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BOOK REVIEW

Mind-food for thoughtful souls

Prozesky, M.H., (Naledi: Gansbaai, 2025), pp. 221, Price: R250, ISBN 978-1-0672345-2-2G.

This book is clearly a philosophy of theology, a religion that is experienced in a believer's daily life. It is a systematic theology starting and pointing out the understanding of human nature, ethics, religion, God, bibliology, and, interestingly, Christology prior to the Gospels.

Prozesky divides the chapters logically, by first defining terms such as truth, evidence, empirical, truthfulness, and world views in Chapters 1 and 2, so that a reader would not misconstrue what he intends to say in the body of his argument.

Starting with Chapter 3, Prozesky unfolds anthropology, arguing from interdisciplinary perspectives based on nine human characteristics, namely culture, health, ethical standards, biological evolution, creativity, psychology and faith, spiritual experience, powers to make choices, and sociality.

Chapter 4 delves into the understanding of ethics guided by Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the community of faith. Choices are made in the context of global ethics, although with "genuine open-mindedness and really rigorous criticality" (p. 73). Moral choices are made from micro-ethics (individual) to mega-ethics (large scale), sometimes going through meso-ethics (organisational). The highlight is the ethics of power that might be controlling (dictatorial) or persuasive (free will). The cosmos is a platform on which ethical choices

(physical, reasoning, moral experience) are made. Ethical living, not usual religious faith, is the foundation of the human survival and well-being. Faith must be governed and tested by ethical values (p. 79). The chapter closes, by highlighting that the stages of mental and moral development implicate and impact religious experiences. Humanity possesses the ability of conscience to self-correct.

As the longest chapter of the book, Chapter 5 explains the questioning of the mind, in order to capture human understanding of religion. Historical ancestry is not available to validate or confirm some of the substantiations about human history. Most of the suppositions remain hypothetical or philosophical propositions. In this instance, Prozesky delves in an axial age of religious and ethical change through three stages of the surges of humanity's moral sense. These stages are the religious lights bearing old religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Vedanta, Hinduism, Zoroasterism, and Parseeism. The second surge was Judaism that carried itself from the age of prophetism in Israel until the dominance of the Greek Empire. The era saw the emergence of philosophers such as Thales, Socrates, and Plato. These philosophies enriched Christianity and Islam significantly. The third surge emanated from the 7th century known as Common Era (CE), commonly known especially among Christians as AD (*anno domini*) – in the year of the Lord. This third surge was introduced by Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammed who knew nothing about axial faiths that arose in Asia. The two shared similarities that only through them and their sacred writings could the truth be found (p. 102).

Prozesky revisits the second threshold he mentioned in Chapter 4. The religious change emerged from Europe, with the emphasis on the use of critical reasoning and careful observation as the driving forces. Linked to this is secularisation that significantly impacts religion, education, and healthcare. Education and healthcare are taken from the church control to the state control, due to emerging constitutionally secular nations such as South Africa. After a qualitative definition of religion, Prozesky briefly highlights the nine essentials about religion. Religion always has a simple two-part structure that involves the believer and the believed. Religion always gives believers a world view. Understanding of the word "redeemed", which is basically what always draws believers to faith and the consequences of either refusal or acceptance of that redemption. There is always more to faith than a world view and message of salvation from which believers draw comfort. Faith is like a language that has some deep and surface structures. Religion is now more diversified than ever, since it exists in the myriads of faiths and religious bodies. There is a striking agreement among religions about core ethical values, although their differences of belief are more powerful than their ethical agreements,

leading to misunderstanding and conflicts and disturbing the harmonious societal coexistence. An unethical religion is practised in abuses of children by religious leaders, commercialisation of the Gospel, social stigmas, and so on. Many people still follow a religion, despite the acidic work of critical thinkers and the influence of secularisation.

