

## BOOK REVIEW

Jennifer C. Snow, *Mission, Race, and Empire: The Episcopal Church in Global Context* (Oxford University Press, 2023)

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I was not sure whether to read this book quickly or slowly: quickly, because I was so fascinated by the way Jennifer Snow reaches into forgotten corners of church history to re-tell the story of the Episcopal Church, or slowly, because I wanted to let each chapter settle into me so I could internalize its wisdom. As it happened, life pressures meant I read this slowly, and the result was a delightful savouring of Snow's impressive work. Snow's goal in offering another history of the Episcopal Church is to tell this story from the margins. By focusing on mission, race and empire, and especially the people who were marginalized in the church because of these pressures, she seeks to demonstrate how the Episcopal Church itself has been fashioned by these forces and contextualized in its North American context. Just as much as any people or part of the world which were the objects of its attention, the Episcopal Church has been created and re-created by mission.

Snow divides her work into three parts: pre-independence, the long 19th century and then the transformation of the church in the 20th century, particularly since World War II. I have read other histories of the Episcopal Church and taught the subject on more than one occasion, yet I found myself being introduced to Episcopalians about whom I was ignorant, such as James Solomon Russell, evangelist and church builder among rural African Americans in the post-civil war South, or Ng Ping (also known as Daniel Gee Ching Wu), whose journey took him from being kidnapped as a child in Shanghai to being one of the first Chinese Episcopal priests in the Bay Area via several years in Hawai'i. Names I knew in one context appear here in entirely new ones. Who knew, for instance, that anthropologist Margaret Mead was a consultant to a 1967 committee drafting a new rite of Christian initiation (and that her contributions were largely ignored)? Snow writes skillfully and draws on a judicious mix of primary and secondary sources to paint compelling portraits of these and other figures who have not often featured in the Episcopal Church's telling of its own story. More conventional historical figures, such as William White, William Augustus Muhlenberg or William Reed Huntingdon, also appear but within the context of the polycentric story that Snow is telling.

Where I struggled with this book is in the final section, particularly the parts covering World War II to the present. It is in this section that Snow's lens is most heavily missiological. She rightly perceives two strands in Protestant missiology in this period: the ecumenical strand embodied, in her telling, in the phrase *missio Dei* and the evangelical strand of Billy Graham, John Stott and the Lausanne Movement. Through the figure of Stephen Bayne, she traces the influence of *missio Dei* on the Episcopal Church. She then argues that it was this same missional motivation towards inclusion and justice that led to the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, the ordination of women and inclusion of LGBTQ populations. I was not convinced by these arguments. First, there is considerable variety and evolution within *missio Dei*. What Stephen Bayne meant by "mission of God" is very different from what Katharine Jefferts Schori meant. Moreover, the distance between the evangelical and ecumenical approaches is not always as distant as Snow makes out. The Five Marks of Mission, for instance, used by Jefferts Schori and others in the *missio Dei* stream, originated in work done by John Stott and others in the evangelical stream. Second, and particularly in the section on liturgical reform, I simply did not see the evidence that convinced me that liturgical reformers were motivated by *missio Dei*. They, and others, may have used similar ideas but that simply demonstrates overlap and correlation, not the causation for which Snow seems to argue. Third, the missiological lens means that other influences are not heeded. For instance, the section on women's ordination is silent on the important role the Episcopal Peace Fellowship played in this accomplishment.

In the earlier sections of the book, Snow is not afraid to ask counterfactuals – how would the church have been different, for instance, if its Mohawk communities had been part of the governance debates when the church was being formed after the Revolution? – and this makes her critical views clear. But these counterfactuals disappear in the final section of the book as Snow traces a history that leads towards greater inclusion. The impression one gets is almost an "end of history" argument that the church has hit on the right theology and now needs to assert it. This may be Snow's view, but I would have appreciated some of the same critical lens in this section as well. Indeed, there is an internal and unacknowledged tension in the book. At the outset, Snow defines mission as "the church incorporating others beyond its current boundaries." By the final section on *missio Dei*, however, Snow is documenting – and approving of – an approach to mission that is not about "incorporating others" into church but about the church's activity in the world. There was room for greater interpretive critique here.

*Mission, Race and Empire* draws on and is a worthy heir to earlier works of Episcopal church history that brings to the fore figures who have been marginalized in the church's history. In spite of my critique, I am full of admiration for this book. It will surely help all Episcopalians navigate a path forward in a changing religious landscape.

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