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BOOK REVIEW

Agnes M. Brazal, *A Theology of Southeast Asia, Liberation-Postcolonial Ethics in the Philippines*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2019. Pages: 204. ISBN 978-1-62698-292-5.

A Theology of Southeast Asia, Liberation-Postcolonial Ethics in the Philippines explores the plurality of theology and critiques their validity. The fundamental ethical issues in the Philippines that the scholar highlighted and evaluated provided a deeper understanding of how the truth of God in Christ is revealed in a small but predominantly Christian country in Southeast Asia and how liberation-postcolonial ethics using discourse analysis, like a fine scalpel, can dissect real-life complex issues, reveal possible areas of discourse, and lead people to practice meaningful and sustainable solutions. Brazal should be commended for a substantial contribution to the liberation-postcolonial ethics literature.

She has written an intellectually inspiring challenge to us all. The challenge is made clear from the start – the work wishes to go beyond the colonial in all its manifestations, in this way being, may we say, more authentically postcolonial than many works which claim that title for themselves. It is clear from the outset that Brazal does not see formal independence of the state as the end of the colonization process both in terms of the power of multinational in countries around the world but also in the way that, despite some movement, there remains a large amount of western influence in academic and intellectual work – including perhaps in the development of the concept postcolonial!

With this understanding clearly in mind Brazal sets out to create a liberation postcolonial ethic against a Filipino background. And what a triumph, the result is a closely argued, imaginative and brave work which ranges from cyberethics to sustainability with ease, elegance of style and a razor sharp analysis. Importantly the analysis also leads to a positive proposed set of actions for church communities if they are indeed to move beyond current ways of working overlaid as they are with ghosts of colonial patterns.

True dialogue lies at the heart of what is being suggested in this work – however it does not look for consensus but is open to refinement and even rejection of received positions. For this to be worthwhile it has to be ‘equality of intellectual authority’ with women, the marginalised and so on holding equal authority. However, Brazal goes further; she would privilege the voices of those damaged by the theories, assertions and doctrines of society and church. Of course the argument is not that what emerges from these voices be left untested intellectually and against scripture and tradition within church circles but rather that with plural voices the church community becomes more genuinely reflective and able to offer grounded critiques to not only their own ideologies but also those of local, national and global ideologies are not grounded in the lives of people and community.

This wonderful work offers much food for thought. It challenges church communities to be more open and dialogical and importantly exposes the ghosts of western imperialism and offers ways to exorcism them – doing so in a truly brave and inspiring way.

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