PREACHING IN THE PERICHORETIC SPACE:
A SOCIAL TRINITARIAN POSTCOLONIAL HOMILETIC
FOR THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

by

Sarah Anne Noreen Travis

A Thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Knox College
and the Department of Pastoral Theology of the Toronto School of Theology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology
Awarded by Knox College and the University of Toronto

© Copyright by Sarah A.N. Travis 2012
Abstract

This thesis addresses continuing manifestations of colonialism and imperialism in the contemporary world, and their impact on the practice of preaching. Preaching has a role to play in the healing and transformation of ecclesial relationships that have been negatively affected by colonial discourse. Of particular interest is the manner in which preaching addresses relationships among postcolonial subjects in Canadian Presbyterian congregations; and among Canadian Presbyterian congregations and global partner churches. Postcolonial theory and Jürgen Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity provide pathways for recognizing and responding to the presence of colonial discourse in the practice of preaching. Postcolonial theory and God’s life-in-Trinity deconstruct colonial discourse, and demonstrate life-giving relationships characterized by freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness. I propose a constructive metaphor, Perichoretic Space, which encompasses trinitarian perichoresis as well as postcolonial Third Space and hybridity in order to imagine a space of encounter for Christian postcolonial subjects. I demonstrate postcolonial biblical criticism through a discussion of the colonial context of Mark 7:24-30, and employ the story of Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman as an encounter between colonial subjects that produces change and healing. Other-oriented homiletic perspectives offer significant insight for postcolonial preaching, yet can also be
critiqued and expanded in light of postcolonial theory. Moving from theory to practice, I situate the practice of preaching within the Perichoretic Space. Practices of a postcolonial imagination: postcolonial hermeneutics, imaginative conversation and testimony, lead to a concrete application of postcolonial theory and Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity, demonstrated by sermon excerpts.
Acknowledgments

The writing of this dissertation has been a journey of discovery and recovery. I want to offer tremendous gratitude to those who have accompanied me.

To Dorcas Gordon, for introducing me to postcolonial hermeneutics, for decades of problematising boundaries to make the way easier for the likes of me, for allowing me space and freedom for discovery, and for giving me a home at Knox College.

To David S. Jacobsen, for consistently high expectations, and his abundant generosity with time and encouragement. I have been blessed to work with two enormously gifted supervisors.

To Paul S. Wilson, for challenging insights and tremendous wisdom about the theory and practice of preaching. Thanks also to Charles Fensham for guiding me to a greater understanding of Jurgen Moltmann’s Social Trinity. Art Van Seters encouraged me to think critically about preaching in the PCC. I hope that my work honours his commitment to social ethics.

To Knox Presbyterian Church in Oakville, and Trafalgar Presbyterian Church in Oakville, for being my church homes during my doctoral studies. And also to St. Mary’s Anglican Church in Walkerville (Windsor), and Knox Presbyterian Church in Guelph, for their continuing love and impact on my faith formation.

To friends in Jobat and the surrounding area, for welcoming us into their lives with such grace and love, especially Dr. Deborah Tezlo, Dr. and Mrs. Dr. Wilson, Rev. Emmanuel Ariel and family, Rev. Arthur, Miss Flora, the congregations in Jobat, Amkut, Mendha, Alirajpur, the students and staff of the Masihi Christian School, and the staff of the Jobat Christian Hospital.

To Canadian Presbyterian missionaries, especially Dr. Wilma Welsh, and Dr. Pauline Brown, who has spent most of her life in the Third Space. I hope that this work honours and continues what so many have accomplished alongside mission partners around the world.

To my parents, Neil and Bonnie Travis, for never doubting my ability, and always insisting on good spelling and grammar. This project was partially inspired by my brother, Jon Travis, and an unpleasant conversation in my kitchen about the nature of Christian mission. I hope that this dissertation is at least the beginning of a response.

To my husband, Paul Miller, for never giving up on me, even when I was ready to give up on myself! You have been a constant source of encouragement and generosity beyond anything I deserve.

This project is dedicated, of course, to Ben Travis-Miller. Thank you Ben, for your wisdom, humour and courage. I am in awe of you, always. In memory of Sam Travis-Miller, whose life and death took me places I never intended to go. Even in grief, there is blessing and hope. This dissertation is living proof of that sustaining reality.
# Table of Contents

**Introduction** ................................................................................. 1

The Persistence of Colonial Memory ................................................ 1
Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic ...................................................... 2
Postcolonial Encounters: A Homiletic Challenge ............................ 6
Preaching, Postcolonialism, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada ....... 9
Statement of Thesis ........................................................................ 11
Methodology .................................................................................. 13

**Chapter One**
An Introduction to Postcolonial Theory with reference to the Presbyterian Church in Canada

Introduction .................................................................................. 19

I. Postcolonial Theory .................................................................. 21
   a. Definition of key terms ......................................................... 21
   b. Colonization, decolonization and the emergence of postcolonial criticism . 29

II. Colonial/Postcolonial Relationships ....................................... 36
   a. Domination, separation, homogeneity, fixedness ...................... 36
   b. The Empire talks back ......................................................... 43
   c. Limitations of postcolonial perspectives ................................. 49

III. The Canadian Context .......................................................... 50
   a. Canada, colonialism and postcolonialism ............................... 50
   b. The Presbyterian Church in Canada ..................................... 55
      I. Postcolonial factors in local congregations ......................... 58
      ii. Postcolonial factors in mission partnerships ..................... 60

Conclusion .................................................................................... 62

**Chapter Two**
Postcolonial Biblical Criticism and the Gospel of Mark

Introduction .................................................................................. 64

I. Postcolonial Biblical Criticism .................................................. 66
   a. The Bible and colonialism ..................................................... 66
   b. Introduction to postcolonial biblical interpretation ................... 68
   c. Examples of postcolonial biblical interpretation across the biblical canon . 71
II. Postcolonial Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark ....................... 75  
  a. Mark in colonial perspective ............................................... 76  
  b. Summary of postcolonial perspectives of Mark’s gospel .............. 78  
    I. Mark as resistance literature ......................................... 78  
    ii. Mark as literature which reinscribes colonial power .............. 79  
    iii. Mark as ambiguous .................................................... 80  

III. Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman: Postcolonial Perspectives ..... 82  
  a. History of interpretation ............................................... 82  
  b. Postcolonial readings of Mark 7:24-30 ................................ 85  
  c. A reading to engage cultural difference, hybridity and Third Space .... 88  

Conclusion ................................................................................. 97

Chapter Three
Jürgen Moltmann’s Social Doctrine of the Trinity

Introduction ................................................................................. 98

I. Moltmann’s Social Doctrine of the Trinity ............................... 102  
  a. freedom ................................................................. 105  
  b. mutual self-giving ...................................................... 108  
  c. self-differentiation ...................................................... 110  
  d. openness ................................................................. 112

II. Correspondence between Divine and Human Community .......... 114

III. Moltmann’s Social Doctrine as a Deconstructive Lens for Colonialism ... 121  
  a. Postmodern deconstruction ............................................. 122  
  b. A social trinitarian deconstruction of domination, separation,  
     homogeneity, and fixedness ........................................... 124

IV. Encounters in the Perichoretic Space: A Metaphor .................. 131  
  a. Locating the Perichoretic Space: the Church in trinitarian embrace 132  
  b. Creatio Continua ......................................................... 133  
  c. The Space between us: Third Spaces within the Perichoretic Space 134  
  d. Ecclesial Discourse “in-Between” ...................................... 138

Conclusion ................................................................................. 141
Chapter Four
Other-Oriented Homiletic Literature

Introduction ................................................................. 142

I. The ‘Turn to the Other’ in Homiletic Literature ................. 146

II. Other-oriented Homiletics since 1969 ............................. 150
   a. freedom vs. domination ........................................... 151
   b. mutual self-giving vs. separation ............................ 156
   c. self-differentiation vs. homogeneity ....................... 164
   d. openness vs. fixedness .......................................... 170

III. Evaluation of Other-oriented Homiletics from a Postcolonial Perspective .............................................. 175
   a. balancing power ................................................... 175
   b. embracing community ........................................... 178
   c. liberating difference ............................................ 180
   d. opening to the other ............................................. 181

IV. Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic: Possibilities and Limitations ...................................................... 182

Conclusion ........................................................................ 183

Chapter Five
A Postcolonial Homiletic

Introduction ....................................................................... 185

I. Preaching in the Perichoretic Space ............................... 188
   a. Preaching as an invitation to Perichoretic Space ....... 188
   b. Knowledge, power and representation ................... 195
   c. Tension, risk, weeping and confession ................... 198
   d. Trinitarian Embrace: re-creation, reconciliation and hope .... 201

II. Preaching and the Postcolonial Imagination ...................... 204
   a. Postcolonial hermeneutics ....................................... 205
      I. re-viewing historical and contemporary contexts .... 205
      ii. postcolonial reading strategies ......................... 208
   b. Creative conversation ............................................. 216
   c. Testimony ........................................................... 225

Concluding reflections ...................................................... 230
Bibliography
Introduction

The Persistence of Colonial Memory

Following the earthquake and tsunami which devastated parts of Japan in March 2011, the world responded with an outpouring of sympathy and generosity. A markedly different reaction arose in China, where some celebrated the misery of their former occupiers. The Chinese people have not forgotten the atrocities committed against them by Japan during its occupation of China in the 1930's and 1940's, at which time at least 20 million Chinese were killed. In some Chinese schools today, children are shown documentary films designed to inspire a continuing hatred for the Japanese. One Chinese citizen blogged: “It is the responsibility of every Chinese father and mother to pass down this history to their children in addition to what they learn in school . . . I have not forgotten and I will not forgive.” As the Chinese were confronted with the images of Japan’s suffering caused by the terrible natural disaster, some began to reconsider their initial response, and their hatred turned to awe as they witnessed the courage and perseverance of the Japanese people.

The shadow of Japanese imperial power persists decades after Japan’s withdrawal from China. This demonstrates that colonial memory may continue to impact relationships among those who have been victims, perpetrators and observers of colonial and imperial acts long after

\[1\] Schiller, Bill. “In China, Awe and Admiration for Japan,” The Toronto Star, March 25, 2011.

\[2\] Ibid. (Schiller does not provide a source for the blog).

\[3\] Ibid.
occupation ends. This impact varies in severity, and is felt in the world at large, as well as in the Christian Church. In Canadian congregations, (formerly) colonized persons gather for worship in the same space as (formerly) colonizing persons. Many Canadian churches have established partnerships with global churches for whom colonialism/imperialism are significant past and present realities. Not only colonial memory, but also ongoing colonial reality, by which I mean both historical and contemporary manifestations of colonialism/imperialism, are important considerations for preaching today.

**Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic**

Preaching addresses a particular local congregation that is linked to other Christian congregations across the globe. Christians in Canada and around the world are affected by colonial memory and current colonial realities. The Christian community, locally and globally, is intended to be a living body, united to others across time and space, and set apart by God for worship and mission. Yet relationships among Christians are vulnerable to sin, including the destructive influence of social patterns such as colonialism/imperialism.

Colonialism/imperialism aims to overpower the other politically, economically and culturally, resulting in discourses that place self at the centre of the equation, ignoring or destroying others through domination, misrepresentation, enforced homogeneity, and the silencing of marginal voices. In worship spaces, and in the space of the global Church, colonial discourse can emerge within ecclesial discourse. In the ecclesial space, colonial discourse

---

4. Observers are those who are not the immediate initiators or recipients of colonial/imperial power, but are nevertheless located in an ethos that has been shaped by colonial/imperial power. These positions vis a vis colonial power are often ambiguous and complicated by multiple power issues.

5. In this dissertation, the term *colonialism/imperialism* refers not only to historical incidents of colonial/imperial occupation and military dominance, but also describes unequal relationships of power and knowledge across national and cultural boundaries in a variety of historical and contemporary settings. Colonialism and imperialism are defined in chapter one. Briefly, colonialism refers to settlement and/or exploitation of a territory by foreign agents. Imperialism is the ideology from which colonialism arises, which justifies and enables foreign control and exploitation of other peoples.
disrupts community and threatens the bond of Christian love. The purpose of this thesis is to articulate a postcolonial homiletic which can address continuing manifestations of colonialism/imperialism, especially as they impact local and global ecclesial relationships. Borrowing from Kwok Pui-lan, I seek “to examine the interdependence of the cultural terrain traversed by both the colonizers and the colonized, as well as how the colonial systems of knowledge cast their impact, long after the colonizers are gone.”

What are the foundations of a postcolonial homiletic? The field of postcolonial studies has produced a sustained and varied critique of colonialism and imperialism. Postcolonial theory has developed concepts and vocabulary such as hybridity and Third Space that may help homiletics to name colonial realities and more adequately understand the relationships among persons involved in colonial/imperial processes. A vast and diverse body of postcolonial scholarship identifies and critiques colonial/imperial projects in history and the contemporary world, and can inform preachers as they seek to develop a broader understanding of the role of colonialism/imperialism in the world and in the Church. Postcolonial criticism provides tools for reading historical texts, including the Bible, so that preachers may approach scriptures from a perspective that honours colonial experience in the text and in the ecclesial space. For these reasons, postcolonial theory is essential for exploring the relationship between preaching and colonial reality.

Preaching, however, is primarily concerned with the Word of God, and proclaiming God’s action in the world. Postcolonial theory is able to inform the practice of preaching, yet it does not specifically address ecclesial relationships. It is not primarily concerned with constructing a theocentric vision for human community, a vision which I perceive to be important for Christian identity and ethics. While postcolonial theory does seek the

---

transformation of human community, it relies primarily on human ability and will to produce transformation. Postcolonial theory is a vital contributor to a postcolonial homiletic, yet it will benefit from a conversation partner more directly rooted in the Word and presence of God. For this, I turn to Jürgen Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine that offers a theological foundation for Christian identity and ethics. Moltmann is convinced that God’s life in Trinity has implications both for human social and political realities. Moltmann has reflected deeply and theologically upon political concerns, and recognizes that the Church must attend to its social and political environment. “If the Church were to ignore its social and political Sitz im Leben - its situation in the life of mankind - then it would be forsaking the cross of its Lord.”

Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity rests on the hope of a Triune God that breaks into the “godforsaken present,” shattering human illusions and hopelessness. Moltmann claims that the manner in which human beings understand, image and relate to God impacts their identity and ethics. In other words, how we perceive God influences who we are (identity) and how we behave toward others (our ethics). He argues that traditional views of the doctrine of the Trinity have contributed to human acts of violence. In contradistinction, the social doctrine of the Trinity images God as non-hierarchical, relational, differentiated, and open to creation. According to Moltmann, humanity has been created to live in the image of the Trinity, *imago trinitatis*, a vision for humanity that contrasts with the reality of human communities

---


threatened by colonial and imperial power. I perceive that Moltmann’s social doctrine, especially its conception of divine community and human community in *imago trinitatis*, serves as a specifically theological deconstruction and critique of colonial discourse alongside postcolonial theory.\(^\text{11}\) This conception of the Trinity, sustained by the action of the Triune God in continually recreating and reconciling humanity, supports an ecclesial identity and ethical vocation which more fully reflect the image of the Triune God. The social doctrine of the Trinity provides a pathway for recognizing, representing and responding to others. The self-emptying (kenotic) love of God revealed through Jesus Christ promises forgiveness and leads to the possibility of reconciliation among human persons torn apart by discourses of power.

Postcolonial theory and Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity each make a significant contribution to a postcolonial homiletic. Preaching participates in the process by which the gathered community comes to understand its identity and ethical vocation. I perceive that the Social Trinity is the foundation for ecclesial identity and ethical vocation, the source of hope, and an active agent of transformation. Despite the political nature of Moltmann’s theology, he does not address colonialism in a specific or sustained manner. Postcolonial theory is a source of essential concepts and collective wisdom about colonial relationships and postcolonial realities, and it urges theology to search itself for the presence of colonial discourse. The postcolonial homiletic developed in this dissertation, and the metaphor Perichoretic Space, place the social doctrine of the Trinity and postcolonial theory into a space of mutual critique and enlightenment. In proximity to one another, they generate creative energy, and inform one another in unique and surprising ways. The hope that ecclesial relationships will be

---

\(^\text{11}\)The Trinity has been historically understood in hierarchical, patriarchal terms. There is some irony in using a doctrine of the Trinity to deconstruct colonialism/imperialism, which is yet another hierarchical system. Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity is a relatively egalitarian model which has addressed some of the difficulties of more traditional models, and provides a useful deconstructive framework, even as it may itself be deconstructed.
transformed, however, always lies in the power and love of the Triune God.

