Introduction

Alien/nation, Liberation, and the Postcolonial Underground

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens.[1]

The Subway

Like a great subterranean serpent, we churn along in the maze beneath the city. Warm and close, avoiding eye contact as if our life depends on it, like cells in an organism guarding our glimmer of identity. We are a beast clothed in many colors. Suits of success gleam with morning confidence. Outfits of night work rumple in exhaustion. Others in stoic tidiness or in sass and sullenness face one more thankless day. The clean glow of a bible-reader awaits another day. Within the blurring roar arise a riff of Spanish, a lilt of Caribbean, a clip of Wall Street, a jolt of Chinese, a bar of Harlem–and fall into the rumble of our serpentine indifference. Suddenly, a young woman of North Asian provenance bursts into uncontrolled laughter. The collective beast startles but pretends to notice nothing. Then we see that her gaze is locked onto the eyes of a woman seated across from her, who grips a huge cello case between her legs. She is also Asian or Asian American, and convulsed with giggles. They look away, trying to break the circuit. But they can't help glancing at each other again, triggering another cascade. A few of us look at one another, yearning to share the joke. But the women primly tuck in their faces and get off at the next stop.

Just an ordinary moment. The parable won't carry much freight. But it lets us set the scene for this book. It is a metropolitan scene, moving at a fast pace. Yet few rural landscapes are free of its effects. A U.S. scene, in fact, but it could be elsewhere. The cultural diversity generated by immigration, travel, and globalization accustoms us to ever new levels of cultural and ethnic multiplicity. The international blurs into the national. "We" do not quite know who is "us" and who is "them." Neither race nor language can any longer define nationality. Our species' togetherness is

[1]Lev. 19:33f.

becoming more apparent–as is all that separates us. Fear lurks in the blurred boundaries. And how manipulable is that fear–that the "alien" will disguise itself as "us," is secretly invading, will strike again. (The subway line we ride lost its southernmost station to the attack on the World Trade Towers.) At any moment the borderlines of religion, of economics, of nation state, of gender or sex or race sharpen and cut through the postmodern pleroma of pluralism.

Our differences divide us all the more harshly in the face of our planetary interdependence. For we are now so globally–economico-info-techno-militarily–linked that we are paradoxically all the more divided. The injustice whereby the resources of the planets and the gifts of its peoples are distributed is ever more "in your face." Some are marked as "aliens"–regardless of legal status–others as "citizens." One nation's hegemony is alienating the rest of the world, yet cannot keep that world out.

There is a wild laughter that breaks through the scene. It infects but does not unify us. We are–all together, all apart–in a state of alien/nation. Yet do we not yearn for that intimacy? Would we "love the alien as ourselves"? "the alien who resides with us"? within us?

A Mazing Grace

Who is observing, in the perspective of the parable? Who is this textual "we"? There are three of us gathering these essays. We live at this moment in the greater metropolitan area of New York; one of us is Puerto Rican, one is European, one is Euro-American. "We" are part alien. (But unlike a science fiction crossbreeding of extraterrestrial and human, we are very much of the earth!) We work across worlds, with multiple imbalances of power. At the center of empire, in the terms of its language, we share a project, a space, a discourse. It is as Christians and as theologians that we find ourselves together in this work.

We have brought together a set of voices who in dramatically varied ways are all reflecting on the relation between what is called "postcolonial theory" and the tasks of Christian theology. Many are "aliens" to or in the United States. All articulate an alienation from the predominant patterns of unification and division that constellate present planetary arrangements, patterns that conform increasingly to the demands of a transnational economy and the dictates of a single superpower with absolutely unprecedented global reach. All actively–and religiously–resist the uncritical fusions of Christianity with such economic or military globalizations. All work with the church in its struggle to face its long implication in empire as a present and not only historical condition.

The "we" of this volume is embedded in the church, and the church is also in our figurative subway–not just as the lone visible Bible-reader!

All of us in this diasporic volume participate actively in a global Christianity. We affirm that church, which offers local spaces for the nurture of the gifts of difference–and a global space for the critique of globalization itself. We practice that critical nurture as both a spirituality and a politics of liberation. We have found insight for this practice within the discourses of "postcolonialism," and particularly of postcolonial theory. Indeed, this theory helps us to figure out not just *what to do*–but *who we are.* It helps us, as liberation theology has, to identify our social location in terms of power relations: Who is oppressor, who is oppressed? It helps us to understand, as have, for instance, the analyses by women of color, that many are multidimensionally oppressed. But it especially highlights the multiple and often contradictory elements of who "we" are. Our colors and cultures, our sexualities and nationalities, crisscross each of our identities, forming complex mazes of power. Whatever our bloodlines or our religious backgrounds, we find ourselves within these mazes. We find these mazes within us.

This labyrinth of identities winds through an intriguing space: the space of postcolonial theory, an "in between space" in which the boundaries between identity and difference, between cultures, nationalities, and subjects, are called into question. Here, there appears what Homi Bhabha calls the "postcolonial hybrid"; a famous character of postcolonial theory, this one wears many guises: misfit, mestiza, mulatto, half-breed, Creole, mongrel, Gypsy, queer, krip, immigrant, outcast–the ones whose language or look keep them always somehow alien. Even perhaps with one another. The ones who at the crossing of the Jordan mispronounce "shibboleth." Who cannot pass. And also those who can, but never know the feeling of home.

