

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Soul of the World: Notes on the Future of Public Catholicism.*  
George Weigel. W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan:  
Grand Rapids, 1996. pp x+206.

A careful observer of the world history will find that there had been three dynamics of change in the latter half of the past century. World history, Catholic Social doctrine and the Church's activism in the world as exemplified by Pope John Paul II are the subjects of these changes. Many revolutions, wars have taken place to safeguard one's autonomy in terms of democracy. But they have failed to create the social space in which democratic pluralism and politics of consent can take root. The fact is that Catholicism always has attempted to put in a singular position (in moral values and public life) to help make the twenty-first century a far more humane epoch. George Weigel, who is writing nearly twenty years about Catholicism and public life, here very distinctively and scholarly states that Christians are to the world what the soul is to the body.

Of the eight chapters, the first two chapters advance explicitly theological arguments about the nature of the Church as a communion of believers on pilgrimage through history. Weigel takes up several of the great issues explored by the Vatican II in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. In his unflinching effort to maintain the sovereignty of Christ, Weigel identifies three first things namely, "the Lordship of Christ, the communion of the Body of Christ, the Church and the Church's proclamation through the power of the Holy Spirit". He speaks about what the Church asks of the world. The Church asks of the world "the space ... in which to carry out its distinctive ministry of word and sacrament" which aims at the world's redemption for which religious freedom is required. The way he brings out this idea basing himself on two rich sources – a patristic source, *Letter to Diognetus* and the documents of Vatican II and Post Vatican II – is noteworthy.

In the third chapter he explores what the Church does *for* the world. The danger which the Christians have always posed to the world and the distinctive nature of the *communio* of Christians occasion a debate over the present worldly governance in which the democratic ideal inspires the people around the globe. His arguments are based on the Gospel text Mt. 22:15-22 - "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". Democracy is not a machine that runs well by itself. The machine needs mechanics of a certain set of mind and soul to make it work in such a manner that the machinery serves the ends of human flourishing. As the machine needs the mechanic to attend to it for effective functioning, so the world needs the Church for its democratic living. The democratic state made futile attempts to be a sacred state. But the truth is that "the democratic state needs the disentangled Church - the post-Christendom Church - in order to remain a law-governed democracy in which freedom serves the ends of genuine human flourishing" (63).

There are many Churches proclaiming the Word of God. But are they promoting ethical values? asks Weigel in the fourth chapter. Some Churches do not provide clear moral counsels on some issues like abortion, homosexuality etc. There should be really a co-relation between one's conviction and the action in the day-to-day life. How can these diverse Christian communities contribute to public moral discourse? Is there a grammar that brings some discipline over how we ought to live together? G.W. tries to answer these probing questions. The Christians have to consider how their most deeply held convictions could be brought to bear on public life. The author analyses how we are a people of faith and how religion helps us give our people that character without which a democracy cannot survive. Playing the Gospel as a trump card makes Christians less effective witnesses to the truths they hold. He rebukes the system in which laws are created only to be enacted outside the system. Hereby he makes a veiled attack on the presence of his country's (USA) military force and its use in another country. He comes down heavily on those who justify the abortion licence given by the Supreme Court. "This has to be argued by deploying natural law arguments that translate our Christian moral convictions into public idiom more powerful than the idiom of the autonomy" (75).

The last four chapters deal with the pressures on the involvement of the Church in the democratic revolution. Human rights are violated in many cases. Though the Church's work is limited to its realm the Church has become the world's foremost institutional defender of human rights.

In order to highlight his theme that the Church is the defender of human rights Weigel extensively uses the social moral encyclicals of Pope John Paul II and many other writings of the theologians. The principle of subsidiarity found in the social teachings of the Church is also emphasized. Truth and freedom should go hand in hand for the smooth running of any democratic society. But the fact is that every democracy today is faced with certain unavoidable moral questions. Hence the writer appeals for a political debate on morals in politics. He warns that "just as the human body dies without oxygen, the democratic body politic dies without the oxygenation of political debate, without public deliberation about how we ought to live together" (156).

