

Decolonial Futures : Intercultural and Interreligious Intelligence for Theological Education

Christine J. Hong. *Decolonial Futures: Intercultural and Interreligious Intelligence for Theological Education*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021. 226 pp. \$100.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 978149857936-0.

In *Decolonial Futures*, Christine Hong, Assistant Professor of Educational Ministry at Columbia Theological Seminary, invites readers to dream of a decolonial future for theological education. According to Hong, “Theological education is experiencing a crisis of conscience. Despite vocal and public commitments to justice and liberation, institutions of theological education are still ultimately colonial and Christian enterprises” (1). In order to save ourselves from this crisis, we must not focus on what to do; rather, we must examine who we are and dream of who we could be. An essential part of this dreaming involves deconstruction and reconstruction. We must address the ways that colonialism has influenced and continues to influence theological education. This includes theological libraries and the institutions of which they are a part. This acknowledgement is an essential part of deconstruction. While we deconstruct, we can also begin the process of reconstruction. These deconstructive and reconstructive efforts are not progressive, rather they are iterative and work in tandem. Hong believes that intercultural and interreligious intelligence will guide us through this two-pronged process.

Decolonial Futures begins by deconstructing the various problematic features of colonialism within theological education. The work of deconstruction involves “undoing competency,” “unbinding liberation,” “upsetting the white, Christian, patriarchy,” and “uncivilizing teaching and learning.” Many times, conversations about cultural and religious intelligence invoke the necessity of competency; however, Hong argues that competency itself is a vestige of colonialism. Instead of competency, she suggests that humility is more helpful, particularly as we seek to decolonize theological education. In her words, “Intercultural and interreligious intelligence at its core is about curiosity, the desire to know and be known [and] builds upon the foundations of basic cultural and religious literacy...” (22). In addition, “intercultural and interreligious intelligence requires a posture of humble modesty...” (23). Also, acknowledging the ways that whiteness supports colonialism is key. The fact that librarianship is overwhelmingly a White profession cannot be ignored. That present reality, as well as our histories, must be a point of reckoning for theological librarians. How do we as theological libraries and librarians reinforce colonial, white values? The work of deconstructing is difficult, but necessary.

Decolonial Futures ends with reconstructing a new way of doing theological education that is truly decolonial. The work of reconstruction involves “reclaiming epistemologies,” “retelling histories,” “reframing religious and cultural borderlands,” and “restoring genealogies.” There are various sources of knowledge, and we all draw upon these varied resources. A decolonial future acknowledges this reality and seeks to expand and reclaim the myriad of epistemologies. In a similar vein, the work of reconstruction involves the sharing of stories and the genealogies that have formed, and possibly malformed, us. We must also practice humility and hospitality as we seek to dismantle false binaries and boundaries. In these ways, we can begin to reconstruct a decolonial future.

The text is interspersed with many metaphors, personal stories, and a multitude of questions. In fact, the text encourages you to genuinely reflect while reading. Even though Hong introduces many colonial and decolonial theories, she makes these more accessible by sharing practical sug-

gestions and experiences. The author also inserts personal stories that bring much of the theories to life. In this way, the text is very much a work of practical theology.

Much of the text focuses upon the ways that teaching and pedagogy can decolonize theological education. Hong offers many different ways that teaching and learning can help decolonize. Borrowing from Maria Harris, everything institutions of theological education do, teaches. Libraries are a vital partner in the teaching and learning process. While Hong does not directly invoke the role of theological libraries, she does name the ways that libraries have been complicit in colonialism. In the midst of discussing the ways to restore genealogies as a way of addressing the effects of colonialism, Hong states, “The way we organize and catalog knowledge...in academic libraries...is itself a colonial enterprise” (158). Given this reality, theological librarians, who are an essential part of theological education, must think seriously, both personally and institutionally, about the ways they are complicit in colonialism. At the same time, they must ask, “What is the role of theological libraries in decolonizing theological education?” This could involve expanding collections to include resources from various cultural and religious traditions as well as the work of minoritized scholars. This could also involve partnerships that help archive, collect, and curate cultural and religious artifacts. In many ways, the possibilities are endless, if librarians only dare to dream.

For those who are involved in library instruction and information literacy efforts, this text holds much promise. When teaching, librarians must remain aware of the ways that information and libraries support colonialism, while seeking to decolonize the library and its pedagogies. Librarians must also critically interrogate the ways that they personally support colonialism. Approaches like critical pedagogy, which arises from the work of Paulo Freire, can be helpful in this regard, as critical information literacy encourages librarians to honor the epistemologies of learners, while encouraging all to critically examine information production and impact. In several places, Hong connects the work of colonialism to a reliance upon text (and spoken word), above all other modes, for scholarly communication. She provides historical and theoretical evidence for this troubling reality. As librarians explore the ways to participate in decolonizing theological education, perhaps the promotion of multimodal scholarship could be one avenue for action.

Overall, this book serves as a strong introduction to the ways that colonialism impacts institutions of theological education, while also introducing the ways that decolonialism can begin to address these. This work will require constant, vigilant, purposeful efforts and cannot be engaged alone. As Hong says, librarians must become “co-conspirators with each other” (163). This text can help theological librarians critically reflect upon the influences of colonialism in their lives and libraries. Of course, instruction librarians will benefit much from Hong’s work, given its focus upon theological teaching and pedagogy. Also, this book is especially impactful for those who benefit from whiteness in institutions and libraries. All who care about the future of theological education and libraries should consider reading this book. Perhaps they can then work together toward a hopeful, new beginning, where all can flourish.

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