

Book Review

Patrick Kraye, *Introducing Intercultural Theology and Ethics: Representing Jesus in a Postcolonial World*

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Published in *Global Missiology*, www.globalmissiology.org, April 2026

Kraye, Patrick (2026). *Introducing Intercultural Theology and Ethics: Representing Jesus in a Postcolonial World*. Oxford: Regnum, ISBN: 978-1917059756 (paperback), \$16.00, pp. 177.

Many intercultural workers and organizations still operate with unconscious cultural arrogance and theological naivete. They assume that, because their theological understandings and ethical applications derive from the Bible, they are universally applicable. This sobering observation is what Patrick Kraye aims to address in *Introducing Intercultural Theology and Ethics*. Kraye judiciously explores the daunting but incarnationally necessary enterprise of encouraging new expressions of theology and ethics by indigenous believers. With three decades of experience living in Pakistan and Afghanistan, strong academic qualifications, graduate-level teaching experience, and service as executive director of an international organization, Patrick Kraye is well equipped to address theology and ethics from an intercultural perspective in the post-colonial era.

Summary

In the Introduction, Kraye observes that workers from the former colonizing countries continue to favor their culturally bounded grasp of the gospel, traditions, and religious practices as they traverse other cultures. This “coloniality” is undergirded by “biblicality,” which Kraye defines as “the universalising of one’s biblically rooted yet culturally bounded interpretation of Scripture and the unwitting sacralising of one’s own religio-cultural assumptions, norms, and values” (p. 4). This unconscious preeminence undervalues local cultural perspectives, standards, and values, eliciting anti-colonial reactions. Kraye’s book, consisting of eight chapters, aims to sensitize cross-cultural workers to this tendency and provide a biblically and theologically grounded alternative path.

Chapter 1 explores whether Western Christians’ theology is culturally bounded or interculturally open. Kraye highlights the challenge of representing Jesus across cultures while distinguishing the gospel’s essence from cultural attachments. Many faith communities in the West resist reexamining beliefs shaped by enculturation, fearing that doing so would lead to compromised beliefs or syncretism. However, engaging other cultures can deepen and enrich faith. The author critiques rigid reliance on systematic theology for creating limiting boundaries and commends biblical theology for recognizing Scripture’s diverse cultural expressions. Ultimately, he calls for a humble, discerning approach to mission—one that remains faithful to the gospel while being culturally relevant.

Chapter 2 examines how biblicality and coloniality hinder intercultural theology and ethics. Biblicality elevates culturally shaped interpretations of Scripture as universally binding, whereas coloniality imposes them on others. Drawing from Acts and Galatians, Kraye shows how early Jewish believers struggled to accept Gentiles without enforcing Jewish norms—tensions that persist today. The author urges humility, cultural immersion, and awareness of interpretive limits in mission work. By valuing local thought worlds and embracing an incarnational approach,

missionaries can minimize these barriers. Such attentiveness fosters richer theological understanding and more authentic, culturally rooted expressions of Christian faith.

Chapter 3 advocates Abraham Kuyper's theological position, which leads to humility and teachability when entering new cultures. Kraye warns against subconscious superiority rooted in theological knowledge or support systems, which can breed frustration with cultural differences. Rejecting dualistic labels of "Christian" and "non-Christian" cultures, Kraye affirms that God is active in all cultures as Creator, Preserver, Revealer, and Redeemer. A positive theology of culture recognizes both beauty and brokenness everywhere. By discerning God's prior work within communities, missionaries can present the gospel more meaningfully while honoring cultural distinctives and resisting dismissive or judgmental attitudes.

Chapter 4 argues that Christians must overcome fear of other religious cultures and recognize God's work within them. Just as first-century Jews viewed Gentiles as religiously unclean, many Christians today are wary of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Matthew's Gospel addresses a similar form of ethnocentrism by presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to bless all nations. Through 14 narrative steps—such as including Gentiles in Jesus's genealogy, highlighting the Magi, praising a Roman centurion's faith, ministering in "Galilee of the Gentiles," and ending with the Great Commission—Matthew reveals God's heart for all peoples. Adopting this global, Kuyperian perspective today means valuing the good within other cultures. A pastoral example involving a Muslim convert shows how affirming cultural goods can reduce fear, maintain family ties, and embody Christ within religious communities.

Chapter 5 uses Ephesians 5:22–33 to model intercultural theologizing that avoids rigid biblicality and colonial imposition. Employing the historical-grammatical method, Kraye distinguishes between transcultural gospel truths and Paul's contextual applications within the Greco-Roman household. While Paul worked within existing structures—such as patriarchy and slavery—he transformed their underlying assumptions through creation theology and the new creation in Christ. In marriage he upheld monogamy, permanence, and voluntary submission, reframing hierarchy through Christ's self-giving love. Husbands are called to sacrificial service and empowerment, not domination; wives are honored as equal in nature, countering views of female inferiority. Marriage becomes a sacred reflection of Christ's union with the Church. Paul's approach to discipleship affirms culture while reshaping worldview from within, fostering Spirit-led, locally grounded, transformative theologies.