Postcolonial Encounters: A Homiletic Challenge

Personal experience has alerted me to the need for postcolonial reflection on homiletic practice. As a white, privileged woman living in Canada, I have paid little attention to the impact of colonialism/imperialism in my life and in the lives of others. I have also disregarded the implicit and explicit participation of the Christian Church in general, and my denomination in particular, in colonial/imperial projects. In 2008 and 2009, I visited central India on three separate occasions, and spent time among the Bhil Christians. These Christians are literally a world away from Canadian Christians. The Bhils are materially poor, tribal people who have been marginalised by ruling Hindu groups - they are ‘dalits,’ without caste, what has traditionally been labelled ‘untouchable’. The Church in central India is just over a century old. Christianity was brought to the mountainous Vindhya Satpura region by Canadian missionaries beginning in the late nineteenth century. In addition to churches, there are schools and a hospital, which were originally established by Canadian Presbyterians. The Bhil Christians remember former missionaries with a gratitude that is as genuine as it is poignant. During visits, our Canadian groups were welcomed as family. For me, it was akin to meeting adopted brothers and sisters for the first time. We are, after all, members of the same Christian family, yet so very

---

12 Some might wonder why a western woman of relative privilege should undertake this project. I consider myself to live at the crossroads of empire, as a citizen of a nation, and a minister of a church that have been implicated in colonialism/imperialism. A postcolonial homiletic cannot be constructed by one voice alone, but will be built upon the experience of many. This project is only a beginning.

13 These Bhils live in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India, which is among the poorest of Indian states. “Bhil” literally means ‘People of the Bow,’ reflecting the importance of hunting in Bhil culture. For more on the history of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Bhil ‘field’ see John Buchanan, Jungle Tales. (Toronto, ON: Thorn Press, 1938); Margaret F. Kennedy, Flame of the Forest: Canadian Presbyterians in India. The Mission becomes the Church. (Don Mills: The Board of World Mission, PCC, 1980); Ruth Compton Brouwer, New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876-1914. (Toronto, ON; Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Geoffrey Johnston, Missionaries for the Record. (Belleville, ON: Guardian Press, 2005); Anne Saunders, Making Connections: The Bhil People of India. (PCC, 2003-2005).
different.

In those encounters, I was very aware that the space between us was filled with a discourse of historical and contemporary inequality, a discourse of power based on social location, wealth, and privilege. These encounters cannot be accurately described as encounters between colonized and colonizer because India is no longer a colony of the British Empire, and The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) has no formal power over the Church of North India. Yet these were encounters among colonial subjects, encounters in which colonial reality still hung in the balance, still affected the manner in which we spoke to one another and perceived one another. Returning home to Canada, I was invited by several congregations to preach sermons that reflected on my experience in India, and my perception of the partnership between the PCC and Indian churches in the context of Christian mission. I had never before considered the omnipresence of ‘empire’ and how it unconsciously crept into my preaching. I began to discern an echo of colonialism in my own voice, an echo which, I suspect, reverberates in the pews. This echo, or what I will later define as ‘colonial discourse’ is manifested in preaching in a number of ways:

- Preachers and hearers tend to underestimate the pervasiveness of empire in the world today, and to assume that colonialism is a past and distant reality which has no effect in the present, especially for people of Euro-American origin. This involves a lack of

---

14 The relationship was of the PCC with the tribal Bhil Christians was forged in the context of the British Raj (lit. *reign*) 1858-1947, in a particular ethos of evangelizing, civilizing mission, which coincided with the age of colonial expansion. What was once a somewhat hierarchical and dependent relationship between the Canadian and Indian churches has evolved into a partnership. While the leadership and staff of these institutions is now indigenous, they still rely on funding from Canada, especially for capital improvements. Such partnerships are a vital part of the ministry of my denomination and many others.

15 Empire today can be considered to be: “a coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power in our world... constituted by a reality and a spirit of lordless domination, created by humankind. An all-encompassing global reality serving, protecting and defending the interests of powerful corporations, nations, elites and privileged people, while exploiting creation, imperiously excludes, enslaves and even sacrifices humanity.” Allan Boesak, Johann Wicusman and Charles Amjad-Ali (eds), *Dreaming a Different World*. (Stellenbosch: The Globalization Project, 2010), 2.
attention to issues such as neocolonialism and globalization,\textsuperscript{16} and the way these can contribute to poverty, and restrict access to resources for some. It may also involve a lack of critical reflection on the complicity of Canadian and other and Western Christians in contemporary imperial projects.

- When representing others in the preaching process, preachers and listeners may rely on assumptions and stereotypes about others. This may include overestimating knowledge about others, and underestimating the agency and intelligence of others.\textsuperscript{17}

- Canadian preachers and hearers, when confronted with the needs or limitations of others, especially those living in the Tricontinent,\textsuperscript{18} may have an attitude of ‘paternalistic benevolence.’\textsuperscript{19} Such an attitude is motivated by a desire to help others, but also a belief that Western cultures, values and infrastructures are superior, universally valid and beneficial. When it comes to global ecclesial partnerships, Canadian Christians may perceive a one-way relationship instead of a partnership of equals - as though these relationships consist only of knowledge and aid flowing from West to Tricontinentals. After one sermon in which I highlighted some of the positive and life-giving contributions of Canadian Presbyterians in India, one member of the congregation said “thank goodness for the British Empire, or those Indians would not have hospitals at all.”\textsuperscript{20} This attitude reflects a belief that other cultures can only flourish with the intervention of Western nations.

\textsuperscript{16}Globalization refers to interconnectedness of global cultures and markets, which may be vulnerable to neocolonial or imperial elements. Neocolonialism encompasses contemporary situations in which one nation exerts military or cultural control over another nation or group. See chapter one for more detailed definitions.

\textsuperscript{17}For the purposes of this dissertation, the term ‘other(s)’ is generally used to represent those who differ from ‘self’ in terms of geographical location, skin colour, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and/or colonial experience. It may also refer to gender, religion or other variables. ‘Other’ is capitalized only when I am preserving another author’s capitalization in a direct quote.

\textsuperscript{18}This term refers to Latin America, Africa and Asia. It was originally proposed during the meeting of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America in Havana, 1966. Robert Young comments that ‘Tricontinental’ avoids some of the pitfalls of the terms ‘Third World’ the ‘South’ and the ‘non-west.’ \textit{Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction}. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001), 4-5.

\textsuperscript{19}Colonial/imperial powers have justified the subjugation of other peoples by claiming that external rule is necessary for the improvement, uplift, salvation or civilization of colonized peoples.

\textsuperscript{20}Colonialism/imperialism have had positive effects in many Tricontinental communities, especially with regard to health care and education. The ecclesial mission partnerships which have developed among Christians in the West and Tricontinent are to be celebrated. For more on how imperial powers have sought to address suffering in the colonies, see Helen Gilbert, and Chris Tiffin, (eds). \textit{Burden or Benefit: Imperial Benevolence and its Legacies}. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).
Preaching and Postcolonialism in the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC)

As I began to reflect on the continuing effects of colonialism/imperialism, it became abundantly clear that not only overseas partnerships are affected by colonialism/imperialism but fellowship within PCC congregations is also affected. Canadian Presbyterian churches are hybrid spaces - forged at the crossroads of cultures. In the twenty-first century, colonialism in the strictest sense has come to an end, yet imperialism has not: our reality continues to be an imperial reality. Regardless of ethnic or cultural background, all who worship in PCC churches are located in a global context of empire. Thus, Canadian Presbyterian churches contain discourses of power which stem from the colonial process and contemporary manifestations of empire. In Canada, sermons are preached and heard by persons living in the midst of empire, some of whom bear on their bodies and souls very real scars of colonial/imperial oppression. Christian churches today experience a dual reality - even as the Church seeks to live into its trinitarian identity and ethical vocation, it is vulnerable to sin and destructive social patterns such as those associated with colonialism/imperialism. Colonial discourses emerge within ecclesial discourse - in pulpit, pew, and among global Christian communities.

Sermonic discourse contributes to the development of ecclesial identity, as well as the formation of ecclesial relationships (local and global). The manner in which preachers interpret scripture, represent others, and respond to the claims of empire can affect the way that listeners perceive and respond to others (within the Church and beyond). Ronald Allen reminds us that “the preacher is called to help the congregation name how it responds to particular encounters

---

21 Empire is experienced in different ways by different persons depending on colonial status. Both metropolis and colony have been and continue to be, negatively affected by the colonial process resulting in a diminishment of human life and spirituality. The task of ‘decolonizing the mind’ is as essential to the colonizer as it is to the colonized. Rebecca Tod Peters, “Decolonizing our Minds: Postcolonial Perspectives on the Church,” in *Women’s Voices and Visions*, edited by Letty Russell, Aruna Gnanadason and J. Shannon Clarkson. (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 2005), 93-110 (99). R.S. Sugirtharajah, Kwok Pui-lan, and others are also concerned with the task of decolonizing the minds of colonized/colonizers.
with Others and to reflect on points at which the congregation’s response is consistent with faithful theological convictions and points at which the congregation needs to reconsider its response to Others.”

Insofar as preachers are products of their cultural context, they can be vulnerable to the lure of empire, and colonial discourses can find their way into sermons. Alternatively, preaching can participate in the process of ‘decolonizing the mind’ by asking “how has the heritage of exploitation, privilege and prosperity shaped our identity as a people of faith?,” and by proclaiming a gospel that transcends and transforms discourses of power.

Alerted to the presence of colonial discourses in the ecclesial space, preachers may choose to speak against colonial discourse, and in favour of an ecclesial identity and ethical vocation more consistent with *imago trinitatis*.

From the perspective of social trinitarian theology, our preaching and worship belong to the life of the Trinity. Thus, ecclesial spaces are filled not only with discourses of power, but also with love and grace and the potential for transformative reconciliation. We gather as a community which has been formed and created to be in the image of the Trinity, *imago trinitatis*. As such, we are created to reach toward God and toward one another, to participate in the life of self-giving love that characterizes the dynamic space of divine fellowship which extends and surrounds human community. In these spaces, we are prepared, by Word and Sacrament, to participate in the mission of God. We are sent out toward our Christian brothers and sisters, but also to engage in a discourse with a multiplicity of others in our communities and in our world. Sermons have a role to play in interrupting colonial discourse, and proclaiming the possibility of healing for relationships distorted or destroyed by colonial discourse.

---


23 Rebecca Todd Peters, 96.

**Thesis Statement**

I propose a postcolonial homiletic that can guide preaching in the PCC and beyond. It will be constructed at the intersection of postcolonial theory, Jürgen Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity, and other-oriented homiletic perspectives. I argue that:

*The Social Trinity reorients post-colonial, ecclesial discourse toward freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness. I propose a postcolonial homiletic for the context of the Presbyterian Church in Canada that emerges from the transformed discourse of the Social Trinity. This homiletic is illustrated by the constructive metaphor ‘Perichoretic Space,’ and is embodied in sermons through practices of a ‘postcolonial imagination’ which include postcolonial hermeneutics, imaginative conversation, and testimony.*

This thesis statement reflects my conviction that transformation and the shaping of ecclesial identity and ethics are supported and enabled by the Social Trinity, and that postcolonial theory provides key insights into colonial reality and postcolonial possibilities. This thesis statement promises a contribution to the field of homiletics that is distinctive in the following ways: First, the foregrounding of colonial experience as a context for preaching; second, the constructive application of postcolonial criticism to the field of homiletics; third, the consideration of the effects of colonialism/imperialism on the worship life and mission of the PCC; fourth, the significance of Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity as a frame for postcolonial ecclesial relationships; and fifth, the original spatial metaphor which I have developed in order to bring together the creative power of God’s life in Trinity, homiletic

---

practice, and the postcolonial imagination.

My own context is the PCC, a context which I have chosen to privilege in this thesis. Postcolonial perspectives challenge notions of the ‘universal,’ and highlight the specifics of location and the realities of cultural difference. As Young argues, “theory cannot operate politically if it is conceived as operating only at a disembodied synchronic level, as if it exists in an atemporal space, without consideration of its impact in relation to specific conditions at a particular moment.” In order to honour the significance of contextuality and cultural difference, I address the “specific conditions” of the PCC at this point in history, and draw examples from my own experience. Despite my specific focus, I perceive that postcolonial theory, social trinitarian theology, and their implications for a postcolonial homiletic are of tremendous value for other Canadian and US denominations.

Two realities are of particular interest for this dissertation. First, in Canadian Presbyterian congregations, preaching addresses a community that dwells within an imperial ethos, and contains a variety of postcolonial subjects including both (formerly) colonized persons and (formerly) colonizing persons, as well as observers of colonialism/imperialism, in the same space of worship and fellowship. Secondly, preaching in the PCC addresses a community that is historically associated with colonialism and cultural imperialism, and is linked to Tricontinental partner churches which struggle under global structures of domination.

---


26Young, 11.

27While this project concerns the worshipping community, local and global, and the inter-relationships within and among these communities, the application of postcolonial criticism to homiletics has relevance for the relationship of the Church to the world beyond, and the development of public theologies. For example, in Canada, the relationship of the Church to First Nations peoples regarding residential schools, land claims and cultural genocide; inter-religious dialogue and cooperation; the response of the Church to government foreign policy and multi-ethnic policy within Canada; and missional outreach to culturally diverse neighbours.
This thesis addresses the preaching of middle-class Canadian preachers, particularly preachers in the PCC, whose ethnic and cultural backgrounds are of European origin (many of whom serve culturally diverse congregations). I will employ postcolonial theory from my perspective as a white, female, Presbyterian Canadian, despite Rebecca Todd Peter’s observation that “the examination of a postcolonial perspective on the Church may, at first glance, seem an imperialistic impossibility for a white, affluent, Protestant woman from [the United States].” I acknowledge that those occupying other social locations may dispute my use of the term ‘postcolonial’, and I hope that the current project allows me to enter into a conversation with others who will critique and enlarge the perspective offered here. While I seek to problematise simple binary oppositions in this dissertation, at times I have chosen to use terms such as ‘colonized’ and ‘colonizer’ for the sake of simplicity, recognizing that both need to be further problematised by other categories such as race, class and gender. My use of these terms is not intended to diminish the diversity and complexity of colonial experience, at home and abroad.

**Methodology**

As described above, I rely on a critical adaptation of postcolonial theory and Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity in pursuit of a constructive vision for a homiletic which can address ecclesial relationships. I argue that the social doctrine of the Trinity, informed by postcolonial theory, is a theological basis for deconstructing the discourse of colonialism. My argument relies on the premise that preachers and listeners are embedded in a web of discourses, understood here as verbal, non-verbal and written conversations or

Rebecca Todd Peters, 99.
communications.\textsuperscript{29} We participate in the construction of discourse, but are also constructed by discourse.\textsuperscript{30} I envision the preaching process as occurring at the intersection of at least five discourses:

- \textit{sermonic discourse}: while sermons are generally delivered by one individual, preaching is not monologic. It involves an encounter among preacher, listener, and the active presence of God-in-Trinity, as well as scripture, culture and history (including colonial and postcolonial discourses), as well as other Christians who may not be physically present. Preaching is a public discourse.\textsuperscript{31}

- \textit{trinitarian discourse}: this discourse describes the interactions among the Persons of the Trinity as they are envisioned by Moltmann’s social doctrine. The Persons of the Trinity reach out toward one another, and toward creation. These trinitarian relationships are characterized by freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness. From a human perspective, this discourse is necessarily imaginative and abstract. It is a way of conceptualizing the interrelations among trinitarian Persons, and the manner in which the Trinity reaches out toward humanity and the rest of creation.

