

Review of Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns,
Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives. Cross
Cultural Theologies. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2011.

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Liturgical studies have rarely drawn on postcolonial thought. Jagessar and Burns pioneer this frontier in this volume. They expose the colonial origins and biases of selected liturgical texts and practices and then suggest modified rites that celebrate diverse voices. While this volume is preeminently about worship, the authors' attention to the use of biblical texts in Christian worship will interest biblical scholars. Further, their practical suggestions will find a receptive audience among those interested in decolonizing public readings of the bible.

The first chapter describes the two authors' social contexts for writing this book and offers a brief history of liturgical studies. The use of autobiography as a preface is by now a familiar trope of postcolonial literature. For the uninitiated, it will serve as an entry point into this type of critical thought. The authors then demonstrate the limitations of contemporary introductory textbooks on liturgical studies. This doubles as an apology for their attempt to find the intersection of postcolonial thought and liturgical studies. Readers may need to supplement the background information provided here, but their argument is compelling.

The following chapter outlines the interaction between postcolonial thought and Christian worship. Liturgical scholars have been attentive to the inculturation of Christian worship. But, as Jagessar suggests, inculturation has proven an insufficient concept to expose the colonial biases of liturgical language and practices. Postcolonial perspectives would build on studies of inculturation but, at the same time, be critical of them.

To illustrate the benefits of postcolonial perspectives, the authors examine the pervasive imagery of light and darkness in Christian worship. Blackness is a distinct concept from darkness in some languages, but in English these words can be synonymous. At international worship gatherings, the use of this imagery in English can perpetuate prejudices founded on differences in skin complexion and fossilized in liturgical language. In addition to liturgical texts, symbols and signs used in worship also represent the motifs of light and darkness. For example, the traditional white color of wafers, vestments, the altar cloth, and chalice veil reflect this imagery.

The third chapter continues the discussion of light and darkness by considering Christian hymns. After exposing the colonial roots of several English hymns and modern attempts to temper their colonial ideology, the authors highlight a litany written about the positive role that darkness plays in the biblical narrative. The imagery of light and darkness explored in these two chapters is based on the biblical language. It will, therefore, find an audience among scholars interested in the history of biblical interpretation.

Chapters four and five offer a general overview of postcolonial criticisms of the use of the Bible in Christian worship and a case study. Jagessar and Burns advocate recognizing the diverse, contradictory voices in the Bible within Christian worship. Lectionary cycles both hinder and promote this goal. Since the liturgical year finds its origins in the northern hemisphere in Europe, it reflects that region's climatic cycle. In that way, it imposes a colonial ideology on global worship. On the other hand, the sequence of four readings within an individual service represents diverse biblical voices. Postcolonial thought would encourage churches to celebrate these divergent voices, interrupting them on occasion to give fuller voice to the voices that might otherwise be marginalized.

The biblical readings for A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols of King's College serve as a case study. This cycle of readings is a limited misinterpretation of the biblical text. The festival was created in 1918 during a period of colonial aspiration for the British Empire. A few examples illustrate its biases. First, the readings represent a supercessionist interpretation of the biblical narrative. Second, the traditional opening hymn, "Once in Royal David's City," bears marks of a patriarchal understanding of children with overtones of the childishness of non-European cultures. Third, the theme of light and darkness appears. To remedy these biases, Jagessar and Burns suggest attending to the difficult questions raised by these texts and to diverse modern interpretations of these readings. These two chapters bring work on postcolonial biblical interpretation into the context of communities that read the Bible in public. For this alone, this book deserves the attention of biblical scholars interested in postcolonial interpretation.

The final chapter discusses how services for baptism and ordination represent a colonial past. The affirmation of faith in the Church of England's *Common Worship* does not attend to the individual contexts of the communities that use it. While the language of Christ's authority over the earth can be seen as advocating the equal dignity of all people, individual attention to unique contexts should be incorporated into this service. Of particular interest are the biblical sources underlying the service's language. Services for ordination are understood within the baptismal covenant. By contrasting two denominations' rites for ordination, themes of the superiority of each successive rank within the ecclesiastical hierarchy are revealed. To the authors, this is reminiscent of empire. They conclude with suggestions for how ministerial education might reflect the concerns of postcolonial ideas.

Readers may find that this book feels incomplete at times, but this is more a reflection of the new ground this study is covering and less a comment on the authors' work. The use of case studies highlights well the general points the authors wish to make, although counterexamples surely exist. On the whole, the authors should be commended for their daring attempt to find the intersection of liturgical studies and postcolonial thought, which along the way intersects with the concerns of biblical scholarship.



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