

## A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION OF KWOK PUI-LAN'S POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL METHOD

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**Abstrak:** Teologi feminis pascakolonial merupakan sebuah gerakan teologis dari Dunia Ketiga yang berusaha menggabungkan perjuangan feminis melawan androsentrisme dan patriarki dari generasi pertama teolog feminis—yang dominan berkulit putih—dengan sebuah kesadaran terhadap pengalaman kolonial dan perjuangan bagi kemerdekaan. Di dalam area penafsiran Alkitab, pendekatan feminis pascakolonial mencoba untuk mendekolonisasi dan mendepartriarkalisasi teks-teks Alkitab dan penafsirannya bagi tujuan-tujuan liberatif. Artikel ini mengobservasi dan menganalisis salah satu teolog feminis pascakolonial yang terkemuka, yaitu Kwok Pui-Lan, secara khusus menelaah metode berteologinya yang unik. Tiga isu spesifik akan dibahas: pandangannya tentang pengalaman, Alkitab, tradisi, dan akal budi sebagai sumber-sumber berteologi, pandangannya tentang doktrin Alkitab dan penafsirannya, dan metodenya dalam melakukan teologi feminis pascakolonial. Artikel ini akan ditutup dengan sebuah evaluasi awal. Sementara beberapa poin positif dapat ditarik dari metodenya, kaum Injili akan melihat beberapa potensi masalah, khususnya terkait isu otoritas, kebenaran, dan identitas.

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**Kata-kata kunci:** teologi feminis pascakolonial, Kwok Pui-Lan, metode teologi, sumber-sumber teologi, doktrin Alkitab, interpretasi, teologi Injili.

**Abstract:** Postcolonial feminist theology is an originally Third-World theological movement which attempts to combine feminist struggles against androcentrism and patriarchy of the first generation of feminist—predominantly White—theologians with an awareness of colonial experience and struggle for independence. In the area of biblical interpretation, postcolonial feminist approach tries to decolonize and depatriarchalize both biblical texts and their interpretations for liberative purposes. In this article, authors will observe and analyze one of the most prominent postcolonial feminist theologians, Kwok Pui-Lan, specifically looking at her unique theological method. Three specific issues will be addressed: her view on experience, Scripture, tradition, and reason as sources of theology, her doctrine of Scripture and its interpretation, and her method of doing postcolonial feminist theology. The article will then be concluded with a preliminary evaluation. While some positive points can be drawn from her method, evangelicals will observe some potential problems, especially those concerning the issues of authority, truth, and identity.

**Keyword:** postcolonial feminist theology, Kwok Pui-Lan, theological method, sources of theology, doctrine scripture, interpretation, evangelical theology.

## **Introduction**

Feminist theology, first emerged in the Western contexts (both American and European), grew out of the “general feminist movement that championed the equality of women and men and

worked to liberate society from the injustice of sexism.”<sup>1</sup> These first generation feminist theologians understood the theological task as an attempt to give voice to women and to include a female perspective in the construction of theological doctrines. In their claim, two forces have been contaminating classical theology: androcentrism (the perspective that considers the male as normative) and patriarchy (an ideology and social system that was the basic pattern of the biblical world, and, in the mind of these thinkers, at the root of all forms of oppression).<sup>2</sup> As feminist theology became more globalized, however, the thought of these first generation feminists were challenged. Feminists from the Third World (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) claimed that these first generation feminists were constructing theology only from the perspective of white women’s experience. For Asian women in particular, the reality of patriarchy and androcentrism cannot be separated from their colonial experience and their struggles for independence.<sup>3</sup> In Asia, patriarchy is not just a matter of male supremacy and male centeredness, it is also “a social system of control and domination, including the colonizers over the colonized, elite over masses, clergy over laity.”<sup>4</sup> In contrast to white Western feminists, Asian women suffer from oppression not only at the level

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1. L. Peacore, “Feminist Theologies,” in *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, eds. William A. Dyrness & Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 318.

2. Peacore, “Feminist Theologies,” 318.

3. Peacore, “Feminist Theologies,” 320.

4. Peacore, “Feminist Theologies,” 320.

of gender, but also at the economic, political, and cultural levels. In other words, for Asian women, the concern for women liberation from male domination cannot be separated from the concern for decolonization.

The purpose of this article is to observe and analyze the theological thoughts of one Asian postcolonial feminist theologian, Kwok Pui-Lan, specifically looking at issues related to her theological method. In order to do so, a brief explanation on postcolonial feminist theology will first be presented. Next, the unique method of Kwok Pui-Lan's theology will be expounded, focusing on her views on the sources of theology, doctrine of Scripture and its interpretation, and how to actually do postcolonial feminist theology. The article will then be concluded with preliminary points of critical appraisal, along with some evangelical reflections.

### **Understanding Postcolonial Feminist Theology**

Feminist theology was initially a predominantly white, North American and European endeavor. As theology became more global, many feminist voices from the majority world began to critique and challenge the predominant feminist views. Feminist from Africa, Asia, and Latin America claimed that the first generation of feminist theologians "was constructing theology from the perspective of white women's experience."<sup>5</sup> It is ironic that these feminist theologians, according to the non-white feminists, made the same

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5. Peacore, "Feminist Theologies," 319.

mistake of patriarchal theology, which is, promoting a particular understanding of experience as universal. The emergence of womanist (African American), Latina/*mujerista* (Latin or Hispanic), *minjung* (Korean) and Asian feminist theology led the way of realizing the fact that “the problem of sexism cannot be separated from the particular woman she is, including her racial and class identity.”<sup>6</sup>

Third-World feminist theologians, Kwok Pui-Lan being one of the most prominent ones, see the importance of collaboration between feminist theology and postcolonial criticism as a scalpel to investigate all tendencies of colonialism. She notes that as Asian women's feminist consciousness were emerged, they quickly discovered that white, middle-class feminist theologies of the 1970s were not relevant for them without first being radically challenged.<sup>7</sup> She mentions four reasons for this.<sup>8</sup> First, the Western feminist theologies speak from within a cultural context in which Christianity is the dominant tradition, whereas everywhere in Asia, except in the Philippines and South Korea, Christians are but a tiny minority. Second, earlier feminist theologies had a tendency to universalize the Western women's experiences as if they represented the lives of all women. Third, the feminist analyses as proposed by white, middle-class women are not radical enough. At least they “fail to provide

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6. Peacore, “Feminist Theologies,” 319.

7. Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2000), 30.

8. The following explanation is adapted from Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 30.

tools to examine colonialism, cultural imperialism, religious pluralism and the horizontal violence of women against women.”<sup>9</sup> Fourth, some of these feminist theologians display racist and ethnocentric orientations, even while calling for a global sisterhood.

As a consequence, most Third-World feminist theologians, distancing themselves from the first generation American and European feminists, believe that feminist concerns must be coupled with and could not be separated from concerns for decolonization. Third-World feminists are not only concerned about patriarchy in hermeneutics and theology, but also colonialism. They existentially understand from their experience that the two are different: “patriarchy is a phenomenon in which men oppress women, whereas in colonialism both men and women oppress men and women of other societies.”<sup>10</sup> Postcolonial feminist scholars like Musa Dube and Laura Donaldson also point out that First World feminists in their exegetical work and their reconstruction of the early church often compromise and overlook the colonial context and content of biblical materials.<sup>11</sup> Musa Dube states that “it is imperative for feminist inclusive readings to be more suspicious of imperialism

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9. Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 30.

10. R. S. Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, eds. David F. Ford & Rachel Muers (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 549.

11. Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” 549.

legitimation.”<sup>12</sup> She gives an example of interpreting Matthew’s depiction of Pilate’s wife as a prophetic woman in the trial of Jesus: “an inclusive reading must be wary that this positive construction may not necessarily articulate a liberative inclusion of an outsider woman; rather, it may serve to legitimate the imperialist presence by presenting it as holy and acceptable.”<sup>13</sup> By coupling feminist and postcolonial concerns, an exegete “cannot equate the experience of Pilate’s wife with that of the mother of Andrew, the son of Zebedee, without taking into account the former’s imperialist status of exploiter and oppressor.”<sup>14</sup>

Postcolonial feminist biblical scholars like Musa Dube generally start with two observations. First, these scholars will “take a closer look at the function of the literary construction of biblical texts so as to understand how, in their portrayals of characters, geography, travelers, and gender relations, they justified colonialism and legitimized the colonizer and colonized positions, thereby perpetuating dependency.”<sup>15</sup> Then, they will “investigate how mainstream white male and female interpreters, employing various critical practices ranging from historical-critical to literary-rhetorical and social-scientific, encourage readers to enter the world of the biblical writers and their rhetorical Language of salvation history and

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12. Musa W. Dube, “Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,” in *Hope Abundant: Third-World and Indigenous Women’s Theology*, ed. Kwok Pui-Lan (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 95.

13. Dube, “Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist,” 95.

14. Dube, “Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist,” 97.

15. Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” 544.

universal mission.”<sup>16</sup> The problem with these interpreters, according to these postcolonial feminists, is that “they do so without decolonizing their own positions or acknowledging the presence of empire and the imperial context in the biblical books.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, they do not “problematize the power relations between themselves and their readers, or account for their gender, class, and race privileges.”<sup>18</sup> The task of postcolonial feminist biblical scholars and theologians, according to Musa Dube, is “to decolonize and depatriarchalize both biblical texts and their interpretations before the texts can be reclaimed for liberative purposes.”<sup>19</sup> In her own words, “To read for decolonization, therefore, is to consciously resist the exploitative forces of imperialism, to affirm the denied differences, and to seek liberating ways of interdependence in our multicultural and post-colonial world.”<sup>20</sup>

## **Kwok Pui-Lan’s Postcolonial Feminist Theological Method**

### ***Background and Context***

Kwok Pui-Lan is an Asian postcolonial feminist woman of Chinese descent. She was born and raised in Hong Kong. Her parents

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16. Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” 544.

17. Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” 544.

18. Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” 544.

19. Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” 544.

20. Dube, “Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist,” 98. She also adds, “To bracket decolonizing is only to maintain the imperial strategies of exploitation and subjugation and to hinder building the necessary “political coalitions” among feminists of different cultures, nations, colors, classes, and sexuality.” See p. 99.

were immigrants from China. At her teenage years, she began attending an Anglican church. Reflecting back, she shows how these early years have played a role in her later embrace of postcolonial concerns:

Having grown up in Hong Kong, I have intimate knowledge of what living as a colonized people means. Before 1971 English was the only official language in Hong Kong. My parents' generation, mostly refugees from China, had to rely on somebody else to read an official letter, to file a tax form, and to understand government notices. The experience has heightened my consciousness of Eurocentric hegemony and the colonization of the mind.<sup>21</sup>

Kwok received her education both in Hong Kong and in the United States. She commenced her doctoral studies at Harvard Divinity School in 1984. Besides that, she also received honorary doctorates from Kampen Theological University in the Netherlands and Uppsala University in Sweden. In 2011 she served as the President of the American Academy of Religion. She also assumed leadership positions at Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning. She is currently Dean's Professor of Systematic Theology at Emory's Chandler School of Theology in Atlanta, GA, USA.<sup>22</sup>

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21. Kwok Pui-Lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 4.

22. For further reference, see Kwok's faculty profile at <https://candler.emory.edu/faculty/profiles/kwok-pui-lan.html> and her personal blog <http://kwokpuiLan.blogspot.com/>.