Every chapter of this book contains relevant and thought provoking expositions and from every page flow new ideas. The arguments are based on the world and Church histories. The method he has adopted not only keeps the reading interesting but also enriches the reader with knowledge and widens his/her horizon. Though the events that are discussed here are done against the historical background of the USA, the common principles applied here are relevant to all the Catholics. *Soul of the World* is a fruitful reading for those who keep asking what the Church has done and could do for the cause of the society, and for all who ponder the challenge of effective Christian witnessing in public life. After giving a complete reading to the book a question arises in the mind of the reader as to how far the overemphasis given by the author only to the positive elements of the Catholic Church is justified especially in the present context of religious pluralism.

**Fr. Alphonse Thainese**

*Dictionary of Third World Theologies*. Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharaja. Eds. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000. Pp. xxiii + 261. Hard Cover \$ 50.

Before Vatican II, theology was the monopoly of the West. Once Vatican Council II put its official seal of recognition to the role of culture and contextualization in this science it was a matter of time for the other countries to swing into action. The call of the Council to the theologians for a shift in interpreting the living Word from a monocultural background to understanding and reinterpreting it in the living cultural context of each country paved the way for the third world theologies. Terminologies of these theologies have swelled the theological lexicon, thereby creating a need for a clear understanding of the concepts. This need is fulfilled in the *Dictionary of the Third World Theologies* edited by the duo V. Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharaja.

Many elements in this book guarantee great benefits to a careful reader. To begin with each article describes succinctly the core meaning of the theology veiled in the notion, which is also substantiated by reference to the third world theologians (pp. 49,123,130,171). The bibliography listed at the end of each article offers the reader ample scope for further reading and research. Reference to synonyms (e.g., *Houseland Theology* = Taiwanese Theologies; *Charismatic Movements* = Pentecostalism; *Mujerista Theology* = Third World Women's Theologies – Hispanic) and to the related concepts (e.g., *Symbols: Inculturation, Worship, Rituals*) that facilitate easy consultation for broader explanation is an added credit to the dictionary.

The use of the plural-form of theology as the title of the book (*Dictionary of Theologies*) is very adequately justified as the book introduces to the reader the different strands and types of theology – Dalit Theology, Decolonizing Theology, Ecofeminist Theology, Malaysian Theology, Thai Theology, Theology of Struggle, Vietnamese Theology and so on – that are specific to the third world countries.

The manner in which important concepts are explained stimulates the interest of the reader to glance through the entire book on the very first take and to fall back upon it to be accurately informed of a theological term from the perspective of different developing nations and their cultures. To cite an example the

concepts 'Bible' and 'liberation theology' are explained not simply from any one third world country's point of view but from different – African, Latin American, Asian – dimensions. This method, besides enriching theology also broadens the range of understanding the concepts and theologies. This technique, something very special to this short dictionary of theologies, is a feather in the Orbis Books' cap. Another asset of this dictionary is that most of the contributors are from the third world countries and that is reason enough to rightly presume that their contribution is not a mere armchair speculation but a sharing of their living experience.

Many modern ideas come to play a vital role in theologies. These ideas though may have common connotations, are certainly endowed with subtle differences. Words like inculturation and socialism, for example, besides the common meaning they bear to all the third world countries, are not used univocally in all the countries of the third world. To explain them from a few continental or national perspectives, as done for the term 'Bible', would make the dictionary still richer. Entry of some more prevalent terms, e.g., ashram, popular devotion, hinduttva, folk religion, animism, satyagraha, holy war or jihad, non-violence, etc. will be an additional feather in this precious dictionary. This could be taken into consideration in the next edition.

This peccadillo, which is near impossible in works of this kind, does not in any way minimize the value of the *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*. This book will greatly benefit its readers in that it sketches clearly the fundamental third world theological notions and the basics of different third world theologies. It is indeed a "Treasure Island". This treasure will be cherished and appreciated more widely if an Asian or third world edition is brought out soon.

**Dr. T. Victor**