- \textit{ecclesial discourse}: refers to the interplay among Christians in local congregations, as well as among global churches. Ecclesial and sermonic discourse have a reciprocal relationship - sermons help shape ecclesiology, and ecclesiology shapes sermons.

- \textit{colonial discourse}: refers to the interactions among colonized and colonizing peoples.\textsuperscript{32} The attempts of colonizers to dominate, separate, homogenize and fix reality in an unchanging course are met with a variety of responses from colonized peoples.

- \textit{postcolonial discourse}: recognizes the ongoing experience and memory of colonialism/imperialism. It seeks to insert an alternative construction of reality that contradicts or neutralizes colonial power.

I believe that the social doctrine of the Trinity (and its corresponding trinitarian

\textsuperscript{29}Discourse is not limited to literary or verbal exchange, but are also encapsulated in the arts, sciences, laws and medical practices. Ania Loomba, \textit{Colonialism/Postcolonialism: The New Cultural Idiom}. (London: Routledge, 1998), 19.

\textsuperscript{30}See Michel Foucault, \textit{Archaeology of Knowledge}, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. (New York: Pantheon, 1972).


\textsuperscript{32}See chapter one for a more complete description of colonial discourse.
discourse), informed by postcolonial theory (postcolonial discourse), contradicts and transforms colonial discourse, and transforms both sermonic discourse and ecclesial discourse. This dissertation consists of five chapters.

**Chapter One**

This dissertation begins by introducing postcolonial theory in order to elucidate the historical and contemporary realities of colonialism/imperialism, thus providing essential building blocks for the arguments that develop in subsequent chapters. I define some of the key terms of postcolonial theory, and trace the development of postcolonial theory within the Western academy in response to processes of modern, Euro-American colonization and global decolonization. Colonial discourse is outlined according to four ‘goals’ of colonizers: domination, separation, homogeneity and fixedness. This outline of colonial discourse will be used as a frame for the social trinitarian deconstruction of colonialism in chapter three. I then identify some of the potential responses available to colonized peoples. I describe the postcolonial situation in Canada and in the PCC. This chapter concludes by identifying the manner in which colonial discourse enters into the ecclesial discourse of the PCC at both the local and global level.

**Chapter Two**

Week by week, preachers turn to the Bible as a source of God’s Word. Therefore, biblical interpretation is a key aspect of a postcolonial homiletic. Chapter two serves to introduce postcolonial biblical criticism, to reflect on the manner in which biblical interpretation can reinforce or contradict colonial discourse, and to provide a concrete example of some of the postcolonial terminology introduced in chapter one (including hybridity, Third Space, ambivalence, and ambiguity).
Chapter two begins by exploring the manner in which the biblical interpretation has been implicated in colonial/imperial processes. The Gospel of Mark is described as a text written and interpreted within the colonial context which contains various responses to colonial power. A postcolonial hermeneutic strategy is demonstrated through a reading of the encounter of Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman in Mark 7:24-30. I argue that the encounter between Jesus and the woman can be understood according to the postcolonial concepts of boundary-crossing, hybridity, and Third Space. This encounter between colonial subjects will later serve as an illustration for contemporary postcolonial ecclesial encounters and for the metaphor ‘Perichoretic Space’ developed in the next chapter. This metaphor combines social trinitarian theology with postcolonial theory.

Chapter Three

Having described how postcolonial theory has problematised colonial discourse in both world and text, I turn to Jürgen Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity in order to problematise colonial discourse as it occurs in the ecclesial space, and look toward an alternative discourse for ecclesial relationships. The Social Trinity is introduced according to four categories that I have derived from my study of Moltmann’s social doctrine - freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness. These terms reflect some of the primary relational properties of the Social Trinity. The chapter then explores correspondence among divine relationships and ecclesial relationships, and then employs the doctrine (informed by postcolonial theory) as a deconstructive lens for colonial discourse. I bring together postcolonial theory and Moltmann’s social doctrine in order to propose a constructive metaphor for ecclesial relationships: Perichoretic Space. This is a dynamic space of struggle, reconciliation, and hope, in which Christians of various colonial status meet encounter one another. These encounters
open up a Third Space between self and others in which the Trinity acts to recreate relationships and reorder discourse. Thus, the possibility aries for local and global Christian communities to encounter one another in a creative process of self-giving and other-receiving. The Perichoretic Space in which these Third Spaces occur is a space of hope. It is also a space of hybridity, tension, and particular discourses of domination, in which the Trinity engages in an ongoing process of transformation.

Chapter Four

Chapter four surveys recent other-oriented homiletic literature. In a manner similar to Moltmann’s social doctrine and postcolonial theory, other-oriented homiletic proposals have privileged freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness. In doing so, they implicitly or explicitly critique colonial discourse (and its tendency toward domination, separation, homogenization and fixedness). This chapter surveys other-oriented homiletic literature in order to gain insights for the development of a postcolonial homiletic. The other-oriented homiletic literature is then evaluated in light of specific issues significant for postcolonial preaching, including balancing power, embracing community, liberating difference and opening to the other. This chapter concludes with a summary of the contributions of Moltmann’s social doctrine, and postcolonial theory to the development of a postcolonial homiletic.

Chapter Five

Chapter five asks “what does it mean to preach in the Perichoretic Space?” In response, it sketches the contours of a postcolonial homiletic rooted in the discourse of the Social Trinity and postcolonial discourse, both of which participate in the development of positive ecclesial discourse. A postcolonial homiletic involves reflection upon the Perichoretic Space, and
encounters within this space (which I have named Third Spaces), and also proclaims the Church’s existence at the centre of the Perichoretic Space. Preaching in this space is affected by a number of variables including power, issues of knowledge and representation, tension, risk, weeping and confession, recreation, reconciliation and hope. I then describe three practices of the postcolonial imagination that make a positive contribution to the development of sermons in the Perichoretic Space: postcolonial hermeneutics, creative conversation, and testimony. Throughout this chapter, excerpts from sermons demonstrate the concrete application of a postcolonial homiletic.

This dissertation reflects on the practice of preaching as it is informed by postcolonial theory, and as it relates to the powerful presence of the Triune God, who is able to interrupt the discourses of colonialism, and bring a new discourse to life in a space of friendship and healing.
Chapter One: An Introduction to Postcolonial Theory with Reference to the Presbyterian Church in Canada

Introduction

Much of the contemporary world order can be attributed to modern processes of colonialism/imperialism. While certain populations have benefited from these processes, others have experienced colonialism/imperialism as one of modernity’s more destructive legacies. Colonial/imperial power structures and relational discourses have been inherited by later generations, and continue to permeate global culture, in often insidious ways. Postcolonial theory examines the manner in which histories and cultures of colonialism/imperialism “intrude our present,” recognizing that many nations within Africa, Asia and Latin America are treated as subordinate by European and North American nations. This subordination has resulted in significant economic, technological and cultural inequalities that are further complicated by diaspora, race, class, and gender. Postcolonial theory asserts the right of all people to material and cultural well-being, and is “directed toward the active transformation of the present out of

---

1While these terms have been applied historically in a variety of ways, colonialism/imperialism represents my choice to define these concepts fluidly in order to denote their overlap and mutual significance for the contemporary context. See my definitions below.


4David Huddart. Homi K. Bhabha. (New York: Routledge, 2006), introduction. I use the singular ‘theory’ to represent the field of postcolonial studies, which is in actuality highly diverse and inclusive of multiple ‘theories’.

the clutches of the past." In seeking to transform the present, postcolonial theory disputes Western hegemony and disrupts the discourse of the dominant by privileging the concerns of others who have been marginalised, oppressed or silenced by the colonial process.7

This chapter introduces postcolonial theory and its related concepts and vocabulary. The following key terms are defined according to their application in this project: colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism, post-colonial, postcolonial, colonial discourse, globalization, postcolonial subjects and postcolonial imagination.8 With reference to the historical processes of modern Euro-American colonization and global decolonization, I trace the development of postcolonial theory as it has emerged out of these processes and impacted literary criticism and other fields, including theology.9

Secondly, this chapter describes four aspects of colonial discourse as it has been initiated by colonizers: domination, separation, homogeneity and fixedness. The postcolonial concepts ambivalence, hybridity, boundaries and Third Space highlight the contribution of colonized persons to the discourse of the colonizer. Despite the colonizer’s attempt to construct a one-way discourse, the colonized have acted as initiators, agents, and respondents to the discourse of the colonizer. Ambiguity lies at the heart of colonial relationships.

Thirdly, this chapter discusses Canada’s postcolonial context with specific reference to the historical and contemporary mission of the PCC, and implications for preaching in the PCC. Colonialism/imperialism have influenced Canada’s history and its contemporary context, contributing to a highly complex postcolonial reality. The PCC has developed within this

---

6Ibid, 4.
9Postcolonial biblical criticism is detailed in chapter two.
To the best of my knowledge, neither academic nor denominational scholarship have addressed these realities.


10 To the best of my knowledge, neither academic nor denominational scholarship have addressed these realities.

11 Ashcroft, 12.


I. Postcolonial Theory

a. Definition of key terms

Postcolonial theory’s conceptual vocabulary is itself a site of continual negotiation. Scholars from a range of social locations debate the meanings of key terms, resulting in ever-evolving and somewhat unstable definitions. Given the nature and purpose of postcolonial debate, it is unwise, if not impossible, to grant absolute authority to any particular or narrow definition. The following definitions are suggestive of the range of available meanings, while explaining the specific manner in which each term is employed throughout this dissertation.

The worship spaces of the PCC are inhabited by both (formerly) colonizing and (formerly) colonized peoples, as well as observers, all of whom live in a nation that continues to be affected by imperial forces and participates in colonial discourses. Colonial discourses have implications not only for relationships within congregations, but also relationships within the global Church. The PCC is committed to partnerships with Tricontinental churches. While these partnerships constitute a vital aspect of the ministry and mission of the PCC, they are vulnerable to continuing colonial discourses. Sermons that address these partnerships may inadvertently participate in colonial discourses through the preachers’ representation of partner churches and the characterization of the relationship among PCC and Tricontinental churches.
Colonialism and Imperialism: Postcolonial critique as a theoretical and political practice has emerged as a form of resistance to colonialism and imperialism, both of which involve: “forms of subjugation of one people by another.” These terms are often used interchangeably, despite possible distinctions between them. Imperialism is an ideological basis for the act of colonialism. In this sense, colonialism is a specific historical example of imperialism. Radiating from the powerful centres of the metropolis, imperialism may be defined as “the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory.” It relates to global power politics, and may be complicated by competition among world powers for control of resources.

Colonialism describes “a particular form of cultural exploitation that developed with the expansion of Europe over the last 400 years,” under the umbrella of imperialism. Colonialism has been characterized by the implanting of settlements in a particular locale, accompanied by the colonizer’s attempt to govern, an exploitative economic relationship, and unequal power relations, resulting in physical and symbolic control of one group over another. Historically,

13 Young, 2001, 15.
15 Ashcroft, 55. This definition was originally put forth by Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1993), 8. Young notes that the words ‘empire,’ ‘imperial,’ and ‘imperialism’ have different historical and political connotations (2001, 25).
17 Ashcroft, 55. Although modern Euro-American colonialism is the focus of this project, colonialism is not limited to the last 400 years, nor has it been limited to Europe.
19 Frequently, this involves the incursion of a foreign power, but colonialism generally operates internally as well as externally. That is, certain members of colonizing nations will be also be oppressed and victimized by colonialism. Not all inhabitants of a colonizing nation exercise power over the colonial process. It is inaccurate to suggest that all who live in ‘the west’ are imperialists, and all who live in the ‘non-west’ are victims of imperialism. Nations are marked by internal stratification. For example, universal suffrage in Britain did not occur until 1928 - women and other groups did not have a vote during the most productive years of British imperialism. Young, 9.
colonies have been established primarily for settlement and/or exploitation of the natural and human resources within the colony.20

Fernando Segovia identifies the widespread presence of colonialism as: “an omnipresent, inescapable and overwhelming reality in the world,” ancient and modern. 21 Although the twentieth century was a period of colonial demise, anti-colonial struggles continue in many parts of the world (for example, in East Timor, Tibet, Palestine and the West Bank). While the implanting of settlements that characterized modern colonialism is no longer a common practice, “imperialism continues apace as Western nations such as America [sic] are still engaged in imperial acts, securing wealth and power through the continuing economic exploitation of other nations.”22 Global superpowers continue to operate imperialistically, yet the primary means of control have changed dramatically since the mid-twentieth century.

Colonialism, as the implanting of settlements has been superseded by neocolonialism,23 a term that denotes “a continuing economic hegemony that means the postcolonial state remains in a situation of dependence on its former masters, and that former masters continue to act in a colonist manner toward formerly colonized states.”24 This dependence is not limited to economics but extends to military, psychological and cultural arenas. Colonialism “has found new space of existence in the so-called postcolonial world in the virtual reality of economics that

---

20The experience of the colonized has differed according to the primary purpose for which the colony was established, and the race/status of individuals within a particular colony. For example, the experience of white Canadian settlers was different from aboriginal occupants.


24Young, 2001, 45.
is not only virtually omnipresent but also much harder to detect.”

I am concerned with the continuing effects of both colonialism and imperialism as it has been practised by Euro-American nations in the modern era. I affirm that historical ideologies of imperialism and practices of colonialism are both continuous and discontinuous with colonial/imperial legacies and manifestations within the postmodern world. It is important also to consider the heterogeneity of empires. Colonial/imperial projects have been carried out in diverse ways, even by a single power as it has acted in different historical epochs and geographical regions.

Post-colonial/Postcolonial: The precise definition of ‘postcolonial’ is elusive and highly disputed. When hyphenated (post-colonial), the term often designates a particular historical period - the time after colonization and decolonization have occurred (ie. post-independence). ‘Postcolonial’ (without hyphen) can refer to reading practices, values, and various forms of representations not limited to the time of actual colonial rule. Postcolonial is an umbrella term which covers culture as it is affected by the imperial process from the actual historical onset of colonization to the present day, encompassing periods of colonial rule, periods of historical decolonization and national independence, and contemporary imperialism. Robert Young suggests that many of the problems associated with defining postcolonial may be resolved “if the postcolonial is defined as coming after colonialism and imperialism, in their original meaning of direct-rule domination, but still positioned within imperialism in its later sense of the global

---


26 Young, 2001, 17. Despite this heterogeneity, it is possible to compare colonial/imperial situations transhistorically. This allows for a conversation between texts produced in a colonial/imperial ethos, and interpretation of those texts in other times and places also shaped by the experience of colonialism/imperialism.

27 McLeod, 5. For example, India gained independence from Britain in 1947, and thus the historical period following would be literally, post-colonial (1947-present).
system of hegemonic economic power.”

The current study employs the term *postcolonial* to represent the ongoing reality for those whose social histories have been shaped, and continue to be shaped culturally, psychologically and economically by the reality of colonialism/imperialism. When referring to colonialism/imperialism, I will often employ the present perfect continuous tense to indicate situations in which colonialism, which is often a past event, has continuing effects in the present, and may continue into the future. The postcolonial experience differs according to social location: “postcoloniality, like patriarchy, is articulated alongside other economic, social, cultural and historical factors, and therefore, in practice, it works quite differently in various parts of the world.” The ‘post’ in postcolonial thus refers to a spatial rather than temporal category, which recognizes the continuing manifestations of colonialism and imperialism, but denotes a desire to recognize and interrupt colonial discourses.

**Colonial discourse:** Colonial discourse refers to “the complex of signs and practices that organize social existence and social reproduction within colonial relationships.” Colonial discourse theories, espoused by such scholars as Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, recognize that colonial power has not been located solely in military and economic

---

28Young, 2001, 57. In some cases, the processes of decolonization had a greater impact on the population of a colony than direct-rule. For example, Jefferess argues that the struggle for independence had greater impact on most Indians than the day-to-day reality of British rule. David Jefferess, *Postcolonial Resistance: Culture, Liberation and Transformation*. (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 60.

