

RESENHA

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CANNON, M. E.; SMITH, A. **Evangelical Theologies of Liberation and Justice**. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019. 376 p.

Mae Elise Cannon and Andrea Smith (editors) bring together known social justice theologians (Soong-Chan Rah, Chanequa Walker-Barnes, Robert Chao Romero, Paul Louis Metzger, and Alexia Salvatierra) “to survey the history and outlines of liberation theology and cover topics such as race, gender, region, body type, animal rights, and the importance of community” (review).

The book is helpful when it points out some of the blind spots of the larger white US evangelicalism with its triumphalism and exceptionalism that has neglected, in the process, many social justice issues present in God’s Word. There is a great amount of fairness to what the authors indicate as “the failure of many in the white church to stand against injustice” (p. 43), the property-tax funded educational systems (p. 70) and the white supremacy widening the gap in racial divide. The critique is valid when it aims to broaden the short-sighted dualistic perspective of reality and apply the gospel to all spheres of life. However, some of the attempts backfire making them fall into the other side of the reductionism. The engagement in social justice becomes central, stripping theology from all its transcendence.

In its introduction, the book starts with a highly reactionary picture of white US evangelicals being accomplices in the death of 200,000 unarmed indigenous civilians in Guatemala, under the dictatorship of supposedly evangelical president Efraín Ríos Montt. When he first rose to power, he was backed by well-known figures such as Luís Palau, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson,

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and this would put them almost as if they were responsible for those massacres. This inflamed view of evangelicals is not helpful, becoming a vague and broad label tarring Pat Robertson, Francis Schaeffer, John Piper and Bill McCartney with the same brush.

The book brings back the liberation hermeneutics with its usual limitations. Jesus' death is taken as a work of liberation and the term *shalom* is used as a 'hurray-word' for the social justice agenda. The *canon within the canon* approach to biblical interpretation is indistinctively applied with the preference for the poor, disenfranchised, oppressed, women of color, and animals. One author claims that Jesus' answer to John the Baptist in prison (Luke 7.18-23) was the "emphasis on acts of mercy toward those in great need and the proclamation of the gospel to the poor... Jesus' aim is proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom to the marginalized and demonstrating it in acts of mercy" (p. 8). But that is not the emphasis at all, for Jesus quotes Isaiah 35:5-6 and 61:1, a clear reference to the eschatological visitation of God among his people. It was the confirmation that he was the long awaited Messiah. From the vantage point of a womanist (feminist of color), a signal text is the story of Hagar, "the slave woman who is discarded after being sexually exploited by her master and mistress" (p. 65), and for one Latino theologian, God has a preferential option for the marginalized communities based upon the origin of Jesus, Nazareth (p. 90). The text of John 8:32, "the truth will set you free", is taken as liberation teaching (p. 262). Jesus and Barabbas had the same agenda, for he "intimately understands Barabbas and empathetically journeys in solidarity with his oppressed community" (p. 302).

Central to all articles in the book is the important discussion on racialization. It is argued that the "Western epistemological system is governed through logics of raciality that fundamentally shape what we even consider to be human" (p. 115), where minorities, Latinos, blacks, fat people, and others are outcasts considered less human by the majority white evangelicals dominating the structures of power. The authors deny traditional models of reconciliation by proximity and interpersonal exchanges for they see the main problem as the power structures set to dominate and maintain the status quo. "American Christians who flourish under the existing system seek to maintain the existing dynamics of inequality" (p. 47). "White evangelicals hold a 'Disney princess' theology in which they see themselves as the princess in every story. They are Esther, never Xerxes or Haman. They are Peter, but never Judas. They are the woman anointing Jesus, never the Pharisees. They are the Jews escaping slavery, never Egypt" (p. 112).

The book essays are highly dependent on the analytical and theological lenses of Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Paulo Freire, and Orlando Costas with their *historical materialism* interpretative framework. The dualism, so condemned by the authors, is actually accentuated, devouring all grace in

the end. Nature prevails. The book fails to provide a more accurate analysis of all these important issues because they are treated in disconnection from the overarching biblical theological metanarrative. Thus, the views on the poor, the kingdom of God, *imago Dei*, reconciliation, shalom, and eschatology (p. 190) are fragmented. Racialization is not a problem only in US, but of all humanity since the fall. Korean and Chinese Christians would not happily give their children in marriage to foreigners. Believers in Rwanda committed racial cleansing in 1994. The chapters on the redefinition of sin point to several facets of its manifestation, but never to the root of all sin and the ultimate solution.

One author proposes reframing the term *evangelical* in order not to entail the power politics that excludes, but to return to the roots of the good news as proclaimed in the Reformation era and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (p. 11). This is a good direction. A sound biblical theology of the kingdom of God is needed to inspire William Wilberforce-like figures in the twenty-first century.