Postcolonial theory offers guiding insight into the mazes: zones of mixture and confusion, threat and discovery. Yet some of its key texts read like mazes themselves, dense with theory. And the most influential of postcolonial theorists–Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha–are literary theorists working outside of any religious institution. Its terms require some decoding–indeed, some effort of concretization, contextualization, and critique–before they can support a theological project. But we find value in the effort. Theology always depends on the philosophies and social theories of its time in order to transcode the Christian witness. Moreover, Christian thinkers have begun to access these works, especially in biblical studies, as the work of Fernando Segovia, R. S. Sugirtharajah, Stephen Moore, Musa Dube, Roland Boer, Tat-Siong Benny Liew, and others shows. Yet as one of these biblical scholars puts it–in a essay within this volume: "While these disciplines are coming to terms with the reality of colonialism, what is striking about systematic theology is the reluctance of its practitioners

to address the relation between European colonialism and the field."[2] This volume, composed largely by theologians (who may or may not call themselves "systematic"), works to overcome the hesitation. Theologians–those within this volume and a couple besides, notably Kwok Pui-lan and Marcella Althaus-Reid–have worked for several years to formulate postcolonial theologies.

So the maze runs through the church–and the church runs through the maze! The ancient church was born a hybrid of the Jewish religion with the plurality of cultures mingling within the Roman Empire. Later, Christianity seemed to become identifiable with European or white civilization. Today, another global hybridity, with both its wounds and its potentiality, is again redefining Christianity. The old European and American denominations, if they are growing at all, are most likely and most vividly growing in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. And within North American cities, immigrant churches have altered the religious landscape. They provide home-space in the in-between, amidst the alien-nation. Sometimes they share buildings with mainly European American congregations–sharing space more than they share stories. They will add their own buildings to a scene modulated no longer only by the architectures of Christianity and Judaism (an ancient hybridity and hardly a settled interchange in itself), but also by mosques, Hindu temples, centers of Santería, Yoga, or Zen. They will all retain links to other homes, even as they are willy-nilly Americanized, hybridized, mixed. And Christianity, however tightly it caulks its cracks and fissures, springs leaks in all directions: interreligiously without; interculturally, nationally, ethnically within.

What of the traditionally white congregation–there where, as one of our parents preached it half a century ago, "We are gathered together for the great hour of segregation"? Even here the alien, the other, appear more than ever in the pew–or pulpit: in the African-American, Korean-American, Chinese-American–hyphens that at once divide and connect. Yet do not even the hyphenated identities of the Euro-American–Italian, Irish, Scottish, German, English, French, Scandinavian–have tales to tell? With their own complex local and global histories, older stories of migration and of alienation, of courage, shame, and hope–must they accept their homogenization? Must the "white-washing" of Christianity continue to bleach out the colors of all our lives? Or might we find redemptive resources along the entire spectrum of Christian–and human–complexity? Can liberation not begin anywhere in the cultural labyrinth?

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[2]See R. S. Sugirtharajah's "Complacencies and Cul-de-sacs," chap. 1 in this volume.

Liberation and Postcolonialism

The engagement of postcolonial theory by theology is incoherent outside of the effects of liberation theology. The liberation theologies of the Americas have been the ones to thematize "liberation" in the biblical tradition, to lift the tradition of exodus and its prophetic replays into Christian prominence. Indeed, it is liberation theology that has made us conscious that the church is political by default if it is not political on purpose–and has fostered solidarity among groups as diverse as base Christian communities all through Latin America, black churches in the U.S., Minjung movements of Korea, and throughout North American and European Christianity.

Beginning in the late 1960s, liberation theology marked a watershed in the history of Western theology. Inspired within Roman Catholicism by the liberalizations of the great Second Vatican Council, and within North America especially by the civil rights and Black Power movements, it took as its starting point the "preferential option for the poor." It claimed that God's love demands a commitment to those who lived in conditions that denied life and thus were contrary to the reign of God proclaimed by Jesus. Hence, liberation theology placed questions of appropriate praxis at the center of the theological task. This shift of focus from orthodoxy to orthopraxy inspired a number of social groups to give theological voice to the particularities of their own struggles for liberation. As these theologies developed and diversified, multiple forms of oppression were being identified alongside the issues of economic injustice to the south and racial injustice in the north. The range of racial/ethnic injustices beyond the U.S. black/white binary, then sexism beyond and within the church, the corollary question of heterosexism, as well as ecological devastation rendered up new starting points for theological reflection–all bristling with embodied and absolute urgency. Each disclosed a new axis of identity in the particularity of each context. Liberation theologies–including now the modes of feminist, womanist, and mujerista theology–continued to agitate and evolve. Yet their contexts overlapped, colluded, leaked into each other as they struggled to represent a utopia, a future free of the larger topos of oppression and its internalized effects.

