

## ASIAN

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HORIZONS

Vol. 5, No. 4, December 2011

## BOOK REVIEW

**Colm McKeating**, *Peace at the Last: A Christian Theology of Last Things*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2009. Pages xvi+282, ISBN: 978971-0511-30-3

A theology of hope – what is called eschatology – is of vital interest and concern today in a world torn by anxiety. To bear witness to the risen Lord amidst these tension filled world is the joyful task of every Christian in the pilgrimage of hope. Colm McKeating's book *Peace at the Last: A Christian Theology of Last Things* is a companion to all those who are partakers in this pilgrimage of hope. A man with his vast missionary, pastoral and teaching experience, Colm McKeating has prepared this book as a course on Christian theology of last Things. He has in mind the men and women who are under training for ministry in the Church and intends to take them beyond the bare bones of Catechism to the fuller reflection and understanding of faith.

This course book is laid out in the logical framework and sequence of themes in eschatology. In light of his vast teaching experience, Colm McKeating has adapted a method of beginning the study by presenting one of the most personal and most momentous of all events, namely, the reality of death and the destiny of the individual, which he thinks to be a more learner-friendly approach. The book contains of thirteen chapters which are divided into three parts and an introduction where McKeating speaks of the hazards of eschatology and discusses the guidelines of interpretation in Eschatology. In the introduction, he takes three up questions of Kant which seek answers regarding human understanding: *What can I know? What must I do? And what may I hope for?* and tries to relate them with the study of eschatology. McKeating beautifully explains eschatology as "Hope seeking understanding" by transposing the famous definition of St Anselm on theology as "faith seeking understanding."

Part one of the study is a survey of the biblical eschatology. In the three chapters under this title, McKeating presents the origin and development of eschatology in the Old Testament, the apocalyptic eschatology and different aspects of the New Testament Eschatology. After giving a brief survey of the prophetic eschatology, he concludes that the prophetic eschatology is simply a road map that marks out Israel's historical journey in her vision of the future. While presenting the basic and prominent ideas of Israel on hope like "the day of the Lord will mark the end and climax of history" and "there will be the

resurrection of the dead and the just will rise to eternal life, the wicked to the eternal death," McKeating, opines that this Jewish legacy of hope and expectation that Christians reinterpret as coming to fulfilment in the person of Jesus Christ. In his survey of the Apocalyptic Eschatology, he points out the danger that many existing uses of the term "apocalypse" can lead to the misinterpretation and discredit of apocalyptic eschatology. So, he tries to give a clear definition of the term in this study and presents apocalyptic eschatology as the "form of prophecy that claims to reveal the secrets of a hidden world and thus to unveil the future." He clearly makes the difference between the prophetic eschatology and the apocalyptic eschatology. For the prophets, hope is always referred to the present world and the historical future of Israel and to the welfare of the nations. In contrast the apocalyptic writers look towards the world beyond history, where God prepares a Kingdom for all the just. While presenting the fourth chapter titled "Aspects of the New Testament Eschatology," McKeating admits that it is really difficult to give a comprehensive survey of eschatology in the New Testament. His survey here is confined to the gospels and the preaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God.

In the part two of the book, McKeating is presenting the basic teachings of the systematic eschatology. In seven chapters he deals with the subject under two sub titles, namely, collective eschatology and individual eschatology. The themes in these chapters are "the coming of Christ," "the day of judgment," "the resurrection of the dead," "the Christian theology of death," "heaven or eternal life," "hell or eternal death," and "the doctrine of purgatory." These sections are of greater importance because they deal with the issues which are fundamental to the Christian life and belief. The detailed surveys of these topics are helpful to quench the thirst of many who are curious to know about these eternal truths. The notion of *parousia* is explained in its original context and the use of the word. While dealing with the concept of the last judgment, McKeating suggests that it is not at all an occasion of dread and trepidation. He also tries to highlight the idea that God's justice is his faithfulness to his promise of salvation and we should not think of it in a juridical way. Under the subtitle, the individual eschatology, he presents the theology of death and the three "possibilities" after the death - eternal life, eternal death and purgatory. According to McKeating, what we know about the heaven is only a "learned ignorance" and opines that we should consider it as an "encounter where the divine and the human meet." In his opinion, the self exclusion of human beings from communion with God and with others constitutes hell. He also welcomes the new approach from the part of the Church in the understanding of purification and sees it as the growth in knowledge and love that comes from the contemplation of God.

The third part of the book deals with the topic, the praxis of eschatology in two chapters, namely, "the Christian life - an economy of hope and Joy" and "the sacrament of hope." As an Easter people who are called to be a beacon of hope, we must realize that there are no circumstances in life, however distressful, that should deprive us of Christian joy. It is interesting to note McKeating's presenting of the Eucharist as "the sacrament of hope." He shows

how it becomes the sign of our future resurrection when we share in the “bread of life” and “the cup of salvation.”

The reading of *Peace at the Last: A Christian Theology of Last Things* is indeed a pilgrimage of hope. It is an exercise that is intellectually stimulating and spiritually nourishing. McKeating has succeeded in presenting the subject in a pleasantly readable and inspiring manner. Since it is meant to be used as a study guide, the addition of the questions for discussion at the end of each chapter is an added impetus for learning. His remark, “every revelation of the past or the future is intended for the present life and is meant to instruct and challenge us” itself reveals the relevance of the book.

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