29Anne McClintock argues that the term ‘post’ colonial is prematurely celebratory, especially for those who find themselves in Northern Ireland, the West Bank, East Timor, among others (256), and for women, who may not occupy the same ‘singular post-colonial condition’ as men (261). “The Angels of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term Post-colonial,” in *Colonial Discourse, Postcolonial Theory*, edited by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 253-266.


31Ashcroft, 41.

32These scholars are sometimes collectively titled the “Holy Trinity” of postcolonial studies.
arenas, but also within discourses of domination in which power and knowledge are inextricably linked.\textsuperscript{33} The specific nature of such discourse varies according to time and place, but it is always embedded in other discourses such as patriarchy, poverty and modernity. Colonizers’ representations and modes of perception have been used as weapons of colonial power insofar as they have sought to covertly colonize the minds and psyches of colonized subjects.\textsuperscript{34} The success of colonial projects has relied, in part, on the ability of the colonizer to convince the colonized that the language of the empire is a natural and true order of life.\textsuperscript{35}

Postcolonial scholars challenge the ability of empire to impose a ‘language’ or discourse, positing that the flow of power between colonized and colonizer is not unidirectional.\textsuperscript{36} The colonized are not simply subjects, or recipients, of colonial discourse, but also agents which actively participate in the discourse by inserting their own voices in order to disrupt, resist or accommodate to the discourse of empire.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, both colonized and colonizers shape, and are shaped by, this discourse.\textsuperscript{38}

Colonial discourse is here understood to be an antagonistic struggle for power, and attraction to power, that arises in the space between colonized and colonizer. I affirm that colonized persons interrupt and subvert the authority of the colonizer, even as the colonizer

\textsuperscript{33}Foucault said “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together.” Michel Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality, Vol One: An Introduction}, trans. Robert Hurley. (London: Allen Lane, 1978). Edward Said is generally acknowledged as the scholar who linked Foucault’s discourse theory to postcolonialism. Young, 2001, 383; Ashcroft, 41.

\textsuperscript{34}Simon Samuel, \textit{A Postcolonial Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus}. (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 1.

\textsuperscript{35}McLeod, 19.

\textsuperscript{36}Some have criticized advocates of colonial discourse theory for overemphasizing discursive aspects of the colonial process, and ignoring the material consequences. For example, see Benita Parry, \textit{Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique}. (London: Routledge, 2004). Also Jefferess, 27, 30. Although this dissertation focuses mainly on symbolic discourses, I assume that those discourses have direct material consequences.

\textsuperscript{37}Samuel, 3.

\textsuperscript{38}See the section below entitled ‘The Empire Talks Back’ for a fuller description of colonial discourse as it relates to hybridity and ambivalence.
attempts to control or orient the discourse in pursuit of the goals of empire, which I have theorized as domination, separation, homogeneity and fixedness.

**Globalization:** Globalization refers to the manner in which local communities and individuals are impacted by global economic and cultural forces. In the past century, the social relations of nations have been reorganized, reflecting the interdependency of economic markets and communication systems. Proponents of globalization perceive it as a positive phenomenon which increases local access to cultural and material global commodities, resulting in an improved standard of living for global communities. Opponents reject globalization “as a form of domination by ‘First World’ countries over ‘Third World’ ones, in which individual distinctions of culture and society become erased by an increasingly homogeneous global culture, and local economies are more firmly incorporated into a system of global capital.” This negative perception of globalization assumes that it is controlled by global power centres, and is another way in which the ‘centre’ regains power over ‘periphery.’

While I perceive the term globalization to be somewhat neutral in itself, I acknowledge that in a postcolonial context globalization is not equally beneficial for all communities. From an ecclesiological perspective, while globalization can be associated with cultural imperialism and a tendency to homogenize ecclesial cultures, it also has the positive effect of increasing the potential for more intimate encounters with global others. The global media and increased mobility are examples of the manner in which globalization brings us closer to others literally and figuratively.

---

39*Ashcroft, 107.*


**Postcolonial Subjects:** Traditionally, colonized peoples have been labelled ‘subjects.’ “Armed with confidence of their own cultural and intellectual superiority, the Europeans approached all those with which they came into contact as ‘subjects’ in need of education, civilization and culture.” Postcolonial subjects, as the term is used here, include all those who are products of colonial discourse. The term signifies the manner in which human beings in the twenty-first century postcolonial context, Western and Tricontinental, continue to construct and be constructed by colonial discourse. It acknowledges the complexity of the postcolonial situation in which many people are multiply oppressed, or occupy simultaneously the roles of colonized/colonizer, oppressed/oppressor. Others may be more accurately termed ‘observers.’ Although there is vast diversity in the experience and relative power of postcolonial subjects, “all are dehumanized by injustice and oppression.”

**Postcolonial Imagination:** Chinese biblical scholar and theologian Kwok Pui-Lan defines postcolonial imagination as “a desire, a determination, and a process of disengagement with the whole colonial syndrome which takes many forms and guises.” A postcolonial imagination fervently hopes and believes that such a ‘post’ is possible. Colonialism is not finished, nor is it contained in discrete historical frames of the past. Similar to the ‘now’ and ‘not yet’ of Christian eschatology, the postcolonial imagination enters a space between the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet,’ recognizes that the world is not as it should be, and begins to imagine a new way of

---

42Rebecca Todd Peters, “Decolonizing our Minds,” 98.
43Ashcroft, 213.
interpreting both past and present. A postcolonial imagination engenders an ethical commitment to identify with others, especially those who struggle under global structures of domination.\(^{47}\)

### b. Colonization, Decolonization and the emergence of Postcolonial Criticism

The majority of the world’s population has been impacted in some way by colonialism/imperialism, and its shadow continues to darken political, economic and cultural spheres.\(^{48}\) In many ways, modern world history has been colonial history. Enrique Dussel has argued that violently overcoming and eclipsing the other was essential to the development of the modern sense of subjectivity.\(^{49}\) Since Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492, the power of Europe has moved outwards to the farthest reaches of the earth. It is no coincidence that the heyday of European colonialism coincided with a burgeoning capitalist economy, which required both raw materials and human labour to fuel production and consumption. Loomba distinguishes between pre-capitalist colonialism, and modern colonialism:

Modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered—it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonised and colonial countries. This flow worked in both directions—slaves and indentured labour as well as raw materials were transported to manufacture goods in the metropolis, or in other locations for metropolitan consumption, but the colonies also provided captive markets for European goods.\(^{50}\)

It is impossible to consider Western colonialism outside of its position within

---


\(^{48}\)Samuel, 1.


\(^{50}\)Loomba, 3.
Christendom.51 According to Canadian theologian Marilyn Legge, “Christianity has been an essential part of global imperial social ordering, regularly and morally legitimating the mechanisms of controlling markets and raw materials to exploit the colonies and their populations.”52 European empires planted populations of white settlers in lands already occupied by indigenous populations, resulting in displacement as well as physical and cultural genocide. This systematic destruction was supported by Church hierarchies, and was often justified by a type of conquest theology which is “a central aspect of a colonial and imperialistic mentality that continues to generate dualistic divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ while claiming that ‘God is on our side’ as a way to justify acts of aggression and power.”53 It can be difficult to untangle the ‘Christianizing mission’ of the Church from the ‘civilizing mission’ of Western colonizers.54 Both have ascribed superiority to Western cultural institutions, “portraying the

51Theologian Douglas John Hall suggests that with Constantine’s conversion to Christianity, Christians in effect became chaplains to his imperium. See “Living in the Midst of Empire,” Appendix A, “Christianity and Empire.”


53Rebecca Todd Peters, “Decolonizing our Minds.” Residential schools run by the Canadian government and Churches are examples of this. Matthew 28:19 (and other texts) have been used as scriptural warrants for such conquests. See chapter two of this dissertation.

54Western mission projects have benefited from colonial/imperial infrastructures. “The missionaries from Europe and North America came out of a context that assumed the supremacy of Western Culture and ‘Western religion,’ that is, Christianity, in a single breath.” Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 230. “On the whole, missionaries accepted the colonial powers - or at least did not question them.” Joerg Rieger, “Theology and Mission Between Neocolonialism and Postcolonialism.” Mission Studies, 21/2 (2004), 201-26 (205). David Bosch explains that missionaries ended up supporting the colonial system simply by “accepting the presence of the colonial lords as an incontrovertible reality,” Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission. (Maryknoll; NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 306. The missionary movement has had some positive consequences. The targets of Western mission were not always passive recipients, but also actively participated in the development of the Christian Church in their own contexts. (Bevans and Schroeder, 231). For example, Andrew Walls notes that the missionary Church gave “new scope for women’s energies and gifts.” See “Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church,” Evangelical Quarterly, 88/2, 1988, 141-155 (154). In Central India, Canadian Presbyterian missionaries have helped to establish schools and hospitals. The Christian faith has enabled the subaltern Bhil people to develop a strong sense of self worth. In other areas, however, patriarchal European systems have had negative consequences, such as the erosion of matrilineal cultures and the intensification of women’s subordination. See Loomba, 167.
West as the centre of all cultural good, a centre with a supposedly redemptive impulse, while it relegates all other cultures to the project of civilizing, Christianizing, assimilating, and developing.”

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Social Darwinism and other social theories provided theoretical justification for the domination of one race over another, thus constructing colonialism as a necessary and natural act resulting in the civilizing or betterment of the colonized peoples. Rudyard Kipling called this the “White man’s burden.” The unjust processes of colonialism were obfuscated behind “a liberal smokescreen of civilizing ‘task’ and paternalistic ‘development’ and ‘aid’.”

By portraying others negatively, Western colonizers have continually underlined their own superiority. In 1978, Edward Said published *Orientalism*, which draws on Marxist theories of power to reflect on the way that colonizers produce knowledge about colonies in a manner that justifies their subjugation. Western production of knowledge about the ‘Orient’ (Said is referring mainly to the Middle East and Egypt) has perpetuated stereotypical representations of the Eastern peoples, including the idea that the Orient is ‘timeless,’ unchanging, fantastic, bizarre, and that its people are variously degenerate. According to Said, Western representations are founded upon unequal binary divisions according to which the

---

55 Dube, “Postcoloniality,” 104.

56 See Loomba, chapter 2. Social Darwinism refers to a collection of theories which emerged in the late nineteenth century based on Darwin’s evolutionary perspectives.


58 Ashcroft, 57.

59 Ibid.

60 Said, *Orientalism*. Young claims that Orientalism founded postcolonial theory as an academic discipline, and that subsequent critiques of Said’s work have defined the field (384).

Orient is constructed as the opposite of the West. The “West occupies a superior rank while the Orient is its ‘other,’ in a subservient position.”

In the decades of imperial expansion, the West “accumulated experiences, territories, peoples, histories; it studied them, classified them, verified them, and above all, it subordinated them to the culture and indeed the very idea of white Christian Europe.”

The non-European world served conveniently as the constitutive other for Europe’s dominant image of itself as rational and civilized. Increasingly, the colonized ‘other’ existed to define the colonizer as culturally and morally superior. This tendency became more pronounced throughout the eighteenth century, as Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and England expanded their colonial domains, and as scientific and technological advances of the enlightenment placed the West in a position of significant advantage over the rest of the world.

By the beginning of the First World War, nine-tenths of the earth’s surface was under imperial control and/or occupation, and one quarter of the world population was under the influence of the British Empire. The era post-World War II witnessed colonized peoples reclaiming power and control in a relatively rapid process of decolonization. Decolonization occurred for a number of reasons, including resistance from colonized peoples, supported by the USSR, China, and Cuba; the rising cost of maintaining colonies; and pressure from the United

---

62McLeod, 41.


65Bevans and Schroeder, 214.

66Bosch, 291.

67Young, 2001, 2.
States which viewed colonial trading policies as barriers to its own expansion of trade.\textsuperscript{68} Despite achieving independence, the power of former colonies was often nominal and could only be exercised within the context of Western capitalism.\textsuperscript{69} For example, Africa was rich in resources, but the markets and channels for distributing such resources were located elsewhere, and governments were forced to maintain the economic relationships of their former colonizers.\textsuperscript{70} Thus, some nations regained political power, but not economic power.\textsuperscript{71} Another consequence of decolonization has been the tendency of native leaders to mimic the former colonizers, so that newly independent states emerge “fully cloaked in the colonial garment and devoted to the structures and policies of their former colonizers.”\textsuperscript{72}

Postcolonial scholars have frequently criticized their own discipline, resulting in a continual evolution of both theory and practice.\textsuperscript{73} Postcolonial theory reflects to some extent a dialectical process among colonizers who seized power, and colonized populations which have sought to regain independence and self-sovereignty.\textsuperscript{74} Despite its origins in anti-colonial struggles and resistance literature produced within the colonies themselves, postcolonial theory has largely developed within Anglophone universities by postcolonial subjects whose “origins and cultural affiliations lay elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{75} Postcolonial theory draws from multiple sources, including literary theory, cultural anthropology, Marxism, sociology, feminism, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68}Ibid, 44. This is evidence of the growing global influence of the United States post-WWII.
\item \textsuperscript{69}Jeffress, 97.
\item \textsuperscript{70}Ibid, 85.
\item \textsuperscript{71}Young, 2001, 45.
\item \textsuperscript{72}Dube, “Postcoloniality,” 101.
\item \textsuperscript{73}Young, 2001, 10.
\item \textsuperscript{74}Ibid, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{75}Ibid, 63-64.
\end{itemize}
psychoanalysis, among others. At best, it is a hybrid and multifaceted conversation which arises from the dialectic among West and East, North and South, metropolis and periphery, and ponders the “positive and negative effects of the mixing of peoples and cultures.” This postcolonial conversation has consequences for both metropolis and colony, as both have been deeply, though differently, impacted by the colonial process, decolonisation and subsequent restructuring.

In the 1980’s, literary scholars and cultural critics began re-reading canonical English literature. Inspired by the poststructuralist views of Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault and Jacques Lacan, scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha have affirmed, challenged and expanded the pioneering work of Edward Said. These and other scholars contributed to the development of postcolonial criticism, an eclectic and cross disciplinary perspective which investigates and exposes “the link between knowledge and power in the textual production of the West.” Written texts can shape the experience of both colonized and colonizer. Texts can be used by colonizers to further inscribe colonial power. The written word can be used by the colonized to resist oppressive regimes, or to tell another story that is absent from dominant portrayals of reality. Postcolonial interpreters use existing tools and methods as an “act of disobedience” directed against the text and its interpretation, claiming that language itself needs to be decolonised, “to be remade in other images.”

As a cultural practice, postcolonial criticism is applied not only as a reading practice for texts but as a category for exploring relationships and discourses between unequal partners. It searches history and contemporary relationships for written, spoken, and non-verbal discourses

76Ibid, 67.
77Ibid, 69.
of power which stem from colonial processes. In both literary and cultural applications, postcolonial criticism analyses the manner in which colonial/imperial representations have impacted, and continue to impact, our representations of others. It seeks to make space for voices silenced in the production of texts and textual interpretation, asking how the construction of knowledge is characterized by the absence, difficulty or impossibility of representing the subaltern or colonized subject. It seeks to undermine simple binary oppositions and contrastive ways of thinking. In other words, postcolonial criticism pays attention to the contact zones between colonizer and colonized; subaltern and powerful; different cultures and perspectives. These contact zones are critical for the postcolonial homiletic developed in this dissertation.

The field of postcolonial theory has been dominated by literary scholars. However, in recent years, other fields have incorporated its insights, including history, economics, political theory, sociology, anthropology, and the arts.\textsuperscript{80} Robert Young notes the tendency of postcolonial theory to be a resolutely secular, rather than spiritual discipline.\textsuperscript{81} Increasingly however, theologians search for points of contact between Christian theology and postcolonial theory.\textsuperscript{82}

As already noted, the Christian Church has been implicated in modern colonialism. Theologians committed to a postcolonial perspective are anxious to overcome reluctance on the part of the Church, and the field of theology, to acknowledge the profound relation between Christianity

\textsuperscript{80}Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffen, \textit{The Post-colonial Studies Reader}. (London: Routledge, 2006, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition), 5.

