Chief Librarian and professor of Scripture at Sacred Heart Theological College – offers an indispensable intellectual-spiritual orientation to students of *religious studies*. Though primarily meant for students frequenting a Catholic faculty, this book is a must-read for all students, irrespective of their Christian affiliation. The book is of great value also for those doing a master's degree in theology as well for those eager for an ongoing theological-spiritual formation. It can be of great assistance for *teachers of religious studies* too.

Interestingly, this 192-page book is divided not into chapters as one would normally expect, but into five sections. This is because it is, in the author's own words, 'an extended essay' (see the Preface on p. 6; and p. 7). In fact, it is intentionally so! It is a sustained argument in favour of a serious engagement with various theological disciplines; hence the title *Apologetically Yours*. The title is apt from another perspective too: the book begins as a strong response to a frank letter the author received from a missionary priest, who suggests that those in training for pastoral ministry ought to be given a thorough grounding in the practical use of the Scriptures that would facilitate preaching and apologetics (defence of one's faith). The author's response is well thought out and precise, down-to-earth and unambiguously straightforward.

After a brief 'Introduction' (pp. 7-10), the essay unfolds in five parts. In the section on 'Apologetics and Fundamental Theology' (pp. 10-33), the author dwells on the meaning and significance of 'apologetics' and suggests that rather than bracing themselves for mere apologetics, students doing a course in theology should aim at laying a solid basis in Fundamental Theology. His brief overview of the importance of Fundamental Theology is bound to pay rich dividends.

The next section is entitled 'A Deeper Knowledge of Sacred Scripture' (pp. 34-66). Here the author highlights the importance of familiarity with the entire Sacred Scripture and a scientific as well as a prayerful approach to the study of God's Word, paying attention to the faith dimension in particular.

The third section dwells at length on 'A Profound Engagement in Sacred Theology' (pp. 67-99). What strikes the reader in a special way in this section is the focus on the person of Jesus Christ. In emphasizing the all-embracing character of Christology (pp. 71-89), Br. Abraham touches the heart of Christian theological formation, namely, Christ-orientation. Readers will certainly benefit from the concise faith-filled rationale the author offers for *why one must contemplate Christ* (pp. 78-89). Next in importance is the stress given to the significance of Theological Anthropology (pp. 89-97). The author shows in lucid language how Theological Anthropology is fundamental to relate to God and man.

In the next brief section – 'The Importance of Patrology' (pp. 100-109) – the author insists on a good familiarity with the theological world-view of the Fathers of the Church for a reliable foundation for the Christian educator. About the Church Fathers, the author says: "these

privileged witnesses to the sacred traditions of the Church were essentially *great lovers of the Lord* and *great lovers of their flock*. It was profound love that ticked in them” (p. 104).

The fifth part is entitled ‘From Scripture-based Theology to Well-integrated Life’ (pp. 110-153). It is an effort to show the link between well-founded theology and holistic Christian living. The author rightly says: “Any true and lasting theology is Scripture-based, tradition-honouring, heaven-born, context-oriented, culture-sensitive, anthropologically relevant, and compassionately pastoral” (p. 152). Echoing genuine Christian tradition, he avers that “all good theology is born in a context of contact with God in prayer” (p. 152). Students stand to gain much from the author’s words on *the reflective process* (pp. 125-128).

In the ‘Conclusion’ (pp. 154-159), among other things, Br. Abraham highlights an important point: “The best defence of truth is carried out by faithfully living it in one’s personal life. The ideal defence of the Church’s precious heritage of faith is a total and visible dedication to *Christus totus caput et corpus*. Such a well-lived life has immense persuasive power and an incredible attraction. After all, it is not by aggressive apologetics, ruthless propaganda, or sheep-stealing that a Christian community grows, but by the irresistible attraction of impactful witness” (pp. 158-159).

An important feature of the book is the inclusion of some 243 footnotes rich in either bibliographical guidance or supplementary input. Along with the arguments marshalled for a serious study of Christian doctrine, this is the most precious contribution that the author makes through this book. Hardly anyone embarking upon a four-year course in theology would know the more important books that he/she needs to read! The mention of this vital collection of books is a very valuable aid to serious students. These lengthy footnotes show the author’s erudition and his extraordinary familiarity with the world of Christian literature. It is important that readers pay attention to his own statement in the Preface: “*The footnotes form an integral part of this extended essay*. So, it is important that *they be read along with the main text*” (p. 6). The footnotes carry not only bibliographical information, but also a number of apt reflections and quotations.

Another significant feature of the book is the ‘Addendum: On the Relevance of Reading and Reflection’ (pp. 160-192). Here the author offers many insights into the importance of reading and reflection. This is certainly an additional boon to the reader.

Throughout this book, the author seems to be in a holy hurry. This is understandable because he has a good number of things to tell the readers and is at pains to impress them about their importance. As a work aimed at encouraging students to embrace serious theological study, reflection and prayer, this book offers much guidance to eager searchers after the truth. As the author himself hopes, it will certainly give a good orientation to students of theology and religious studies.

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