By the 1990s, these theological methods began to recognize complications that early liberation movements did not face: the oppressive dynamics internal to oppressed communities; the ambiguous and shifting complexities of national, cultural, even sexual identities; and the difficulties of creating sustainable coalitions–including coalitions with progressives who do not embody a specifically oppressed identity. At the same time it began to realize that the very modern Marxist style of oppositional analysis–the purely oppressed revolting against the merely

oppressive–offered limited resources for addressing the complexities of postmodern power structures. As Latin American theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid explains, "Oppression is perhaps what we cannot have in common, because oppression is built in overlapping levels of multiple and contradictory elements which, according to context, produce variably dense, saturated effects...[A]ny theology concerned with issues of wealth and poverty needs to consider more the incoherence of oppression and its multiple dimensions rather than its commonalities."[3] The decentralized powers of a post–cold war, globalized capitalism flexibly yoked to a single, undeterred superpower challenged liberationist theory and practice.[4]

All these challenges have motivated some theologians to search for additional interpretive frameworks to support the political dimensions of the Christian witness. We persist within the force field of liberation theology. No political theology could "supersede" and in some fundamental way transcend the historic work of liberation theology. But within our shifting and diverging contexts, where the very notion of a Christian or a poor or a black or a lesbian or a feminist or a Latina "identity" does not move on straight tracks, we seek fresh insights into emancipation. We need–as theology has always needed, whether it admits it or not–timely theories that can better attune our faith to the new problems and potentialities of its context. The contributors to this volume find in postcolonial theory an important resource for this task.

Defining Postcolonialism

"Postcolonial Theory" is a subset of "postcolonial studies," itself a subset of a "postcolonialism." This anthology attends with considerable consistency to the theory but roves across the wide, transdisciplinary range of the "postcolonial." First, one does not want to fall into a very common confusion: that "postcolonial theory" is presuming the end of colonialism. "Post" in this discourse never means simply "after" but also "beyond"–as an ethical intention and direction. Western imperialism is the frame of reference for the term "postcolonial," which emerges in the struggles of the colonies of Europe for their independence. As Fernando Segovia, a leading exponent of postcolonial discourse within Christian studies, explains, the "postcolonial" may be understood especially in two ways, "each with its own significant semantic range." It covers "a

[3]Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 168f.

[4]For a detailed discussion on the relation between liberation hermeneutics and postcolonial biblical criticism, cf. R. S. Sugirtharajah's "Convergent Trajectories? Liberation Hermeneutics and Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," in *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 101–23.

temporal (what-follows-the-colonial) as well as a critical application (what-questions-the-colonial)."[5]

The first designates the "historico-political": the "period of time following the formal separation or 'independence' of a 'colony' or group of colonies from a governing 'empire.'"[6] Within the framework of Western imperialism, this might include the end of the eighteenth century, when the United States reeled off from the British Empire.[7] In the literature of the postcolonial it usually refers to the entire nineteenth century, during which Latin America and much of the Caribbean achieved independence from Europe; and to the twentieth-century process, largely culminating after the Second World War, during which most of Africa, Asia, and Oceania gained political independence. But the achievement of the status of nationhood and freedom from European empires–while profoundly coveted and achieved at great cost–did not solve the problem of imperialism for the (formerly) colonized peoples.

Other forms of domination, largely driven by a globalizing capitalism, quickly replaced the formal structures of empire. The concepts of "neo-colonial," "imperialist," and "neo-imperial" articulate this condition of informal subjection of a sovereign state to a superpower and/or to transnational corporate priorities. Forms of formal colonialism, however, also survive alongside of neo-colonial ones. As Robert Young points out, "The list of colonies, dependent, trust and unincorporated territories, overseas departments, and other such names signifying colonial status in some form is still surprisingly long (still-extant colonies that enjoy a wide diversity of labels designating their subordinate status as dependent territories include British Gibraltar, the Falklands/Malvinas and a dozen other islands; Danish Greenland; Dutch Antilles; French Guiana, Martinique, Réunion, St. Pierre and Miquelon, off Newfoundland; US Puerto Rico, Samoa, Virgin Islands; Spanish Ceuta, Melilla and the Canary Islands)."[8]

So this is where the second sense of postcolonial comes into play: Its "post" indicates not a chronological but a critical idea, and so indicates the intention to go *beyond* the colonial in all its forms. Postcolonial analysis does highlight the historical effects of the European empires, with both their settler and exploitation colonies. But it pursues this historical archeology in order to shed light on the aftermath of that

[5]Fernando F. Segovia, "Interpreting beyond Borders: Postcolonial Studies and Diasporic Studies in Biblical Criticism," in *Interpreting beyond Borders,* ed. Fernando F. Segovia, vol. 3 of *The Bible and Postcolonialism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 12.

[6]Ibid.

[7]With the declared intention of founding its own empire. "Even as early as 1783, the United States was, to Washington, a 'rising empire.'" Richard W. Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), 74.

[8]Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 3.

imperialism. This aftermath persists. And thus, postcolonialism is a discourse of resistance to any subsequent related projects of dominance–as, for instance, those of economic globalization and United States hyperpower.

As Sugirtharajah characterizes this strategy of resistance, however, it is irreducible to a simple and direct oppositionalism: "Postcolonial discourse is not about the territorial ejection of imperial powers or about learning, Caliban-like, the art of cursing the evils of empire. Rather, it is an active interrogation of the hegemonic systems of thought, textual codes, and symbolic practices which the West constructed in its domination of colonial subjects. In other words, postcolonialism is concerned with the question of cultural and discursive domination."[9] We are not, then, pursuing a traditional style of *anti*-imperialism, with its rigid binarism. Rather, we espouse a genre of inquiry highly sensitive to textual nuance, historical ambiguity, and the ways that colonial power shapes not only the outer limits of the globe but also the inner reaches of subjectivity. Domination deforms not only politics but also language–*logos* itself–and those who utter it.

