

## Book Reviews:

1. *The Ethics of Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research: Proposals for a Legal Framework for India*. Author: J. Charles Davis. Published by Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2014. ISBN: 978-81-269-1870-6.

Embryonic stem cell research is still at the center of the controversy which opened up in 1998 with the report by J. Thomson and colleagues on the first successful culturing of human embryonic stem cells. Presented as one of the ultimate conquests of science, and promoted on the promises of future clinical applications in degenerative medicine, this research, however, contained one drawback, of an ethical nature. This due to the necessary destruction of human embryos - which would have otherwise developed into healthy children had no obstacle been placed on their path - in order to obtain human embryonic stem cells (hESCs). In fact, this original problem, intrinsically linked to hESCs research, served also for scientists as a sort of “trojan horse” to pull down an ethical barrier which seemed to limit or oppose the “freedom of scientific research”.

This ideological aspect of the “hESCS research movement”, which went well beyond the scientific and medical aspects of the matter, explained the vivacity of the debate on hESCs research which has agitated parliaments, international organizations, political movements, and religions for decades, regardless of the fact that hESCs research has never reached the goal of clinical applications. A similar ideological pressure on health institutions and government bodies, “in the name of science and for the good of humanity”, can be found in history when the theme of the necessary sterilization of the “unfits” was promoted by medical authorities such as H. H. Laughlin and served as a *Trojan horse* for giving power and authority to the eugenic movement in the United States, Alberta (Canada), Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Nazi Germany where it triumphed. The opposition against the (false) premises of the eugenists had a hard time making her voice heard, because of the great prestige and authority of the eugenists scientists.

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As regards the hESCs debate, however, it should have developed by now into a more peaceful and consensual approach. . Indeed, the introduction within the stem cell field of induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) by S. Yamanaka and his colleagues in July of 2006, has changed the deal. These iPSCs are indeed identical in every respect to the ESCs, except for their being obtained by reprogramming somatic cells, without any ethical problem. Besides, iPSCs have largely demonstrated their superiority over hESCs in allowing the creation of cellular models of pathologies for pharmaceutical studies, and can be used in patients for regenerative medicine without the problem of immunological rejection that hinder the clinical application of hESCs. The value of this discovery has been rightly recognized through the attribution of the 2012 Nobel Price of Medicine to S. Yamanaka and J. Gurdon - the fathers of the “reprogramming” technique. But, even without taking into consideration these iPSCs, the successes obtained in the applications of non embryonic stem cells - somatic stem cells such as the hematopoietic stem cells from bone marrow or blood, umbilical stem cells, amniotic stem cells - to patients, starting in 1968, should have reoriented the stem cell debate to a more constructive direction, a long time ago.

Father J. Charles Davis, in his book “on the ethics of human embryonic stem cell research: proposals for a legal framework for India”, gives us a very well documented, balanced, serene and useful document, which indeed should serve in India for establishing the necessary ethical basis for appropriated guidelines on stem cell research. He rightly bases his ethical discussion on the solid ground of biology, recalling to mind the reality of this fascinating tiny being which is the embryo, despite his/her delusive appearance of being a simple little ball of cells. In reality, when dealing with the embryo, we have an extremely active and fast-growing, fully fledged organism, which finds in himself/herself the aim of his/her development, the molecular keys for said development, and the biological tools to realize it, in a constant operation of self-correction and preparation for the subsequent steps, each step preparing the next. Today, epigenetics explains in a better way why this biological unit is so special among all other types of organisms, and the way this “teleonomic” character of the embryo affirms itself since the onset - that is since

the formation of the zygote through fertilization of the ovocyte. The selective genomic activation which epigenetics realizes in the early embryo is both the result and the expression of the drive that animates this embryo, from the moment of fertilization.

From this biological base, Father Charles Davis goes on to unfold, in a very enlightened way, the various aspects of hESC's research debate, with the arguments that each part brings to it, especially the "gradualist" view on the construct of personhood which is much present in the minds of scientist, today. He also presents the proper points of view of the different religions on hESC's research, the differences between their appraisal coming from the respective understandings of the biological status of the embryo, and therefore of the moral status that can be granted to him/her. A rich contribution appears in his book within the presentation of the various regulations or guidelines on hESC's research that have been developed, at the national or international level.

