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Book Review

Thomas Vallianippuram, *New Society in John's Gospel*, Aloor: Biblia Publications, 2008. Pages: xxx+479. ISBN: 81-87271-14-0.

In his doctoral dissertation *New Society in John's gospel*, Dr Thomas Vallianippuram explores the gospel of John and the related Johannine writings to expound the theological insights for a new society and civilization. Though the word society is a modern concept there are equivalent terms used for it in Palestine at the time of Jesus and studying these concepts the author shapes the Johannine vision of a new society

The method he adopts is an integrated approach of synchronic and diachronic analysis together with a balanced exegesis taking into account the world of the author, of the text and of the reader. He tries to approach the gospel from a social hermeneutical perspective meticulously analyzing the texts employing historical critical method, narrative criticism, social scientific criticism and social hermeneutics.

The author begins with a survey of the views of some of the authors who give social and liberationist interpretation of the fourth gospel. He analyses the Greek concepts *kosmos*, *kainos* and *erga* and explains the Johannine perspective of a new society. He also studies the hermeneutical keys that John provides to find out the social thrust of the gospel. The core of the research work can be seen in chapters 5-8 where the author makes a thorough exegetico-theological analysis of John 5 and 9 and presents the Johannine theology of a new society. He analyses the word *kosmos* as meaning human society which is a realm of sin, darkness and alienation from God. The *kosmos* is not basically evil, though it stands against Christ and his values. Hence there is no need of a flight from it but liberation from the clutches of Satan, from materialism and egoism. As the human society is alienated from God and is craving for redemption the liberation from darkness and alienation has to be achieved through the continuation of the salvific works of Jesus.

The followers of Jesus are entrusted with the task of creating a new society which is characterized by peace, fraternity, equality, freedom, justice, solidarity and prosperity. In it there is no discrimination among persons, violation of human rights, misery, injustice or exploitation. The vision of the society is unique and different from that of the Synoptics as it is built up on the foundation of God experience and mysticism. The new society is created when disciples continue the works of Jesus which includes Jesus' life-giving actions, challenges to the existing unjust establishments, prophetic

protest against the corrupt systems of the society, etc. The vision of Jesus for a new society challenges the reader to work for the realization of that vision in his own life situation.

The exegetical analysis of the author proves that John's vision of life is an integral and integrated one including spiritual, mental, physical and social realms of humans. Jesus made changes in the society removing inequality, injustice and oppression and struggled to remove the insensitiveness of the rich and the powerful towards the sufferings of the marginalized and the oppressed. The disciple of Jesus too has to continue the life-giving and judging works of Jesus. The life giving work in John means the bringing up of wholeness, holistic liberation and development. The judging work implies a commitment to moral values. The disciples, through their social involvement and option of the poor, work for the deposing of the oppressors who perpetrated injustice and exploitation and work for the uplift of the marginalized and downtrodden.

The author gives practical suggestion for radical social transformation and creation of a counter culture of life and light combating the culture of darkness and death. He gives insights for the rebuilding of Indian society according to the gospel values and for fighting against corruption, violence, sexual injustice, exploitation of Dalits and tribals, child marriage, child labour, abortions and suicidal tendencies.

The work is informative and inspiring and it powerfully establishes that the Johannine Jesus had a vision of a new society. Against the general tendency of considering the gospel as a mystical and spiritual writing the author tries to explore social and communitarian aspects of the gospel. The new attempt is challenging but rewarding and makes the work an original contribution of the author. Indeed the work is the result of an enormous amount of labour analyzing the relevant and current views on the subject.

Thus the work stands as an outstanding contribution to study the Johannine vision of a new society and to understand the theological perspectives of the evangelist. This admirable work has precision, clarity of thought, rich insights and creative ideas to the reader. I am sure that both students and scholars will benefit from it and it will contribute to widen the missionary horizon of the church which aims at a holistic liberation and development of the outcast and marginalized.

Sebastian Mulloparampil, CMI

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