\textsuperscript{81}Young, 2001, 338.

and empire. Perhaps not surprisingly, postcolonial theory has made an impact on missional ecclesiologies, as theologians reflect on the way that Christian mission has interacted with colonialism/imperialism. Postcolonial criticism is beginning to find its way into Christian practice (i.e. worship), and this dissertation seeks to bring it more fully into the field of homiletics.

II. Colonial/Postcolonial Relationships

a. Colonial Discourse: domination, separation, homogeneity, fixedness

The scope, goals and consequences of modern colonial projects have differed according to a number of variables, including the purpose of the project (whether it involved large-scale settlement), the relative global power of the colonizing nation, and the resistance offered by indigenous groups. In considering the interaction among colonizers and colonized peoples, it is important to avoid homogenizing colonizers or colonial subjects, yet it is possible to discern some general tendencies of colonial relationships. Building on the above discussion of postcolonial theory, I have reorganized key insights into four categories that describe the colonizers’ contribution to colonial discourse. These are fluid categories, and by no means the only possible categories for describing such interactions. These terms are derived from my own study of colonialism and postcolonialism, and provide the framework for a discussion of the Social Trinity’s deconstruction of colonialism in chapter three, and other-oriented preaching in


chapter four. These tendencies, domination, separation, homogeneity and fixedness, represent the goals of the colonizers. Colonized peoples seek to thwart these goals in a number of ways, which will be discussed in the section entitled ‘The Empire Talks Back.’

**Domination:** Colonialism/imperialism has often taken the form of “violent dialogue” among representatives of European states and the indigenous people of other continents. Colonizers have shown a lack of concern for colonized others, which has frequently translated into violent oppression, and have unilaterally imposed culture and political rule without regard for the agency or autonomy of colonized peoples. Slavery and indentured labour movements, apartheid, military responses to colonial uprisings, sexual violence against indigenous women - all of these are examples of the violent tactics and consequences of colonialism/imperialism. In order to maintain power and control, colonizers have sometimes relied on visible military presence. In a cycle of reciprocal violence, resistance to colonial/imperial power has frequently led to violent revolution. Colonized peoples may begin to understand their own existence as a matter of violent confrontation with colonizing settlers. I perceive material consequences arising from the colonial oppression and exploitation of indigenous resources, such as poverty and food insecurity, to be another form of violence that has threatened the physical well being of

---


87The violence of slavery is a particularly poignant example of the manner in which human bodies were violated as a means of economic gain. Brad Braxton notes “colonial Christianity was a primary ideological pillar of Trans-Atlantic slavery.” See “Paul and Racial Reconciliation: A Postcolonial Approach to 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.” In *Scripture and Traditions: Essays on Early Christianity and Judaism in Honor of Carl R. Holladay*, edited by Patrick Gray and Gail R. O’Day. (Boston, MA: Brill, 2008), 423.

88Jeffress notes that postcolonial resistance theories, such as that proposed by Fanon, may presume a need for violent resistance on the part of the oppressed (77, 158). See Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington. (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
colonized peoples. In addition to physical and material violence, colonizers have attempted to
dominate colonies in more symbolic ways. “It is not (just) the sword that establishes and
maintains colonial authority but the culture of fear that violence produces and depends upon.”

Colonial power also attempts to control the production of knowledge about colonized peoples. Production of knowledge about colonized people and cultures has been accomplished without their input or participation, often resulting in inaccurate and degenerate portraits of colonized others. Colonial/imperial powers have relied on a series of stereotypes to describe the identities of the colonized peoples, “…laziness, aggression, violence, greed, sexual promiscuity, bestiality, primitivism, innocence and irrationality are attributed (often contradictorily and inconsistently) by the English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese colonists to Turks, Africans, Native Americans, Jews, Indians, the Irish, and others.”

Colonial/imperial powers have also relied on a strategy of colonizing imaginations in order that colonized subjects might view themselves according to colonial representations. In this sense, colonial discourse has interfered with the right of colonized peoples to narrate their own histories and identities. The narrative of colonial power has left little room for the oppressed to speak: “they exist only as they are constructed within the colonial imagination, a function of the empire’s will to power.”

By assuming the intellectual, political, economic, technological and spiritual superiority of the West, Western powers have constructed a world order that situates themselves at the centre and pushes all others to the margins. Decisions regarding the lives and livelihoods of colonized peoples have been made by others who lived in distant lands, or who have resided,

---

89 Jefferess, 124.
90 McLeod, 22.
91 Loomba, 107.
92 Jefferess, 24.
unwelcome, in the colonies.

**Separation**: Colonial discourse constructs oppositional relationships between colonized and colonizer.\(^{93}\) The power of one group over another forces the maintenance of social boundaries. Postcolonial theorists have posited that colonists separate ‘civilized’ and ‘savage,’ in order to maintain ‘cultural purity.’\(^{94}\) The maintenance of social and physical boundaries between rulers and ruled has been essential to colonial projects: “Different colonial regimes tried (to varying extents) to maintain cultural and racial segregation precisely because, in practice, the interactions between colonising and colonised peoples constantly challenged any neat division between races and cultures.”\(^{95}\) In order to justify colonial projects, it has been important to emphasize differences among rulers and ruled. Thus, the practice of overemphasizing differences has been used as a weapon of oppression. As Dussel has written, “essentializing declares that differences of race, sex, class, and sexual orientation are part of created nature and cannot be changed. When we essentialise, it is possible to justify oppression, poverty, exploitation, and imperialism by declaring that the dominating group has been created to ‘rule the world.’”\(^{96}\) As noted above, colonizers have sought to construct the identity of those whom they have oppressed, which has served to legitimate and rationalize European oppression, insofar as colonial subjects have been constructed as a threat to the security of the empire, or as needing external governance (i.e. they have been constructed as children in need of parenting, or

\(^{93}\)Despite these attempts at separation, ironically, the colonized and colonizers are inextricably linked with one another.

\(^{94}\)See Ashcroft, *Key Concepts*. Theorists such as Homi K Bhabha dispute the existence of cultural purity. See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1994).

\(^{95}\)Loomba, 69. For example, servants of colour worked within white households.

uncivilized.) For example, colonial leaders have monitored the sexual relationships of colonized peoples, and expressed considerable anxiety around relationships among colonized and colonizers. This anxiety may have arisen from a fear that colonizers might ‘mix’ with indigenous cultures, undermining claims to cultural superiority and “blurring the line” between ruler and ruled.

It has been in the best interest of colonizers to enforce ‘divide and rule’ policies which emphasise differences among subgroups within a particular colony. An extreme example of colonial separation were the apartheid policies of South Africa. Apartheid is a ‘politics of separation’ that divided people according to race, and thus prevented contact and preempted the possibility of cultural understanding. Another example of separation that divides a native population stems from the tendency of colonizers to deploy natives as agents of colonial power. These natives acted as intermediaries to ensure that the colonizers did not have to come face to face with oppressed populations. In other cases, indigenous landowners have cooperated with

---

97 An example of the Church aiding the preservation of an unjust status quo in order to protect the security of imperial interests arises from missionary hermeneutics. Sugirtharajah has argued that commentaries written during the colonial period for the Anglican Church in India “seek out and identify what they deem to be evils of Indian society: superstition, mendacity, laziness and bribery; all of these have to be resisted. In setting moral boundaries between Indian Christians and other Indians, the commentaries served to establish the case for British intervention. By prescribing Christian morality, these commentaries become the textual means for justifying the British occupation as the harbinger of civilization.” See “Imperial Critical Commentaries: Christian Discourse and Commentarial Writings in Colonial India.” Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 73, 83-112 (87-88).


This kind of separation was not enforced by all colonizers. Some preferred to settle in the colony, intermarrying and adopting local language and customs, thus providing “a strong base for colonial rule.” For example, the Portugese in India or the Spanish in America. See Loomba, 110.

99 “Apartheid has been characterized as the most extreme example of traditional colonial power.” Jefferess, 151. See Abdul R. JanMohamed, Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983).

colonial powers. An example of separation in the contemporary context arises from the manner in which market forces extend and drive the gap between rich and poor.

**Homogeneity:** While colonialism has sought to maintain boundaries between persons and groups, it has also aimed to erase otherness in a quest for unity and homogeneity. By suppressing indigenous systems in favour of Western governance, values and culture, Western colonialism has attempted to eradicate other cultures. Colonialism/imperialism has been marked by a tension that sought both to separate groups by emphasising “racial hierarchies in order to maintain rule and continue material exploitation,” and simultaneously enforce a homogenous world view by uplifting ‘primitive’ groups to European ‘civilization.’

While colonizers essentialized differences between and among people, they still attempted to unify disparate groups under a common flag, religion, or economic system:

Thus the intention is to assert an unbridgeable gap or difference between colonisers and colonised peoples. But the effort to convert the natives also assumes that the latter can be transformed by the religious or cultural truths enshrined in the colonial texts. Here the assumption is that the gap between cultures and people can be bridged. Thus there is a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the attempt to educate, ‘civilise’ or co-opt the colonial ‘other.’

Colonial attempts to ‘bridge the gap’ have been rooted in an assumption that the world view of the dominant culture is ‘universal’ and can be held true for all humanity. “In the practice of colonialism, the universal human was revealed to be the white man.”

Other cultures have

---

101 Jefferess, 24.
102 Murder, genocide and ethnic cleansing are extreme manifestations of a drive to erase difference or otherness.
104 Loomba, 90.
105 Jefferess, 10.
been undervalued or despised, and perceived to be in need of betterment or advancement, goals that “mask the extensive and multifaceted exploitation of the colony.”

In many of its modern missionary endeavours, the Christian Church has revealed an “allergy to difference,” and participated in cultural imperialism. Missionaries, in many contexts, have taught Western values and lifestyles. New converts to Christianity have been expected to conform to Western standards of dress, hygiene and manners.

A contemporary example of homogenization arises from the hegemony of neo-liberal economic globalization. Global economic institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and transnational corporations can be interpreted as an attempt to unify all markets under one, Western, economic model. All nations and peoples are expected to submit to the logic of Western economics.

**Fixedness:** Colonial/imperial projects have relied on the presentation of a stable and unified worldview rooted in the colonizer’s right to rule and control colonized peoples. This concept of fixedness is closely related to the suppression of difference, separation, and boundary maintenance described above. By fixing boundaries and social roles, colonial discourse has kept groups separate from one another. Colonizers have worked to convince colonized peoples that the language of empire is normative - the true order of life. “Under colonialism, a colonised people are made subservient to ways of regarding the world which reflect and support colonialist

---


107 Keller, 10.

108 For example, see Nupur Choudhuri, *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 197-198.

109 Nestor O Miguez, “Jesus and Empire: Then and Now,” in “Living in the Midst of Empire,” Appendix G.

110 McLeod, 19.
values. A particular value system is taught as the best, truest world-view.” Thus, colonial
discourse has sought to fix identities and social relationships into a hierarchy of categories such
as ruler/ruled, colonizer/colonized, civil/savage etc. Modern colonial/imperial processes have
been fixed within a Western, Christian metanarrative which assigned roles and established
boundaries between and among peoples. Class systems are prime examples - classes assign
individuals or groups a particular identity based on their position within a fixed hierarchy of
categories. Movement between classes, or mixing of classes, is discouraged or forbidden.

Religious, social and political systems claiming that language, knowledge and
boundaries are fixed may be aesthetically pleasing, and may offer a sense of security because
they are without loose ends, troubling inconsistences or ambiguities. Such systems provide the
framework for ideologies that claim to have no alternative. There is thus room for only one
story, one version of reality, one construction of social relationships.

b. The Empire Talks Back

In symbolic and literal ways, colonizers have initiated one-way conversations, in which
the colonized other is inserted into the discursive space fully formed in the colonizer’s own
image. Yet colonial discourse has historically emerged as a multi-directional discourse. Anti-
colonial sentiment and criticism did not begin with postcolonial theory, anti-colonialism has
existed as long as colonialism. Thus, the goals of the colonizer presented above, domination,
separation, homogeneity and fixedness, have been variously resisted, challenged, accommodated
or internalized by colonial subjects. In the twentieth century, particularly in the aftermath of
World War II and sweeping decolonization, came an extended reflection upon the past and

111Ibid.

112World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Accra Confession, paragraph 10.
present agency of the colonized within colonial discourse. Postcolonial theory has challenged
the attempts of colonial discourse to locate language and the production of knowledge within
closed systems. Systems claiming to encompass all known reality cannot account for the
novelty, variety and ambiguity at the heart of reality. According to various postcolonial theories,
dominated peoples contradict or reject colonial constructions of subaltern identity and resist the
identity imposed by the colonizer in subtle, unconscious or overt ways.\footnote{113}

While Edward Said tended to stress the agency of the colonizer, scholars such as Homi
K. Bhabha have particularly stressed the active agency of the colonized, arguing that colonial
power is not a straightforward form of oppression, but involves a complex interaction between
the colonizer and the colonized which undermines any assumption of simple polarization. To
suggest that power is entirely in the hands of the colonizer is an oversimplification. Colonial
discourse is not a one-way flow of power from colonizer to colonized, but rather a complex
interaction in which the identity of both colonized and colonizer are constructed.\footnote{114} Jefferess
comments: “Bhabha constructs colonial power as a political and cultural structure in which
subjects have varying positions or experiences of empowerment/dominance and
disempowerment/exploitation.”\footnote{115} Despite the manner in which colonial discourse defines or
attempts to define the colonized, the subaltern or colonized subject ‘talks back’ to the colonizer.
Colonized persons may use the very tools of colonial power in order to “at least partially

\footnote{113}{David Huddart, Homi K. Bhabha. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 40.}

\footnote{114}{Gayatri Spivak challenged the enlightenment assumption of autonomous agency over individual
consciousness, claiming that human consciousness is derived from discourse. It is constructed, not chosen. The
consciousness of subalterns is constructed by sources outside of self. The colonial subject is not free to be
sovereign over his or her own construction of selfhood. Instead, the colonial subject is defined by the voice of the
colonizer. See Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, edited by C.
Nelson and L. Grossberg. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988).}

\footnote{115}{Jefferess, 31.}
dismantle the colonizer’s house.\textsuperscript{116} Thus colonial discourse is opened up, and it becomes clear that colonial authority is not capable of completely destroying, or even adequately naming, indigenous culture. The manner in which the colonizer represents colonized peoples is open to negotiation and transformation by colonized populations. The colonizer says “you are who I say you are,” but the colonized subject refuses to be defined by the voice of the colonizer, and asserts his or her own voice within the discourse. This undermines the authority of the colonizer by asserting the right of the colonized to narrate, or signify, his or her own experience. The voice of the other interrupts and calls into question the authority of the dominant.\textsuperscript{117}

Ambivalence, hybridity and Third Space are terms which have arisen within postcolonial studies. The following descriptions particularly attend to the development of these concepts in the work of Homi K. Bhabha.\textsuperscript{118} These concepts interrupt simple binary distinctions between colonized and colonizer, recognizing that reality and identity are somewhat ambiguous, and have shifting meanings dependent on historical circumstance and personal interpretation.

\textit{Ambivalence} is a term derived from psychoanalysis, and refers to a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and its opposite,\textsuperscript{119} a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from a person, action or object.\textsuperscript{120} According to advocates of colonial discourse theory,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item [\textsuperscript{116}] Laura E. Donaldson, “Postcolonialism and Bible Reading.” \textit{Semeia} 75 (1996), 1-14 (4). For example, Donaldson suggests that teaching English in mission schools gave the colonized a common language, especially in regions with many local dialects and languages. By learning English, colonized peoples with different mother tongues were enabled to organize in various ways against the colonizer.
\item [\textsuperscript{117}] Bhabha, 114.
\item [\textsuperscript{118}] Scholars have critiqued Bhabha’s theories, including Bhabha’s apparent homogenization of colonial discourse across time and space (Jeffreress, 32); his lack of emphasis on historical examples of organized and intentional opposition (Robert Young, \textit{White Mythologies: Writing History and the West}, London: Routledge, 1990, 128); and his disregard for material conditions such as poverty, access to resources, etc. (See Jeffreress, 32; and Parry’s materialist critique of postcolonial studies.
\item [\textsuperscript{119}] Samuel, 28.
\item [\textsuperscript{120}] Ashcroft, \textit{Key Concepts}, 12.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
ambivalence is a hallmark of the complex relationship between the colonizer and colonized. “The colonial condition in all its power-laden inequality is a site crisscrossed with discourses of both affiliation to colonial power and resistance to that same power.” A colonized subject might despise the colonizer, yet also desire to resemble the colonizer. For the dominant colonizer, ambivalence is unwelcome because it disrupts the straightforward authority of the colonizer. Colonizers desire compliant subjects who act according to the colonizer’s expectations, but ambivalent colonized subjects tend to copy or mimic colonizers, resulting in a kind of mockery. Those in the margins talk back to the powerful centre, unsettling the confidence and self-identity of those who occupy the central places of power. In the words of Robert Young, the periphery, which is classified by the centre as “the borderline, the marginal, the unclassifiable, the doubtful,” responds by constituting the centre as an “equivocal, indefinite, indeterminate ambivalence.”

