

Miguel A. De La Torre, *Burying White Privilege: Resurrecting A Badass Christianity*, USA: Wim. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2019, pp. xi, 153 (hardback 978-0802876881).

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For the past fifteen years, a scholar-activist, Miguel A. De La Torre has been one of the foremost explicators of contemporary liberation theology for the English-speaking audience. During the same period, he has been developing his own theological positions on social ethics, LGBT civil rights, immigration issues, and the Eurocentric Christian thinking in a series of books and articles that both draw on and re-work these theologies of liberation. In his recent book, *Burying White Privilege: Resurrecting A Badass Christianity*, he looks at how American god of Christian nationalists are responsible for some gravest acts of violence on American soil and its activities in the rest of the world. The thought-provoking book is not overly long, yet by digging into the history of Eurocentric loci of rationality, key details emerge clarifying and confronting the ideology of white Christian privilege. His corrosive and erudite critique of the myth of white Christian privilege, especially the institutionalized racism and ethnic

discrimination, resonate powerfully within and outside academia, both Western and the non-Western world. He makes this case with a clear, accessible to more readers and contemporary cadence, while also injecting a passion for his subject gained through years of struggle for liberation and justice.

The book begins how the author's public lecture, especially academic conference, turn it into an actual book (ix-xi). More importantly, De La Torre confessed, the "...book represents the therapeutic process of decolonizing my mind, a process of move away from how I have been taught to see myself, my community, and the overall social order" (xi). In terms of its contents, the book exposes deep problems of the (white) Euro-American Christianity. However, before anything else, it is also important to note, De La Torre pointed out that whiteness has nothing to do with skin pigmentation, instead, whiteness has to do with worldview, a way of being, thinking, and reasoning morally (4). Structurally speaking, the book is logically divided into four chapters that are clearly titled and easy to navigate. The first chapter deal with the historical development and decay of the Euro-American Christianity (1-39). It divided into five subtopics: *Who is Killing Christianity?; Embracing Hypocrisy; But I'm So Exceptional; Haters Gonna Hate;*

*Stupid Is As Stupid Does*. The first subtopic, De La Torre discusses how these white or Euro-American Christianity killing Christianity in America (4). This is become evident, for instance, when Euro-American Christians voted Trump as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the America in 2017 (5-7). Despite his will-known history of sexual misconduct, being a bigot, racist, and homophobic, Euro-American Christians sees Trump as a Christian and their savior (a modern-day King Cyprus), especially by James Dobson, Jerry Falwell Jr., Tony Perkins, Franklin Graham, and Pat Robertson (11). In fact, political scientists argue, without white Christian nationalists voting bloc, no Republican candidate elected to public offices. Consequently, the image of Christianity hijack and distorted by the evil ideology of white supremacy (13). The second subtopic, *Embracing Hypocrisy*, shows there is undeniable hypocrisy among these white Christian ministers. And many among them become defender and defender of sex offenders. For example, like Franklin Graham argues that Trump's sex life is "nobody's business" (14). The third subtopic, *But I'm So Exceptional*, he looks at the origins and the development of American exceptionalism. He offers critiques how the Christian God becomes the author of a US

exceptionalism and gave rise to the problematic imperial concepts of the Manifest Destiny that justifies the ideology of white supremacy (20-24). The fourth subtopic, *Haters Gonna Hate*, he shows "hatred" and "anti-intellectual" are common among white Christian groups. Lastly, *Stupid Is As Stupid Does*, he concluded, Christians must be nullified the imperialistic motto, "Make America Great Again" that replaced "What would Jesus do?" (6). For him, Christianity has a prophetic task to confront and challenge the Eurocentric and Trumpish Christianity (33-39). De La Torre believes that therefore this form of Christianity cannot last perpetually. Nonetheless, according to him, "Our survival requires us to dig the graves for this Trumpish Christianity" (39).

The chapter two focuses on the fallacy of whiteness and how sincere Christians injured by white supremacy (40-80). To begin with, De La Torre narrated his faith journey with white Christian community that thought him Bible classism, bigotry, racism, heterosexism, and misogyny (40-45). But as he grew up, educated or fluent in Eurocentric thought, and become conscious of white supremacy, he started to question the white dominant culture (44-45). He realized that the white Christian community DNA often fostered racism, often

He argues that most white Christians are not willing to question the political economy that maintain their privileges (64). Afterward, he enumerates five characteristics of white Christian groups in America, especially these Christian nationalists who provide unwavering support for Trump. The five characteristics, according to De La Torre, are the following: (a) abdicating democratic moral authority by praising international bullies (b) delegitimizing the free press (c) vilifying immigrants (d) neutralizing independent oversight by overriding constitutional checks and balances in the name of the people (e) demonizing loyal opposition (Ibid). Next, he shows the strong connection between Euro-American Christianity and Capitalism (61-80). Lastly, aside from being ideologically constructed, he is convinced that white supremacy is sustained and maintained by ignorance, in its various forms, is the driving force of the American white dominant culture (79).