Even the most sublime religious language has been transcoded for imperial purposes. Therefore, the prophetic tradition always challenged first of all its own communities. Indeed, liberation theology can be said to have pursued a tri-focal critique (1) of the oppressive powers of state, economy, and culture; (2) of how the church has absorbed, justified, and benefited from these powers; and (3) also of the ways the people, the poor, the oppressed (often but not always considered as Christians) have themselves internalized oppressive patterns, requiring hence a process of conscientization, a "pedagogy of the oppressed."[10] Postcolonial theory will further our understanding of this three-way circulation. It will help in the analysis of the troubling ways that Christianity, born as a movement of a colonized people, could also come to mimic the empire.

Postcolonialism and Theory

What is called "postcolonial theory" emerged in the aftermath of the British Empire from studies of the construction in English literature of the colonial relationship, and reciprocally of the literary representations of the relationship by writers from the former colonies. In the academy it is located in the intersection of literary, subaltern, diasporic, or cultural studies. But as "theory" it also makes use of what is called–always problematically–postmodern thought. Thus, thinkers such as Bhabha, Said, and Spivak (the "holy trinity" of postcolonial theory mentioned

[9]R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism, Bible and Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998), 17.

[10]Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000).

above), as well as Robert Young, Trinh Minh Ha, Rey Chow, Chela Sandoval, and others, draw freely, if critically, on the work of leading poststructuralists Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva.

Some postcolonial thinkers would eschew this largely French school of theory as just another wave of Eurocentrism. Thus, "postmodernism is still seen as Eurocentric in its conceptual and aesthetic thrust."[11] It disappoints in "its lack of a theory of resistance; its failure to cultivate a transformative agenda due to its detached attitudes; its revalidation of the local and its celebration of differences, which are liable to lead to further alienation of subalterns thus assigned to their own space and concerns; its repudiation of and skepticism toward grand-narratives, which fail to take into account liberation as an emancipatory metastory..."[12] With Sugirtharajah's summation of the critique, we underscore the crucial bond that any postcolonial revision of theology will want to maintain with liberation theology. Nonetheless, the tension within postcolonial studies will not be resolved by any curt dismissal of French theory.

"Postcolonial theory," in fact, also challenges any hegemony of Eurocentric high theory, but it does so in part through its positive engagement of the French paradigm. What does it find there? Postcolonial theorists have found in the French poststructuralists a prism for the autodeconstruction of Eurocentrism. For as Robert Young observes, "deconstruction [is] a deconstruction of the concept, the authority, and assumed primacy of, the category of 'the West.'"[13] Above all, postcolonial theorists borrow the critique of "the same"–of the identity of the dominant Western subject, as an imperial identity that is established by its violation of difference, that is, its appropriation or annihilation of the Other. Derrida has focused on the "ontotheology" of this sameness, Foucault on the regime of "power/knowledge" that advances its sciences, Lacan and Kristeva on the construction of its subjectivity. All poststructuralists point to the cultural power dynamics at work in this ontology that reduces otherness, alterity, difference to a unifying sameness.[14]

This ontology emanates from Greek metaphysics. But it was early absorbed by Christianity; indeed, it became the foundation for Christian theology. It conceives of "being" as changeless self-identity over and

[11]Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics,* 15.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Robert J. C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 19.

[14]For discussions on the relation of poststructuralist and postcolonial theory, cf. Stephen Moore's "Postcolonialism," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretations,* ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Setting to Work of Deconstruction," in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999) and Young, *White Mythologies.*

against change and difference. These abstractions did not remain abstract. They exercised great historical force. Once Christianity converted the Roman Empire, this logic of sameness over difference stimulated a Christian allergy to difference. And it could conveniently collude with the imperial project of a homogenizing dominance. Hence, the deconstruction of these ontological assumptions is indispensable to any counter-imperial Christian theology.

Through the biblical witnesses, however, Christian tradition bears the scars of imperial forms that predate Constantine and even Christianity itself. For almost the entire history of the biblical corpus is formed in reaction to one empire or another. Not surprisingly, perhaps, it is in the area of biblical studies and early Christian history that postcolonial theory has already generated a considerable library.[15] Postcolonial theory facilitates new readings of scripture and of the history of the interpretation of scripture, helping to uncover their complex ties to empire. As liberation hermeneutics have focused on the anti-imperial thematics of scripture, it identifies itself unreservedly with the biblical witness. By contrast, postcolonial readings operate with a more troubling ambivalence, tracing both decolonizing and colonizing themes within scripture. They also "mine the Bible for its liberative strands. However, it is important to be mindful that this same Bible contains elements of bondage and disenfranchisement. What postcolonial biblical criticism does is to make this ambivalence and paradox clear and visible."[16] As the African feminist Musa Dube insists, postcolonial criticism must ask "why biblical texts endorsed unequal power distribution along geographical and racial differences; why, in the wake of political independence, power has remained unequally distributed; and how to read for empowering the disempowered areas and races or creating a better system."[17]

We are interested in the specifically *theological* character of this ambivalence as attention to the imperial contexts of the church, ancient and contemporary–and so in critical reconstructions of the language of faith itself. We are exploring constructive theological pathways to counter-imperial Christian action. There have been important works of theology engaging postmodern philosophies. Yet in spite of the excitement postcolonial theory has been generating in other areas of religious studies and the liberal arts for more than a decade, the use of postcolonial theory as a tool for theological reflection is just beginning to emerge. This particular "post," this "after," has eschatological resonance, imminent in its significance if not in its fulfillment: "Postcolonial theology" invokes a discourse yet "to come."