The aim of Father Charles Davis' contribution is to propose an adequate legal framework, based on an ethical ground, which could be adopted in India, and would take into account the Indian traditions, and their ethical implications along centuries of history, up to now. Since much of these traditions and implications come from natural morality, that is the call to do good and avoid evil which is basic to all human beings, there can be an agreement between these Indian traditions and ethical principles and the ethical "western" principles - much influenced by Christianity. However, today, "bioethics" has taken its distance from natural morality, giving greater room to the individual's autonomy, and less room to the value of human life and basic human rights, and this is in part due to the influence of the utilitarian current. The present trend in this matter born in the "western" world may complicate the debate; but, above all for India, with all its historical and spiritual heritage, the open question that has to be considered regarding the hESC's debate, financing and promotion, is whether or not this country of great importance can afford shifting the debate from a strictly utilitarian and economy-based point of view, to a more human-based view in which the dignity of our humanity can be taken into account.

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2. *The Dynamics of Development: Negations and Negotiations*. Editor: Kieth D'souza. Published by Association of Christian Philosophers of India (ACPI) and Asian Trading Corporation (ATC), Bangalore, 2014. ISBN 978-81-7056-713-5

'Development', a term debated due to its varied definitions, is often used, abused, misused and even overused due to various vested interests. It is an oft-negated cum negotiated word, which adorns the glossary of only a few in the book of history. Many a question is answered and many an answer is questioned in the history of development. We never call something as development unless it is holistic. Anything that is rapid and instantaneous is considered to be cancerous. A lopsided development, by and for the power centres is always perilous to the future of a nation. Whereas farsighted and people oriented developmental tasks will take the nation to newer heights.

*The Dynamics of Development: Negations and Negotiations* is a resourceful and thought-provoking book. It is a compilation of the papers presented at the ACPI Annual Research Seminar in St. Charles Seminary, Nagpur on 25-28 October, 2013 by 21 reputed philosophers from all over India. This is a rare collection of thoughts that was pooled and edited together with utmost care; compiled as a single a volume by Kieth D'souza, and published by Association of Christian Philosophers of India (ACPI) and Asian Trading Corporation (ATC) in 2014.

This book, though seems to question many of the 'defined answers' of the existing so called 'developmental structures' of the society, literally provokes the readers not only to find an answer but 'to be an answer', by being a pulling force to draft a new history. It echoes a clarion call to *google* our search in the web of our life from the optics of the neglected or negotiated. These articles colour this book with different crayons of thoughts and a diverse textures of reflections. *In his editorial Keith D'Souza writes,*

Some of the papers demonstrate a appreciative assessment of development measures and strategies, while others independently negate these with more critical treatments of both ideologies and practices associated with development processes and projects. Many of the articles attempt to negotiate between these extreme

positions, in order to work out more holistic and realistic mediatory approaches. These attempts at negotiation take into account the pitfalls and collateral damage associated with development, but at the same time do not fight shy of the necessity to project a future that is proactive, productive and sensitive to various factors of development.

The articles are classified under four major headings: (1) The Development Problematic, (2) Eco-Political Development, (3) Socio-Cultural Development and (4) Psycho-Spiritual Development. Swami Sachidananda Bharathi, Johnson J. Puthenpurackal and Victor Ferrao, whose articles are queued first in this book, set the framework to quench our philosophical thirst from the rest of the articles. Martin Sebastian Kallungal, George Rajmohan, Sebastian Thomas Palamoottil and John Peter Vallabadoss analyse the Indian models of development in economics and politics, starting with *Arthasastra*, Gandhi, Nehru and ending with Amartya Sen and contemporary ones. They emphasize that the vision of Indian Economic-Political Development, though remains in nostalgic and utopian realm for many centuries, are still realistic and attainable. Nishant A. Irudayadason analyses the geopolitical systems that have given a new shape to the global economy and studies the relation between geopolitics and development, whereas George Panthanmackel sheds lights on justice for holistic development from the history lane till today.

Vincent Aint, Stephen Jayard and Selvaraj display the perils of the marginalized Indigenous and women sections, and migrated communities in India, who are caught between the devilish notion of 'progress or perish'. Their analysis zoom out the reality what 'development' has done to these communities. Sekar Sebastian bounces upon the term 'development' and criticizes it for exploiting Mother Nature in the name of development. Whereas Robert Pen positively posts the developments in information revolution in India. Francis Arackal takes a panoramic view of development with the cultural magnifier and looks at it accordingly.

