

Al Tizon. *Christ Among the Classes: The Rich, the Poor, and the Mission of the Church*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2023. 201 pages. \$35.

“Ushers, close the doors!”¹ A well-known Black Gospel Singer and Pastor repeatedly implored during the offering period of a worship service, to raise \$40,000. In a clip that has now gone viral, the Pastor says that if each member of the congregation of a thousand people, each gave \$20 they could come close to reaching their goal. This image of the doors of the church being closed directly contrasts with the church’s idea of the doors of the church always being open for salvation through Jesus. For some people, this moment elucidated one of the major concerns of the modern Christian Church: less of a focus on the mission of Jesus and more on financial gain.

It was against the backdrop of this unfolding viral moment that I began reading Al Tizon’s critical examination of classism in *Christ Among the Classes: The Rich, the Poor, and the Mission of the Church*. Tizon calls classism “a great evil that drives all other kinds of evil” (161). Further, he argues that the evil of classism, as it goes unchecked, does “great damage to the church’s witness in the world” (xxi).

Tizon structures the book in two parts: Christ Among the Classes, and Church Among the Classes. Part one explores how Jesus’s ministry was deeply connected with those who were not a part of the ruling classes of society. Jesus’ solidarity with the poor challenged those who were rich to redirect their wealth toward the gospel’s mission. The incarnation itself, as Tizon emphasizes, is the perfect illustration of God intentionally choosing commonality with the common people. Chapter one explores Jesus’ humble beginnings starting with his lowly birth story and the shepherds who were present at this miraculous event. The following two chapters juxtapose Jesus’ association and relationship with those who were considered poor, powerless, and riffraff as opposed to how he interacted with those who had power and resources. Tizon ends the first section of the book by contemplating if Jesus’ teachings on money were a total condemnation of wealth. He reviews the story Zacchaeus, which for him showcases that the love of Jesus does surpass class differences.

In Part two, Tizon builds on the teachings of Jesus by offering six steps the Church can use as a self-evaluation tool to confront the “classism that resides naturally in our hearts and in the structures of our institutions” (47). The six steps are: (a) awakening to compassion, (b) self-gain to generosity, (c) accumulation to simplicity, (d) propriety right to hospitality, (e) savior complex to friendship, (f) and safety to solidarity. Tizon uses these steps to create the Church Among the Classes Inventory (CACI) tool that individuals and churches may utilize to measure their engagement with the poor.

One of the strengths of this book is Tizon’s call for the Church to realign itself with the life and ministry of Jesus. The teachings, interactions, and examples of Jesus as the basis of the faith, require the Christian Church to reexamine its relationship to and treatment of those who are economically marginalized. As Jesus intentionally aligned himself with the “least of these,” so must the people and Church that profess to be followers of this Christ.

The challenge of the book was in its lack of exploration concerning the way that issues of class interact with race, gender, sexuality, or colonial history. I believe it is impossible to talk about class without including some analysis of racism, sexism, and other forms of injustice. Yes, the pursuit of wealth led to many colonial atrocities, but it is impossible to divorce that conversation from matters of race or even gender.

¹ “Close the doors” clip: <https://www.tiktok.com/@tmz/video/7486574026807102766>

Christ Among the Classes is a clarion call to the Christian Church to examine itself so that it might be free from the evil of classism. Tizon reminds us that Jesus was counted among the riffraff of society, and it is our mission to do the same. We have not been called to close the doors to meet our budget, instead, we must fight to open the doors so the whosoever may come.

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