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[15]See the bibliography in this volume.

[16]Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism,* 101.

[17]Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 17.

Themes of Postcolonial Theory

One of the main targets of postcolonial critique has been the modern understanding of *identity.* Modern thought organized itself according to discrete and mutually exclusive categories: same/other, spirit/matter, subject/object, inside/outside, pure/impure, rational/chaotic. Human beings could then in the politics of modernity be identified according to a corollary logic as: civilized/primitive, Christian/pagan, native/alien, white/black, male/female, rich/poor, whole/disabled. These categories supported a myriad of exclusive and oppressive practices–as well as revolutionary reactions. Liberation theologies dramatically challenged the hierarchies built on those binaries. But inasmuch as they content themselves with exalting a single, liberatory identity such as "the poor," or "the people," "blacks" or "women," they remain, we have suggested, more or less within the (*same*) modern paradigm. Postcolonial theory, Spivak argues, turns its "critical glance not specifically at the putative identity of the two poles of a binary opposition, but at the hidden ethico-political agenda that drives the differentiation between the two."[18] It attends to the processes through which categories such as "Third world," "woman," "native," are created, but also to the between spaces in which they may be undermined.

In Latina/o discourse, for example, the between spaces of crossroads, borderlands, *fronteras* have become favored metaphors of identity. The ancient Jewish metaphor of dispersion, "diaspora," appears among immigrants from Asia and Africa as well. The use of such spatial figures reflects the shift of focus in discussions of identity and (or *as*) difference. To some extent, this shift of focus responds to the realities of the post–cold war world. The displacement of peoples from former colonies to the metropolitan centers as a result of global capitalism has given birth to cities where refugees, migrants, and exiles from all over the world are in constant interaction among themselves and with the dominant cultures. The signs of these interactions are vivid. Gloria Anzaldúa explains playfully what "to live in the Borderlands means": "to put *chile* in the borscht,/eat whole wheat *tortillas,*/speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;/be stopped by *la migra* at the border checkpoints."[19]

The prominence that postcolonial thought gives to the borderlands, the interstices or in-between spaces, however, is more than descriptive. It gives rise to what Bhabha calls an "interstitial perspective," which challenges familiar understandings of identity. This perspective accompanies a new sense of subjectivity, resistant to the dynamics of subjection, an "interstitial subjectivity." For identity is not here a fixed set

[18]Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 332.

[19]Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 216.

of traits, but rather evolves through a continuing process of interrelation, identification, and differentiation. A person's identity is formed as she or he negotiates a sense of belonging to some groups and being distanced from others. Where this fosters closing off a separate identity, whether as a church, a person, a creed, or as a political entity, a nationality, or a social group, it creates the delusion of an identity detached from all that it excludes. We may call such a delusion *the idolatry of identity.* This is the point at which the *difference* of identity separates and hardens into *an essential sameness.* Such separation renders an identity in some qualitative sense independent of the rest of creation. But this is to deny its own creatureliness–theologically, the ultimate idolatry.

Whereas colonialism's "worst and most paradoxical gift, was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or western, or oriental," Edward Said argues, "survival in fact is about connections between things."[20] In contrast to colonialism's hardened identities, postcolonial thought focuses on the complexities of those groupings, of their feelings of home and diaspora, of belonging and exile. In contexts where boundaries are established to identify some as insiders, some as out, the space collapses for this in-between existence of hybrid identities. For a system that runs on unifying identities has a limited tolerance for hybrids. They show its failure. For according to the theory we are considering, the systemic demand for fixed identities and absolute differences is undermined by its own insistence that the colonized *imitate* the colonizer. The British Empire with its "civilizing mission"–and, in eerie repetition, the U.S. superpower with its "democratizing mission"–have functioned by offering themselves as the ideal to be imitated. Yet of course it is known (but concealed) that such imitation can only fail. One may recreate oneself in the image of the colonizers–like *The Mimic Men* in V. S. Naipaul's great novel, in which a fallen Caribbean leader, as an immigrant in London, seat of the former empire, reflects on how his generation of postcolonials imitated the gestures, styles, and attitudes of the British. "We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World."[21] But mimicry does not achieve its end; the mimic man/woman remains "almost the same, but not white."[22] Not quite, not white. This mimicry becomes "a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed."[23]

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[20]Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 336.

[21]V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men,* cited in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 88.

[22]Ibid., 89.

[23]Ibid.

The postcolonial hybridity is produced by empire: by direct invasion, violation, and rape, or by the indirect subjection that stimulates survivalist strategies of mimicry and appropriation. Postcolonial theory (though often accused of such) never simply "celebrates" difference *or* hybridity. Yet it can–this would be its postmodern temptation–collapse into "the triumphalist self-declared hybrid,"[24] whose elite status Gayatri Spivak ironizes. Postcolonial theory at its best resists the dissipation of liberatory energies into an urbane multiculturalism. It rightly recognizes that hybridity, in all its ambiguity, remains incurable–and contains great potential for resistance. Postcolonialism questions the basis on which "insiders" and "outsiders" are identified–the "rules of recognition."[25] As a consequence, it threatens the practices of exclusion and subordination that are based on those distinctions. And these are not only practices of the oppressors but also–whether by imitation, tradition, or defensive reaction–of the oppressed.

