

Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology. By Kwok Pui-lan. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005. 252 pages. \$24.95.

Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology is a fascinating collection of essays, most of which Kwok Pui-lan has initially published elsewhere and now offers in a revised and expanded form. As postcolonial theory and critical methodologies have increasingly engaged the attention of biblical and historical disciplines during recent years, theology has frequently been found to be slow to interrogate the analytical and constructive possibilities of postcolonial criticism. Hence Kwok's book offers a particularly useful contribution: first, by appropriately and inventively bridging the disciplinary divide between biblical, historical, theological, and philosophical trajectories, and second, by highlighting the various postcolonial modulations of feminist thought.

Kwok divides the book into two parts: "Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Interpretation" and "Postcolonial Feminist Theological Vision." The first part comprises four essays, which generally focus on the issue of theological method's coming of age in the postcolonial era. Amidst the unceasing disciplinary debates regarding the meaning of the "post" in postcoloniality, Kwok carefully draws attention to the larger methodological implications of postcolonialism as a reading strategy and discursive practice that seeks to unmask colonial epistemological frameworks, logics, and cultural representations. The tasks of threefold postcolonial feminist imagination – historical, dialogical, and diasporic – are to resignify gender by moving beyond both Western liberal humanism and the poststructuralist emphasis on difference toward a transnational approach that foregrounds the relation of female subjects in the context of globalization, and to requeer sexuality through tracing the genealogies of sexual discourses in the wider nexus of race, class, and religious difference in the colonial process (23-24). The second part of the book offers a targeted postcolonial feminist re-imagining of gender, particularly in relation to Christology, inscribed here

as radically hybrid (Ch.7). This section also presents a timely and passionate analysis of the Western liberal paradigm of religious pluralism (Ch.8), and the occidentally-generated and -inscribed, modern concept of religion.

Among the merits of this collection of essays is Kwok's dynamic range of vision for contemporary theology, which thankfully moves away from (and beyond) the long-entrenched and alienating disciplinary allegiances. This approach respectfully and critically appreciates both the Christian tradition and critical discourses, without shying away from openly controversial issues, such as the role of women's experiences as a source of theological reflection, and the bewildering and conflictual variety of such experiences. Herein lies another merit of Kwok's book: in a concise fashion, she maps the debate that covers the ambiguous relation of what has come to be known as "white feminism" to colonial discourses and colonially-inscribed cultural and political practices. The obvious corollary – the often-homogenized "Third World women's experience" – is addressed in its frequently-neglected diversity. The reader's attention is drawn to precisely those feminist theories and practices which underscore the importance of class and cultural issues in feminist discourses, rather than concentrating exclusively on gender. Her objective is to interrogate both the enduringly dominant constructions of the Euro-Christ and the fabrication of the Western European face of Christianity as the sole normative orthodoxy for all practical purposes. Again, the problem of gender, i.e., the maleness of Christ, does not convey on its own the complexity of the enmeshment of Christian theology in colonial discourses, such as, for example, the obsessive, modern scholarly manhunts for the nativistically pristine "historical Jesus."

Two questions about this overall engaging collection merit consideration here. First, in line with the typical postcolonial project of "provincializing" Europe after Eurocentrism, Kwok rightly advocates a decentralization of what would be more properly and more precisely understood as the Western geo-cultural dominance in theological discourse. But as in most postcolonial discourses, and so also in Kwok's book, the Europe in need of re-territORIZATION is a homogenized, monolithic, and somewhat careless construct, which does not bear resemblance either to the geo-politically and socio-culturally disparate Europe of the era of high colonialism, or to Europe as it exists today. It is somewhat surprising that only the Jews and pre-Enlightenment witches and heretics merit the attention of a postcolonially-engaged scholarship as the (easy) "others of Europe," while huge intra-European segments of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and racial subalterns are routinely ignored. Yet here the underlying problem continues to reside in the methodological drag of postcolonial studies in general, rather than in this book in particular.

The second question is of a theological nature. In postcolonially-influenced theological discourses, it has become more widespread to link the postcolonial concept of hybridity with the Christological conception of Jesus Christ as a hybrid. Yet typically, this connection is made without deeper exploration as to what exactly such a conceptualization may entail in the context of the Christological dogmas, as articulated, for example, in the Nicene creed and the Chalcedonian definition. Kwok also makes references to Jesus/Christ as a hybridized concept, as the contact zone

and borderland between “the human and the divine, the one and the many, the historical and the cosmological, the Jewish and the Hellenistic, the prophetic and the sacramental” (171). This suggests an interesting but as yet under-theorized involvement with traditional high Christology. The actual analysis of Jesus Christ as hybrid unfortunately never really reaches into these doctrinal intricacies, but remains focused on the hitherto equally neglected cultural, historical, and textual hybridities. On this account, Kwok’s work leaves this reader’s interest aroused and searching for more.

Kwok’s essays bring a vast range of pressing theological issues to the fore, and therein lies perhaps the book’s greatest virtue, namely, the accessibility and range of postcolonially-shaped theological reflection as it bears on many pivotal concerns of contemporary theology. Postcolonial criticism is notorious for its density of jargon and overall discipline-specific, arcane inaccessibility. Kwok has succeeded in producing an elegant, panoramic view of the import of postcolonial studies for theologians, to helpfully complement the emerging literature in postcolonial biblical studies. This volume can be highly recommended as a fine introduction to postcolonial criticism, particularly for theologians located and trained in the West, to broaden their methodological horizons with the additional benefit of a first-rate survey of the problematic of feminist thought in an un-seamlessly globalized world.

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