*Hybridity* is “a strategic interruption of the manner in which cultural difference is constructed and sustained in colonial contexts.” This concept contests the notion of cultural purity which has been a sustaining foundation for colonialism, and challenges unitary claims, refusing to collapse difference, or signify easy ‘multicultural’ or ‘cosmopolitan’ relationships.

---


123 Young gives a particularly interesting example of this phenomenon. The Roman Empire was a model for British imperialism - thus Classics were an essential aspect of education in British schools and universities as a means of indoctrinating the ideology of empire. Young writes “the English upper classes remained shamelessly in love with the culture of their own conquerors of over a thousand years earlier and imitated them in their own cultural productions and educational institutions. They were the first mimic men.” *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 33.

124 Ibid, 161.

125 Ibid, 383.

126 Ibid, 383.
Cultures are not discrete entities, but are interdependent and mutually constructed through continual interaction. Boundaries, which may be physical, geographical, or signified (metaphorical), are highly relevant places for encounters and the production of meaning. As an analytical construct, postcolonial hybridity assumes colonial discourse as a site of negotiation. Boundaries between cultures or identities are creative spaces of struggle and negotiation.\textsuperscript{127} Hybridity challenges the construction and representation of both centre and periphery by asserting that new transcultural forms arise in the contact zone.\textsuperscript{128} Such is the reality of a colonial situation in which the cultures of colonized and colonizer come together and result in new, hybrid cultures.\textsuperscript{129} Hybridity is precisely the kind of mixing which colonists have sought to avoid by separating groups from one another. As postcolonial, multicultural nations such as Canada have proven, it is impossible to avoid cultural mixedness.\textsuperscript{130}

Bhabha employs the spatial metaphor Third Space to describe the location in which these new cultures are produced. This liminal space between cultures opens up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. In this sense the in-between, Third Space, is a space of intervention and creativity.\textsuperscript{131} He writes “it is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.”\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{127}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{128}Ashcroft, \textit{Key Concepts}, 114.

\textsuperscript{129}Immigration in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries has resulted in global diasporas that continues to mix cultures together in novel ways.

\textsuperscript{130}In the PCC, the context of preaching is always a hybrid space, occupied by a variety of postcolonial subjects, races, ages, genders, as well as the variety of social and cultural experiences listeners bring to the worship space.

\textsuperscript{131}Samuel, 30.

\textsuperscript{132}Bhabha, 37. For Third Space see page 14.
Hybridity is a difficult and agonistic process,\textsuperscript{133} and is not able to account for all reality. Binaries persist, and the question of who is able to enter the Third Space remains. Although hybridity does not resolve the tension between cultures, it does signify a creative space that protests notions of purity and recognizes the power of difference for generating meaning. In that way, Bhabha’s theory casts a positive vision for social change.\textsuperscript{134} As he explains, “in its dominant form, it is claimed that [hybridity] can provide a way out of binary thinking, allow the inscription of the agency of the subaltern, and even permit a restructuring and destabilizing of power.”\textsuperscript{135} In the Third Space lies the possibility of reinscribing and resignifying the past, which might result in new authority structures and political initiatives.\textsuperscript{136} According to Bhabha, this space has the potential to free us from the seemingly inevitable repetition of history, what he calls “repetition without a difference.”\textsuperscript{137} This hybrid strategy or discourse opens up “a Third Space of negotiation where power is unequal, but its articulation may be equivocal.”\textsuperscript{138} Agency may be available to the colonial subject or subaltern who would otherwise be ignored or silenced.\textsuperscript{139} It is a space of “dislocation and displacement”\textsuperscript{140} in which colonial discourse is decentred and the discourse of the dominant is called into question, challenged, interrupted, by the voice of the subaltern. The power of the colonizer is contested as the colonial subject

\textsuperscript{133}Huddart, 113.

\textsuperscript{134}Although hybridity and Third Space appear to be ‘liberating’ categories, the exact nature of the social change for which Bhabha is calling remains elusive. Jin Hee Han, “Homi K. Bhabha and the Mixed Blessing of Hybridity in Biblical Hermeneutics,” Bible and Critical Theory, (Dec. 2005), 8.


\textsuperscript{137}Homi K. Bhabha, “Cultures In Between,” Artforum. (September 1993), 167-214.

\textsuperscript{138}Ibid, 208.

\textsuperscript{139}This space does not automatically equalize power relations. Some individuals or groups are doubly or triply marginalised.

\textsuperscript{140}Bhabha, Location of Culture, 163.
challenges the unitariness of dominant discourses, revealing them to be fractured and unstable, and plagued by ambivalence.\(^\text{141}\)

c. Limitations of postcolonial perspectives

A postcolonial perspective holds tremendous promise for opening a discursive space between colonized and colonizers; between past and present; between the hegemonic West and the developing world, but it is necessary to proceed with caution. Postcolonial theorists and practitioners critique colonial structures, but they also critique postcolonial theory itself. Gayatri Spivak warns that it is difficult for postcolonial scholars to avoid “neocolonizing anticolonialism,” according to which scholars say ‘no’ to colonial structures while continuing to inhabit those structures and benefit from them.\(^\text{142}\) Postcolonial theory, unlike anti-colonial resistance, has emerged largely from a privileged, academic position, and it is has been controlled by Western scholarship, prompting Seamus Deane to suggest that “postcolonial discourse emerges as a ruse of power, a contemporary form of Western liberalism, radical in its openness to otherness but Western in its gaze on otherness.”\(^\text{143}\) In this sense, postcolonial perspectives emerge as a neocolonial attempt by the empire to assign a role to former colonies, in which the empire “commands them once again to speak its language.”\(^\text{144}\) Despite scholarly attempts to reject simplistic binary divisions of reality, the term post-colonial itself “re-orients

\(^{141}\) Ibid, 173.


\(^{143}\) Seamus Deane, “Imperialism/Nationalism,” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study,* edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 354-368 (356). Young argues, however, that some of the foundations of postcolonial theory, such as poststructuralism, were first theorized in non-Western cultures. (2003, 67-68).

\(^{144}\) Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible,* 111.
the globe once more around a single, binary opposition: colonial/post-colonial.”

When applied transhistorically, postcolonial criticism risks conflating important differences between colonized peoples. These cautions and critiques must be taken seriously. Postcolonial inquiry itself must be continually decentered and deconstructed, and it must be informed by a variety of global voices. Despite its limitations, postcolonial theory offers a unique window into the past and present realities of both colonized and colonizing peoples. When undertaken with an awareness of its potential dangers, it is possible to mitigate some of the concerns raised above.

III. The Canadian Context

a. Canada, Colonialism and Postcolonialism

In September 2009, Canada’s Prime Minister Stephen Harper declared that Canada “has no history of colonialism.” While Canada has never formally colonized another country, Canada’s relationship with colonialism/imperialism is much more complex than Mr. Harper suggests. Indeed, the history of Canada is a colonial/imperial history. Wallis, Sunseri and Galabuzi argue “both colonialism and racialization exist in Canada’s history and present as an unacknowledged continuity that defines its dominant social, economic, political and social orders.”

---

145 McClintock, 257.
146 See Kwok, Postcolonial Imagination, and McClintock.
Today, Canada is a geographically and culturally diverse country with a population of approximately 31.6 million people occupying nine million square kilometres. Canada’s land has been settled for centuries by First Nations peoples. Its nationhood was initiated by a collection of settler colonies ruled by Britain (and formerly by France), imposed on an indigenous population. Many of the first Canadian settlers emigrated voluntarily from Europe, and were recipients of crown benefits. The consequences of British and French colonialism were disastrous for aboriginal Canadians. After Confederation, as the national railways were established and western expansion encouraged, the government of Canada instituted policies that appropriated First Nations land and relegated First Nations peoples to reserve lands. The Canadian government also instituted policies which sought to integrate First Nations peoples into a white-European world view, resulting in the establishment of residential schools for children. Aboriginal children were removed from their homes, and educated according to the languages and customs of the dominant culture. This treatment of aboriginals “lacked the pomp and ceremony of the British Raj, or the status-enhancing experience of a handful of officials ruling over millions in tropical Africa, Ceylon, or the Dutch East Indies,” but it was connected to the “global phenomenon of empire at that time.” While there is considerable debate among scholars as to whether and how Canada can be considered ‘postcolonial,’ there is agreement that Canada’s postcolonial identity is complex and ambiguous. Colonialism/imperialism have shaped and continue to shape the nation and its inhabitants, but whether one perceives the

---


152 See Legge, “Negotiating Mission.”

153 Living in the Midst of Empire, UCC, 7.
Canadian context and/or literature as postcolonial depends on identity and social location. “It depends on the definitions; it depends on who is asking the question, from what position, in space, time and privilege.”

Today, Canada participates in global markets and financial institutions. Despite its powerful position on the world stage, some have argued that Canada’s location in the shadow of the United States makes it, in effect, an economic colony of the United States. Harold Wells refers to Canada as “a northern, peripheral, increasingly dominated nation.” Thus, as a nation, Canada is simultaneously powerful in its own right, and subordinated to other world powers.

Canada’s postcolonial location is complicated by cultural heterogeneity. Canada is home to large populations of immigrants who may have encountered European colonialism/imperialism as negative displacement or even annihilation. Persons associated with colonizing nations live side by side with those from colonized nations. With regard to Canada’s indigenous peoples, and racialized immigrants, there is evidence that Canada continues to be structured by a racial hierarchy. In the national myth of Canada and other white settler colonies, “it is believed that white people came first and that it is they who principally developed the land.” This has resulted in continuing disadvantages for non-white groups, especially concerning access to employment, and a disproportionate poverty level among indigenous peoples and some immigrant communities. “In the post-9/11 era, concerns about national

---


158 Wallis, Sunseri, and Galabuzi, 2,7.
security betray a distinct neocolonial tenor of the discourses about who the enemy is and who
must be protected by the Canadian State.”\textsuperscript{159} All of these point to continued patterns of internal
colonization.\textsuperscript{160}

Canada’s contemporary situation exemplifies postcolonial hybridity, a concept which
may illuminate Canada’s colonial/imperial histories and identities, and provide opportunity for
dialogue, particularly with regard to preaching that nurtures ecclesial relationships. Tamara
Palmer Seiler locates Canada’s collective experience “at the margins of several empires.”\textsuperscript{161}
This location has contributed to a non-static hybridity and proliferation of difference in this
country. Some Canadians descend from early settlers, others relate to those who have been
forcibly removed from ancestral lands and whose cultures have been a least partially destroyed.
Others have immigrated from colonizing nations where they were part of the dominant culture or
part of an oppressed culture or both. Cynthia Sugars suggests that configuring Canadian
postcoloniality involves recognizing Canada as “a site of overlapping and conflicting sites
determined by a multiplicity of social relations, which are nevertheless interpellated by the
national label “Canada.”\textsuperscript{162}

Canadian churches such as the PCC also exist at the margins of several empires. Those
who occupy Canadian pews, and participate in Canadian preaching have complex postcolonial
identities, and occupy an ambiguous postcolonial space. Canadian churches enact multiple roles

\textsuperscript{159}Ibid, 6. This is true especially for Muslim and Arab communities. A parallel situation arose during
World War II when many Japanese Canadians were interned in camps.

\textsuperscript{160}Ibid, 339.

\textsuperscript{161}Tamara Palmer Seiler, “Multi-vocality and Multicultural Literature: Towards a Post-Colonial and
Multicultural Aesthetic,” in \textit{Literary Pluralities}, edited by Christl Verduyn. (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press,
1998), 47-63 (62). Also quoted in Moss, 12.

\textsuperscript{162}Cynthia Sugars, “Can the Canadian Speak? Lost in Postcolonial Space.” \textit{Ariel}, 32, 3 (2001), 115-52
(143).
in the discourse of power, and are sites of discourse in which a variety of postcolonial subjects meet. The PCC and other churches have played an important part in the establishment of Canada as a nation. Bramadat and Seljack conclude: “Until very recently, the European colonization of Canada has always occurred under the sign of the cross; that is, the Europeans who first created Canada imagined it always as a Christian project.”¹⁶³ ‘Civilization’ and Christianity were “naturally and organically enmeshed in the imaginations of Canada’s first explorers, conquerors and settlers.”¹⁶⁴ Canadian churches have historically wielded tremendous social power, and have played key roles in the establishment of medical and educational systems.¹⁶⁵ Paul Bramadat and David Seljack note that public discourse in Canada today recognizes that Christianity has been part of the colonial project, which has led to a distrust or resentment toward churches.¹⁶⁶ As their influence in broader society has decreased, mainline Canadian churches, including the PCC, articulate a “discourse of loss.”¹⁶⁷ Charles Fensham offers an interesting insight into the manner in which such discourses of loss relates to colonialism. As churches lose influence, status and resources, a sense of embarrassment can lead them to develop “new ways of hiding embarrassment through strategies to regain power.”¹⁶⁸ He goes on “one can argue that the Church is colonized by power, prestige and state, as

¹⁶³Paul Bramadat and David Seljack (eds), Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 6. These authors note that some Christians, such as Mennonites, were organized according to their resistance to the state. Differences may also exist among Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

¹⁶⁴Ibid, 7.

¹⁶⁵Ibid, 6.

¹⁶⁶Ibid, 16.

¹⁶⁷Ibid, 15.

¹⁶⁸Fensham, “The Glory of God Gives Life,” 59. One such strategy is a “hegemonic drive toward cohesiveness” in churches (62). Such a drive might seek to suppress difference, and hide or deny power inequalities.
expressed in the ideas of Christendom and consumer capitalist democracy.\textsuperscript{169} The PCC and other Canadian churches are increasingly marginalised, yet still powerful relative to other groups, including Tricontinental immigrants.

There has been a dramatic increase in the ethnic diversity of Canadian churches in recent decades,\textsuperscript{170} and a corresponding increase in the diversity of colonial experience and colonial memory. Local churches are home to recent immigrants as well as multiple generations of immigrants. This increase in diversity can be partially attributed to immigration from countries which have been ‘Christianized’ through missionary efforts of Western churches.\textsuperscript{171} Depending on the degree of diversity within a given congregation or denomination, ecclesial life is complicated by issues such as race, socio-economic status, gender, geographic location, and language.

\textbf{b. The Presbyterian Church in Canada}

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a Reformed Protestant denomination with approximately one hundred and five thousand members nationally.\textsuperscript{172} It is a diverse church composed of persons of Ghanaian, Korean, Indian, Caribbean, Guyanese, Scottish, Irish, Eastern European birth or descent, among others.\textsuperscript{173} Some of this diversity can be attributed to overseas

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{169}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{170}Bramadat and Seljack note that the relationship among ethnicity and Christianity has received little attention from Canadian scholars (4).

\textsuperscript{171}Ibid, 5.

\textsuperscript{172}\textit{PCC, Acts and Proceedings of the 137\textsuperscript{th} General Assembly}, “Statistical and Financial Reports,” 533. Presbyterian literally means ‘rule by elders’, and refers to the manner in which local churches are governed. Congregations are linked to one another by a hierarchical system of presbyteries, synods and a General Assembly.