So the hybrid must constantly negotiate her/his position between contrasting, often contradictory, realities. This in-between position can be painfully torn between conflicting loyalties and subject to the rejection of all groups–"caught in the crossfire between camps/while carrying all five races on your back/not knowing which side to turn to, run from."[26] It can also be an enriching position, nurtured by multiple sources.

It may access the excitement of multiple art forms, flavors, languages, traditions–like the energies of a great city, in which multiple immigrant groups struggle and suffer, but also survive and create. And the hybrid may turn that intensity–in all its ambivalence–to transformative use.

Christianity and Hybridity

Christianity, after all, offers as its central doctrine the symbol of a divine/human hybrid, at once mimicking and scandalizing the operative metaphysical binaries of the time. And what is Christianity but a great hybrid, comprised at the urban crossroads of the Roman Empire? It exploded into mission on Pentecost: a vision of a multilingual understanding dancing in dissident flames upon the heads of its first community. It cannot be understood apart from the extraordinary creativity of its high-risk hybridities–for instance, its "neither Greek nor Jew"–that is, *both* Greek *and* Jewish, which let it spread like wildfire.[27] Yet neither can it be understood apart from its early acquiescence in empire, discernible according to some postcolonial hermeneutics already in the

[24]Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 361.

[25]Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 110.

[26]Anzaldúa, *Borderlands,* 216.

[27]For a reading of Daniel Boyarin's *A Radical Jew* from the perspective of contemporary diasporas, cf. Segovia, "Interpreting beyond Borders."

gospels, a mimicry that prepares the way for its imperial–and monolingual–appropriation of multiple cultures after Constantine.[28]

If empire is the contextual condition within which Christianity and its texts must always be read, hybridity is a pervasive symptom. There remain for Christians, then, no unambiguous identities, no sites of pure identity or of pure difference. Rather, every place, every subject-position, must be read as an event in-between–between aliens, between places, between times. Indeed, as even some Western Christianities–such as process, feminist, and ecological theologies–have already well understood, every identity whatsoever must be read as an event of relationship: A subject *takes place* amidst a dense ecology of interdependence. Relationships are internalized through mimicry as hybridity. Within the imperial condition, then, a human subject is a hybrid event rent by the asymmetries of power.

A theology that decolonizes the between-spaces of our interdependence will shift its task from boundary-protection to border-crossings: hardly an "alien" metaphor for Christianity. The task of a postcolonial theology will not be to shore up the barriers between the Christian and the non-Christian, the holy and the profane, the church and the world, the ethical and the immoral, even the Creator and the creation. Nor will it be simply to demolish them. We will want instead to pay careful attention to what happens in all these in-between places. What refuses enclosure? What *crosses* over? What revels and reveals itself in the many tongues of many peoples? What is dis/closed in the shifting borderlands?

Put in terms of ecclesiological practice: Postcolonial theory in theology will increase the church's capacity to speak meaningfully within an ever more globalized and cosmopolitan environment. It may help to sensitize Christians of the northern hemisphere to the complexity of the global church. For five hundred years, the synergy of conquest, commerce, and Christ worked the church across the face of the globe. Of course, the churches of Europe and North America still exercise disproportionate influence, paralleling the processes of economic globalization. Nonetheless, the result of this long-term Christian globalization is, ironically, that the churches of Europe and North America no longer *own* Christianity. According to Segovia, the stunning numbers drive the point home: In 1900 approximately 65 percent of the world's Christians lived in Europe or North America, while today that figure is "about 35 percent. Similarly, while in 1900 Christians in Africa, Asia and Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean represented 17.2

[28]This is starkly outlined by Musa Dube, who worries white feminist readers of, for example, the gospel of Matthew, for their failure to investigate its imperial context. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation.*

percent of global Christianity, today that figure is placed at 60.3 percent."[29] This is a dramatic reversal. If the Christianities of the postcolonial peoples still necessarily mimic missionary Christianity–they implicitly mock by their success the pale home churches, dwindling both in numbers and in burning tongues! Indeed, sometimes this mimicry reenergizes the most conservative, patriarchal, and heterosexist legacy of the West.

Within the imperial centers, a church ministering among recent immigrants and long-term diasporas–among people with an increasingly complex ethnic identity, with wildly varying combinations of traditional faith and plural, "syncretistic," religious formations–cannot rely on inherited "rules of recognition." It is challenged to ever greater flexibility in its community building. It hears again the ancient, underfulfilled command–corrective of any idolatry of identity–to love the alien/stranger/immigrant *as yourself.*

Even in its relatively homogenous rural and suburban forms, the church hears this voice and faces a choice: to form a fortress against the chaotic uncertainties of postmodern life, providing familiarity and refuge but risking the asphyxiation of the Spirit; or to embrace a new democratic cosmopolitanism in which the Spirit connects rather than separates our differences. In this Spirit we will continuously–not just once–renegotiate Christian discipleship. It will be a negotiation not limited to matters of doctrinal and denominational identity, but responsive also–and always–to the nagging questions of culture, ethnicity, sexuality, and economics. Is theological depth–or spiritual freedom–dissipated through such multiplying concerns? The authors in this volume believe that these more "political" questions, when refracted through the postcolonial prism, do not dilute but rather enrich the space of doctrinal negotiation. Traditional theological themes–such as God as creator, as Christ, as Spirit–may take on a new dimensionality, indeed an incarnality, in the interstitial perspective of a postcolonial theology.

