

Melba Padilla Maggay (Editor), *The Gospel in Culture: Contextualization Issues Through Asian Eyes*, (Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature Inc., 2013). 520 pp. Php350/\$ 8.49 paperback.

Melba Padilla-Maggay is a social anthropologist and the co-founder and President of the Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture which makes her an excellent person to edit this book. She has managed to gather many Filipino Evangelical theological scholars to contribute towards the success of this book. Briefly here are the writers:

1. E. Acoba who works in Southern Philippines with several ethnic Muslim groups. He is an advocate of the 'insider-paradigm' approach.
2. Lorenzo C. Bautista is a medical doctor with theological degrees. He is the Chair of the Theology faculty in Asian Theological Seminary (ATS). His varied study interests include local theology, church history and social development.
3. Mona P Bias, an *Ibaloy-Kankaney* tribe member of the Benguet Province, is an Old Testament scholar. She uses her various disciplines as a grid to exegete her own tribal background.
4. Edgar Battad Ebojo completed his PhD at the University of Birmingham, UK in New Testament and as a textual historian. He is the Translations Manager of the Philippine Bible Society.
5. Timoteo D. Gener is a pastor-theologian, who is the President of ATS.
6. Adonis Abelard O. Gorospe, also with ATS as the Academic Dean and Associate Professor for Theology, Spirituality and Church History.
7. Athena E. Gorospe, another Associate Professor at ATS, teaches in the Old Testament with contemporary application as to how the Scriptures address philosophy, culture and the social context of the Philippines.
8. David S. Lim serves as the Executive Trustee/CEO of the Asian School for Development and Cross-cultural Studies and the President of China Ministries International-Philippines. His area of discipline is New Testament Theology.
9. Jonathan M. Nambu is a Japanese-American who has lived in the Philippines for the past twenty-three years. He is the executive director of Samaritana Transformation Ministries

- that serve women survivors of prostitution and trafficking, engaging his expertise in Transformational Urban Leadership.
10. Narry F. Santos is the Senior Pastor of Greenhills Christian Fellowship, Toronto and the Executive Pastor of Greenhills Christian Fellowship, Canada. He is a church-planter as well as an Adjunct Professor at Tyndale University, College and Seminary, with two earned doctorates in New Testament and Philippine Studies.
 11. Amanda Shao Tan hails as a faculty of Hermeneutics and Biblical Interpretation at ATS. However, she is also involved in counseling, discipling and speaking at the seminary. She is of Chinese ethnicity and has a special interest in physical disabilities and what the Scriptures say about it and how Scriptures speak to Chinese culture.
 12. Federico G. Villanueva is the publications secretary of Asia Theological Association and the general editor of the Asia Bible Commentary series. He is also a Bible translator and part-time consultant with the Philippine Bible Society. His area of study has been the Old Testament.

The book is organized into three parts after the *Introduction*. Part I is about *Christianity in Culture: Historical Appropriations*, Part II is entitled *The Text in Context: Hermeneutical Explorations* and finally Part III is called *The Gospel in Context: Communicating in a Pluralized Context*. In the *Introduction*, Maggay sets the tone by explaining *The Task of Contextualization* especially highlighting the *Issues of Reading, Appropriating and Transmitting the Faith*. A main pitfall of contextualization is without a doubt “syncretism.” She deals with this issue in the very beginning and assures her readers that the contributors to this book have very skillfully not fallen into such a pit. Instead they have used their “insiders” perspective to give us a fresh view of the Gospel in Culture in the spirit of the title of the book.

Stated clearly by Maggay is “A main thesis of this book is that the church communities appropriate the Gospel always within the terms of their own cultural narratives.” (p 9) The contributors of the first part do their appropriations in the framework of historical contexts with application to contemporary settings. At times though, there seems to be a reading into the context chosen, such as in the chapter by Gorospe that focuses on Origen, who Gorospe claims to give contemporary theologians the methodology to engage with secularism and Asian religions. That would probably be a historical stretch as Origen was in

another time and space from the present situation. The second part is more standard in dealing with the interpretive task of the Church while also theologizing the Text in Context. The third and final part deals with contextualization in specific situations such as Chinese religions, Islam and globalization.

This book is so rich and fresh in its approach. There is great insight into the Filipino way of looking at things as well as a general Asian way of looking at things. As such, it was easy for this reviewer to identify with many of the summations of the different authors. If a Westerner were reading this book, it will be helpful to them as they would be able to understand the Filipino and Asian culture better, which may make them more effective in presenting the Gospel in this context. I personally found Chapter 12 most helpful in *Contextualizing the Gospel in Ancestor-Venerating Cultures* (pp 377-415) where the distinction was made between “worship” and “veneration” as this is the stigma for those who come from such backgrounds to remain filially pious and yet also not deny the principles from the Bible. Lim makes it clear that if the disciple of Christ is clear, then he or she will not be sinning against their own conscience.

However, as a Pentecostal, I would have hoped that Chapter Three on *Spirits, Scribes and Scriptures* could have been written by a Filipino Pentecostal who may have given a better insider’s view on this topic of ‘spiritual warfare’ in reading the New Testament texts. The scholarship is there but not with the Pentecostal experience. I would heartily recommend this book to missionaries and theologians for their further study on contextualizing theology, especially in the Filipino context.

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