The third chapter revolves around three interrelated challenges: self-deception, the cult of Trump, white supremacy. White Christian nationalists, according to De La Torre, is peppered with talk of the poisonous effects of self-deception (82). Forasmuch as American white dominance culture is main and sustain, as De La Torre describes, white

Christian nationalists would remain steadfast in their support to Trump's administration (81-99). While this chapter gives emphasis on the three interrelated challenges, he also pointed out that the sign of triumph of the white Christianity. According to him, "The triumph of the colonizing process is best demonstrated when people of color define themselves and their communities through white, Christian paradigms, which consciously or unconsciously contributed to their marginalization (103)". He added, by way of conclusion, unless all these three challenges are faced and condemn white supremacy in all its forms (83), opting for decolonizing of self (103), participating in killing the white God of nationalism (109), and embracing the Badass Christianity (114), America and the world faces a bleak future.

The last chapter, De La Torre draws an important conclusion. According to him, "Simply stated, Christianity in the United States will not save the marginalized, mainly because they remain invisible and ignored. Euro-American Christianity is not for them, but it has fooled them into believing it is (138)". As long as white supremacy thrives on, manufactured within Christianity and that counted as correct versions of Christianity, as De la Torre contends, most likely continue to justify the misery of "*disenfranchised*

communities”. Disenfranchised communities, for De la Torre, pertains or synonymous with the poor, oppressed, and marginalized groups (134). Finally, De la Torre suggests that, “For Christianity to be liberating, to be badass, it must move beyond the decent Christianity of the empire (138.)”. However, what is this “badass Christianity?” (139). Echoing decolonial option, according to De la Torre, badass Christianity is:

- the decolonization of a liberating faith expression intended to upset the prevailing social order designed to maintain neoliberalism;
- a commitment to a radical solidarity with the oppressed, realizing that no one can ever be “saved” as long as the poor continue to be damned by our current economic structures;
- a celebration of belief through whichever cultural symbols best connect us to the Deity;
- a rejection of laws and regulations made mainly by men, specifically white men, which trespass upon the basic rights of all;
- a survival ethics that responds to the hopelessness of the people;
- a liberation and salvation discovered as one struggles with others for the liberation of all;

- a rejection of Eurocentric theological thought due to its colonizing, philosophical world view;
- disruptive and revolutionary, overturning the temple’s tables of oppressors;
- calling bullsh\*t on religious and political hypocrisy;
- costly --- sacrificing all, even one’s life or security for the sake of justice.

Needless-to-say, *Burying White Privilege: Resurrecting A Badass Christianity* is a gem of a book, written with prophetic insights and pastoral sensitivity by a decolonial theologian. I found it to be instructive and a pleasure to read. Whatever one’s specialty, there is something of interest in this thought-provoking book. Significantly, a down-to-earth language of the theological praxis, making the work accessible to an even wider audience, more importantly including people from the non-academic world. De la Torre makes a compelling case that unmask the failure of Euro-American Christianity and its color blindness, while maintaining white supremacy and oppressive social structures.

Though this kind of theological reflection is not new in the Philippine context. Since the Philippines, is a product of Western colonialism or neo-colonial state

(Page and Sonnenburg, 2003), De La Torre's decolonial project delivered an insightful, penetrating, cogently, written account of unsettling relationship between legacies of Western colonialism and Christianity. The book, without a doubt, embedded a kind of enduring message that contemporary Filipino liberation theologians always needed to be confronted with, the impose (Euro-American) Western forms of theologizing. Actually, what I meant by Western forms of theologizing, is theologizing that failed to upset the prevailing social order designed to maintain the dominant ideology of neoliberalism in the Philippines (Ramos, 2020; Martinez, 2019; Oliveros, 2016). For instance, despite the recent spate of economic growth, Philippines remains afflicted by entrenched poverty, legacies of systemic injustice, and alarmingly high and rising inequality (IBON, 2020; Rivas, 2019; Mourdoukoutas, Forbes 2017). The gap between rich and poor is greater than in any other region of the world apart from other developing countries, and this gap continues to grow (IBON, 2020; Rivas, 2019). Besides experiencing widespread social exclusion, discrimination, and fewer educational opportunities for Filipino poor, oppressed and marginalized groups (ibid). Aside from that, under the Duterte regime, according to

Chao Cabatingan, the COVID-19 pandemic flushed out the Philippine neoliberal policies (Rappler, 2020; Ramos, 2020; Martinez, 2019). Last but not least, De La Torre concept of "badass Christianity", it will reward emerging decolonial scholars, and students of the religions, theologians, and all who seek a deeper understanding of the enduring legacies of colonialism in Philippine economy, politics, and socio-culture spheres. More importantly, theologies that justified Duterte's populist-authoritarian rule and its mass killing (Llanera and de Guzman, 2019; Cornelio and Medina, 2018; Ravillas, 2018)

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