Essays in Postcolonial Theology

The essays in this volume are not content with political and cultural criticism. They together work toward a constructive postcolonial theology. From one point of view, the essays form something like a doctrinal landscape, clumping together under the headings of **Theology,** as disciplinary framework; **Christology,** both vis-à-vis the biblical Jesus and the Christ of faith; **Theological Anthropology,** as the reconstruction of Christian subjectivity in *imago dei;* and the doctrine of **God**. These doctrinal loci form an interconnected archipelago within a roiling sea of difference. And as is true of all livelier theologies, the action

[29]Segovia, *Interpreting beyond Borders,* 21.

in each of these essays takes place not within an abstract doctrinal formulation, but *between the doctrinal symbols* themselves, and *between the doctrines and the contexts* in which they come to life. Both stylistically and substantively, each of these essays may be heard in a certain sense mimicking, even mocking, the dogmas they consider–thus very carefully and riskily prizing open the space for their imaginative contributions to Christian theology. They were not commissioned to reconstruct specific doctrines. Rather, they have arisen quite spontaneously in such a way as to allow us to map them–if only momentarily, fluidly, and problematically–on the grid of a systematic theology. This arrangement demonstrates the surprising theological *intensity* (not only the predictable social *extensity*) of the postcolonial potential.

First, **Theology** is reimagined within the shifting context of the postcolonial. Balancing on both biblical and British edges of theology, R. S. Sugirtharajah's essay frames the challenge to the historic discipline of theology. If, as he says, "there has been a marked hesitancy to critically evaluate the impact of the empire among Systematic Theologians," he also challenges the secular bias and relative ignorance of religion of most postcolonial theorists. Offering a rich narrative of the negotiations between nationalism and Christianity by Indian converts under the British Empire, he moves on to deploy the concept of "vernacular cosmopolitanism." Resisting the tendency to "glorify the local and discredit the global," this discursive practice requires "an exchange of ideas in all directions," while "keeping a constant vigilance over the predatory nature of western values." He thus sets the stage for this project: "It is in this multi-directional swirl of cultural ideas that I foresee the emergence of postcolonial theology."

Mark Lewis Taylor enunciates for the volume the "postcolonial spirit." Detecting a "turn to spirit" among postcolonial thinkers as well as communal conditions that manifest a "postcolonial ethos of differential liberatory struggle" both in certain Christian communities and in interreligious coalitions, he proceeds to lay out "four practical tests" for theological resistance to U.S. violence and imperialism. Any possible U.S. postcolonial theology, he suggests, must pass these tests. "Postcolonial spirit is found in the turning toward ever new hybrid spaces where the struggle for liberation is underway."

Theological Anthropology as the doctrine of the human creature recreates itself in the postcolonial encounter. Taking their stance within or between diverse sociopolitical locations, the essays in this section interrogate dominant constructions of identity. They imagine subjectivities that resist the homogenizing and divisive tendencies of racial and ethnic labels, normative appearances, or religious and national identities. Theology can rethink its understanding of the *imago dei* with the help of theories of the split subject–as the embodiment and

internalization of colonizing ideals, but also as the site of *spirited* resistance.

Asking "Who Is Americano/a?" Michelle Gonzalez narrates the quest for a Latino/a identity–as a properly and profoundly theological task. She shows that Latino/a theologians–often preceding postcolonial theory–"offer a fruitful starting point for a theological anthropology that takes hybridity seriously." Attending to the complexity of its identities, Latino/a theology emphasizes the relational character of a humanity that is the image of a trinitarian God. This attention to hybridity highlights a risk for conceptualizing subjectivity: "Too often, the contributions of people of color are parochialized into a sub-category, seen as a quaint exception to the dominant rhetoric."

Asking "Who/What Is Asian?" Namsoon Kang offers a Korean postcolonial analysis for theology. She brings to this collection a perspective from outside of both U.S. hybridity and the legacy of the British Empire. "Postcolonial theological anthropology must reject the search for the unchanging, culturally essential core of Asians/Asianness," writes Kang. "The hybrid self, decentering any foundational notion of Asian, can be a Christian ideal of losing oneself to find oneself."

Such a self is not self-identical, self-same, or unified. Thus, the Spirit might find space within the splits, fissures, and wounds of the subject. Occupying the theological field between pneumatology and anthropology, Sharon Betcher's reflection on the politics of disablement exposes a secularized eschatology at work in the medical technology of "miraculous" remediation. She traces the links between missionary justifications of colonialism, and the colonizing ideal of the "wholesome" body. As an alternative she invokes a Spirit that lives not beyond but within the vulnerabilities of our interdependent flesh.

And when Michael Nausner asks after the subject and its boundaries, he finds the subject situated at the boundary itself. He lets postcolonial theology challenge the U.S. rhetoric of "homeland security" as it mushroomed following the attack on the World Trade Towers. In "Homeland as Borderland," the border itself emerges as "the unavoidable and dynamic location of Christian subjectivity," the site of a "community of negotiation."

