

Virginia Fabella & R. S. Surgirtharajah, (Editors.) *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, Maryknoll / New York: Orbis Book 2000; xxiii + 261 pages, Hard Cover.

Introducing this dictionary, the editors themselves assert that it is a unique book. “It is unique in the sense that it is probably the first time that a dictionary has been devoted to issues specifically related to the Third World and its theological concerns, and also the first time it has been written solely by the people normally relegated to the periphery”. This declaration sums up, more or less, the peculiarities of this dictionary, and states why it is written. It is presumed that Western theologians wrote other dictionaries of theology, from the perspective of the West, and for the interests and views of the mighty. In contrast, this is a dictionary written from the perspective of the poor and for the purpose of taking care of the specific theological concerns of the marginalized people of the Third World.

The themes and topics explained in this dictionary are customarily approached from the standpoint of the poor and the weak. For this reason, only authors from the Third World or people who share the same experience of being marginalized were allowed to forward entries for this compilation, which makes the perspective of the poor the starting point for the attainment of theological knowledge. This is a revolutionary methodology that has gained acceptance even in history. The true history of oppressed people, some historians would say, cannot be read from the lives of kings, “but in the struggles of ordinary people against the forces of nature and the cruelty of men”.¹ Any body who appreciates this point would readily see the justification for the provision of a *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* in addition to many other dictionaries of theology.

According to the editors, this dictionary does not lay claim to definitiveness or authority on all matters relating to Third World theologies. All it does is to explore the theological horizon in our time full of diversity and ambiguity. The editors insist therefore that this work has no political or cultural agenda beside the aim to explain terms and ideas in Third World theologies. By saying that, they surely underestimate the scope of a pioneering dictionary; for, whether it is of political or revolutionary intent, it constitutes by its very nature a definite

¹ John Iliffé, *The African Poor. A history*. Cambridge University Press 1987, p.1.

and authoritative reference for researchers in the areas of Third World theologies. As such, it must in effect redefine theological knowledge and ideas, reshape images and encourage paradigm shifts.

There is indeed more to this dictionary than meet the eyes. In terms of its conception and availability it is a statement. Its realisation at this point in time is a statement about the maturity and self-consciousness of Christians in various nations sharing a common *spiritual experience* as the oppressed of the world. Just 14 years ago, in December 1986, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) met in Mexico to discuss the theme: “Commonalities, Divergences, and Cross-fertilization among Third World Theologies”. During that conference the difficulties became apparent about identifying common elements among three continents (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) and integrating them into one common theological purpose despite evident divergences.²

Since then, the struggle to find an appropriate nomenclature for such a group that cuts across continental and geographical variations, as well as ethnic and cultural differences has been on. A good number of theologians find the term “Third World” derogatory, but they have not been able to procure a better alternative for the classification of the groups of marginalized people from the various continents. There has thus been a non-stop quest for common identity despite obvious differences and a continuous attempt to fashion a new theology for the whole world from the perspective of the poor. All these struggles about the nomenclature, identity and integration of the Third World Theologies into the one theology of the Church seem now settled with the introduction of this dictionary, because, by nature, a dictionary has the ability to standardise meanings and methods, as well as claim authority and authenticity.

This work is a milestone in the development of Third World theologies: for, it unifies the horizon of Third World theologies and provides a common direction and purpose for the divergent and emergent theologies. And it is indeed remarkable, not merely because it emerges from the perspective of the poor, and could be termed the first major declaration of the maturity of Third World theologies, but fundamentally, because it professes and practices pluralism. It ably provides in major entries varied perspectives from various continents to demonstrate the plurality of views that subsists within the Third World theological