\textsuperscript{173}These groups are listed in no particular order. According to the 2001 census, 7.25 percent of Canadian Presbyterians were visible minorities. See Stuart Macdonald “Presbyterians and Reformed Christians and Ethnicity”in \textit{Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada}, edited by Paul Bramadat and David Seljak. (175). Although the
missionary efforts which have been concentrated in Korea, Taiwan, Ghana, Nigeria, Malawi, Guyana, Latin America, Central India and other locations. Denominationally, however, some ethnic voices are louder than others, and some are missing altogether in the Canadian Presbyterian discourse: “there are some deafening silences in the national choir.”

The PCC has been affected by the “discourse of loss” described above. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries many members of the PCC occupied places of privilege within Canadian society. Macdonald argues: “historically, most members of the Presbyterian Church in Canada saw themselves as members of the Protestant establishment and expected all institutions in Canadian society to reflect their values.” However, census data indicates that between 1991 and 2001 the number of people identifying themselves as Presbyterian declined by approximately 36.6 percent. PCC churches are much less influential than in the past, yet remain powerful relative to other groups - they collectively possess considerable resources, including real estate in many communities across the country.

As a national Church located within the Canadian ethos, all congregations of the PCC

---

174 Macdonald notes that despite attempts to assimilate immigrants and aboriginals into the British heritage of the PCC, there exist PCC congregations which are primarily Korean, Ghanaian, Taiwanese, Chinese, Hungarian, and South Asian, and been encouraged to maintain a specific language and culture within the Church (182). These churches have been on the margins of the denomination (188). In an article in the Presbyterian Record, referring to the PCC’s two linguistically based Han-ca Presbyteries, the Rev. In Kee Kim suggests that a Korean, separate but equal structure within the PCC was a matter of self-preservation for Korean-Canadian Presbyterians. Andrew Faiz, “Ethnicity, Identity and Isolation: The Long Shadow of Racism in the Church.” The Presbyterian Record (April, 2010), 32-36. Many immigrants prefer to integrate into multi-ethnic congregations.

175Faiz, 32-36.

176See Macdonald, 174.

177Macdonald, 188. One of the most significant manifestations of this ‘privilege’ occurred within the history of Canada and its churches concerns aboriginal peoples. Any conversation about colonialism within the PCC must consider this history - both in the local congregation, and as we shape our understanding of overseas mission partners.
have in common their placement within a postcolonial Canada in all its complex ambiguity. Churches share aspects of national history as well as those factors common to the history and development of the PCC. Contemporary Canadian realities such as rhetoric concerning national security, media portrayals of others, national myths about Canadian identity - all of these are part of the organic context of the PCC and affect its communal life. Canadian Presbyterians may uncritically accept a vision of themselves as tolerant or multicultural without asking questions related to how such ideologies address questions of racial and gender oppression and diversity.

Given the far-flung nature of the PCC, the variety of contexts within which congregations find themselves, and the unique demographic of each congregation, it is difficult to generalize. Local congregations will vary with regard to the particularities of colonial experience due to factors such as geographical location, local economy, ethnic make-up, and congregational history. For example, congregations in large cities will likely have a different experience of cultural hybridity than those in rural areas. I contend that colonial discourse exists within most, if not all, congregations of the PCC, although it will manifest itself in particular ways, and with various degrees of intensity depending on a number of factors. In reflecting on postcolonial factors in local congregations and global partnerships, and how those factors impact the preaching process, I wish to emphasize that in the Canadian Presbyterian context, these discourses are not necessarily occurring among colonized and colonized, but occur within communities of colonial subjects who have various experiences of colonialism, and occupy various power levels.

178 Eva Mackey refers, for example, to a “persistent national myth of tolerance” in Canada. “Settling Differences: Managing and Representing People and Land in the Canadian National Project,” in Colonialism and Racism in Canada, 17-37.

179 To the best of my knowledge, the impact of colonialism has not been addressed in terms of its specific implications for the PCC.
this dissertation is to encourage preachers to examine congregational and mission contexts for evidence of colonial discourses.

Postcolonial factors in local congregational relationships

In a study document entitled “Living in the Midst of Empire,” the United Church of Canada lists a number of ways that empire can affect congregational life including: models and methods of faith formation, interfaith assumptions, investment portfolios, spending and consumption habits, who is ordained/called/hired as leaders, methods of decision making, and worship forms. Colonial discourses in local congregations can interfere with the manner in which the gospel is preached, and the manner in which it is interpreted, received, and acted upon. When I preach at one PCC church near Toronto, I am addressing many first and second generation immigrants from India, Guyana, Kenya, Ghana, and Jamaica. As a white woman whose family has been in Canada for many generations, my experience and perspective differs in significant ways from those who hear my sermons. Because of my skin colour, my educational background, and my British heritage, I am implicated literally and figuratively in systems of Western colonial/imperial power. Many of the men and women in the pews have been at the receiving end of Western domination, as their countries of origin have been significant sites for colonial power. In addition, many have chosen to worship in PCC churches because their families in their home countries worshipped in partner churches planted and shaped by Western missionaries. We are all inhabitants of Canada, a nation with a significant colonial/imperial history. What are the implications of cultural difference and colonial memory

---

180 Some will deny or downplay the significance of colonialism in our current context. In unspoken or very blatant ways, some may assert that the PCC should continue to be shaped and defined by its white, European heritage. Presbyterians of non-European origin may be more cognizant of colonial discourse.

181 Living in the Midst of Empire, 27.
when it comes to the space between preacher and hearers? Do I represent the colonizer? Do I continue to hold, consciously or unconsciously, the kinds of attitudes that Western nations have historically applied to the birth cultures of those to whom I preach the gospel? Is my sermonic discourse impacted by colonial discourses?

In another PCC church where I have led worship, there is a British flag hanging in the sanctuary. When we gather in the Fellowship Hall after worship for coffee, a portrait of a young Queen Elizabeth II gazes down upon us. I am aware that along with a large number of immigrants from England, Scotland and Wales, I am preaching to South African immigrants - black South Africans, white South Africans - English and Afrikaans speaking. South Africa, like Canada, is a former settler colony. Its history is marked by both British and Dutch colonialism, and the resultant Apartheid policies forcibly separated black and white - yet also served to internally divide racial groups. How does that particular colonial memory shape the manner in which these congregants hear my preaching? What complex discourses of power lurk among those who sit in the pews, and among preacher and pew?

Colonial/imperial memory contributes to the self-understanding and daily experience of many persons who preach, and listen to preaching. For example, groups whose land has been invaded or commandeered by a foreign power, such as First Nations Christians, or Korean immigrants who remember the Japanese occupation, might hear and interpret a sermon addressing a biblical conquest narrative differently from a person of European origin. Colonial/imperial experience might impact not only how individuals hear preaching, but also the degree to which they can experience preaching as healing or transformative. If a preacher ignores or downplays the significance of empire in the text or the contemporary situation, hearers for whom empire is an ongoing reality might resist the message of the sermon. Where colonialism/imperialism has succeeded at separating one group from another, preaching can
reinforce those boundaries through sermons that unconsciously reiterate Western cultural, economic and spiritual superiority, or the need for others to conform to Western values. Listeners may variously resist, accommodate to, or internalize the message of the sermon dependent on colonial experience. I have named only a few of the ways in which the ecclesial relationships in PCC and other Canadian congregations continue to be impacted by colonial discourses. Preachers addressing postcolonial congregations must be aware of these dynamics, and be vigilant about the pervasive and destructive nature of colonial discourse.

Postcolonial factors in relationships among PCC Congregations and Partner Churches

The relationships between Canadian and global Christians may be affected by colonialism/imperialism, a reality that should be addressed in preaching. Rieger argues: “the quality of international encounters....depends on how we deal with colonialism, neocolonialism and postcolonialism.” International partnerships are an integral aspect of the PCC’s ministry and mission, and are the organizational basis for participation in overseas projects, leadership development, and emergency aid. The manner in which preaching addresses these partnerships may affect how listeners experience, perceive, and engage with ecclesial others. Partner churches have themselves been shaped by a particular experience of colonialism/imperialism, often in more profound and obvious ways than PCC churches in Canada. An important aspect

---

182 Rieger argues that if ‘first world’ churches repress our colonial histories, they will come back to haunt us. “Theology and Mission,” 202.

183 The PCC also partners with Canadian organizations, such as CIDA. The PCC has partnership agreements with churches such as the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (Malawi); Korean Christian Church in Japan; The Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba; The Church of North India; The Guyana Reformed Church; The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. See international ministries report in the *Acts and Proceedings of the 137th General Assembly*, 339, for a complete listing of partner churches and agencies.

184 Many churches have experienced the negative impact of colonialism/imperialism firsthand - including, but not limited to, the Korean Church in Japan, India, Taiwan, South Africa, Ghana, Ireland, and Scotland.
of coming to know and understand our ecclesial partners is the development of an awareness and understanding of how colonialism has affected, and continues to affect the nations in which these churches exist.

Partnerships are formed with various global churches and organizations, based on mutual agreement regarding values, purpose and goals of mission, and are given oversight at the denominational level. Local PCC congregations are encouraged to support partner churches through prayer and financial contributions. Some congregations organize mission trips, are involved in mission awareness Sundays, welcome overseas visitors and respond to emergency aid appeals. Thus, partnerships are important at the congregational as well as denominational level of the PCC.

Partnerships among Canadian Presbyterians and overseas churches are spaces of possibility, in which all involved can experience a meaningful and satisfying form of Christian communion. However, such communion will be deepened through an awareness of power differentials, and how colonial/imperial history and neocolonial asymmetries of power impact encounters in the present. A myriad of factors contribute to inequality among Western churches and other churches. Most Tricontinental churches are younger than North American and European counterparts. Many Tricontinental churches are poorer and more vulnerable to fluctuations in global markets, weather patterns (affecting food production), and less able to respond to and recover from natural and human-made disaster. The history of many of these Tricontinental churches is intimately bound up with the mission and benevolence of the West. Western churches have historically been ‘parent churches’, and thus have had ‘parental’

---

185See Rieger, “Theology and Mission.”

186The factors involved will differ according to the geographic location of the partner church. One notable exception especially relevant for the PCC is South Korea.
authority over these churches, an authority augmented by Western colonial/imperial power. Although Canadian churches often have more actual power than mission partner churches, they may perceive themselves to be less powerful than they actually are, especially based on their relative status within Canada and the prevailing “discourse of loss.” Canadian Christians may underestimate the effects of attitudes of cultural and financial superiority, as well as power imbalances on global mission partnerships.¹⁸⁷ While some visitors from partner churches may occasionally have opportunity to address national and local PCC gatherings, one might wonder whether their ability to speak truth is affected by power dynamics and historical relationships.¹⁸⁸ In engaging with mission partners, the partners too often remain on the receiving end of the Western partners’ desire to ‘do something,’¹⁸⁹ rather than operating at the level of equality and mutual benefit.

Preaching plays an important role in shaping global ecclesial relationships and assisting Canadian Presbyterians to know and understand overseas partners. Preaching also has opportunity to support Christians (and others) overseas who are in need of material assistance by raising awareness of partners’ needs. Thus, it matters that preachers have a grasp of how colonial discourse affects sermons, and impacts listener perception of the needs and identities of others, near and far.

Conclusion

Postcolonial theory has offered a sustained and varied critique of

¹⁸⁷For example, who controls financial resources, and who makes decisions about how gift money is spent in Tricontinental churches?

¹⁸⁸Anecdotally, despite a number of letters and comments from Canadian missionaries, the national PCC website has almost no content directly from partner churches, despite the availability of translation.

colonialism/imperialism in past and present. Canada is a nation partially shaped by colonialism/imperialism, and the PCC is situated in a postcolonial context. Preaching participates in the development of ecclesial discourse, and has a role to play in addressing some of the colonial/imperial realities in the PCC, both at the local and global levels. The next chapter turns to postcolonial biblical criticism in order to demonstrate postcolonial hermeneutics that are significant for a postcolonial homiletic, and to further delineate some of the concepts introduced in chapter one, especially hybridity and Third Space.
Chapter Two: Postcolonial Biblical Criticism and the Gospel of Mark

Introduction

During a visit to Peru, Pope John Paul II met with representatives of a Peruvian indigenous movement who said to him:

John Paul II, we, Andean and American Indians, have decided to take advantage of your visit to return to you your Bible, since in five centuries it has not given us love, peace or justice.

Please, take back your Bible and give it back to our oppressors, because they need its moral teachings more than we do. Ever since the arrival of Christopher Columbus a culture, a language, religion and values which belong to Europe have been imposed on Latin America by force.

The Bible came to us as part of the imposed colonial transformation. It was an ideological weapon of this colonial assault. The Spanish sword which attacked and murdered the bodies of the Indians at night became the cross which attacked the Indian soul.¹

This striking indictment of the Christian Church points to the manner in which the Bible has been used as a weapon of colonial power. The Bible has also been a source of positive and redemptive transformation for colonized persons who perceive it as an ally against colonial power.² Sanchez writes: “the colonised would mimic the European’s use of the book in order to contest the legitimacy of European rule,” reappropriating the sacred texts and repeating them ‘with a difference’ in order to subvert colonial authority.³ The relationship between the Bible

---


²For example, see Hemchand Gossai and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, Religion, Culture and Tradition in the Caribbean. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000). Carribean theologians looked to the Bible for motifs “that could at one and the same time be a rejection of colonialism and a guide beyond the post-colonial era.” (124)

and colonialism is complex. There are numerous interpretations for each text, and great power is given to the words of scripture in many contexts.

Preachers engage biblical texts on a weekly basis, thus biblical interpretation is an important aspect of a postcolonial homiletic. If preachers are to address a community which has been impacted by colonialism/imperialism, it is necessary that they consider the manner in which the Bible has been implicated in the colonial/imperial process, and also how it speaks a word of liberation into a postcolonial ethos. Postcolonial biblical interpretation looks for a plurality of voices within the text itself, and listens for the voices of a plurality of interpretive voices in the Church and beyond. This chapter explores the topic of postcolonial biblical interpretation as it has emerged from postcolonial theory, setting the stage for a practical and abridged postcolonial biblical hermeneutic suitable for weekly sermon preparation, which is developed in chapter five. The postcolonial concepts ‘hybridity’ and Third Space introduced in chapter one are also important aspects of a postcolonial homiletic, especially my metaphor Perichoretic Space. I seek to interpret the story of Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman told in Mark 7:24-30 as a textual example of a hybrid encounter in the Third Space, thereby demonstrating both the textual existence of a Third Space, and the practice of reading scripture from within a postcolonial imagination. In this way I will demonstrate that this particular biblical text speaks to the contemporary postcolonial situation.

Beginning with an exploration of the reciprocal relationship among biblical texts and colonialism/imperialism, this chapter goes on to survey the manner in which biblical interpreters have adapted and/or applied postcolonial theory to the field of biblical studies and to texts across the biblical canon. Secondly, this chapter situates the Gospel of Mark within its colonial context claiming that the Markan text is somewhat ambivalent regarding colonial power, in turn accommodating and resisting the Roman Empire. An awareness of various colonial responses in the text will aid preachers in understanding the complexity of the colonial reality for the gospel
writer and his audience. Thirdly, this chapter contrasts traditional and postcolonial interpretations of the encounter between Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman as told in Mark 7:24-30. An overview of the passage’s history of interpretation is followed by a survey of postcolonial readings. Finally, I engage a postcolonial reading of Mark 7:24-30 in terms of postcolonial boundary-crossing, hybridity, and Third Space, building on the discussion of these terms in chapter one, and contributing to the spatial metaphor developed in chapters three and five. Mark describes an encounter not between colonized and colonizer, but between two colonial subjects - individuals representing different cultures and power levels, in a context of Roman rule that is infused with colonial/imperial discourses. The encounter between Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman is an encounter characterized by struggle, tension and ambiguity - an encounter which ultimately results in healing for the woman’s daughter.

I. Postcolonial Biblical Criticism

a. The Bible and Colonialism

Biblical texts were shaped by their original imperial contexts, and have in turn shaped other imperial contexts. Despite its potential as a liberating text, the Bible is unsafe and problematic insofar as the biblical texts, as much as any other work of literature, encapsulate the interests and agendas of those who have produced and interpreted them.\(^4\) Schüssler Fiorenza claims: "it is not only the intentions of the ‘original authors’ that must be considered, but also the manner in which texts and interpretations of texts have functioned in historical and political settings."\(^5\) Biblical interpretation is not a neutral task. The agenda(s) and contexts of the interpreter will affect the manner in which the text is understood and acted upon. Textual


interpretation can have serious ethical and political consequences.