"While conquering the outerspace with our developmental tools, we need to conquer our innerspace too," posits Kuruvilla Pandikattu, "And for this we need to formulate alternative

theories of human development from our existential perspective” elaborates Keith D’Souza. Devasia M. Antony elucidates the Gandian concept of ‘Sva’ of Svaraj, focussing on the philosophical assemblage of the hermeneutic contours that constitute the polyvalent canon of Svaraj. The last three articles by Kurian Alumkal, James D. Chellappa and Ashley Miranda dwell in the spectrum of religious affinities focusing on Buddhism and Christianity that cater to human and humane development.

These articles make us take a tour into the cultural, economic, religious, political and societal spectrums of human development, by piercing through the history with a hope of walking into a really developed world in future. They beckon the readers to reflect upon the reality, so as to refract from the unhealthy developments and to resonate with the true human development.

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3. *Deconstructing Tourism: A challenge of Justice for the Church - A Theological Perspective Reading from the Global South.* Editors: Caesar D’Mello, Wati Longchar and Philip Mathew. Published by Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia, Taiwan and Senate Centre for Extension and Pastoral Theological Research, Kolkata, 2014. ISBN: 1682-6086.

Tourism is one of the biggest industries on this planet earth and is steadily attempting even to go beyond our planet earth through space tourism. It is one of the fastest growing industries. It often passes off as a non-polluting and green industry. The myths about the environmental as well as communitarian impacts of tourism have been de-mythologized by several scholars across the globe, particularly those belonging to the global south. But unfortunately, tourism is largely thought to be a boon and a tool of liberation for the poor when in reality it puts tremendous pressure on the environment and the marginalized communities. The Book, *Deconstructing Tourism: A challenge of Justice for the*

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*Church - A Theological Perspective Reading from the Global South*, Edited by Caesar D'Mello, Wati Longchar and Philip Mathew is timely and relevant. The views mass tourism from an ethico-theological perspective in an ecumenical spirit. It appears to be a unique as well as maiden venture of the church that attempts to give a theological response to the phenomena of mass tourism. The studies that comprise this book demonstrate that the kind of tourism promoted in our society is not a blessing and fills in the lacunae that remained unaddressed in the Church though its framework of theology, ethics, social analysis and missiological concerns.

This is a fruit of a serious ecumenical theological consultations that include the international consultation on theology of tourism in Chennai and consultation on Church and development: tourism in North East, both organized by Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT) in 2001 and academic conference at SCEPTRE, Kolkata, 2013. Scholars from different theological communities have collaborated to evolve a theological response to the profit oriented tourism industry that is riding on the wings of globalization, neo-liberalisation and free-market. One can find a critical understanding and analysis of mass tourism from the preferential option of the marginalized communities and environmentally responsible locus in the theologization attempted in the book. This book qualifies as a tool of theological learning that promises to enable theological communities to comprehend, introspect and critique their response to the rapidly growing mass tourism. The ethico-theological imperative rising in the context of mass tourism challenges our theological institutions, associations and communities to develop a profound gospel response to the objectification of humans and God.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first part is primarily expository in nature. Comprising of Seven Chapters that manifest how mass tourism dresses itself as development while it marginalizes, dehumanizes and commodifies the people and divert their resources and use them as raw material to create wealth for a small elitist minority that is preying on the tourism pie. The second part comprises of eight chapters and is profoundly concerned to inspire missiological responses and

authentic praxis for justice in the context of emerging dehumanising conditions as a result of mass tourism. The book as whole offers a substantive theological critic to the footprint of tourism in the global south. The social, moral and environmental costs of tourism challenge the theological communities to evolve contextual theological responses that open up new possibilities for us to influence mass tourism and bring about a transformative people based and people driven tourism. Hence, we can no longer close our eyes to the world of tourism. It is imperative to all theological communities to respond authentically so that we are enabled to incarnate the gospel in our society marked by global tourism.

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4. *In Search of Cosmic Origins: The Great Saga of the Universe*. Author: Joseph Mathew. Published by Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, 2014. ISBN 978-81-7086-693-0.

The author, Joseph Mathew is a Capuchin priest and a renowned professor of philosophy for the past several years. He teaches philosophy in various seminaries in India and abroad. In 2010 he authored the book *In Search of the Divine: New Essays in Philosophical Theology* which discussed the “God-question” from a philosophical-theological viewpoint. The new book, *In Search of Cosmic Origins: The Great Saga of the Universe* is yet another brilliant contribution from him to scientific cosmology and philosophical theology concerning the genesis of the universe. Specifically it is an in-depth study to understand the origin of the universe with its important cosmic structures and events, its evolution over billions of years and finally its meaning and purpose.

