DOI : https://doi.org/10.54424/ajt.v39i1.220

ASIA JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY
April, vol. 39(1): 92-95
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Book Reviews

David Muthukumar Sivasubramanian, *Introduction to Christian Doctrines* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2024), 382pp., ISBN: 9788193259771, ₹450, paperback.

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Christianity has been translated into and out of its many multicontextual encounters in history, embodying a distinct plurality. Excerpting doctrines from such a dynamic faith in a single volume demands theological, historical, and cultural dexterity. In *Introduction to Christian Doctrines*, David Muthukumar Sivasubramanian demonstrates that dexterity by delivering a holistic and insightful exploration of Christian theology's foundational principles through balancing historical analysis with contemporary interpretations. Particularly significant is its contextual approach, making the work accessible and relevant for an Indian readership.

The book opens with a discussion of the nature of theology, doctrines, and dogma, concurrently establishing a framework for understanding Christian theological discourse. Sivasubramanian addresses fundamental questions such as the sources of theology—scripture, tradition, reason, experience, and culture—and thereby provides an overview of doctrinal orthodoxy versus heterodoxy. This foundation, along with the proposed post-foundationalist epistemological mooring, helps readers to navigate the rich diversity within Christian beliefs and, at the same time, to understand the essential coherence that binds these beliefs together. By emphasizing a post-foundationalist framework, Sivasubramanian bridges the gap between modernist rigidity and postmodern relativism. This allows theology to operate as a disciplined inquiry without succumbing to absolutism or skepticism. The articulation of theology as contextual, yet universal, creates an avenue for dialogue between Christianity's core convictions and

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pluralistic cultural expressions. This dual focus enriches the pedagogical utility of the book for both academic and ecclesiastical settings.

The book's structure remains intentionally introductory and delineates essential doctrines such as revelation, Trinity, nature of God, Christology, pneumatology, creation, anthropology, sin and salvation, ecclesiology, worship, ministry, and eschatology. Each doctrine is grounded in its biblical foundation, followed by a historical examination of the key theological shifts shaping its development—from the apostles and early church fathers to later contributions by influential figures such as Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and more contemporary theologians, including Barth, Moltmann, and feminist theologians. Unique to this volume are the reflections of prominent Indian Christian thinkers such as Pandipeddi Chenchiah, Vengal Chakkarai, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, and Raimundo Panikkar, who provide localized interpretations that bridge traditional Christian beliefs with Indian philosophical and religious perspectives.

Another notable feature of this work is its treatment of the doctrine of Christ, in which contextual perspectives—liberationist, feminist, and Dalit—are woven into the discourse. This section critically examines Christ's redemptive work, addressing Christology not only from a traditional Western lens but also through the lens of lived Christian experiences from the Global South, thereby broadening and diversifying theological understanding. By including marginalized voices and highlighting their theological insights, the book exemplifies how Christology can serve as a site of resistance and hope. Sivasubramanian's engagement with Dalit and tribal theologies is particularly striking, as it underscores the subversive dimensions of Christ's identity as the suffering servant. This recentering of theological reflection on marginalized experiences challenges readers to reimagine the implications of Christ's life and mission within their own contexts.

The book's exploration of the doctrine of the Church integrates diverse non-Western viewpoints on ecclesial practices and social ethics. This approach broadens traditional ecclesiology by positioning the church as a dynamic agent for holistic community renewal. In the chapter on theological anthropology, the author addresses concepts such as *imago Dei* (the image of God) in conjunction with indigenous understandings of personhood and community. This juxtaposition moves beyond

Western individualism to explore the relational essence of humanity. The chapter on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit further distinguishes itself by incorporating voices from marginalized communities, including Dalit and tribal perspectives, highlighting their unique understandings of the Spirit's role in empowerment and liberation. This inclusive methodology, consistently employed throughout the book, not only enhances theological discourse but also illustrates the dynamic interplay between faith and culture in shaping spiritual experiences, thereby distinguishing it from other systematic theology primers.

The final chapters address worship, ministry, and eschatology, underscoring the author's commitment to present doctrines not only as abstract truths but as dynamic realities that shape the lived experiences of faith communities. The chapter on worship provides a rich theological framework for understanding Christian worship as a response to divine revelation. Following the book's established pattern, the author goes through biblical precedents, historical developments, and contextual expressions, and invites the reader to consider worship as both a communal and a transformative act. The emphasis on practices of contextual worship highlights the plurality of Christian worship traditions, encouraging a deeper engagement with cultural diversity in worship styles.

In the chapter on ministry, the author unpacks the theological underpinnings of Christian service, grounding it in the concept of the priesthood of all believers. By exploring historical shifts and contemporary models of ministry, the chapter presents ministry as a participatory and inclusive vocation. Special attention is given to non-Western paradigms of service, such as the role of ministry in marginalized and oppressed communities, which broadens the scope of theological reflection on this critical aspect of church life. The concluding chapter on eschatology explores Christian hope and its implications for ethical living and mission. While engaging with traditional eschatological themes such as resurrection and the kingdom of God, the chapter also considers such contemporary issues as ecological responsibility and social justice. This approach not only contextualizes eschatological doctrines but also presents them as a call to action, connecting future hope with present responsibilities. Together, these chapters effectively integrate theological principles with lived realities, making them particularly relevant for students and practitioners of theology.

Sivasubramian's approach effectively contextualizes doctrine within varying sociopolitical landscapes, demonstrating how shifts in religious authority, scriptural interpretation, and philosophical engagement have consistently reshaped Christian thought. This provides readers with a robust framework for discerning how doctrinal beliefs evolve and adapt over time, helping readers appreciate Christianity's internal diversity and its intersections with broader historical trends. It highlights that while doctrines anchor beliefs, they are not rigid, allowing space for reinterpretation as Christianity constantly interacts with diverse cultural and intellectual landscapes. Moreover, Indian Christian theological reflections underscore the importance of dialogical engagement, incorporating indigenous concepts such as *moksha* (liberation), *maya* (illusion), *karma* (action), and relational ontologies into nuanced interpretations of Christian doctrines. This contextualization is particularly valuable for the Indian audience, as it aligns Christian doctrines with familiar local categories, enabling a socioculturally rooted understanding of faith. By offering a detailed presentation of core doctrines alongside nuanced cultural reflections, the book proves invaluable for understanding the global expressions of Christian theology, extending its relevance to international students and general readers alike.

Overall, Sivasubramian's *Introduction to Christian Doctrines* is a commendable addition to introductory theological literature, particularly for its contextual engagement with Indian thought and its comprehensive overview of Christian doctrines. It is recommended for early theological students and adult learners seeking a foundational understanding of Christian theology through a traditionally sound, historically sensitive, and culturally positioned lens. While providing an essential foundation in Christian doctrines the book also encourages readers to appreciate the diversity and adaptability of Christian theology. The various doctrines presented thematically using accessible language and modern insights encourage readers to engage critically with the material, thereby fostering open and sustained theological reflection.

About reviewer

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