

## Book Reviews

***Wings of Faith: Towards Public Theologies in India* by Patrick Gangaprasagam published in Delhi by the Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2013, pp. 1-264, ₹275.00, ISBN 978-81-8465-332-8.**

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Patrick Gnanaprasagam, a Fulbright-Nehru Visiting Scholar (Fellow) at Harvard University, teaches and researches at the Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras. The book under review *Wings of Faith: Towards Public Theologies in India* is a collection of essays on the theme public theologies in India. A few essays dwell upon the theme of public theology more directly while others on realities which characterise the context of its relevance. These essays chart a relatively new path in the Indian theological world and open an initial sounding for debate in the future. The author argues that experience of religion today has tangible *publicness* about it. He observes that at one end of the spectrum, we have some exceptional countries which establish religion at the state level and impose it upon political and civil spheres. On the other end of the spectrum, there are those countries which devalue religion completely in relation to public life. In between these two extremes, there are majority of countries which neither establish nor disestablish religion. India is contextualised in such a way.

The first part of the book has five essays which deal with contemporary context and concerns which are circumstantially related to public theology. The introductory essay delves upon the facility that emerges today for organising an emancipatory self and for negotiating borders between self and others with relatively better freedom than found in earlier contexts of life. The second essay ruminates on the issue that the contemporary era, by going beyond the earlier phases of hierarchical and dominating modes of interfacing knowledge with religion brings up a potential moment when faith takes the central place (by becoming a necessity). Following this essay, the third one, dwells upon the Indian temptation - where there is an emerging necessity of faith, surfacing of sectarian identities with the aid of fundamentalist discourses associated with religion. This essay points towards the Indian religions that need attention and critique the prevalence of poverty, unemployment, underemployment, lack or

complete absence of sanitation, social justice, child labour and the like which have taken a beating at the hands of the Hindutva-upper-middle class nexus; so also some of the basic religio-cultural values of religious tolerance, harmony, social justice and the like. 'Globalisation and Indian Minorities' is the next essay in the line which discusses about the plight of the Indian social minorities, the subalterns. The following essay just after suggests that Indian secularism can become an emancipatory ideal for the people hitherto excluded from the public. Taking a historical and religio-social cue, this essay explores the emancipatory project of the social minorities of India which has entered a new phase at this age of globalisation.

The second part of the book discusses in detail about the public theology in India. The essays in this part of the book explore western and Indian concerns of public theology which are relevant in the Indian context. Several models of interactions between religions are discussed in detail in this essay such as a) translation, b) conversation and c) hospitality. The essayist critiques that the arena of the civil society is the ground wherein the public theology can unfold meaningfully and effectively. The next essay makes an evaluation of the subaltern studies project and points out that a subaltern approach can be taken to religious studies in the light of public theology. The subalterns who have been oppressed by realities such as race, caste, patriarchy and class can take the shelter in Indian secularism to empower themselves. The essay suggests that forging of emancipatory selfhood or identity of these subaltern people is one of the most meaningful ways by which we can contribute to the emergence of global civil society, which will be a freer society than contemporary one. It is asserted that there is nothing but the subaltern location, where the poor, oppressed, and the socially excluded people seek God and the meaning of their life amidst the thick of their struggle. It is this location that gives meaning to a post-secular commitment and offers emancipatory convergence to plurality of religions.

There is also a concern that the market driven and market-ridden world which needs an act of doing public theology by theologically evaluating the politics of such a context. He surmises that there is a need of public theology to keep opening a world that is being closed by the idolatry of a market. The essay takes a prescriptive turn to suggest as to how the Churches can become one in spirit - by becoming an active catalytic agent in the grassroots to facilitate inter-human encounter, by becoming critically aware of the social, political and economic functions of its Christian theologies, by working in solidarity with other religious traditions, by fostering a hermeneutical engagement with the field of social sciences to enrich contextual theologising, by becoming self-reflexively critical in the context of market driven consumeristic economy and finally by promoting a subaltern approach to public issues and by being involved in the continuous process of interrogation of religio-cultural theologies. This particular essay explores the nuances of the feudal economy and religion, industrial capitalist economy and religion, contemporary economy and religion and knowledge economy and religion. It is habitat of reflexive modernisation, sustained by knowledge-economy,

comes up with the necessity to believe and prove a congenial climate for religion. Further, the author speaks about the context of public theology in the Indian Church and he asserts that public theologies as undertaken in the subaltern civil society are, then, fitting ways of experiencing the creative wings of faith today.

Considering the context and the situation of the Church today in India, the essay points out that understanding civil society as a processual and normative ideal is helpful to make the church function as a site of civil society. This can facilitate the church to interact with the civil society with the emancipatory concern of the subalterns. The very last but one essay titled 'Violence in Contemporary Life: A Theological Appraisal' discusses in detail about the violence in contemporary life, violence due to religions though many scholars do not implicate violence with religion. As a theological response, the essayist offers some suggestions such as rooted transcendence in Jesus offering Biblical basis of the message that Christ lived with example. Apart from this, theology of culture is yet another response to the contemporary violence. Elaborated further, it is assessed that a critical theology of culture is that which treats culture more as a critical praxis, a dynamic activity rather than a content, more a process than a substance which calls for a shift from just being a victim to being active agents of negotiations of violence as some of the Christian theological reflections interpret the suffering of Jesus as a model of solidarity with the victim - suffering on behalf of the real victim, the sinful humanity. Finally the essayist envisages that a critical theology of culture and civil society will converge to give us an experience of the transforming grace which brings enduring peace to our society.

The blurb of this book reads as 'underlying the creative potentialities of the self of social collectives to negotiate a world filled with challenges and opportunities, the essays in this volume reflect upon the transformative value of the public role of religion for an increasingly inter-connecting world. They critically analyse the contemporary issues like fundamentalism, politics of market, violence, etc. and explore the subaltern avenue of democracy, secularism and civil society from the perspective of public theology. This book makes for a lucid reading for students, research scholars, civil society activists and teachers will find an active conversational partner. His scholarly and erudite take on the public theology, contemporary violence and the response to it, subaltern perspective to the public theology in India has made this book an unputdownable and grappling read.