Aristotle's description of humans as “beings that by nature desire to know,” portrays the most fundamental characteristic of us. We are essentially seekers. At the highest level we seek answers to the “big questions” like how does this universe with its fascinating



immensity and enormity originate? Does it have a cause like other natural events? Does its physical evolution over billions of years finely tuned with purpose and meaning? The task of this book is “searching answers to such ultimate questions” (Prologue, xiv). These questions are answered from the point of view of religion, philosophy and modern science.

The book is written in the form of a story from prologue to epilogue. “The book develops the plot of the story with many ‘characters’ such as the universe itself, galaxies, stars, the solar system, the Sun, the Earth and Finally man. Hence it can be read as a story from the beginning to the end” (prologue, xiv). The flavour of the story, its simple and clear language and the logical flow of text enable the readers to journey through the marvels and mysteries of ‘The Great Saga of the Universe’ at ease in spite of the complexity of the subjects dealt in this book.

The title of the book under review, *In Search of Cosmic Origins: The Great Saga of the Universe*, underlines the three main concerns of the author which also depicts the three fold division of the book respectively: “A History of the Search for the Cosmic Origins”, “The Great Saga of the Universe” and “In Search of Cosmic Foundations”. The first part which is again subdivided into five chapters and many subsections, narrates the ‘searching questions’ about the origins of universe. These questions are answered first by the great religious myths, then by philosophers and cosmologists. This part introduces the readers with ‘Creation Myths’ of world religions and major cultures, the ‘teleological cosmology of Aristotle and other western classical philosophers and various modern and contemporary scientific theories such as Newtonian Mechanical Cosmology, Einstein’s Relativity Cosmology, Quantum Physics, etc. These complex ideas and highly mathematical theories of universe are presented with utter simplicity, and yet without losing their precision and accuracy.

The second part, unlike the ‘search’ questions’ of the first part, narrates the ‘great saga’ of what actually happened in the beginning and in the course of the evolution of our universe. It starts with the creation of the universe in the Big Bang, then enters into the saga of galaxies which “provided the space for cosmic objects such as quasars, black holes, stars, interstellar gas clouds,

planets and finally living beings like the humans” (cf. p. 129). Four chapters, following a logical sequence, describes the formation of intricate cosmological objects and phenomena: i) the saga of origin and fate of the universe, ii) the saga of galaxies, iii) the saga of stars and iv) the saga of solar system leading to the arrival of humans. The narration even goes up to the cosmic fate that awaits us. The complex theories of scientific cosmology are told here in an exciting way as the author unravels up-to-date scientific theories one by one.

The scientific searching of “The Great Saga of the Universe” raises some ultimate questions. If we stop with science, this searching becomes inconclusive and incomplete. Hence in the third part with the title, “In Search of Cosmic Foundations”, the author searches for answers to the ultimate questions of our universe. And his search terminates at the “Cosmic Designer.’ This part is basically a philosophical appropriation of the modern and contemporary cosmological theories of the origin and the evolution of the universe. It has two chapters, the first deals with “proximate foundations” and the second one with “ultimate foundations”. What makes this part most interesting is the fact that the author ventures into some ultimate philosophical speculation of the universe here: “There is apparently a direction to the whole cosmic evolution, namely, humanity. In fact “Man on Earth” was the last section of “The Saga of the Universe”. This does not appear to be a mere accident. For, contemporary physicists and cosmologists have stumbled upon a number of cosmic coincidences which render our universe is 'just right' for human place. It is quite atypical and extraordinary because conditions are just right for the existence of man. Hence, a number of cosmologists have attempted to answer the 'why' question in terms of humanity, and have proposed the 'anthropic principle.’” Thus the author makes a theistic interpretation of the ultimate foundation of the cosmic history in the final part of the book which he believes as valid as the scientific interpretation of the cosmic saga.

I consider *In Search of Cosmic Origins: The Great Saga of the Universe* is an outstanding book, combining both scientific depth and metaphysical insights. As a whole it is a saga of the physical creation and evolution of the universe with plots and sub-plots and

with numerous cosmic characters narrated in the form of a logical, simple and unified story. It provides the inquiring readers of cosmology a good resource of knowledge about the various mysteries of the universe. For students and professors of physics, philosophy of science and cosmology this book will be an insightful reading.

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