

Urban Ecclesiology: Gospel of Mark, Familia Dei and a Filipino Community Facing Homelessness. By Pascal D. Bazzell. New York: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark, 2015. Pp. xv + 252. \$128.

What are the nature and purpose of the church? Where is the church? These are the questions that Bazzell seeks to answer through dialogue with a multicultural and multi-religious Filipino ecclesial community facing homelessness (FECH) living in a park in Davao, a city located in the southern part of the Philippines.

The strength of the book lies in its attention to the theoretical and methodological considerations (chapter 2), theological and ecclesial bases and framework (chapter 3), and the hermeneutical reflections (chapter 5, part I) that provide the foundation for important work today at the intersection of ecclesiology and ethnography, ecclesiality, locality, and marginality. In so doing, he develops a “local ecclesiological methodology that aims to bridge the gap between more traditional ecclesiology and empirical ecclesiology” (185). This emphasis on theory and method, which comprises most of the book, is not a surprise given that this is a revised version of B.’s dissertation.

It is not until chapters 4 to 6 that a description of the FECH and their experiences are brought to bear on reflections on Christology and ecclesiology. One hears the voices of the FECH most vividly in chapter 5 where B. reports on their reflections on the Gospel of Mark that raise new insights in understanding various themes in that Gospel, such as understanding of the beheading of John the Baptist, Jesus’s encounter with the Syrophenician woman, understanding Jesus’s ministry and the FECH’s own discipleship in light of the dynamic of shame and honor in family and society—all read through the lens of FECH’s own experiences. Out of these reflections, B. offers the ecclesial metaphor of family (kinship) as relevant to being church for the FECH. He proceeds in chapter 6 to develop a *familia Dei* ecclesiology that challenges notions of Philippine kinship that become too limited to one’s smaller circle of relationships, and “breaks down such kinship barriers” (181). He also uses this image to expand the understanding of the nature and purpose of the church to include those who are at the margins.

While B.’s goal is to move toward a more inclusive ecclesiology through the image of the *familia Dei* rooted in the relational love of the triune God, the more traditional descriptions of family and Trinity seem to be obstacles to his very goal. He describes this new family as founded in the “fatherhood of God” and the authority of God’s Son, and union with others as analogous to the union of male and female in marriage (151). In addressing Christian unity in the face of other religions, he describes these others as the “‘*black sheep*’ in our family . . . but they are family and belong with us” (176; italics mine). Do these images that have been seen as exclusionary of certain groups help address not only what B. lists as the issues and problems that modern families face—“marriage with non-believers, interfaith marriage, same-sex marriage” (190)—but also issues of exclusion within many Christian churches themselves?

Moreover, in his development of *familia Dei* ecclesiology, he does not seem to consider Philippine theological work where this image is not new. For example, in 1991, the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) adapted this biblical image for Philippine culture by developing an image of church as a “community of

families” (PCP II, par. 419) and the family as “a basis for basic ecclesial communities” (PCP II, par. 421). Additionally, kinship and the significance of the ordinary, which B. explores, are familiar themes in many liberation and feminist theologies, particularly Latino/a (or Hispanic) theologies where kinship and a communal identity as well as the ordinary struggles of life (*lo cotidiano*) deeply shape these theologies. It would have been interesting to see this theme developed in dialogue with these other theologies including the place of popular religiosity in ecclesiological reflections, which interestingly is not mentioned at all.

A new angle to a *familia Dei* ecclesiology might have been provided by the experience itself of homelessness, and how one accounts for that in new theological reflections of family and church. The three themes that grounded ecclesiology of the FECH—family, cultural values of shame and honor, and the supernatural world—could generally be applied to Philippine culture and not just to the FECH. B. moves toward a recognition of the value of considering the experience of homelessness in his description of a homeless Jesus and the radical call to the margins. How the homeless Jesus translates into a homeless *familia Dei* ecclesiology remains unclear, but it is the development of this image that may bear great fruit in the construction of an inclusive urban ecclesiology where everyone truly is invited to the table.

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Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World. Miroslav Volf. New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2015. Pp. xviii + 280. \$28.

Volf is a highly distinguished theologian who has spent decades working on issues of justice, peace, and reconciliation. In this volume he offers a constructive argument for the necessity of religions in an age of globalization. It addresses a broad audience, one constantly bombarded with the message that religion is irrational and tribalistic and therefore inherently prone to fanaticism, conflict, and violence.

Not shying away from his own Christian faith, V. grounds his own version of religious humanism in the core belief that God unconditionally loves human beings and calls on us to love one another. He invites adherents of other religious traditions, as well as secularists of good will, to consider ways in which their own convictions might resonate with the account of human flourishing sketched here. Careful not to assume that all religions share a common core that could be distilled into a set of universal religious convictions, V. does suggest that for all their distinctiveness, major world religions share certain “structural affinities” and “basic principles that guide human interaction,” such as the virtues of truthfulness, justice, and compassion.

Religions at their best object to the grinding poverty imposed on over a billion people on the planet as well as to reducing human flourishing to prosperity, health, longevity, and fertility. They remind us that economic progress and freedom are for the sake of enabling people to lead good lives rather than the other way around. One does not have to be a Christian to recognize that “life is more than food” (Luke 12:23).