

Pascal D. Bazzell, *Urban Ecclesiology: Gospel of Mark, Familia Dei and a Filipino Community Facing Homelessness, Ecclesiological Investigations vol. 19* (London: Bloomsbury-T&T Clark, 2015), hardback xvi + 252pp. ISBN: 978-0-567-65980-4, \$96.99.

If someone claims to do empirical studies in the field of theology, I am always cautious. Too many times the approach is only empirical at the surface and the results are frequently self-serving. Pascal D. Bazzell's work is a laudable exception. He sets out to study a community of homeless families in Davao City, Philippines and how it develops a sense of being church, facing the challenges of life on the streets in the name of Christ. His analysis does not only make for a fascinating read, Bazzell ends up with a variety of findings that build components of a grassroots ecclesiology in Asia. More importantly, it is serious about mapping the contours of a church that is poor and lives with the poor. As such it develops an ecclesiology of the marginalized and challenges many Western models of mission engagement in the urban slums of this world.

Bazzell begins by clarifying how a study on being a church among the homeless can be approached. How can a discourse between ecclesiology and marginalization be fostered? He sets the stage of his research project and looks at various paradigms for serving the homeless populations. His study is a careful listening to a Filipino ecclesial community facing poverty, pain, injustice and oppression and how this community is on a journey with Jesus.

The second chapter clarifies theoretical constructs and methodological principles that are essential to an empirical study. The third chapter provides a theological framework for his research. What kind of a biblical understanding of church can we apply? Pascal Bazzell suggests the metaphor of the *familia Dei*, the family of God, as a suitable model to bring the context to focus, on the one hand the presence of God's grace and on the other hand people living on the streets and calling a public park their home.

The fourth chapter is an ethnographic description of this community. How is their identity shaped and how do these people live with their common quest for survival? The stage is set for the fifth chapter in which Bazzell engages the community with a reading of the Gospel of Mark. It is not an imposition of theological ideas delivered to the homeless by an outsider, but rather an exercise by these very people as they interpret the Good News in order to understand and apply it.

In chapter six, the author succeeds in integrating the empirical and theological data. He does this by using the notion of *familia Dei* an applying it to the cultural milieu as well as to the ecclesial framework established earlier. In the final chapter Bazzell discusses the nature and implications of such an ecclesiology of the homeless. A conclusion that is open to further reflection and action.

The multi-disciplinary nature of this book makes it worthwhile reading for a variety of reasons. It provides a sociological view of the homeless in their own words (an analysis of interviews with the homeless is added in the book's appendices), it raises hermeneutical questions (reading the Gospel of Mark from the grassroots), it invites to ecumenical reflection (the church as the global *familia Dei* in spite of all its imperfections) and it evokes a missiological vision that aims at going beyond colonial or post-colonial entrapments. Pascal Bazzell refers to a large variety of theologians and social scientists. He has consulted relevant writings of Vatican II and the World Council of Churches. He is aware of the reflections of Pentecostal authors and includes Asian writers to the dialogue. His argumentation is solid. His writing style is clear and the frequent summaries help the reader to move from one subject to the other without losing sight of the main points. There are plenty of nuggets to be discovered. His chapter on ecclesiality, for instance, is worthwhile reading on its own. The price of the book may not make it affordable for every theologian and pastor, especially in the Global South, but it certainly is a volume that should be available in every seminary library.

Reviewed by J.D. Plüss