Chapter 6 examines how to present the gospel meaningfully in intercultural contexts, particularly among Muslims. Kraye argues that common Western formulations—emphasizing original sin, substitutionary punishment, and forgiveness—often create misunderstanding. Muslims reject inherited sin but acknowledge personal wrongdoing and moral weakness, so insisting on "sinful nature" can become an unnecessary barrier. Likewise, describing the cross only as substitutionary punishment conflicts with Islamic assumptions about prophecy, justice, and honor. Scripture also portrays the cross as victory, redemption, and a new exodus—metaphors that may communicate more clearly. Forgiveness, often heard as moral license, should instead be framed as reconciliation and transformation. The chapter urges listening to felt needs—such as fear, oppression, and desire for moral change—and highlighting the Spirit-empowered, transformed life made possible through the whole Christ-event.

Chapter 7 introduces intercultural ethics, distinguishing cultural influence from moral relativism. While rejecting situational ethics, Kraye affirms the enduring authority of biblical

commands summarized in love of God and neighbor. Yet applying these commands requires wisdom, since Scripture includes both universal laws and context-specific applications. The Torah functioned as more than a legislative code for Israel. It was instructional wisdom shaped by its cultural setting, pointing beyond details to enduring ethical principles that promote human flourishing. Jesus fulfills and clarifies the law through “grace and truth,” providing the transcultural standard embodied in the cross and empowered by the Spirit. Thus, believers must mine Scripture for wisdom and apply Christ’s law of love appropriately within diverse cultures to form communities that reflect God’s kingdom and foster shalom.

Chapter 8 presents intercultural ethics in action. The Pentateuch’s laws were culturally bounded, intended to form ethical wisdom reflecting God’s character within specific contexts. Intercultural workers must recognize that neither their own nor their hosts’ moral frameworks perfectly align with God’s standards. Cultural perspectives shape conscience, making moral sensitivities variable across societies. While cultures share broad moral values through common grace—integrity, justice, mercy, and respect—their expressions differ, often causing misunderstanding, unnecessary obstacles, and harm. Krayer illustrates from a Pashtun context that what foreigners considered “bribery” was sanctioned by respectable locals as an alternative taxation system, “corruption” was reciprocity, and “lying” was face-saving communication. Ethical categories formed in one culture are not automatically transferable to another. Incarnational living fosters mutual understanding, enlarges moral awareness, and helps believers grow together toward God’s vision of shalom, avoiding judgmentalism and representing Christ faithfully in diverse cultural contexts.

The book concludes that intercultural theology and ethics are an ongoing, humbling journey that deconstructs assumptions, deepens dependence on Jesus, and enriches community. In a postcolonial world, believers must value all cultures, read Scripture together across differences, and pursue God’s kingdom through mutual, transformative relationships.

Analysis

In my experience, a great many global workers need to heed Krayer’s challenge to set their sights beyond merely adapting to local cultural ways of communicating and living. Instead, cross-cultural missionaries must engage, understand, and work within others’ worldviews. With cultural sensitivity, theological insight, and spiritual mettle, Krayer unmask missionaries’ mistaken assumptions. Chief among them are the universalizing and hallowing of one’s own tradition’s theological and ethical formulations, which, although true or beneficial in one’s own context, are culturally bounded and often irrelevant to other cultures.

The breadth and depth of scholarship, informed exegesis, and sound hermeneutics should pass muster with academics, yet the clear and plain style makes this work wholly accessible to practitioners. While contextual theologizing has gained a hearing in some theological circles, Krayer’s proposals on how missionaries think theologically and present the gospel need to be heard by global workers. Western theological training institutions require multiple theology courses, but ethics courses are often optional, and intercultural ethics is absent altogether. The analysis and endorsement of alternative ethical behaviors in Krayer’s final two chapters are extraordinarily insightful, uniquely challenging, and likely disconcerting.

Krayer is attuned to fears, concerns, and potential sources of resistance and addresses them astutely. Nevertheless, I expect his book will elicit criticism and negative reactions in some

quarters. Questioning culturally shaped interpretations may sound like questioning Scripture itself or undermining biblical inerrancy or clarity. Some may view critiques of “coloniality” as politically driven or influenced by secular academic trends rather than grounded in Scripture. Some will react to any mention of deconstructing theological assumptions, a process that they deem destabilizing and threatening to long-held beliefs and communal identity. Those deeply influenced by confessional or systematic traditions may resist prioritizing biblical theology or contextual reinterpretation. Seeing that missionary movements shaped by Western theology have borne much fruit in many contexts, some will attribute lack of fruitfulness primarily to the hardheartedness of resistant peoples. Affirming cultural beauty and God’s activity in all cultures may appear to blur boundaries between Christianity and other religions.

I am comfortable with Krayer’s rationale for giving token gifts to government administrators as an expression of reciprocity and not as bribery, but I expect that not all will agree. Krayer might have added a caveat that, in some other non-Western cultures, the lines of bribery and reciprocity may be drawn differently than they were where he lived. He might also have reminded his readers that factors beyond biblicality and coloniality may contribute to disagreements regarding appropriate intercultural ethics. For instance, individuals in the same culture and faith community may have different *personal* convictions over ethical situations, just as they do about drinking alcohol, eating meat, or frankness versus politeness. However, these are mere quibbles, given the outstanding and unique contribution this book makes.

Those who are crossing cultures to serve Christ with unconscious coloniality will likely be frustrated, censorious of local culture, and limited in their effectiveness if they ignore this book. Brave the challenge and wrestle with it!