

BOOK REVIEW

**Olofinjana, Israel Oluwole, Wise, David and Reifsnider, Usha (eds). 2025. *Polyphonic God: Exploring Intercultural Theology, Churches and Justice***

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Reviewed by Patrick Todjeras

This timely edited volume emerges from the conviction that the future of the Church – at least in the UK – will be irreducibly intercultural or it will be diminished. Set against a postmodern, secular, and sharply polarized Britain in which public discourse regularly declares the “failure” of multiculturalism, the editors argue that intercultural churches can embody a counter-narrative of the kingdom, enacting unity-in-diversity in concrete congregational life.

The book’s central theological proposal is the metaphor of a “polyphonic God”. Drawing on Trinitarian theology, the editors suggest that the Triune God is not mono-cultural or mono-lingual but “speaks more than one language and inhabits multiple worldviews while remaining one in essence”. This metaphor provides the imaginative center of gravity for the volume: if God’s being is polyphonic, then the church as the Body of Christ is called to reflect that polyphony in its worship, leadership, and public witness. Intercultural churches are thus not a pragmatic response to demographic change but an ecclesiological imperative.

The book is structured in three parts, each combining theological reflection and grounded case studies.

Part I, “Intercultural Theology: Foundational Thought and Perspectives”, sets out the theological framework. Israel Olofinjana opens by locating intercultural ecclesiology within the contested politics of multiculturalism in Britain, making the case that intercultural churches offer a constructive alternative to both assimilationist and segregationist imaginaries. David Wise then develops the rich metaphor of “tapestry” to describe inter-ethnic congregations, emphasizing that beauty arises not from uniformity but from the careful weaving together of distinct threads. A third chapter reads Ephesians through the lens of the household of God, exploring

how the family metaphor can both illuminate and challenge contemporary intercultural church practices.

Part II, “Intercultural Churches and Practices: Ecclesiology Re-imagined”, offers a set of empirical and practical explorations. Chapters range from liturgical questions – such as Ian Collinge’s discussion of “re-tuning” worship for a culturally diverse age – to congregational narratives from across the UK. We hear of a Korean diaspora church in transition, of Greenford Baptist Church’s long-term journey towards intercultural community, of an Edinburgh congregation seeking to live “among the nations, for the nations”, and of the complexities of identity formation captured in the disarming question, “What even is my culture?” These chapters will be of particular interest to practitioners, as they do not present idealised success stories but rather processes marked by partial steps, tensions, and ongoing negotiation.

Part III, “Intercultural Justice: Racial Justice and Reconciliation”, explicitly connects intercultural ecclesiology with theologies and practices of justice. Here, the volume most clearly fulfils its stated ambition to bring together three conversations often pursued separately: intercultural church, mission, and racial justice. Kate Coleman’s contribution on “just leadership” foregrounds the cultivation of radical empathy as a means of confronting systemic injustice. Sharon Prentis reflects on “intercultural life together” as an embodied form of racial justice in worship and mission, while Mohan Seevaratnam explores a spirituality of holiness that refuses to separate piety from solidarity. A chapter by Dominic and Catherine De Souza envisages intercultural churches as catalysts for racial justice, and Usha Reifsnider’s concluding reflection on antiracist mission in postcolonial Britain situates these ecclesial experiments within longer histories of empire, migration, and majority-world Christianity.

Several features make *Polyphonic God* a significant contribution to the literature on ecclesial futures. First, the book is unapologetically grounded in the British context, with particular attention to the interplay between Black Majority Churches, historic denominations, and new intercultural congregations. This rootedness allows for thick description: the reader encounters specific places, leaders, and congregations rather than abstract models. At the same time, many of the dynamics explored – diaspora leadership, “reverse mission”, contested narratives of national identity – will resonate far beyond the UK.

Second, the volume weaves together voices from different social locations and disciplines. Academics, denominational leaders, and local practitioners all contribute chapters, modelling the very polyphony it commends. This plurality is not merely about representation; it shapes the theological method. Missiology, political theology, practical theology, and leadership studies are brought into conversation in ways that resist easy systematization but mirror the complexity of lived intercultural church.

Third, the editors insist that racial justice is not an optional “add-on” to intercultural ecclesiology but integral to it. Particularly in Part III, the book challenges any

notion of “diverse” churches that leave underlying power structures untouched. The insistence that intercultural congregations must attend to histories of colonialism, whiteness, and structural racism gives the volume a prophetic edge and positions it well within ongoing debates about decolonizing theology and mission.

There are, however, some limitations that readers of *Ecclesial Futures* may wish to note. The UK focus, while a strength, also means that conversation partners from other regions – especially from the Majority World – are present mainly through diaspora voices in Britain rather than through sustained engagement with churches in Africa, Asia, or Latin America themselves. Comparative case studies might have further enriched the argument, particularly given the global scope implied by the metaphor of a polyphonic God.

Methodologically, the book sits somewhere between empirical research and narrative theology. Many chapters offer descriptive accounts of congregational journeys, but the precise research methods employed (sampling, data collection, analytical frames) are not always transparent. Readers looking for robust empirical studies of intercultural congregations may therefore need to supplement this volume with more methodologically explicit research. Conversely, those seeking a tightly argued systematic ecclesiology may find the polyphony of voices occasionally diffuse; the editors’ introduction and conclusion could perhaps have drawn more explicit thematic threads together.

Finally, while the Trinitarian metaphor of polyphony is suggestive and generative, it would benefit from further critical interrogation. Questions remain about how this image relates to classical doctrines of divine simplicity and unity, and how it avoids projecting contemporary ideals of diversity back into the divine life. Some readers might also wish for a more explicit engagement with pneumatology, sacramentality, and eschatology in relation to intercultural ecclesial practice.

These caveats notwithstanding, *Polyphonic God* is a rich and provocative resource for those concerned with the shape of the church in an era of migration, fragmentation, and renewed struggles for racial justice. It will be of particular value to practitioners and leaders who are already engaged in intercultural ministry and seeking theological language for what they intuitively sense on the ground, as well as to scholars exploring the intersections of ecclesiology, mission, and race. For readers of *Ecclesial Futures*, the volume offers both a window into emerging intercultural church movements in Britain and an invitation to imagine how a “polyphonic” vision of God and church might reconfigure their own contexts.

## About the Reviewer

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