As a postcolonial feminist theologian, she has published extensively, among other things, in the area of Asian feminist theology and biblical criticism, postcolonial theology and biblical criticism, and the history of relationship between Chinese women and Christianity. Though her scholarly context has been predominantly the Western Academy, Kwok has maintained her Asian identity and always intentional and strategic in using her academic privileges to advance the cause of the marginalized groups, especially the Asian women.<sup>23</sup> In her words,

Currently doing research and teaching theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I enjoy many privileges other Asians do not dream of having. At the same time, as a woman and a Chinese in Diaspora, I am twice removed from the center of the American academy and society. I speak from a position of both privilege and marginalization. It is a very limited space, but fluid and creative. I intend to use the relative freedom and privilege I enjoy as strategically as I can to fight the crippling effects of western imperialism and Chinese paternalism at once.<sup>24</sup>

All of these multiple and complex national, cultural, and ecclesial identities (being a Chinese woman, growing up in the British colony of Hong Kong, receiving education in the US, being part of Anglican church, etc.) surely play a significant role in the

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23. One of the concrete expressions of this burden is her co-founding of a global network of postcolonial women theologians called Pacific, Asian, North American Asian Women in Theology and Ministry (PANAAWTM). For further reference, see <http://www.panaawtm.org/>.

24. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 6.

development of her view of the Bible, hermeneutics, and theology, especially on her way of viewing things in a multidimensional way.<sup>25</sup>

What does it mean to be an Asian woman for Kwok Pui-Lan? For one, Kwok never claims to speak for or represent other Asians, because she believes that Asia is so diverse and because one's understanding of being *Asian* depends on one's social and historical location.<sup>26</sup> Asia is always "multiple, fluid, and changing."<sup>27</sup> Avoiding the essentialist and anti-essentialist or social constructionist debate, Kwok believes that to say one is Asian does not imply "an essence of 'Asianness', or an abstract Asian subjectivity, or a generalized Asian womanhood."<sup>28</sup> She says that when Asian theologians call themselves Asian, the term signifies "the consciousness of belonging to the history of particular groups of people; inheriting the myths, Languages, and cuisines of certain cultures; commitment to looking at the world and ourselves from particular vantage points; and solidarity with the struggles and destiny of specific peoples."<sup>29</sup>

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25. Kwok says, "My own background as a Chinese woman, having grown up in the British colony of Hong Kong, carrying a "British Dependent Territories Citizen" passport, belonging to the Anglican Church, and having received theological education both in Hong Kong and in the United States points to the complexities in the construction of national, cultural, and ecclesial identities. I have experienced the constant tension of oscillating between different worlds, the freedom to look at one part of myself from another part, and the joy in crossing boundaries and assimilating new insights in a multidimensional way." See Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 6.

26. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 6

27. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 24.

28. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 24.

29. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 24. She adds, "For these theologians the term *Asian* has an identifiable set of meanings: shared

Seen from another vantage point, the meaning of Asia can also be connected to the West, because “Asia and the West are closely linked not only in terms of colonial history but also in terms of cultural imagination.”<sup>30</sup> For her, being an Asian woman “signifies the self-awareness that sees the construct of gender from a particular culture as a vantage point from which to look at the world and to act politically.” This understanding of Asian woman is “multilayered, fluid, and open to new and continual reinterpretation, depending on shifting contexts and changing historical circumstances.”<sup>31</sup> For Kwok, the perspective of Asian women is always “partial, situated, and context-bound, without any false claims to be universal, objective, or value-neutral.”<sup>32</sup> Concluding her analysis of Asian feminist theology, Hyun Hui Kim argues that this “consciousness of fluid and negotiated boundaries functions as an important methodological tool for Asian feminist theology, especially in the contemporary globalized context.”<sup>33</sup> It is within this contextual background that Kwok’s theological method will be observed and analyzed.

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colonial history, multiple religious traditions, rich and diverse cultures, immense suffering and poverty, a long history of patriarchal control, and present political struggles.”

30. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 24.

31. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 26.

32. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 26.

33. Hyun Hui Kim, *Asian Feminist Theology*, accessed 1 November 2020, <http://www.drew.edu/theological/2012/03/30/asian-feminist-theology/>.

***On the Sources of Postcolonial Feminist Theology***

In Kwok's discussion on the sources of theology, she still uses the traditional categories of sources that include experience, Scripture, tradition and reason. However, she tries to scrutinize this categories and "expose how they have masked or excluded the voices of multiply marginalized women."<sup>34</sup>

*Experience.* Kwok believes that women's experience is the source and criterion of truth. Quoting Rosemary Ruether, she affirms that "the uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of *women's* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, Kwok admits that "women's experience" itself is a highly contested term. Feminist theologians themselves have different opinions on what constitutes women's experience and how experience, given its diverse and changing nature, can be normative in theology. She understands that there is a tension between those who tend to universalize women's experience (essentialist) and those who tend to see women's experience as a purely social or discursive construct (anti-essentialist). She mentions Sheila Greeve Davaney who warns against universalizing white women's experience to cover up racial and class privileges,<sup>36</sup> and second-generation feminists like Rebecca Chopp who points out that

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34. Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2005), 53.

35. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 54.

36. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 55

“it was the reliance on the theoretical assumptions of modern theory that led the first generation of feminist theologians to universalize their experience and adopt an essentialist viewpoint.”<sup>37</sup> For Kwok, “the assumption that the human experience of Western people (including white feminist theologians) is the norm for all people is not just an intellectual blind spot, but is heavily influenced by the colonial experience.”<sup>38</sup>

However, Kwok argues that the use of postmodern and poststructuralist frameworks to critique essentialists is not without problems. She quotes Beverly Harrison in saying that these second-generation feminists’ preoccupation with correct theory rather than political activism (concerns for liberation movement, structural changes of the church and society, etc.) makes them “lose touch with the rank and file of the women’s movement.”<sup>39</sup> Trying to find a middle-way, Kwok argues that while she does not deny the need for a pluralistic and diverse understanding of *mujerista*, Asian, or black women beyond the stereotypes,<sup>40</sup> she is “keenly aware of the need for strategic deployment of certain generalized representations by a subalternized group at a particular stage of the political struggle, while keeping in mind that these representations are provisional, open to change, and negotiable.”<sup>41</sup> She thereby proposes the need

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37. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 57.

38. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 56.

39. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 58.

40. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 58.

41. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 58.

for politics of difference and solidarity among women, because she believes that “we cannot understand ourselves without listening to others, especially to those we have oppressed or have the potential to oppress.”<sup>42</sup>

*Scripture.* Kwok mentions that by using the critical lens of hermeneutics of suspicion, feminist scholarship has critiqued many traditional claims regarding the Bible, such as the authority of the Bible, the boundary of the canon, the androcentric bias of the text and the history of interpretation.<sup>43</sup> From a postcolonial perspective, there are at least three issues that she thinks must be pondered: “the use of the Bible in colonial discourse, the influence of colonialism in the academic study of the Bible, and the development of postcolonial readings of the Bible.”<sup>44</sup> For Kwok, the Bible is an integral part of the colonial discourse and has been used to justify the political and military aggression of the West. Kwok highlights selective passages from the Bible that were emphasized to justify this cause, namely the Matthean Great Commission of Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19) and the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>45</sup>

The Bible was seen as a “prized possession of the West ... and thus served as a signifier that functioned to support Western beliefs in the inferiority and deficiency of the ‘heathen’ cultures.”<sup>46</sup> Kwok

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42. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 60.

43. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 61.

44. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 61.

45. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 61.

46. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 61.

rejects the distinction between the so-called special revelation and the general revelation, because it reinforces the superiority of Christianity in the evolutionary scheme of “religions.” The academic study of the Bible in the metropolitan centers of Europe was not immune from cultural imperialism. The rise of historical-critical method and the subsequent quest for historical Jesus, for Kwok, was far from value-neutral, because “the political interests of Europe determined the questions to be asked, the gathering of data, the framework of interpretation, and the final outcome.”<sup>47</sup> In her view, “A *Western* historical criticism should not be taken as universally valid, because *Western* notions of historical process are not universally valid. We have to learn from other cultures insights to broaden our historical imagination.”<sup>48</sup> With regard to postcolonial readings of the Bible, she agrees with other postcolonial feminists like Laura Donaldson that the Bible must be looked from the vantage point of women multiply oppressed because of race, class, conquest, and colonialism.<sup>49</sup> It is imperative that the Bible should be read not only with a single-axis framework of gender without simultaneously paying attention to the power dynamics at work in the text.

*Tradition.* Discussion of tradition is critical in feminist theology especially because “women have been shut out from shaping the collective memory of the church.”<sup>50</sup> Quoting Schüssler

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47. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 63.

48. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 64.

49. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 64-5.

50. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 66.

Fiorenza, Kwok argues that “all tradition must be scrutinized through the critical feminist lens, and women have the freedom to choose and reject traditions.”<sup>51</sup> Coupled with postcolonial concerns, Kwok believes that these three issues must be addressed: “the move beyond Eurocentrism to multicultural investigations of Christian tradition, the use of resources from cultures historically not shaped by Christianity, and the future visions of tradition informed by feminist insights and struggles from the global context.”<sup>52</sup> Agreeing with Dipesh Chakrabarty, Kwok asserts that the need to decenter or provincialize Europe is paramount if we are to develop “a vibrant, polycentric, and plurivocal theological imagination.”<sup>53</sup>

To do this, Kwok suggests that we must develop an international and multicultural understanding of Christian tradition. One of the ways is to examine how Christianity has defined itself through its contact with Others: “Judaism and Hellenistic traditions, the so-called barbarian attack, the rise of the Muslim world, and the encounter with cultures and peoples of the Third World.”<sup>54</sup> Besides critiquing Western tradition, feminist theologians from diverse cultures must explore the use of myths, legends, and other oral and literary resources for theology. For Kwok, the primacy of the whole Western tradition should be contested, and “indigenous resources must be used on an equal footing and interpreted intertextually with

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51. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 66.

52. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 67.

53. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 67.

54. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 67.

Western sources.”<sup>55</sup> She encourages the use of Asian philosophy, shamanism, women’s literature, and wisdom of women passed from generation to generation. She reminds us, however, that the use of indigenous resources does not mean going back to the premodern stage “when one’s culture and tradition were undefiled by the conquistadors and the colonizers.”<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, formerly colonized people must assess the ambivalent legacy of their own tradition and interact with multicultural traditions from around the globe.

*Reason.* For Kwok, this is a heavily loaded term for postcolonial feminist theologians, because the “Man of Reason,” created by the Enlightenment, has put them in double jeopardy: “As women, they were considered emotional and irrational when compared to men, and as the colonized, they were seen as childlike and immature, in need of the tutelage of white people.”<sup>57</sup> The concept of “Man of Reason” was “considered not only fit to rule women, but also destined to be the master of the world and to remake other people in his image.”<sup>58</sup> Three issues become Kwok’s concern: “the fundamental questions of the approaches of feminist epistemologies, the foundation of knowing, and the self-critique of postcolonial reason.”<sup>59</sup> Postcolonial feminist epistemology “debunks

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55. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 68.

56. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 69.

57. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 70.

58. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 71.

59. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 72.

any claims to the innate form of feminine knowing that is superior to or subversive of male knowing and finds embarrassing any romanticizing suggestions that women, by nature, are more caring and loving, or closer to God.”<sup>60</sup> A postcolonial knowing subject insists that changing the gender of the subject is not enough, without “simultaneously taking into consideration how race, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, and colonialism form an intricate web to shape both the identity of knower and her ‘situated knowledge.’”<sup>61</sup> Kwok also debunks the myth that there is an evolutionary development in human thinking which entails an inevitable progress from “mythos” to “logos.”<sup>62</sup> Myths have usually been seen as primitive and opposed to, or incompatible with, rationality, which is more modern and civilized. She refuses this kind of dichotomy, because myths have their own form of reasoning and logic which is not inferior to Western rationality. In her words, “... a simple dichotomy between mythos and logos is untenable and we have to attend to cultural specificity in terms of modes of thinking and reasoning.”<sup>63</sup>

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60. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 72. She adds, “The colonizers have been both men and women, and female colonizers, either through their overt support of the colonial regimes, or through their silent complicity, have not demonstrated themselves to know more about loving and God.”

61. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 73.

62. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 73.

63. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 74.

Kwok ends her discussion of reason by emphasizing the necessity of self-critique of postcolonial intellectuals. The works of postcolonial critics have been criticized as highly abstract and difficult, more concerned about the Western academy than with actual social and political change. She repeatedly reminds her fellows to treat their academic and intellectual privilege carefully and strategically, lest they forget “to listen to the voices of those who are less privileged and those whom we have the potential to oppress.”<sup>64</sup>

### ***On Postcolonial Feminist Doctrine of Scripture and Interpretation***

In high school I was taught selections from the Confucian classics, which were included in the study of Chinese Language and literature. Nobody objected to teaching Confucian classics in the schools, since they are seldom viewed as religious scriptures. In addition to the Confucian classics, Buddhist schools teach their students Buddhist sutras, and Christian schools, the Bible. Since I did not go to a Christian school, I encountered the Bible in a school fellowship for Christians and in the Anglican church, which I attended from my teenage years.<sup>65</sup>

With that testimony, Kwok says that from the very beginning of her life, she was exposed to “a pluralistic understanding of the Bible.”<sup>66</sup> This experience in the multiscriptural Chinese context teaches her that scripture is a very fluid and dynamic concept. Three lessons she drew from this experience. First, she learns about what

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64. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 76.

65. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 21.

66. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 21.

many scholars in the history of religions have called “the relational character of scripture.”<sup>67</sup> A text becomes scripture because of the way people receive it and enter into relationship with it. Second, in a multiscriptural context, one is exposed to different kinds of scripture at the same time. While each kind of scripture may claim authority over its adherents, “the fact that different scriptures coexist makes relative the claim of ultimate authority for any one of them.”<sup>68</sup> Third, in a multiscriptural world, the boundaries that delimit scripture are not that rigid. Given this pluralistic understanding of scripture in the Asian context, she feels that “it is unfortunate that a narrow and exclusive view of the Bible flourished during the century of mission and so became the dominant position held by many Asian churches.”<sup>69</sup>

Kwok then gives three suggestions on the use of Bible in theology by Asian postcolonial feminists.<sup>70</sup> First, Asian theologians must demythologize the sacred authority that is associated with the Bible. Second, Asian theologians must demystify the ways the Bible has been used to reinforce unequal relationships between the East and the West, women and men, and the rich and the poor. Third, Asian theologians need to construct new models of interpreting the Bible based on the culture and history of Asia and the struggles of Asian people.

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67. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 22.

68. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 22.

69. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 23.

70. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 30.

Kwok questions the sacrality of the Bible, the so-called written text of the Word of God. For her, the notion of the “presence” of God speaking through the text drives us to discover what that “one voice” is. She relativizes this claim by saying that “once we recognize the Bible as one system of Language to designate the ‘sacred’, we may also be able to see the biblical text as one form of human construction to talk about God.”<sup>71</sup> Other systems of Language might have a radically different way of presenting the “sacred.” Kwok also questions the issue of canon, saying that the formation of a religious canon is clearly a matter of power.<sup>72</sup> She began to question whether the concept of canon is still useful, because canon can also lead to the repression of truth. For her, stories about women liberation, as well as other stories drawn from different cultural contexts, “must be regarded as being as ‘sacred’ as the biblical stories.”<sup>73</sup> She boldly claims, “There is always the element of holiness in the people’s struggle for humanhood and their stories are authenticated by their own lives and not the divine voice of God.”<sup>74</sup> Kwok also rejects the notion that the Bible provides the norm for interpretation in itself.<sup>75</sup> She says, “Today we must claim back the power to look at the Bible with our own eyes and to stress that divine immanence is within us, not in something sealed off and handed down from almost two

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71. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 17.

72. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 17.

73. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 18.

74. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 18.

75. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 18.

thousand years ago.”<sup>76</sup> The critical principle for interpretation lies “not in the Bible itself, but in the community of women and men who read the Bible and, through their dialogical imagination, appropriate it for their own liberation.”<sup>77</sup>

With this, Kwok develops a multifaith hermeneutics which expresses that concept of dialogical imagination. She defines the concept of “dialogical imagination” as follows:

The term *dialogical imagination* describes the process of creative hermeneutics in Asia. It attempts to convey the complexities, the multidimensional linkages, and the different levels of meaning that underlie our present task of relating the Bible to Asia. This task is dialogical, for it involves ongoing conversation among different religious and cultural traditions. It is highly imaginative, for it looks at both the Bible and our Asian reality anew, challenging the historical-critical method, presumed by many to be objective and neutral.<sup>78</sup>

Kwok suggests that we can practice this dialogical imagination by using Asian myths, legends, and stories in biblical reflection or using social biography of the people as a hermeneutical key to understand both our reality and the message of the Bible.<sup>79</sup> She imagines the Bible as a “*talking book*, engendering conversations and creating a polyphonic theological discourse.”<sup>80</sup> A dialogical model

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76. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 18.

77. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 19.

78. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 13.

79. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 13.

80. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 32. In page 42, Kwok mentions five advantages to seeing the Bible as a talking book. First, it shifts

takes into consideration not only the written text but also oral discussion of the text in different social dialects. Kwok emphasizes that a “preoccupation with the written text cannot help us understand the lively process by which the Bible is told and retold by Asian Christian men and women.”<sup>81</sup> The focus of this dialogical hermeneutics is not simply the author’s voice or the “orthodox” interpretation of the church leaders; it highlights the possibilities of different readings by multiple race, class, culture, and sexual orientation.<sup>82</sup> She says that a dialogical model of interpretation emphasizes that Christian churches exist in dialogue with other human communities, including different faith communities: “In multireligious Asia, we do not have one scripture, but many scriptures, not one religious narrative, but multiple religious narratives.”<sup>83</sup> A dialogical model understands the self not as an

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the discussion away from an undue emphasis on the authority of the written text to the community of faith that is talking about the Bible and talking with one another. Second, it highlights the importance of the oral transmission of scripture in the religious life of Asia. Third, as a talking book, its meaning is not fixed but open to negotiation in the discursive context. Fourth, it invites us to listen to the multiplicity of voices, filling in for the voiceless and uplifting the voices that have been marginalized. Fifth, it implies that truth is not sealed off or handed down from the past but is to be found in open discussion, honest conversation, and creative dialogue.

81. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 36-7.

82. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 37.

83. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 38. She adds, “In the past, Christians in Asia were encouraged to see our world and ourselves narrowly through one grand narrative: The Bible. This is very limiting because it rules out many possibilities and requires that all alternative narratives be subsumed and suppressed into it.”

isolated, monolithic identity but as a center of multiple relationships. Therefore, biblical interpretation cannot follow a single-axis framework, whether it is race, class, or gender; a dialogical model must adopt a multiaxial framework of analysis.<sup>84</sup> The meaning of a text cannot be found by tracing it back to the voice of God or of its author, nor can it be limited to the “original meaning” of its *Sitz im Leben*. Multiple meanings are created in public discussion, creative dialogue, and sometimes heated controversy.”<sup>85</sup>

### ***On Doing Postcolonial Feminist Theology***

Kwok explains that postcolonial feminist theology is still in the gestation process: “its theoretical horizon, its subject matter, and its future direction have yet to be defined.”<sup>86</sup> For her, there is no one single postcolonial feminist theology that is adequate or comprehensive enough to cover the pluralistic postcolonial contexts, as the experiences of colonialism are far from homogeneous. There will need to be a “rainbow of colors, pluriphonic voices, and multiple rhythms, following different heartbeats.”<sup>87</sup>

But who are the people who can do postcolonial feminist theology?<sup>88</sup> For some scholars, men are incapable of doing feminist theology because they lack the experiences that women go through,

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84. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 39.

85. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, 40.

86. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 126.

87. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 127.

88. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 127.

therefore they cannot speak about feminist issues with authority. However, other scholars see feminism as a political stance rather than an embodied experience; therefore, men can certainly contribute to the fight against women's oppression. Kwok herself is more inclined to think that the development of feminist theory and theology is "primarily the responsibility of feminists, though profeminist men can indeed be allies in the movement and struggle...women should be given a preeminent role representing themselves."<sup>89</sup>

The next question then is, who are the women who can do postcolonial feminist theology?<sup>90</sup> She asks whether it is only restricted to the colonized others, the female subalterns and their descendants or should include women who benefit from colonialism and still reap the plenty of neocolonialism. She argues that because the colonial process is doubly inscribed, affecting both the metropolitan centers and the colonies, the postcolonial process "must involve both the colonizers and the colonized."<sup>91</sup> This means that "not only do the colonized need to disengage from the colonial syndrome, the colonizers have to decolonize their minds and practices as well."<sup>92</sup> She further claims that it is not always clear-cut as to who are the postcolonials and who are not. In sum, she argues that "both the (former) female colonizers and the (former) colonized

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89. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 127.

90. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 127.

91. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 127.

92. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 127.

women are able to do postcolonial feminist theology, although they will have different entry points, priorities of issues, accents, and inflections."<sup>93</sup>

What will be the scope, themes, and organization of a book on postcolonial feminist theology?<sup>94</sup> One approach is to adopt traditional Christian themes as a way to think through theology, such as God, Christ, atonement, church, and eschatology. The advantage of this "reformist approach" is that "this can appropriate and rearticulate as many patriarchal elements of traditional theology as possible, both to contest their discursive power and to provide alternative ways of thinking."<sup>95</sup> The disadvantage is that it "gives too much power to the theological categories established by the patriarchal tradition and limits creative ways of reconceptualizing the whole discipline."<sup>96</sup> The other approach starts not from the established theological tradition, but from a feminist analysis of the postcolonial condition, and then articulates theological issues and themes from such an analysis. The advantage is that "it is inductive and culturally specific, for the issues and themes will not be predetermined, but derived from concrete experiences social

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93. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 127. She also insists that female subalterns who experience the intersection of oppressions in the most immediate and brutal way have epistemological privileges in terms of articulating a postcolonial feminist theology that will be more inclusive than others.

94. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 147.

95. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 147.

96. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 147.

struggles.”<sup>97</sup> The disadvantage is that “it may continue to be marginalized, because it may not have significantly engaged and contested the theological mainstream.”<sup>98</sup> For Kwok, these two approaches are not diametrically opposite, and many postcolonial theological projects will be a hybrid of the two: “Postcolonial theologians will not shy away from reconstructing certain Christian doctrines if they are still significant for their communities, while adding other themes and concerns they deem appropriate.”<sup>99</sup>

For whom is postcolonial feminist theology written?<sup>100</sup> For Kwok, the readers are likely to be an “imagined community,”<sup>101</sup> made up of intellectuals interested in the relation between theology and empire building and having the commitment to subvert the use of sacred symbols to oppress people. These may be theologians, scholars in religion, and intellectuals working in different disciplines using postcolonial theory, and Christians in progressive religious communities. For Kwok, the most important contribution of postcolonial feminist theology will be “to reconceptualize the relation of theology and empire through the multiple lenses of gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and so forth.”<sup>102</sup> Three issues require urgent attention:<sup>103</sup> (1) the circulation of theological symbols

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97. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 147.

98. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 147.

99. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 147-8.

100. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 148.

101. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 148.

102. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 144.

103. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 144-5.

and cultural capital in the colonial period and its permutations in late capitalism; (2) how we conceptualize the religious difference that has fueled much colonial discourse; and (3) the environmental degradation and its impact on the lives of marginalized women who bear the major brunt of its effects.

Regarding the future of postcolonial feminist theology, Kwok asks, "Will postcolonial feminist theology be temporary fad, ascendant for the moment because words with the prefix "post-" are currently in vogue?"<sup>104</sup> To which she answers, "It is a pity if postcolonialism is considered a 'fad' in theology, which would only show how insular the field of theology is, because we are lagging almost a generation behind postcolonial studies in other fields."<sup>105</sup>

## **Preliminary Evaluation of Kwok Pui-Lan's Theological Method**

### ***Positive Points to Appreciate***

In general, both feminist and postcolonial theologies' concern for presence of the marginalized voices in theological construction must be commended. Feminist theology, since its beginning, has been pointing out the evils of androcentrism, patriarchy and misogyny that have permeated theology by valuing the voices and the experiences of women. M. Steele Ireland points out that postcolonial theology has "brought out voices from the margins, opened up fresh ways of looking at the biblical text and

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104. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 149.

105. Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 149.

broadened theological perspectives by encouraging alternative ways of doing theology.”<sup>106</sup> It also helps us “develop a sensitivity to the marginalized, to the conquered, that we may gain a different perspective that enriches our theological and biblical understanding and opens our eyes to the ways the Bible may be manipulated to justify oppressive practices.”<sup>107</sup>

More pointedly, postcolonial feminist critique to the first generation feminist thoughts is right to the point. Kwok’s suggestion that biblical interpretation and theology must be done not in a single-axis framework (gender only, for example) but multi-axial framework of analysis (not only gender, but also class, race, sexuality, culture, etc.) is generally commendable, as long as we keep holding that the Bible as the canonical Word of God is the norming norm for both interpretation and theology. Within evangelical convictions, to certain extent we can agree with postcolonial feminists that theology must be plurivocal and polyphonic. For us evangelicals, theology must be plurivocal and polyphonic because no single interpretive tradition/community “could discern all that there is to be gleaned from Scripture.”<sup>108</sup> In Kevin Vanhoozer’s words, “A canonically bounded polyphonic tradition that includes Western and non-

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106. M. Steele Ireland, “Postcolonial Theology,” in *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, eds. William A. Dyrness & Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 685.

107. Ireland, “Postcolonial Theology,” 685.

108. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Systematic Theology,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 779.

Western voices, ancient and modern, best corresponds to the nature of the Scriptures themselves.”<sup>109</sup>

To say that systematic theology should be plurivocal does not mean “anything goes,” because the whole Scriptural canon in its unity and its diversity is our measuring rod in doing theology. Mikhail Bakhtin reminds us about the possibility of a “plural unity,”<sup>110</sup> both with regard to the biblical voices and the interpretive traditions. For Bakhtin, truth cannot be articulated only by one single voice or single perspective. Many voices and many perspectives are needed to do justice to the Truth. Many perspectives need to be put into dialogue for the truth to emerge, and the characteristic of the dialogue itself is its “unfinalizability.”<sup>111</sup> T.D. Gener and L. Bautista have noted that in the context of contemporary global theologies, the plurality of biblical voices “provides a necessary impetus for plurality of theological expressions and continues to inspire the recognition of ‘new explosions of different forms (narrative, ritual, symbol, concept).’”<sup>112</sup>

Kwok’s discussion of reason as one of the sources of theology is also helpful in many ways. She reminds theologians not to be

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109. Vanhoozer, “Systematic Theology,” 779.

110. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 80.

111. Vanhoozer, “The Voice and the Actor,” 80.

112. T.D. Gener and L. Bautista, “Theological Method,” in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness & Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 893.

preoccupied with Western way of rationality or even to be deluded into thinking that the Eastern or Asian way of rationality is inferior to the Western way. Her plea for the necessity of self-critique must be applied by evangelical theologians, too. Quite often, the works of evangelical theologians can be highly abstract and do not engage with real ecclesial and societal issues of the day. Her reminder to treat academic and intellectual privilege carefully and strategically, “lest we forget to listen to the voices of those who are less privileged and those whom we have the potential to oppress” must always be remembered. This self-critique can also lead evangelical theologians to what Kelly M. Kapic calls anthroposensitive theology, by which he means “a refusal to divorce theological considerations from practical human application, since theological reflections are always interwoven with anthropological concern.”<sup>113</sup>

### ***Potential Problems to be Concerned About***

Nevertheless, there are some potential problems in Kwok’s vision of postcolonial feminist theology that evangelicals will have some concerns about. Here, three points of concern will be highlighted: on authority, on truth, and on identity.

