

Book Review

Poon, Michael Nai-Chiu, ed. *Christian Movements in Southeast Asia: A Theological Exploration*. Singapore: Genesis Books: Trinity Theological College, 2010. 180 pages.

Christian Movements in Southeast Asia is the second book in CSCA Christianity in Southeast Asia Series. In fulfilling the twofold purpose of the Series—to encourage theological reflections by local Christian theologians and to introduce Southeast Asian Christianity thought to the wider audience—this book is set on a theological journey to understand Christian movements in Southeast Asia at the beginning of the twenty-first century until the present. This journey, according to Poon, requires the local Christian theologians ‘to deepen the understanding and expression of the theological nature of Christian movements in their lands, to encourage their growth, and help ensure that these newer expressions and practices are connected to the central calling of the whole church’ (x).

The book consists of essays by six prominent global and regional historians, missiologists and theologians who ‘join hands to evaluate the popular expressions of Southeast Asian Christianity, and to discuss their significance in relation to the emerging scholarship on world Christianity’ (back cover). These expressions of Christian movements are introduced by Michael Poon in his introductory essay ‘The Theological Locus of Christian Movements in Southeast Asia’ followed by Simon Chan’s essay in chapter one: ‘Folk Christianity and Primal Spirituality: Prospects for Theological Development’. In chapter two John Roxborough’s proposition that Christianity has both local and universal expressions is discussed in his essay ‘Situating Southeast Asian Christian Movements in the History of World Christianity’. Drawing from his South Asian experience, Roger E. Hedlund contributed two essays: ‘Present-day Independent Christian Movements: A South Asian Perspective’ (chapter three) and ‘Understanding Southeast Asian Christianity’ (chapter four). In both essays Hedlund argues for indigeneity rather than the ‘three-self’ methodological proposals of nineteenth century missionaries. Charles E. Farhadian explores how Christian movements in Southeast Asia respond to the wider cultural, religious, socioeconomics and political forces of today in his essay ‘A Missiological Reflection on Present-day Christian Movements in Southeast Asia’ in chapter five. The final chapter, ‘Documentation and Ecclesial Deficit: A Personal Plea to Churches’, contains Andrew F. Walls summary of his vision and life-long pursuit. He argues that active theologising needs to take into account the larger maps of spiritual reality, which the Enlightenment model often ignores. The book ends with a select bibliography of eighty most important books and articles for further exploration.

The strength of this book is due to the fact that the essays reflect Southeast Asian Christianity from six different perspectives. In addition, they are a combination of perspectives from both local Asian historian/theologians/missiologists and Western missiologists who have worked in this part of the world. These perspectives provide us with a balanced treatment of Southeast Asian Christianity. On the one side are Asians who grew up in Asia but educated in the Western part of the world, and on the other side are Westerners who were brought up Westerners but have broad experiences living and working as missionaries in Asia.

Being a part of the Series that studies present-day Christianity in Southeast Asia, specifically in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia (vii), this book has one weakness. It does not really reflect the entire picture of Christianity in Southeast Asia. We may give it the benefit of the doubt, but a study that focuses on Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia does not truly give full representation of Southeast Asian Christianity. The region consists of other countries Myanmar, the Indochina countries, and Brunei. These countries have diverse cultural, historical, religious and sociopolitical resources, of which some do not have any similarities with those of Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. These resources, taken in their own settings along with Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, may provide a different theological picture for Southeast Asian Christianity. A consideration of the whole region of Southeast Asia will give a better representation of Southeast Asian Christianity.

This book is a recommended reading for those who are interested in understanding Southeast Asian expressions of Christianity. Theology students as well as pastors who are seriously interested in Asian theological/missiological reflection will benefit from reading the essays. They will find the book to be challenging yet meaningful to their thinking about Christian presence in their local settings. Asian Christians, especially those from Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, will also benefit from the knowledge shared in the book. Those who read this book will certainly be informed that there is a need for an independent Asian own Christian identity and not one that is borrowed from Western Christianity. The understanding

of Christian movement (regardless of how 'movement' is perceived) and its expression in Southeast Asia will encourage many other thinking Christians to start reflecting on their own Asian Christian expressions.

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