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**BOOK REVIEW**

**Joseph Pathrapankal**, *Text and Context in Biblical Interpretation*, Thiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 2009 (revised edition; first published in 1993). Pages: 240. ISBN 978-81-7821-125-1

The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) by Vatican II proposed the Bible as the soul of theology and rule of her faith (*DV* 16, 21). In *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict XVI wishes to point out certain fundamental approaches to a rediscovery of God's Word in the life of the Church as a wellspring of constant renewal (*VD* 1). The Word of God may take on a new meaning and interpretation because of the new context in which it is being read. Professor Joseph Pathrapankal, a well known Indian biblical theologian, tries to emphasize the need of taking the context of interpretation as a decisive factor in the understanding of the text in his book, *Text and Context in Biblical Interpretation*. As the author points out in the preface, the purpose of this revised edition is to enlarge the theological horizons of the readers on account of the radical changes taking place in theological and biblical thinking. The present volume contains ten studies which try to explore the contextualized understanding of the Word of God.

In the first chapter, "Interpretation of the Word: God's Word, Human Word and Interpreter's Word," the author states that the dynamics of the tension between past and present, between particularity and universalism constitutes one of the difficult tasks of hermeneutics today. The biblical hermeneutics have passed through a complex and complicated history and it aims at a more relevant and meaningful hermeneutics in order to cope up with the social, cultural and religious aspirations of the Christians of our times. Pathrapankal draws our attention to the limitations of various methods of interpretation and observes that a synchronic and situational contextualization of the Bible and its message will be helpful in developing a positive approach to life in our times.

In the second chapter of the book, "Bible and Inculturation," Pathrapankal observes: "Inculturation is a continuation of the very mystery of Christ-

event" (41). He analyzes how the Bible reveals several important aspects of culture and inculturation which should serve as a model for the Church. He makes a survey of the cultural assimilation as well as cultural transformation in the Bible. Pathrapankal, after analyzing the biblical foundations for a theology of world religions in the third chapter, makes a very bold statement that the uniqueness of Christianity consists not in its exclusiveness and claim for superiority over other religions, rather in its capacity to transcend the categories of historically determined religious traditions and in its broad-based approach to all other religion through which it can impart the doctrine of the universal Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of the whole humankind.

In "Contemporary Christological Discussions: Indian Perspectives," he deals with the new foci of the Christological discussions and sees how decisive they are for the Indian interpretation of the meaning and message of Jesus Christ. "Pneuma: Divine and Human in Christian Theology" takes up the study of Pneuma, the basic datum of theological reflections as well as religious experience in all religions. He rejoices in the new dimensions of ecumenism and dialogue evolving in all religions.

"Missionary perspectives in the Acts of the Apostles" analyzes how the missionaries, as persons guided by the Spirit, are those who have tried to transcend the barriers and limitations of parochialism in order to arrive at the horizons of universalism. The author depicts the picture which the Acts of the Apostles gives and draws inspiration from it for contemporary missionary and evangelizing endeavours.

"Conviction and Commitment: A Study on the Personality of Paul" highlights some of the specific characteristics of Paul's religiosity. Christian faith is a pilgrimage in which the Indian theologians have an important role to play. In the chapter titled "Pauline Approach to Sharing Worship: A study on 1 Cor 8:1-11:1," Pathrapankal is examining how Paul was trying to transcend the established principles of orthopraxis in the official Church of Jerusalem and exhorts us to go ahead on these prophetic lines shown by St Paul to develop a new theology of inter-religious relationships. In the ninth chapter, he makes a survey of one of the richest Pauline contributions to theology, the Pauline reflections on the Church. After studying the growth process of the concept of the Church in the Pauline writings and in the early Church, he concludes that the Church is what its leaders make it. In a globalized world various Churches have to be more inter-related and proactive. The book ends with a study on Priesthood of the New Covenant.

After commenting on the radical changes that have been taken place in the world, Pathrapankal highlights the situation of the radically challenged and re-interpreted reality of Christian priesthood.

This classical work by Professor Joseph Pathrapankal stands the test of the time. It reiterates the importance of reclaiming the commitment of the exegetes to relate the text of the Bible to the living context of their contemporary society. It will remain as an outstanding contribution to the situational and contextualized study and interpretation of the Bible in a pluralistic society like India. This work with its precision, clarity of thought and creative outlook penned by one of the most outstanding biblical theologians of India, will enlarge the theological horizons of many and will serve both the students and scholars of the Scripture and theology.

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