

Kwok Pui-lan. *Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021, 275 pages. \$30.00. ISBN-10: 0664267491

Long before the recent passing of the late British monarch that sparked a heated conversation on the afterlife of British imperialism, there have been multiple voices from the peripheries that demand us to recognize the deep entanglement between Western colonialism, racism, and global capitalism. In the field of theology as well, variegated voices from Africa, Asia, and Latin America have contested the Euroamerican hegemony. In her fresh volume *Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World*, renowned Asian American feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan brings her postcolonial perspective to the field of political theology, a fast-growing yet still amorphous area that studies the intersection between the theological and the political.

Besides the introductory chapter that offers Kwok's theological autobiography, this volume is divided into three parts. Part 1 is dedicated to her "political theology of postcoloniality." In chapter 1, Kwok proposes an alternative mode of doing political theology which arises from the "underside" of modernity. Interrogating the emerging field of (Western) political theology, she draws upon diverse postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. In her view, both confessional and secular Western political theologies are limited by their Eurocentric biases and thus are in need of a postcolonial turn. This postcolonial emphasis is deepened by Kwok's tracing of the Western construction of the notion of "religion" (ch.2). After touching upon the topic of race and sexuality via Marcella Althaus-Reid's postcolonial queer theology (ch.3), Kwok offers a political-theological intervention on the troubling relationship between American imperialism and (white) Christianity, shedding light on the current Sino-American competition (ch.4).

Part 2 more explicitly canvasses diverse postcolonial theo-politics formed in the Asia Pacific context. Whereas chapter 5 is spent on contextual theologies in the East Asian context (for instance, *minjung* theology in South Korea, and Homeland Theology in Taiwan), in chapter 6 Kwok discusses transnational feminist theological resistance to the ongoing US neocolonialism and militarism in Asia Pacific. Chapter 7 contains Kwok's reflection on the Hong Kong protest against Chinese colonialism; here, Kwok not only delineates the socio-historical backgrounds of the protest but also wrestles with the topic of democracy and un/civil disobedience. Part 3 includes Kwok's essays on an array of postcolonial practices from postcolonial pedagogy (ch.8), to postcolonial preaching (ch.9), to interreligious solidarity and peacebuilding in the midst of violence (ch.10), and to ecological justice in the Anthropocene (ch.11).

While *Postcolonial Politics* is a collection of previously published essays with varied topics rather than a tightly structured monograph, a reader can detect a common thread that penetrates the whole volume. Kwok seeks to dismantle the Euroamerican regime of truth that has long dominated political-theological discourses, and thereby promotes more contextualized spirituality and practices rooted in the lived experience of the subaltern in the Global South. Minding the limitations of liberal recognition, inclusion, and multiculturalism that fail to fully consider the power differentials among cultural and religious traditions, Kwok advocates messy interstitial spaces wherein mutual contestation and learning might engender transnational solidarity across the boundaries. Particularly, she pays close attention to the geopolitical landscape in Asia Pacific and its political-theological implications. Suspicious of both Chinese and American superpowers, Kwok seeks to promote a more egalitarian and emancipatory democratic politics that stems from a multitude of grassroots movements.

Constructive theologian Joerg Rieger laments that even when theologians customarily invoke “the big three” of intersectionality, namely, race, gender, and class, the latter is oftentimes neglected.¹ In this regard, there is a lot to commend in this book, particularly in Kwok’s careful attention to the intersection among religion, politics, and economy. Kwok is acutely aware that when postcolonial theories are detached from the material realities of anticolonial struggles and selectively appropriated by Western academics in the name of a “linguistic turn,” they can be readily co-opted by neoliberal capitalism. That being said, while the author makes some tantalizing remarks about the importance of class-talk several times—for example, “...the question of class is seldom discussed for fear of inciting ‘class conflict’ or ‘class warfare.’ For churches to be prophetic, they must address structural issues of late capitalism and the culture of poverty” (196)—there is not much of a systematic and theoretical analysis and critique of global racial capitalism in cahoots with neocolonialism, and its disastrous effects on this planet as well as the impoverished in the Global South. I wish Kwok had elaborated more on capitalist political economy with a separate chapter—I’m certain that she could’ve done so, given her co-authored book *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (2012)—since as critical theorist Nancy Fraser expounded, capitalism’s exploitation and expropriation are inextricably intertwined with various structural injustices and violences—racial, gender, and ecological.

Of course, this minor complaint is not meant to negate the author’s formidable contributions in this monograph (and in many others) to the field of postcolonial theology, Asian American feminist theology, and political theology. In her epilogue, Kwok asks, “Given the uncertainty and the unknown future that will emerge in the post-pandemic world, what are theological resources for hope?” (202) Her wager is on “the long history of anticolonial and postcolonial struggles for justice” (Ibid.). Resonating with other theologians such as Catherine Keller and Keri Day, Kwok suggests that hope (as opposed to optimism) is less about beliefs than about practices based on the aspiration towards a different possible future. *Postcolonial Politics* is a passionate call for all Christians’ active participation in the Spirit’s decolonizing work.

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¹ Joerg Rieger, “Instigating Class Struggle?: The Study of Class in Religion and Theology and Some Implications for Gender, Race, and Ethnicity,” in *Religion, Theology, and Class: Fresh Engagements after Long Silence*, edited by Joerg Rieger, 189-211 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).