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BOOK REVIEWS

P. Lawrence Thomas CMI, *Designed to Be Dignified: Christian Concept of Human Dignity in the Indian Cultural Context*, Mumbai: St Paul's Publications, 2021. Pages: 509. ISBN 978-93-5015-394-9

The work under consideration is the young author's doctoral dissertation submitted at the Faculty of Theology at the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule, Vallendar, Germany for the degree of Doctorate in Theology. The dissertation deals with the theme of human dignity that is to be respected and protected across religions and cultures to ensure equality of all and a just human society where everyone can lead a peaceful life upon our common home. So the author holds that a human person is destined or designed to enjoy a dignified life.

The book consists of five chapters besides the Foreword by the director of the Dissertation himself, the Glossary of non-English words with diacritical signs, General Introduction, General Conclusion, and an extensive Bibliography. In chapter One, the author gives the philosophical and theological concepts of the human person. He browses through the understanding of the human person as expressed by the Western and Indian philosophical traditions. He brings out the concept of the human person as discussed in the ancient, medieval and modern periods of Western philosophy as well as their Indian counterparts. He, then, describes the theological concept of the human person as developed by the major religions, such as, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. As the study is done chiefly through the Christian perspective, the author treats the biblical understanding of the human person rather extensively by analysing the insights contained in the Old and New Testaments.

Chapter Two is a study of the social doctrines of the Church regarding sacredness of human dignity. The author systematically analyzes the development of the Church teachings on the theme beginning with *Rerum Novarum*, the first official Church document on social themes, and goes through all the land mark documents on the

theme promulgated thereafter by Popes as well as Ecumenical Councils.

Chapter Three spells out the dimensions and thrusts of the human person. Here, the human person is studied from various angles such as, his/her nature, capabilities, orientations, etc. This chapter ends with the analysis of the Christian concept of the human person, who receives his or her dignity only because a human person is an image and likeness of God, a finite expression of God's infinite self-expressions. The author notes that today human dignity is endangered and violence against human dignity is degrading the human person.

Chapter Four is a description of the challenges posed to the human person by the Indian social sector. The author deals with the evils prevalent in the cultural, religious, social, economic and moral areas, such as, violation of human dignity, sectarianism, religious fundamentalism, religious eclecticism, disregard for other faiths, casteism, classism, illiteracy, unemployment, consumerism, individualism, challenges to democratic values, abortion and euthanasia.

The final Chapter gives the conclusions and proposals of the author. The author explains how we can regain human identity of the individuals for the creation of a just society. In view of the inadequacies of the concept of human dignity in other cultures and religions, the author concludes that only in the Christian teachings on the human person can one find true solutions to the problems that fuel the violation of human dignity. The author asserts that the Biblical Christian world view is far superior to all other worldviews to safeguard the concept of human dignity. Without belief in creation, we are forced to face the implication that ultimately there is no good reason to treat human beings as having dignity. The human dignity is to be affirmed and respected across all cultures and religions to develop an empathetic attitude to other people, to feel one with the suffering sections of humanity, to enable everyone to live in peace upon our common habitat and make space for everyone's growth. To make this happen, the author argues that a practical theology has to be worked out. The *Homo sapiens* has to evolve into a human being. That is to say, humans have to become more compassionate and should become bridges connecting individuals, rather than remaining selfish and individualistic. The Indian context terribly needs such a transition which can be realized by living the Gospel.

In the words of the writer of the Foreword to the book, "This book makes an excellent impression and indicates comprehensive

knowledge on the part of the author” (p. 13). The book, no doubt, offers a comprehensive treatment of the theme of human dignity by covering a vast area of research materials and studies on the themes of human dignity, human rights and social justice that shows the acute analytical power of the author. It is indeed an authoritative exposition of one of the aspects of Christian anthropology, the dignity of every human person. With an attractive cover design, reader-friendly language and a font size and line spacing healthy to the eyes, the book invites an interested and captivating reading. The book can be of immense use for students of theology and anthropology, researchers, pastoral workers and all those who are called to work with people both in the religious and secular world.

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Yann Vagneux, *Indian Portraits: Eight Christian Encounters with Hinduism* (Translated from the French by Roderick Campbell Guion, Caroline Malcolm & William Skudlarek), Nirala Publications, 2021. Pages: 263. ISBN: 978-81-951915-8-1

In a world of too much digitalization and over dependence on technology, people have forgotten their spiritual rhythms and inner lives. Through the *Indian Portraits* Yann Vagneux has sketched out a unique spiritual constellation from the lives of eight Christian men and women who ventured out a spiritual pilgrimage into the heart of Hinduism and returned as committed Christians and unique witnesses of Christ.

The *Indian Portraits* has brought together the mysticism of those who burned themselves in the love of God. Some of them such as Mother Teresa, Pierre Ceyrac Jean Vanier and the L’Arche communities, become the manifestation or rather incarnation of divine compassion. Others such as Henri Le Saux, Thérèse Lemoine, Marc Chaduc, Vandana Mataji, and Prasanna Devi became the embodiment of the mystery of Trinity, ‘inebriated by the one and only Source and extinguished themselves into the non-dual mystery of the Self-annihilated, glorified, beatified to the mystery of the Source (p.158).

The book most vividly narrates each one’s inner pilgrimage into the unknown by the unchartered paths through the ups and downs, but always depending completely on the guidance of the Spirit who moves like the winds which is invisible, but experienceable in its unfathomable depths. All of them found out that silence was the mystery of their vocation. They remained faithful to their calling to be