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### Imitating Christ in Magwi: An Anthropological Theology

Simon Ahiokhai

*University of Portland*, [ahiokha@up.edu](mailto:ahiokha@up.edu)

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*Imitating Christ in Magwi: An Anthropological Theology*. By Todd D. Whitmore. T&T Clark, 2019. 400 pages. \$29.95. Paperback. ISBN:978-0-5676-8417-2.

As an anthropologist and a theologian, Todd D. Whitmore weaves insights from both disciplines to give an account of the religiosity of the people of northern Uganda and South Sudan without attempting to be an apologist for a Eurocentric theological ambition playing out in the former British territories. Cognizant of the limitations of ethnographic studies, the work, *Imitating Christ in Magwi: An Anthropological Theology* calls attention to the dangers of writing. To write about the other is to simplify that which by its nature transcends simplification. To address this concern, the work stresses the responsibility of the theologian to investigate that which has been said before with a critical lens. It is on this note that the author sheds light on the successes and failures of the Comboni Missionaries in their work in the region. In order to preserve their place in the grand agenda of colonialism, these missionary agents learned how to retell stories of atrocities in ways that they become legends of valor and piety. The text moves beyond the pointing of fingers at colonial agents. It showcases the dynamic religio-cultural resistance of the Acholi people of northern Uganda to the violence of religio-political colonialism of the Comboni Missionaries and the British colonial agents.

The work is divided into four parts with eight chapters. Each chapter sheds light on the many contours that define the lives and faith of the people of the region. The introductory chapter wrestles with what theology ought to be in today's world, and how the theological project can become a strategic ally in the act of giving voice to the voices and making visible those who have been made invisible by the totalizing systems of erasure. Part one tells the stories of the different 'magics' at play in the region. The first is the colonial magic of writing aimed at erasing the cultures of the people. The second is the missionary magic. It operates with the bias that the

evangelized people have no worthy religious heritage, hence the legitimacy of the missionary project. The third magic is the corrective magic of the Acholi people. The dynamic nature of Acholi religiosity allowed for an escape from totalization of the colonial agenda via the trans-localized spirits that guide them. Furthermore, the work of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Gulu is presented as an example of gospel mimesis that the author insists upon as the way to do relevant theology in today's world. In their fidelity to their charism, they reimagine the gospel message in ways that it speaks to the concrete experiences of the Acholi people as they suffer the vestiges of war.

In part two, three major movements occur. The first explores in detail the nature of mimetic scholarship that is grounded in apprenticeship to the other. This opens the scholar to an experience of encounter that is grounded in vulnerability and surprises that come from the other who stands before them. The second movement showcases the limits of mimesis; especially as appropriated within the colonial agenda. Here, the colonized is portrayed as a creature capable of learning the ways of the colonizer when properly educated. The third movement makes a case for how the limits of mimesis can be overcome by the theologian who stands as a disciple in the sacred space of the other.

Part three recounts the multiple contours of the stories and memories of the region of northern Uganda. The systematic killing of those who dare to disagree with the corrupt political system in the country is named for what it is - a genocide. The grave responsibility of a pilgrim is to bring back home the wisdom learned from the journey. Part four presents a reflection on ways the reader can appropriate lessons learned by the author from being with the Acholi people during his research.

Finally, this work is an important read for students interested in new ways of doing ethnographic work. By creating a tapestry of inquiry from multiple disciplines of anthropology and theology, this work can become a relevant read for scholars interested in interdisciplinary studies in the humanities and social sciences. Whitmore has opened a new path for doing holistic theology in this work.

SimonMary Asese Aihiokhai, Ph.D.

University of Portland.