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**Book Review**

**Mathew Vekathanam, OCD, *Life and After Life: The God of Fulfilment*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010. Pages: viii+280. ISBN 81-7086-545-X.**

In the book under review, Vekathanam offers a brilliant presentation of Eschatology. This book mainly deals with the Christian hope for the future (P.1) and indicates certain issues that affect our daily life: death, judgement hell heaven parousia, etc. One of the most mysterious questions people often ask is what really happens to life after death. Are there places called heaven, hell, purgatory etc? Fr. Vekathanam, a renowned theologian, presents here a Christian response to the above questions.

The book is presented in eleven chapters. In the first chapter, “The Future as the Central Theme for the Present” the author speaks about the hope in the future of unending happiness to which we are destined and which we have to reach by our co-operation with God’s grace (p.5.). In this chapter the author synthesizes the traditional, dynamic and revolutionary thinking of eschatology as developed by various thinkers.

In the second chapter, “The Task of Christian Eschatology and its Challenge” the author highlights the theology of hope. The Christian faith lives by and is inspired by the resurrection of the crucified Christ (p.16). The author emphasizes that hope is based on the present experience of God’s love for us here and now. The character of being “already and not yet” is an indispensable aspect of Christian experience (p.17). The third chapter elaborates the Christian faith as the basis of Christian hope. It is based on the proclamation of the Jesus Christ, his deeds, his death and resurrection (p.22). Here the author emphasizes that Christ-Event is the central theme of the *Eschaton*.

In the following chapter, “Death: Rupture and transformation,” he discusses the concept of death and says that the universe, all living being and the entire humanity are created with the purpose of coming to an end some time (p.41). The author explains death as the result of sin, death as personal act, death as the radical option, death as self giving and death as gain.

Chapter five, “Judgement: The Clarifying Encounter,” provides a beautiful analysis of Judgement: There are two types of judgement, namely particular judgement and the general judgement. The next chapter presents the concept of the purgatory as a state of purification. This explained with sufficient biblical and magisterial teachings of the

Church. The suffrages offered on our behalf while in purgatorial maturation process would help us because then we would have to accept, in humility and thanksgiving, the help offered by the communion of the saints, by the mystical body of the Christ.

The chapter “The Beatifying Encounter with Christ: Heaven,” explains heaven in terms of the beatifying encounter with the risen Christ. This concept is beautifully presented with various imageries like marriage feast, banquet, paradise etc. He concludes this chapter by saying that heaven is the touch of God. Through this image of touch, what is portrayed is the intimate, tender nature of the relation and contact with God. In Chapter eight, “The Frustrating Encounter: Hell” the writer gives an idea that hell refers to eternal damnation, which is essentially loveless-ness. Eternal hell is a serious affair. We do not know whether some are lost and who they are. A mountaineer has always to be aware of the possibility of catastrophic slip from the cliff in to the abyss (p.129). He concludes this chapter by saying that where there is no love, hell is already present.

Chapter nine, “The transforming encounter: Resurrection,” explains how the dead are raised? The resurrected person will not be the one according to the flesh, but one according to the spirit (p.142). By explaining this concept he says that there is no time factor involved between the events of death and resurrection. It is all simultaneous if we look at it from the angle of time. The next chapter “The Cosmic Encounter: Parousia”, highlights the final epiphany of the lord bringing about cosmic fulfilment. It is the last item in the history of salvation (p.150). The last chapter, “The Fate of the Anabaptized,” deals with the necessity of baptism for the salvation (p.157). The church has not a defined doctrine on the eternal fate of unbaptized infants. The basic problem in the whole approach is the notion of the “original sin.” The author concludes this chapter by presenting the current approaches to this issue.

The vital theme that connects all the discussions in this book is the theology of hope. Vekathanam’s book is an important contribution to the present reality of human existence. This book will be of great help in our seminaries and colleges.

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