² *Third World Theologies. Commonalities & Divergences*, edited by K. C. Abraham, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 1990, p. vii ff

domain. This pluralistic approach informs the methodology of the dictionary, which is exemplified in its abundant use of plurals for captions like theologies, Christologies, ecclesiologies, methodologies etc. For central themes like Bible, Christologies, Ecclesiologies, Liberation theologies, Third World Theologies and Third World Women's Theologies, this dictionary samples views from the African, African American, Asian, Caribbean, Hispanic, Latin America and Third World Women theologians in confirmation of its pluralistic inclination. Although this methodology often makes this dictionary look like a comparative study, it makes it exhibit an enviable strength for wielding together the rich ideas from various cultures of the Third World. It fulfils the dreams of EATWOT to speak with one voice and be identified as one in the endeavour to do theology from the perspective of the underside of history.

Another feature of this dictionary is its use of typically Third World metaphors and imagery to illustrate points, making it easy for entries to reflect Third World interests. It includes classical themes, which it reformulates in such a way that they take care of the concern of the spirituality of the marginalized people. It uses new theological paradigms like inculturation, liberation and feminism to illumine ideas that are otherwise ancient. A lot of new subject matter of Third World origin are brought into theological circle in this compilation. Certain issues earlier neglected in theological anthologies like poverty, peace, oppression, capitalism, justice, colonisation, post colonialism, racism, sexism, dependency theory, development, ecology, globalisation, human rights, indigenisation, militarism, solidarity, Third World debt, urbanisation and violence etc. are given prominence in this collection. Entries are carefully written to show the historical, social and theological contexts of the Third World; just as common and classical themes are presented in such a way that the difference between Western and Third World usages becomes obvious.

The *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* shall no doubt prove to be an asset for theologians of the Third World. But much needs to be done yet to bring it to a comprehensive standard. It has lapses. Some fundamental themes are conspicuously absent, especially issues that every contextual theology must presuppose. How can a dictionary of this nature that claims to take care of the inculturation and liberation theologies in Asia and Latin America fail to include entries on Indian Buddhism and Hinduism, Chinese Confucian heritage and Caribbean Voodoo religions. These are religions that influence the approach to

liberation and inculturation processes in those countries. Leaving them out would make their offspring theologies look superficial. Again, some essential Third World theological issues like pluralism, liturgy, prayer, Cross, human suffering, divine suffering, and the Suffering Servant of God are regrettably left out. It is to be hoped that future editions will take note of these omissions. These limitations, notwithstanding, this dictionary is a necessary reference book for all peoples interested in the Third World theologies. The list of selected English-language Journals on Issues in Third World Theologies attached at the last pages of this dictionary is of much value.

Amuluche G. Nnamani (St. Joseph's Parish, Itchi, Box 32 Nsukka, Nigeria)

Joseph-Thérèse Agbasiere. *Women In Igbo Life and Thought*, Edited with a foreword by Shirely Ardner, London and New York: Routledge, 2000. xxvii + 188 pages.

Every artist reproduces her likeness in her work. This may apply to this book by the late Joseph-Thérèse Agbasiere. Unfortunately her book is published posthumously. The author passed away two years before its publication. If she were alive today she would have loved to present to a live-audience, especially scholars, women with university education and in the academia, her views on the Igbo woman and on Igbo customs and traditions contained in greater detail in her doctoral thesis. Fortunately, before her death, she had completed the final draft of the book, drawn from her doctoral thesis, and confided the editing to her friend Shirely Ardner who also wrote a biographical note on this great Igbo woman.

The book is a portrait of the 'authentic' Igbo woman. It is also a portrait of Joseph-Thérèse. This statement may appear contradictory in view of the fact that the author chose a life of celibacy in a religious congregation rather than celebrating the peak of adult maturity as a person and as a woman in marriage. But those who knew her as a nun and an educationist testify that every inch of her bore witness to the portrait of serenity and influence that is the role of the woman in Igbo tradition and culture. To G. T. Basden's disputable comment that for the Igbo 'Celibacy is an impossible prospect' she replied, "Such an interpretation stands in question in the light of a development – that is, the phenomenal