



Review of

Jonathan Ingleby,
Beyond Empire: Postcolonialism and Mission in a Global Context
(Milton Keynes, UK: AuthorHouse, 2010).

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“Why mention an aspect of twentieth century political theory and some recent events in world affairs in the same breath as the Kingdom of God and *mission Dei*?” asks Jonathan Ingleby (p. 227) in the last chapter of his book *Beyond Empire: Postcolonialism and Mission in a Global Context*. His conviction and his answer to that rhetoric question is of course that there is indeed every good reason to combine the three. I agree with him on this. It is high time that mission studies move beyond “historical studies, cultural anthropology, [and] contemporary strategic concerns” as a previous reviewer, Kang San Tan, remarks.

Does Ingleby, a former mission partner in India and subsequently Head of Mission Studies at Redcliffe College, UK, however, succeed in his project, combining critical postcolonial theory with missiology? Is he able to have postcolonialism add that extra element into mission thinking? No doubt, much contemporary - but sadly antiquated - mission thinking badly needs a critical review today! Ingleby does succeed. At least to some extent he does. His observations, particularly on “recent events” are painstakingly disturbing. Ingleby is a man with a mission himself, namely to address the powers of this world, to reveal the inequalities of global society and call for action by the churches. Generally, Ingleby does this well and stands out as a true Christian activist with a heart on the side of the poorest of the poor and a number of sombre complaints for the powerful people of this world.

The argument is somewhat weakened, however, by a recurring number of sweeping statements and causal relations with no further analysis, eg. pp. 114f: “We have already thought about the 150 million street children world-wide. Why are they there? It is because of the breakdown of family life as a result of poverty. Where does poverty come from? It is a disease of Empire”. This may well be a true picture of reality, but the lack of a more detailed analysis and provision of empirical scholarly material to underline the argument (which is no doubt available if you look for it) cut the impact on the reader short.

Further to this, I believe Ingleby’s critique of current western society is too one-sided, not allowing for the complexity that constitutes our various constituencies today. In fact, at a number of occasions, I think Ingleby falls back into the mistake of operating with dualisms, a them-and-us terminology, which is exactly one of the main pitfalls postcolonial theories reveal. It is also, by the way, one that Ingleby himself warns about in several instances. I suppose, however, that his occasional way of thinking, which Ingleby correctly attributes to the western paradigm of modernity, only illustrates how we - direct descendants from the world view born out of modernity - are deeply dependent of dualisms in our perception of the world. Even postcolonial theorists are.

Further to answer the question whether Ingleby manages to combine mission thinking with postcolonial theory, one must point to the overall framework of the book. *Beyond Empire*

consists of an introduction, six chapters, one conclusion and two appendixes. All rather *comme-il-faut* for a monograph of this type. Nevertheless, as a reader, one is at times puzzled with regard to correspondence between the various chapters. A more truthful description of *Beyond Empire*, I would say, compared to it being a traditional monograph, is “a collection of essays.” Now, there is absolutely nothing wrong with a collection of essays – and Ingleby’s essays are good, thought provoking ones, just like proper essays should be. I lack, nonetheless, a more thorough intertwining design between his critique of the “powers that be.” his introduction to postcolonial theory and the chapter where Ingleby challenges mission thinking in its current state.

It seems as if the inherent deconstructive potential that the world has come to know as the centre piece of postcolonial theory never really unfolds as a particular and novel critical discipline in *Beyond Empire*. Ingleby’s devastating attack on Western society and all that comes with it, e.g. individualism, broken communities and consumerism, is not - on the whole - a postcolonial critique, but rather a politically grounded Marxist critique of ideological liberalism. Not exactly a novelty - even if a rarity today more than 20 years after the Berlin Wall came down.

To me, where *Beyond Empire* lifts itself from the flock is Chapter 4 where Ingleby under the heading “*What next for Mission?*” address some of the major challenges in mission today. This section of the book is furthermore, as the heading suggests, a constructive attempt to actually making a difference, to think beyond customary tradition, to add to mission theory and praxis as these disciplines are commonly managed in a Western context. Chapter four contained for me the majority of moments where I thought, “Yes, this is good ground breaking stuff; this I will share with my colleagues!”

Just to mention one aspect that caused such judgment within me, let me highlight Ingleby’s doubts on the rationale of bringing missionaries and evangelists from the southern hemisphere to Europe in order to “revive” and “re-evangelise” the allegedly dying churches in this part of the world. Such “mission-in-return” - as it has been popularly termed - is considered good post-colonial (!) praxis in many churches throughout Europe over the last few decades. However, Ingleby dares to question the potential: Will an African, Asian or Latin American

missionary be able to understand the European context and thus have the impact needed in order to fulfil his task?

The real postcolonial attitude to that issue is of course: Did Western missionaries ever identify with and understand the context they were sent to operate within? Ingleby rightly questions this and thus opens a plethora of hard issues addressed not only to mission history but indeed also to contemporary mission theory and praxis. This may turn out to be the main strength of Ingleby's writing: he questions our patterns and ways in mission, attempting to move the Church "beyond empire." This is Ingleby's bold theological vision.

As a rule, any book that attempts to move the Church and life up mission theory to a new level with the application of postcolonial thinking as a broker between history, tradition and our current global context is highly recommended. *Beyond Empire: Postcolonialism and Mission in a Global Context* is indeed no exception to this rule.