Christ, the symbolic epicenter of Christian theopolitics, from one perspective conquers, from another decolonizes, the world. As Christian constructive theology, this volume is blessed with four essays meditating on the liberating force of Jesus as the Christ. Such liberating power is thematized already in Nausner's depiction of Jesus as a borderland person, destabilizing and inhabiting divisive boundaries.

Stephen D. Moore explores the postcolonial ambivalence of Mark's gospel. He asks whether its christology is "merely mirroring Roman imperial ideology" by "inaugurating an empire of God that inevitably

evinces many of the oppressive traits of the Roman empire it displaces." While uncovering deep tensions within the gospel's explicitly apocalyptic sections, Moore nonetheless discovers elsewhere in Mark "a counter-imperial apocalyptic ethic."

W. Anne Joh, negotiating the between-space of a Korean American context, explores the Korean concept of *jeong* as a postcolonial "in-between" space–different from the liberationist-oppositional notion of *dan*. While Kang warns of the dangers of the uses of the Korean concept of *han* (suffering) when it leads to the homogenization of Asians' experience or their representation as "pure victims," Joh finds *han* in the midst of the hybridity arising in the dynamic contexts of immigration and seeks subversive strategies that recognize its complexity. Read through the lenses of jeong, Jesus' practice of liberation opens "the interstitial space, from which radical subversive resistance can emerge creatively."

Exploring the economic implications of neocolonial empire, Marion Grau imagines the trickster Christ of a "divine commerce." Her multidimensional *economia* draws on early Christian scriptural and dogmatic sources in order to "queer" postcolonial theology–and thus to render it mobile and efficacious within the contemporary United States.

Lurking within and behind all of these theological proposals is the question of **God**. Can speech about "God" liberate rather than oppress, release rather than repress? Can it help us to live as creatures within a gorgeous creation–that we have already irrevocably violated? As Spivak says, "the planet is a species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan."[30] Might we yet inhabit the planet–in its socialities and its ecologies–with the respect we *owe* it? Does this other "system" not resonate with the language of "God"–albeit differently?

Mayra Rivera's "God at the Crossroads" introduces a postcolonial *theology of divine wisdom*. By way of an excavation of the ancient colonial context of the biblical Wisdom figure, she recovers Sophia the Hybrid–God with an unmistakably foreign and female accent, appearing at the crossroads with the *atravesados*, the misfits and mestizos, at once disturbing and reconstructing the space of theology itself.

In his reflection on "Liberating God-Talk," Joerg Rieger asks "what happens when God-talk is turned loose from the powers that be, when it comes from those who bear the marks of colonialism and neo-colonialism in their flesh?" Advocating the emancipatory truth of the gospel of John, he stresses the needed continuity between liberation and postcolonial theology.

From the perspective of a theology of creation–as the operation of a creativity within a bottomless chaos of relations–Catherine Keller's

[30]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2003), 72.

"Love of Postcolonialism" poses a two-way genitive: for it is not only that there is academic appetite for postcolonial theory, but that the theory itself yields an unexpected intimacy. This essay considers both a political and a theological critique of postcolonial theory. It finds, however, that even the criticisms become embroiled in the planetarity of an irreducible–and irreducibly divine–Love.

These postcolonial theologies lovingly inhabit the mazes of their contextual specificities even as they dare to imagine theology in its multiple, even cosmological, dimensions. The spirit of postcolonial theologies–found, for instance, in the negotiations of early Christian communities, Indian nationalist struggles, Latin American base communities–inspire varying visions of vernacular cosmopolitanism, communities of differential liberatory struggles and negotiation. Similarly, meditation on the complexities of human subjectivity that are often suppressed beneath rigid identities, the "multiple forms of corporeal flourishing" suffocated under mandatory appearances, gives way to postcolonial theological anthropologies. They enunciate a self in relation to an other–within and without, human or non-human–and a Christian identity dynamically emerging at the borderlands. Christ is approached from various sites of the various traditional christological models–scriptural witness, liberatory practices of early Christian communities, and atonement theory. These postcolonial christologies attend to the complexities found at the boundaries where the human-human or human-divine interactions occur. Here, redemption requires a full and tricky embodiment. At the crossroads of local struggles and global challenges, of personal subjectivities and communal identities, of human and divine encounters, postcolonial theologies open themselves to the risks and hopes of a radically planetary love.

In the "community of negotiation" formed by these essays and developing with their readership, the interstitial complexity begins to make itself felt. This negotiation seems at once to enable communication–and to exceed its boundaries. For at its best the postcolonial embrace of complexity may stimulate not only analysis but action, not only the ironies of ambivalence but the coalitions of hope. And perhaps even an occasional underground laughter.

POSTCOLONIAL THEOLOGIES

DIVINITY *and* EMPIRE

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Cover art: Getty Images
Cover design: Elizabeth Wright
Interior design: Hui-Chu Wang
Art direction: Elizabeth Wright

Visit Chalice Press on the World Wide Web at
www.chalicepress.com

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 05 06 07 08 09 10

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Postcolonial theologies : divinity and empire / Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN-10: 0-827230-01-X (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN-13: 978-0-827230-01-X
1. Christian sociology. 2. Postcolonialism. I. Keller, Catherine, 1953- II. Nausner, Michael. III. Rivera, Mayra.
BT738.P625 2004
230'.046–dc22

2004011564

Printed in the United States of America