



2016

Powell's "Inconclusive Theologies: Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, Kierkegaard, and Theological Discourse" (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Cutforth-Anderson, Lisa (2016) "Powell's "Inconclusive Theologies: Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, Kierkegaard, and Theological Discourse" (Book Review)," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 59 : Iss. 1 , Article 55.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol59/iss1/55>

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Inconclusive Theologies: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Kierkegaard, and Theological Discourse,

by Lisa D. Powell. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2014. 288 pp. \$30.00.
ISBN 9780881464634

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This book considers in what forms the precepts of Christianity ought to be communicated as Christianity is the experiential relationship between God and man, thus, it must be impossible to systemize such subjectivity into a conclusive theology. Using the writings of Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and Kierkegaard, Lisa D. Powell suggests formulating a conclusive, systematic theology of Christianity is prideful. One can never know God completely, so it is impossible to summarize Him directly and conclusively. She chose Sor Juana, who, as a woman living in the time of the Spanish Inquisition, had to communicate her theological ideas through indirect communication, such as the newly developed format of the modern novel, medieval morality plays and poetry. Similarly, she chose Kierkegaard because he believed God cannot be systemized, and therefore, a conclusive, systemized theology of God is a contradiction. Though Powell references, contrasts and compares numerous Christian writers (fully indexed), through extensive footnotes and a bibliography, she focuses on Sor Juana and Kierkegaard.

She begins with the proposal, demonstrated through Sor Juana and Kierkegaard, that forming a totally conclusive and systematic theology is at odds with retaining proper humility before God. She then traces Kierkegaard's ideas about Socratic ignorance (the truly wise know they know nothing), followed by the humility of faith demonstrated in Sor Juana's letters. From there, she discusses Sor Juana's poetry and concludes with the intrinsic limits of theological language. She presents these themes through highly academic and complex writing.

Her complex writing style and complexity of topic is not recommend for undergraduate theological studies. In order for full appreciation of Powell's suggestions in this volume, the reader must have an extensive English vocabulary, studied existentialism, other philosophies, church history, systematic theology, and various genres of literature. This book is not an easy or quick read, but asks difficult theological questions with which graduate and post-graduate students of theology must grapple.