These thoughts are balanced with religious world views that bring together the natural and supernatural parts of human experience to the satisfaction of the believer. World views are to be tested comprehensively, coherently, and independently to confirm facts. In this instance, Prozesky appeals to Ninian Smart's explanation of the experiential part of religion. Eric Abbot's monograph, *Flatland*, is used to judge beliefs, worship, and outreach to measure ethical and spiritual expansion in the religious world. Bigotry in deep and surface structures in religions needs to be addressed through an understanding of deep spiritual experience.

Prozesky refers to Friedrich Schleiermacher's understanding of religion through his own Christian faith. He opines that feeling is at the heart of faith, that sensation is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophical and theological formulations are secondary products. The argument is further taken from Schleiermacher's "feeling" to spiritual development informed by James Fowler who was influenced by Jean Piaget. These six stages of Fowler are the stepping stones towards aspirations to the highest levels of spirituality, where bigotries and critical judgements are eliminated. The author continues to give an informative biography of two ethical and spiritual leaders who reached Fowler's Stage Six faith, namely Mahatma Gandhi and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Informed by different psychologists, Prozesky continues to discuss ways of being religious, especially for religious choices by extrinsic and intrinsic religionists. The intrinsic type possesses a great concern for others, while the extrinsic believers are religious practitioners for ulterior motives.

One of the inevitabilities in religion is violence motivated by faith, slave trade, apartheid, homophobia, and so on. Bad religion invades the religious landscape; religion is used to violate human rights and religious liberties. Faith and belief exist in balance since they both serve to provide an experience of mysterious realities that are supremely good. The author highlights transcendence and the summit of the soul as reaching the climax of earth's spiritual story, gazing in awe at the Mount Everest of the soul, where the religious being encounters a reality far greater than anything else. Chapter 5 closes with some reference to the secular critics of religion who claim that there is never any clear evidence that God exists, and that vivid spiritual experiences do not prove that God exists but are merely brain events. Prozesky summarises this chapter: religion is the coming together of supreme goodness,

where human beings possess greater, supernatural, creative gratitude, yet remain fallible, capable of both good and evil. Through religion, human beings experience and transcend mental and moral capacities that are supremely beneficial.

Chapter 6 is purely bibliological. It is situated in the traditional bibliology from the Christian point of view, addressing issues such as inspiration, the problem of the reliability of the original manuscripts, demythologisation, process theology, inerrancy and infallibility, and historicity of the Bible. Chapter 7 is Christological highlighting the truth-finding of Jesus before and beyond the Gospels together with supernatural truth claims about Jesus. Factuality of the Gospels concerning Jesus is examined and found that the Gospels are not the full embodiment of the truth of the person, acts, and context of Jesus. Jesus' geo-cultural context, which is always ignored by Bible readers, gives more insights into Jesus. The chapter closes with dual apologetics on the resurrection, debating whether it is a fact, fable or neither.

The final chapter is a reminder to the reader of what the soul-food is. It is defined as "everything that the human spirit has found good, beautiful, true, and uplifting" (p. 196). Jan Smuts is used together with Alfred Whitehead to elaborate the concept of rethinking soul within the cosmology – the totality of all that is real. Their world views especially on cosmology perceive the universe as an environment of significant freedom with possibilities of moral good. The cosmos is mysterious and richly enabling. It is a creative opportunity and rigid constraints, offering scope with no guarantee of profound well-being. It is structured for experience, knowledge, morality, and spirituality.

In reflection, the book is both mind-stimulating and spirit-inspiring. It is profoundly philosophical but spiritually reviving. One highlight is that the author, though leaning on western sources, attempts to use South African contexts or African philosophies such as *muhle* (creation was good), *uNkulunkulu* (concept of God), and so on.

The book is eclectic in approach, very interdisciplinary, applying fields such as psychology, philosophy, geography, history, as well as natural scientists such as mathematicians. It does not only delve into Christian theology, but it also engages other religions such as Islam, African Traditional Religions, Judaism, Hinduism, and so on.

It is good for both new and seasoned scholars of theology and philosophy. The students of religion will benefit immensely by engaging this author.