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Raimundo Barreto and Robert Sirvent, eds. Decolonial Christianities: Latinx and Latin American Perspectives

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Raimundo Barreto and Robert Sirvent, eds. *Decolonial Christianities: Latinx and Latin American Perspectives*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. 301 pp. \$84.99 Paper. ISBN: 978-3-030-24168-1.

A volume in the Palgrave Macmillan series “New Approaches to Religion and Power,” *Decolonial Christianities: Latinx and Latin American Perspectives* explicitly engages with the realities of colonialism and coloniality and their impact on Christianity and the church. If the reader needs help understanding the difference between these similar but distinct words—colonialism and coloniality—or other related terms such as postcolonialism and decoloniality, or how decolonial theology is distinct from liberation theology, this book is a fine place to begin learning. The contributors to this book address the violent, global, and nuanced legacies that colonialism has bequeathed to Christianity and does so from Latinx and Latin American contexts and perspectives. *Decolonial Christianities* calls the reader, the theologian, and the church to make their own decolonial turn—that is, to join the movement “of theological and practical resistance, political and epistemological, to the logic of modernity/coloniality” (2).

Bringing to center stage the ongoing, even if little known, decolonial epistemologies and praxis that can be found in Latinx, Latin American, and Indigenous communities, this volume is an education in decolonial praxis and in the “theoretical connections between decolonial thought and Christian theology.” It aims explicitly to inspire the reader’s imagination toward a Christianity “otherwise,” unlinked from the modern/colonial Eurocentric norm (3). It is a rich resource that provides analytical tools for critical and constructive theological reflection and for examination in the theological classroom. It introduces and engages with the foundational thinkers of decoloniality, most prominently Franz Fanon, Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel (author of the first of the book’s three central essays), Sylvia Wynter, Walter Mignolo, and

Nelson Maldonado-Torres. While nearly all the individual essays stand on their own as an important contribution to the larger conversation on decolonial thought and Christian theology, together as a collection they make up a robust and worthwhile volume that, in its entirety, calls for contribution to the decolonizing project long overdue for the Christian church, moving it away from the system of death tied up with both historical and present forms of Christianity.

The first part of the book includes three focal essays that set the foundation for the rest of the volume. Enrique Dussel's essay demonstrates the various Christianities (the plural is intentional) made manifest in history due to their changing relationship with empire and colonialism (messianic Christianity, triumphant, metropolitan, and colonial Christendom). He instructs the reader on the significance and need for the epistemological decolonization of theology and points to the new space needed "to redo theology as a whole" (42). Luis N. Rivera-Pagán's essay expounds on diasporic existence and identity and on the resultant existential dislocation born of violent imperial invasions in both the biblical narrative and the Caribbean experience, with specific reference to Puerto Rico. Finally, Sylvia Marcos's essay, carefully grounded in years of work with women in Mexico's Indigenous communities, is a rich and concise education in Mesoamerican Indigenous spirituality, its cosmovisions and principles, and their impact on Indigenous women's movements on behalf of themselves and their communities.

The essays that follow, divided into four sections, together continue complexifying the narratives about colonialism, Christianity, and empire. They first call attention to the reality of Indigenous influence on Christianity and provide examples of Christianity's necessary yielding to Indigenous preferences. Dispelling the dominant narrative that Christianity was only "a product of colonial imposition and imperial terror" (104), subsequent essays detail native peoples' active participation "in the development of local indigenous Christianities" (110). At

the same time, there is clear recognition throughout the book of the “grave violation of human integrity” and human dignity involved in all imperial conquests (54), whether implicitly or explicitly, and in the “sophisticated forms” of “horrific violence” inherent in the views and posture toward the Indigenous by the church, the Crown, and their governments, at every level of policy (152). There is solid gender diversity among the authors, and two of the chapters explicitly engage sexuality and queer perspectives, pointing to the possibilities within decolonial Christianity and theology of challenging their own (hetero) normativities.

What is condemnable to ask, to articulate, in Christian theology? *Decolonial Christianities* elaborates on one of the major influences as to why that might be the case: coloniality. It challenges and invites readers into the possibility of thinking theologically deeply and creatively, as both individuals and church, in ways outside the constraints of coloniality. It calls Christians to face the church’s violent colonial legacies so as to not “relive again the historic demons” not sufficiently confronted in the past. It appropriately provincializes the dominant Eurocentric Christianity and calls for active engagement in the open-ended, ongoing humanizing project of decolonial Christianities—in the plural (176). It calls the church to the practice of “dangerous memory” that does not permit past and current suffering and violence to go unacknowledged (153) and invites it instead to practice “liturgies of repentance” and to “birth old and new ways of living and being and praying” (272). This volume is a necessary acquisition for all theological libraries and for the personal collections of those who can afford it.

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