

Book Review

Ludwig Bertsch, *Laien als Gemeindeführer: Ein afrikanisches Modell: Texte der Erzdiözese Kinshasa vorgestellt und kommentiert.* Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1990 (Theologie der Dritten Welt, Bd. 14), 232 pp., (ISBN 3451218755).

This book zeroes in on the contribution made by lay people to the life of religious communities, as realised in the church in Africa, more particularly at Kinshasa (Zaire). The approach chosen is totally based upon ecclesiastical documents, such as those issued by Rome, in the Second Vatican Council, and in the Code of Canon Law of 1983, and also on the insights of the Catholic Bishops in Zaire, over the last 30 years.

It is maintained that the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist turn everybody into an apostle, and into one who had the coresponsibility to pass on the faith he (or she) received. Such an active faith calls, in each one's heart, for a never-ceasing conversion, while it operates also in the circle of those known to him. The basis is, therefore, that the Spirit of God is active in every baptised person. They, thus, share in the prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles of Christ Himself. As to the Zairean, in particular, there is also a strong need to be part of what happens around him, to belong to it.

The Bishops of this land have had the strength to ask fundamental questions about the traditional methods of their pastoral work, in order to become more effective in the future. Eventually, the whole stress was put on the obedience, in faith, to the person of Christ. This emphasis creates groups of people who, through their daily activity, show that they, too, are loving, caring people. The respect for the rules and regulations of the ecclesiastical institute are not waived, although obedience to the authorities is no longer the first guiding principle. The type of people, here formed, are men and women, who live together (in a "quartier"), rejoice together at a birth, are sorry together, when one dies, or when they feel the pinch of poverty, but, also who, celebrate together at the eucharist.

The "mokambi" is the leader of such a group. There are some 20 of them in a given parish. Hence, the whole parish is a community of communities, in which the priest is mainly delegated to confer the sacraments. This means that the church, as such, is no longer the business of bishops, and priests, or missionaries. Instead, it is the task, and challenge, for every

baptised person, who respects his or her neighbour, the world around, and God. One hears, often, about a shortage of priestly vocations. However, where there is a broad basis of lay people, vocations are bound to flourish.

This book is intended for missionaries – and that is every Christian – and encourages missionaries to try out new ways, in a different culture, after this “African model”.

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