



### **A Montfortian among the biblical theologians**

**ROME** - The springtime has just begun, and anyone traveling through Europe will not miss the beautiful flowers and blooming trees and plants that make the landscapes green and heavenly. On 21 March, first day of spring, the weather in Rome was pleasant. As someone who traveled from Belgium, I found it to be a blessing and felt fortunate. The sun was shining, and the atmosphere was inviting to visit Rome and admire its historical monuments and splendid places. On this beautiful day, Fr. Alex SWAMY NATHAN, SMM defended his thesis entitled: “Where are you from? (19:9): An Exegetico-Theological Inquiry of ‘pothen’ and its Christological function in the Fourth Gospel”.

Given that the weather was lovely on that day, Rome was busier than the previous days. Recognizing and experiencing God’s blessing and His Providential Care in the ecological cooperation of nature, Fr. Alex felt doubly supported by the General Community of Montfort Missionaries in Rome due to their impressive presence. Almost all members of the community who were present at that time and could travel came to the hall to support him. The moderator of the defense applauded the encouraging presence of the confreres at the very beginning of the event. More importantly, the presence of the Superior General and his Council was noted. Brother John KALLARACKAL, the Superior General of the Brothers of Saint-Gabriel, was also present to extend his support to Fr. Alex.

Fr. Alex was calm and well-poised to demonstrate his expertise and the fruits of his hard work. Confreres from the General community took care of the practical arrangements for the smooth happening of the event. The presentation of his findings was well-prepared and clearly conveyed. This was noted by the moderator, and he applauded Fr. Alex for his excellent writing, which was understandable and engaging. His research was direct and focused. His arguments were not complex, and his writing style proved that he was determined to reach his findings beyond the academic circle. Bernateda Jojko, the supervisor of Alex’s dissertation, was full of praise and admiration for the superb research accomplished by him. She affirmed that his research was original and revolutionary. She

was very content with the outcomes of the research. She added that it can provide new insights and open untraveled avenues to attend to the central Christological mystery of the two natures of Jesus, who came to be believed as the promised Messiah and later worshipped as the Incarnate Word of God. Alex's attempt to bridge biblical studies with systematic theology deserves much appreciation, as a multidisciplinary approach is one of the most recommended academic methods in universities currently.

The corrector of Alex's research felicitated him for using simple language in his investigation and presenting convincing arguments. According to him, Alex's research was readable and well-focused on the research question. He expressed his appreciation for Alex's attempt to provide a linguistic solution to one of the irresolvable Christological mysteries: the two natures of Jesus Christ, fully human and fully God. While the great theologians of Christianity introduced theological terms like 'person' to reconcile the two natures into a salvific convergence, Alex explored 'pothen' to illustrate the evangelist's attempt to highlight the union of the divine and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ.

The supervisor and the corrector also underlined the difficulties that arise when the theological focus shifts from Jesus Christ to the Holy Spirit, and the dissonance that continues to haunt the academic world in explaining the relationship between them, especially when our belief in one Triune God becomes the focal point of evangelization and liturgical celebration. Besides them, it must be mentioned here that the moderator of the defense was at his best in his task. He ensured a pleasant atmosphere through his calm and affable academic moderation, which is required for the candidate to be confident and perform well. He welcomed the General Community and the members of the other Montfortian families with professional friendliness and appreciated their encouraging presence for Alex.

All ended well with a good reception, where the highlight of the menu was a large cake printed with Alex's name. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to Fr. Alex for his original research. May he utilize his expertise in the field of biblical studies for the evangelization and the mission of the congregation.

*Fr. Nepo JAMES RAJ, SMM*