

## BOOK REVIEW

Kwok Pui-Lan, *The Anglican Tradition from a Postcolonial Perspective* (New York: Seabury Books, 2023), pp. 256, ISBN: 978-1640656291  
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This is the latest work in the author's long and distinguished career during which she has made important contributions to the study of Anglicanism. This book brings together her current thoughts on the issues facing international Anglicanism through what she calls a postcolonial optic. She frames this in the context of the enormous demographic change that has occurred in the last eighty years. She notes that in 1970, 62% of Anglicans lived in Europe, but in 2020 that figure was 31%. The figures in Africa for this period were 16% and 59%. Moreover, currently, roughly a quarter of provinces in the Anglican Communion are in countries that have never been part of the British Empire. What that means is that while historically speaking Anglicans generally have their historical antecedents in English Christianity, that historical reality is less and less significant in the contemporary experience of Anglicans. Of course, the significance of that ancient tradition is mediated to contemporary Anglicans via a long history in which recent dynamics are more powerful than their predecessors. Nonetheless, it is the hangover of empire that makes the postcolonial optic so relevant. She sets this in the context of the recent attempts to deal with conflicts in the Anglican Communion and in particular in the three approaches identified by Norman Doe, the instruments of unity (the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lambeth Conference, Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates Meeting), the canonical instruments of unity in each of the provinces and the proposed covenant of 2004. She declares that since these instruments have failed and cannot bring about unity, we should seek new resources to live together as a family of churches across racial, cultural, linguistic and regional differences. We need to outgrow the Anglo-Saxon captivity of the past. In this search, postcolonial theories and concepts can offer ways of thinking to point forward. It is a very useful strategy because it is not simply the decisions, such as they are, but elements of the culture that emanate both towards them and within them

In Chapter 1, titled Introduction, we are given a succinct overview of some postcolonial theorists (6-13), brief comments on postcolonial thought in Anglicanism (1-17) and a description of the contents of the book. Chapter 2 reviews the relation between Anglicanism and colonialism from the eighteenth

century. This chapter nicely highlights how confused and highly differentiated Anglican relations had become by the 1998 Lambeth Conference. In Chapter 3, this narrative is developed and focussed on global order, economics and an environmentally sustainable world. The argument of these three foundational chapters is then related in the following three chapters to worship, sexuality, mission and interreligious relations. That path inevitably traces some of the most contentious issues that have occupied Anglicans internationally for the last three decades. These issues are handled with a sure and steady touch.

I wonder, however, if this discussion might not have been enriched by an open engagement with the issue of power that has been at work in the conflicts of recent times and not always seen or acknowledged. At the turn of the century, one often heard it said that Canterbury had the power of tradition, New York the power of money and Nigeria the power of numbers. Uncovering the uncanny dynamics of power might open up some surprising freedoms for a postcolonial church that has deep 'Christendom instincts of power' within it.

The concluding chapter sums up her hopes and thoughts about the future of Anglican life around the world. She looks to a polycentric communion beyond British colonial hegemony and hopes that the sympathy and openness implied in the old tradition of a *via media* might hold together new antipathies as it had done in the past with older antipathies. Her very clarifying book will contribute to the fulfilment of such a hope.

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