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BOOK REVIEWS

Charles Irudayam, *Towards an Ethical Framework for Poverty Eradication: A Critical Reflection on Amartya Sen's Capability Theory in the Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, Delhi: ISPCK, Tercentenary Publication, 2010, pages xxii + 391, ISBN: 978-81-8465-049-5

The present world is both spectacularly rich and distressingly impoverished. Global markets, transnational exchanges, technological advancements and newly-emerging super powers bring a hope that the world we coexist is really flat. Yet, when we know that 18 million people die annually prematurely from poverty related causes (7), it would demand us to confess publically that our hope is an illusionary misconception. Taking this reality seriously into a comparative theoretical framework, Charles Irudayam investigates the concept of poverty and the possible way for making an ethical agenda for poverty eradication under the title: *Towards an Ethical Framework for Poverty Eradication: A Critical Reflection on Amartya Sen's Capability Theory in the Light of Catholic Social Teaching*. This work in general, attempts to re-read Amartya Sen's capability theory in the light of Catholic Social Teaching (CST, in short).

Poverty is irreducibly an equivocal and a multidimensional concept. There may be no political thinker, or even an economist-philosopher,

who has taken global poverty a serious topic of philosophical discussion and debate as Indian Nobel laureate Amartya Sen in the recent decades. Sen argues for enhancing people's substantial freedoms and equalizing conditions for their realization, understood poverty as absence of freedoms and not goods, showed how there can be famine in a world even when food production increased, and advised governments and international bodies on how to make globalization work in favour of the world's least. Hence, he explains human development in terms of expansion of individual freedom or what he calls it 'capabilities.' In his analysis, Irudayam on the one hand tries to explore the converging and diverging elements in these two approaches – the capability theory and the CST – and on the other hand, the possibility of enriching both by taking reasonable and important elements of the other. By keeping an interdisciplinary approach to the research problem – indeed this work is a defended doctoral research at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium – the author takes poverty as an economic, religious, political and a social reality.

In the first chapter, Irudayam clarifies the plurivocal meaning of the term poverty. He analyses and compares Arjan Verschoor's model, where Verschoor uses Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs to specify what is to be included in the conception of poverty, Paul Shaffer's two conceptual model of poverty, which explains the physical deprivation model and the social deprivation model, and Anthony Atkinson's broad model of measuring poverty, bringing consumption of specific goods, total expenditure and total income. Irudayam argues that "there is no objective, value free, uncontroversial, and universally accepted concept of poverty that could be made available for social

sciences studying about poverty” (40). Irudayam seems to hold the view of Sen’s broad conception of poverty: ‘poverty as deprivation of capabilities and social opportunities.’

The first part of the second chapter explains Sen’s early life, academic and social influences, and his unique contribution in the field of economics and ethics, ‘for having restored an ethical dimension to the discussion of vital ethical problems.’ In the second part we find the ethical implications of Sen’s capability theory. Irudayam explains how Sen rejects both welfarist consequentialism and constraint-based deontology for being fundamentally inadequate to face the challenges of different kinds of interdependences present the moral problems, and how he defends a ‘goal rights system.’ Keeping line with Sen, Irudayam also contends for a functional democracy as a precondition to bring about economic development and eradicate poverty. Yet, he is not uncritical about the practise of democracy in his land, India, where market-driven capitalism dominates, or even sometimes, destroys the universal values of democracy. Although individual identity has to be distinguished from one’s collective identity in a democratic society, Irudayam rightly says that, due to the age-old caste system individual identity merges with the collective identity and thus, society loses its moral dimension (160).

In the third chapter, Irudayam explores the concept of poverty in the CST starting from *Rerum Novarum*. In the first part, investigation mainly concentrates on the biblical and other sources, development, and the principles of CST. This exploration leads to show how the principles of CST remain stepping-stones to move further to create an ethical framework towards poverty eradication (343). In the second part, the

author critically scrutinizes the social documents of the Church together with the FABC and the USCCB documents. His analysis is not only based on the popular documents but exemplified by bringing and reflecting on the contributions of important Asian theologians including George Lobo and Aloysius Pieris.

Irudayam focuses on an ethical framework for poverty reduction in the fourth chapter. In this process of engaging the CST in dialogue with Sen, Irudayam criticises both Sen's capability theory, arguing that it is developed under individualist moorings, and the CST, for being abstract and vague concept of the common good, and contends that both of them "do not value the starting point of the other as important as their own starting point" (343). Both in the *Gaudium et Spes* and in the capability approach, it is the human person who is the goal of all social and economic institutions (276). Similarly, the understanding of poverty as lack of freedom and the agency role of individuals for social change, and other-regarding concerns can be seen in both the approaches. Irudayam, however, finds that the language of the CST is too moralistic, especially when he compares it with the pragmatic approach of Amartya Sen. CST's emphasis on structural solidarity follows the traditional mentality of the Church, Irudayam argues, that praises charity, not engaging structures with a critique. The author promotes a *moral cosmopolitan approach* (339).

A rising tide may not lift up all the boats. "The past answers for the present problems may not be sufficient" (9). This stream of literature contributes substantially for discussing new way outs. This work highlights the epistemological challenges and crises of the Church to

offer appropriate answers to the present problems, and so, it deserves a wide spectrum of readers including political thinkers, economists, theologians, policy makers, and, in general, those who like interdisciplinary approach.

Roy Varghese Palatty (roypalattycmi@gmail.com) Centre for Economics and Ethics, KU Leuven, Belgium.