*On Authority.* Grenz and Olson say that “in order for any Christian theology to be truly prophetic, it must have some means of

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113. Kelly M. Kapic, *A Little Book for New Theologians: Why and How to Study Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 47.

self-criticism as well as criticism of the culture around it.”<sup>114</sup> By rejecting any authority except that exercised by feminist consciousness, feminist theology does not have any means for this self-critique: “Feminist theology is adept at exposing the evils of the patriarchy deeply rooted in society and the church. But what norm does it recognize for criticizing its own principles and practices?”<sup>115</sup> For Grenz and Olson, this is a serious problem for any theology that raises a “critical principle” drawn from the consciousness of a particular group of people—whether philosophers or the oppressed—and uses it to determine what is and what is not normative in Scripture.”<sup>116</sup>

Ireland critiques postcolonial rereading of the Bible as “playing up certain aspects of the text at the expense of the broader story.”<sup>117</sup> Ireland asks, “Does postcolonial theory overwhelm the smaller narrative with its own metanarrative of oppression and liberation? And what does it say to those who would affirm the orthodox view of the Bible as God’s Word? Is the oppositional approach to the biblical text compatible with a higher view of the

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114. Stanley Grenz & Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 234.

115. Grenz & Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 234-5.

116. Grenz & Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 235. They quote Donald Bloesch in saying, “When a theology becomes consciously ideological, as in some forms of feminist and liberation theologies, it is bound to lose sight of the transcendent divine criterion, the living Word of God, by which alone it can determine the validity of its social valuations.”

117. Ireland, “Postcolonial Theology,” 685.

Bible?"<sup>118</sup> We have seen that Kwok's view on the Bible is radically different from evangelicals who hold to the high view of Scripture – both in its nature and in its function. We have seen that she rejects the sacrality of the text, questions the usefulness of the concept of canon, and rejects the Bible as providing the norm for interpretation. For her, as quoted above, the critical principle for interpretation lies not in the Bible itself, but in the community of women and men who read the Bible and, through their dialogical imagination, appropriate it for their own liberation.

But who defines this concept of liberation? What is the standard by which they would know that they have or have not achieved this liberation? How would they resolve the difference notions of liberation held by different people within their own postcolonial feminist camp (not to mention the difference of opinions on what is true/false, good/bad, and beautiful/ugly)? How about those feminists who still hold relatively more conservative theology than them? Do their experiences and religious views matter? Experience is indeed a valid source for theology, but it should not be the norming norm (Scripture should). Experience should be shaped by Scripture, rather than being that which authoritatively shapes our knowledge of Scripture.

*On Truth.* Postcolonial feminists tend to problematize the power dynamics in biblical interpretation and theology, even the text of the Bible itself. Feminists tend to problematize the patriarchal

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118. IreLand, "Postcolonial Theology," 685.

sources/authors of the text, interpretation, and theology, while postcolonialists problematize the colonizing forces. However, to say that a statement/interpretation/doctrine came from a particular source/author is one thing, to affirm its truthfulness or falsehood is another thing. Is it possible that an interpretation and theology produced by a male or by a colonizer be truthful? Of course. Postcolonial feminists like Kwok tend to conflate the difference between the source/author of interpretation and theology and the truthfulness of them, assuming that any interpretation and theology produced by male and by those influenced by colonization must be wrong and thereby must be rejected. Kwok even problematizes the Bible itself, because she does not believe that the Bible is the reliable and trustworthy Word of God. Kwok does not seem to take into account the transcendent factors, i.e. the work of the Holy Spirit and the good providence of God that allow finite, fallen, and fragile human beings to become human authors of the Bible, to engage in biblical interpretation and to construct a theology that is true – despite their finite, fallen, and fragile nature as human being.

*On Identity.* “Can we be a postcolonial feminist and still be a Christian?” This is an important question. With Kwok’s concept of dialogical imagination and multiscriptural hermeneutics, it is difficult to maintain Christian identity and the catholicity of Christian faith as handed down from generation to generation by the church catholic. Kwok does not see anything special with the Bible and the catholic tradition that should shape our identity as a Christian. Her concept of

multiscriptural hermeneutics place any tradition on the equal footing with the Bible and Christian tradition, and we are continually shaping and being shaped by all of these equally-authoritative texts and traditions. As we engage in mutual dialogue with people from multiple backgrounds, we will construct meaning and identity for ourselves – and who knows how different that meaning and identity construction will be compared to our initial Christian identity. Identity must assume the existence of some constants in changing contexts; continuities in discontinuities. Identity must also assume the same origin. For Christians, “the unity of Christian tradition may be determined by its narrative continuity, but its identity depends also on its recognizable link with a fixed point of origin: the life and death of Jesus Christ.”<sup>119</sup> Kwok’s theological method does not seem to leave room for this.

## **Conclusion**

Kwok’s postcolonial feminist theology reminds evangelicals of our own blind spots, of the marginalized voices that always need to be heard, of the temptation of power for finite, fallen and finite biblical scholars and theologians like us, and of the deeply contextual and situational nature of any theological construction. However, as Grenz and Olson remind us, “Without the objective norm of the transcultural Word of God, Christianity becomes whatever any

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119. Vincent Brümmer, “The Identity of the Christian Tradition,” in *Identity and Change in the Christian Tradition*, eds. Marcel Sarot & Gijsbert van den Brink (Frankfurt: Peter Lang), 1999.

individual or group says it is."<sup>120</sup> Without the transcendent Word of God, our theology will be reduced only to the projection of our individual or social identities, which eventually will exclude those who embrace different individual or social identities.

By learning about postcolonial feminist theology, evangelicals are reminded that our theology must always be contextual, but never to the expense of losing our canonical integrity and catholic fidelity. A truly evangelical contextual theology must be missional, a way of continuing the same drama that has been inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in different cultural contexts. This missional dimension is lacking in Kwok's notion of dialogical imagination. An evangelical contextual theology must indeed embrace a dialogical hermeneutics, which involves dialogue (better: triologue) between the canon, creed, and context, but such dialogue will always be normed by the Triune God's speech-acts in His Holy Scripture.

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120. Grenz & Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 235.

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