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Leung Lai, Barbara M. "Invited Book Review of *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization*." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (January 2021): 175-177.

STEVE HEINRICHS (ed.), *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018). Pp. xvii + 304. Paper \$25.

As the subtitle indicates, this volume is a collection of a series of “biblical experiments” (the number of brief contributions precludes listing them all here). An overall impression of these results reminds one of Edison’s light bulb (1879), or the Wright brothers’ Kitty Hawk (1903), and, more recently, the first mobile phone (1973), and the earliest internet (1989). That is to say, the reflections in this volume and the various inventions through history share three characteristics: (1) They are breakthroughs, trailblazers, marching into largely uncharted territories. As daring ventures, they are worth doing and demand

due attention. (2) At the same time, these accomplishments are the early products in their respective fields of development. They are innovative attempts, not yet polished and grossly unrefined. However, one should never devalue a breakthrough's significance by limiting it to its "in-progress" capability (in our immediate context, liberating and decolonizing the biblical text). (3) It follows that the more one values the contribution of these efforts, the more one should engage in marking out the inadequacies, shaping the path toward further advancements.

(1) Specifically in the Canadian context, this book, along with a subsequent volume *Reading In-Between: How Minoritized Cultural Communities Interpret the Bible in Canada* (ed. Néstor Medina, Alison Hari-Singh, HyeRan Kim-Cragg; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019; see the following review) are of utmost importance. They are the "firstfruits" in reading the Bible among indigenous and minoritized peoples/authors. While there are a few representative volumes directing their attention to Asian American hermeneutics (e.g., *T & T Clark Handbook of Asian American Hermeneutics* [ed. Uriah Y. Kim and Seung Ai Yang; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019]) or reading the biblical text from largely global perspectives (e.g., *Global Perspectives on the Old Testament* [ed. Mark Roncace and Joseph Weaver; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2014]), *Unsettling the Word* is the first volume devoted largely to reading the Bible through the lens of the exploited and dispossessed indigenous peoples in Canada. It is most commendable that a wide range of indigenous representatives are included from all North America. In addition, the inclusion reaches over to Australia, South Africa, and Palestine and goes farther to other groups—African Americans, Latino Americans, and the (im)migrant communities. Under the "Indigenous-Settler" relationship, First Peoples as well as Settler authors of different backgrounds (academics, biblical and nonbiblical professionals) are engaged in the conversation. This provides both breadth and diversity in the discourse toward decolonization.

(2) The volume is also a multigenre collection. While the bulk of the contributions are poetic reflections, an innovative and diverse mode of expression characterizes its contents: lament, letter writing, personification, imaginary dialogue, dramatic role-play, story-(re)telling, prayer, (re)imagery analogy, and so on. Drawing on the power of (re)imagination, the rich rhetoric exhibited in the book produces a pleasant aroma in hearing the chosen texts afresh through different literary media. On the other hand, the articles are also diverse in their scope, methodology, and intended purpose. They are scattered all over the place in the Bible and engage in the discourse from all directions. The strength of the volume is in letting each experimenter decide on where, how much, and how to "experiment," and letting the results just blossom wherever.

(3) Collectively, the authors in this volume have demonstrated a remarkable degree of self-engagement through consciously putting their "world in front of the text." Back in 1995, the contributors to *Text and Experience: Towards a Cultural Exegesis of the Bible* (ed. Daniel Smith-Christopher; Biblical Seminar 35; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) innovatively coined the term "text" as humanity's flesh-and-blood lived experience under the sun. Therefore, "text" and "experience" are inseparable: "text" embodies one's collective "life experience," and "life experience" is the cumulative sum of the lived reality that makes up one's "text." In this light, the Indigenous/Settler authors have remarkably produced an exemplary collection of "life-texts/texts-of-life" rooted in their flesh-and-blood lived experience. The impact of these texts on their audience is potentially quite explosive.

As stated in the foreword, “re-reading and re-imagining the ancient text for the sake of reparative futures” (p. iii) is the volume’s set goal. I believe the book has succeeded in generating interest and more vibrant conversations among fellow researchers, students, and perhaps, people in the public domain. “Can we reclaim the Bible from the dominant powers and make it an instrument for justice toward decolonization?” (p. iii). Along the proposed trajectory of this area of inquiry (i.e., colonization → decolonization → toward reparative futures/reconciliation), the call for a subsequent volume focusing on envisioning and exploring the biblical foundations for moving toward reparative futures is paramount. Building on these “firstfruits,” I anticipate that it will be a volume that is better organized and aim driven, providing a firm footing toward a renewed appropriation of the biblical text, which has been, for centuries, wrongly appropriated.

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