As the central text of the Christian faith, the Bible has been upheld as a normative text, and countless communities have shaped their identities based on it. It has been coopted both as a weapon of empire, and a manifesto for liberative movements. Communities whose values differed from normative interpretations of biblical values have been judged to be in need of correction, or civilising. In his classic text *Orientalism*, Edward Said outlines the role of the eighteenth-century revolution in biblical studies in representing the “Orient” and constructing representations of others. Biblical texts have been used as warrants for colonial expansion, thus reinforcing the idea that churches in “Asia and Africa have been recipients of the gospel as a gift from the benevolent West to enlighten the heathen.” Franz Fanon has argued that the religion of the colonizer (Christianity) can colonize the minds of colonized peoples, paralysing them against responding to, or resisting the oppressive rule of the colonizer because of its emphasis on meekness and forgiveness.

Closer to home, biblical interpretations have contributed to immeasurable physical and cultural violence against Native North Americans. Laura Donaldson, referring to Christian denominations’ apologies to Native North Americans for historical treatment says “the inadequacy of these responses foregrounds the need for a critical paradigm that would enable churches to confront their histories in a more direct manner.” Postcolonial biblical interpretation is a critical paradigm which desires a more just and faithful framework for

---

6For more on how colonization has been legitimized according to biblical land traditions, see Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique.* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Liberation theologians from a variety of ideological standpoints, including feminist, Latin American, subaltern, African American, have found within scripture a vision for freedom, and impetus for both resisting oppressors and building more just systems.


9Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 93.

10Laura E. Donaldson, “Postcolonialism and Bible Reading,” *Semeia* 75 (1996), 1-14, 2.
interpreting scripture in the midst of the complex relationship between Bible and empire.

b. An Introduction to Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation

Postcolonial biblical interpretation takes seriously the reality of empires in the ancient and contemporary worlds and explores

the enigma of how a disparate set of texts written in the margins of the Roman Empire, if not from its underside, eventually became, collectively, the charter documents of a post-Constantinian, which is to say, imperial Christianity - which is also the enigma of how one Jesus of Nazareth, a Galilean peasant nonentity, became, primarily through the agency of these same unlikely texts, a new Romulus, the founder of a new Rome.¹¹

This interpretive style is highly attuned to the social locations of the authors and interpreters of the biblical texts. Sugirtharajah categorizes it as a “mental attitude rather than a method.”¹² Stephen Moore agrees that postcolonial criticism is not a method of interpretation per se, but rather a “critical sensibility acutely attuned to a specific range of interrelated historical and textual phenomena.”¹³ A postcolonial approach to biblical studies recognizes the diversity of colonial/postcolonial experience, and should not be limited to a monolithic critical practice. This approach listens for conflicting voices within the text itself, and within the interpretive community. Postcolonial criticism will not seek to recover a single meaning of the text, but will “recognise a multiplicity of meanings.”¹⁴ It will not collapse or homogenize various interpretations, but read contrapuntally,¹⁵ that is, approach the text with a simultaneous

---


¹²Sugirtharajah, The Postcolonial Bible, 93.

¹³Moore, Empire and Apocalypse, 7.


awareness of multiple perspectives, including colonized and colonizer, metropolis and periphery, and others. In Said’s words, to read contrapuntally is to employ a strategy “modelled not . . . on a symphony, but rather on an atonal ensemble.”

In the biblical text, there are voices from the centre and the periphery, voices of domination, submission, resistance and collaboration - but these voices are not always distinct.

By examining and exposing threads of colonial/imperial power and domination embodied in biblical texts and subsequent interpretations of those texts, postcolonial biblical interpreters search for “alternative hermeneutics while thus overturning and dismantling colonial perspectives.” These alternative hermeneutics will bring to the forefront marginal aspects of texts, and aim to recover and reassert the identities, cultures, and traditions that “colonial Christianity has marginalised, erased, suppressed or pronounced ‘idolatrous,’” while recognizing that the text itself may already be engaged in this process of recovery and reassertion.

Postcolonial biblical interpretation, like postcolonial theory itself, has emerged largely from within the Western academy. Yet it has potentially positive consequences for interpretation within global communities, and especially for preaching that addresses postcolonial ecclesial relationships in denominations such as the PCC. This interpretive stance respects the text as a resource which potentially “enables ordinary poor and marginalised people to interpret the biblical text in a manner that foregrounds and emphasizes their own lived

---

16 Ibid.

17 Donaldson argues that interpreters should approach texts with a “multiaxial frame of reference.” Postcolonialism and Bible Reading, 8. A multiaxial frame considers not only gender, culture, and class, but “the intersection of anti-Judaism, sexism, and cultural and religious imperialism in the history of the text’s interpretation.” Kwok, Pui Lan. Discovering the Bible in a Non-biblical World. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 79.

18 Sugirtharajah, The Postcolonial Bible, 16.

19 Moore, Empire and Apocalypse, 15.
experience and contextual realities.” Western academic practitioners of postcolonial biblical interpretation have much to learn from the experience of social, cultural and economic others, and a responsibility to “ensure that the yearnings of the poor take precedence over the interests of the affluent; that the emancipation of the subjugated has primacy over the freedom of the powerful; and that the participation of the marginalised takes priority over the perpetuation of a system which systematically excludes them.”

By remembering and acknowledging past and present colonial/imperial projects, postcolonial interpreters can provide a new ground for interaction among parties separated by power inequalities, such as those who gather for worship in PCC churches. A postcolonial interpreter will interrogate the biblical text at particular points, especially where it shows signs of “ambivalence, incoherence, and self-subversion - and not least where its message of emancipation subtly mutates into oppression.” The interpreter learns to ‘see’ the imprint of colonialism in the text itself, and becomes aware of the danger of “colluding with textual tactics and interpretations that might reinforce a politics of dominance.” In awareness of his or her responsibility to honour the voice and experience of the marginalised, the reader must decide whether to “applaud and collude with the text, or resist its stance.”

Postcolonial, feminist and liberation hermeneutics are distinct approaches which share some common ground. Each approaches the text with a hermeneutic of suspicion; shares a

---


22Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 31. See also Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 259-61. The introduction to the current chapter, and the following section that deals with postcolonial criticism across the biblical canon provide concrete examples of the oppressive interpretations of the biblical text.


24Ibid. This responsibility toward others will be described in social trinitarian terms in chapter three of this dissertation.
commitment to others; highlights the historical context of the interpreter, and distrusts totalizing tendencies. Both postcolonial and feminist scholars are “confronted with the struggle against reading canons they did not write or select; against literary images that derogate their humanity and legitimize their oppression.”

Postcolonial scholars caution against any tendency to sublate experience across cultures or class, and have critiqued some liberationist and feminist scholars for a tendency to homogenize the experience of the poor. Women and men, rich and poor, Western and Tricontinental - each has a unique experience of colonialism/postcolonialism. Postcolonial feminist biblical scholars draw attention to the double oppression of women under a colonial system, and have critiqued other feminist scholars for ignoring the colonial context of biblical narratives.

c. Examples of Postcolonial Interpretations Across the Canon of Biblical Literature

Biblical interpreters approach a growing number of texts from a postcolonial perspective. Before turning to Mark 7:24-30, this section briefly describes the application of

---


26For a critique of liberation hermeneutics from a postcolonial perspective, see Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, chapter 4, and Still at the Margin, 12-13.

27Without examining issues other than gender, the “reading becomes a debate between white Western Christian women and white Western Christian men seeking to share in the power of dominating the whole world . . . consequently alienating the Other woman.” Musa Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 38.


postcolonial reading strategies to the Exodus narrative (3:7-8), Matthew 28:19-20, and Romans 13:1-7, in order to demonstrate the breadth of biblical material which can be usefully analysed according to a postcolonial framework.

**Reading as a Canaanite: The Exodus Narrative**

*The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. ... So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey - the home of the Canaanites. Exodus 3:7-8 (NRSV)*

Laura Donaldson invites biblical interpreters to “read like a Canaanite,” by recognizing the presence of others in the text who are not the primary focus of biblical authors. From a postcolonial point of view, Israel can be viewed as both victim and perpetrator of colonialism/imperialism. Although the Exodus story is a paradigmatic exploration of freedom and liberation, it does not promote freedom and liberation for all. God sends the Israelites into the home of the Canaanites. The promised land is already occupied, albeit by a much maligned race. God’s directive to the Israelites is at best to avoid other races, at worst, a directive to kill and destroy not only the Canaanite people but also their culture. A postcolonial exploration of this narrative might consider the story from the point of view of the ‘colonized,’ in this case, the Canaanites. The story takes on a different meaning if read from the position of Canaan’s inhabitants, or indeed, if read from the perspective of any modern peoples whose land has been expropriated, such as the indigenous people of North America. Donaldson argues: “indeed, when we listen to the voices which are silenced by canonical readings of the story, the Exodus...”

---


---

29Donaldson, Postcolonialism and Bible Reading, 11.
loses its appropriateness as a model for human liberation."\textsuperscript{30} This is not to suggest that the narrative should be discarded, but that it should be read contrapuntally, and with greater awareness of the silenced voices within.

The Great Justification for Conquest?: Matthew 28:19-20a

\textit{Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.} Matthew 28:19-20a (NRSV)

Postcolonial critics have investigated how Matthew 28:19-20a has been interpreted as a justification for extra-biblical conquest\textsuperscript{31} and has contributed to the creation of Christian empires.\textsuperscript{32} Sugirtharajah reinvestigates Matthew’s commission in light of its use as a “biblical warrant to missionize the natives” in both the colonial and post-independence periods in India.\textsuperscript{33} He indicates that this text was largely dormant during the Reformation period, but was invoked with increasing frequency during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, corresponding to the rise of Western imperialism.\textsuperscript{34}

Musa Dube, a Botswanian scholar, challenges traditional Protestant interpretations of this passage, which she views as generally imperialist in nature. Matthew’s commission, Dube claims, has been interpreted and enacted as a justification for uninvited border-crossing,

The command not only instructs Christian readers to travel to all nations but also contains a “pedagogical imperative” - to “make disciples of all nations.”

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{30}Ibid.
  \item\textsuperscript{31}Ibid, 6.
  \item\textsuperscript{33}Sugirtharajah, \textit{The Postcolonial Bible}, 95.
  \item\textsuperscript{34}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
such an imperative consider the consequences of trespassing? Does it make room for Christian travellers to be discipled by all nations? Or is the discipling in question conceived solely in terms of a one-way traffic? . . .the text clearly implies that Christian disciples have a duty to teach all nations, without any suggestion that they must also in turn learn from all nations.35

Pauline Hybridity: Romans 13:1-7

\[
\text{Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is not authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. Romans 13:1-2 (NRSV)}
\]

John Marshall has critiqued Pauline scholars for failing to give an adequate account of Paul’s position vis à vis the Roman Empire in light of Romans 13:1-7. Paul has been “variously categorized as an assimilationist with, register to, rebel against, collaborator with, or reformer of Roman imperial power.”36 Marshall turns to Bhabha’s concept of hybridity to underscore Paul’s ambivalence, which he claims to be the “condition of colonial existence.”37 According to Marshall’s interpretation, Paul and his audience are caught in the interstitial space of empire, a space of both collaboration and resistance. In order for Paul’s mission to succeed, he must find a mode of agency that simultaneously satisfies and undermines Roman authority. Paul borrows Roman political ideology to be such a mode of agency. Marshall argues that “knowing or choosing when to affiliate and when or how to resist are part and parcel of negotiating life and power in a colonial situation.”38 Marshall also considers Paul’s use of imperial language and images, claiming that many of Paul’s communicative devices are “begged, borrowed, stolen and


38Ibid, 170.
earned from the elites of the Roman Empire’s cities.”

IIII. Postcolonial Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark was authored by a colonial subject, intended for a colonized audience, and has been interpreted by those who inhabit various colonial and postcolonial spaces. It is therefore a valuable text with which to situate a discussion of a postcolonial hermeneutic for preaching. A postcolonial hermeneutic will seek to discern the presence of empire in the text and in the context of the contemporary interpreter, and explore the way in which Mark, as gospel writer, created a space of encounter among postcolonial subjects. After a brief consideration of the audience and date of Mark’s gospel, this section will establish the colonial context of the gospel; explore the nature of colonial oppression described and implied in the narrative; and outline three broad postcolonial perspectives on the gospel as a whole in order to demonstrate the range of available options for interpretation.

An in-depth discussion of the audience and date of the Gospel of Mark is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Gerd Thiessen notes that there is a long history of dating Mark by reference to political history, usually a connection with the Jewish war is presumed. The gospel may also coincide with Nero’s persecution of Christians in 64 CE. I assume that Mark was written in second half of the first century, shortly before or just after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Richard Horsley believes that the gospel of Mark is a “submerged people’s

40 Joy, 82.
41 Gerd Thiessen, trans. Linda Maloney. The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 18. Although the nature of colonial oppression may have differed according to the exact date of the gospel relative to the destruction of the temple, my concern here is to establish a colonial presence in the text and its original context.
history,” addressed to Greek speaking, Gentile people who identified with the Jesus movement. The author’s “awkward grammar and inelegant style” may be an indication of his audience’s low sociocultural status. The very presence of subalterns in the text may offer insight into the position of the Markan community. David Joy senses that Mark and his audience stand in solidarity with peasants and artisans represented in the text. The following discussion assumes that the economic and social issues displayed in the Gospel of Mark reflect to some degree the situation of Mark’s community as a marginalised community oppressed by Roman Imperial rule.

a. Mark in Colonial Perspective

A text produced in a colonial milieu is bound to express a response to colonial rule. Mark’s gospel was written in the midst of the Roman Empire. Roman military occupation was clearly a concern for Mark. The gospel is “dense with colonial and military allusions and associations.” Various characters attest to a colonial presence and the phenomenon of colonial collaboration (i.e. Levi and other tax collectors (2:13-17); King Herod (6:14, 8:15); officers at Herod’s feast (6:21); the emperor (12:13-17); Pilate (15:1-15, 16:43-45); imperial soldiers (15:16-32); and the centurion at the foot of the cross (15:39). Mark’s Jesus was tried in a colonial court and died on a colonial cross. Crucifixion was a cruel punishment practised by the Roman authorities in response to insurgence, treason, or other political crimes.

What was the nature of colonial oppression in Jesus’ Galilee? John Dominic Crossan paints a grim picture of exploited Galilean peasants: “They had no cash, they had little land, they

---


44Joy, 94.


46Samuel, 88.
paid their taxes and eked out a living, their bodies bore the scars of hard work, and they were despised. This was the world of Jesus the peasant.”

Land ownership was an area of profound tension between Galilee and Rome. Taxation and land appropriation resulted in a gradual enslaving of the peasants. Industry was under the authority of Rome, including the fishing industry which was “controlled by the ruling classes and the main beneficiaries of this industry were the Roman emperors.”

In the time of Jesus, Roman rule was mediated by Herodian kingship and the temple priesthood, a state of affairs that further complicated the colonial situation. The beneficiaries of Roman domination were not only the Roman leaders and elites, but also the local rulers and client kings, some of whom cooperated with colonial authority. For example, the temple leadership may have been indebted to the Roman colonizers for the tax revenues which were used to expand the temple, among other financial and security benefits.

Although the experience of Roman occupation in terms of economics and culture may have been different in upper and lower Galilee, both places shared a history of occupation, and were simultaneously oppressed by Roman imperial ideology and the cooperation of local authorities with Roman authorities. This shared oppression created a particular space in which the original audience would have heard the words of Mark’s Jesus. For example, Stephen Moore discusses Mark’s use of ‘basileia’: “In any Roman province, the primary referent of


48 Ibid, 71.


51 Ibid, 78.

52 E. Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ.* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1973), 308.
b. Summary of Postcolonial Perspectives of Mark’s Gospel

A growing number of scholars have examined the Gospel of Mark from a postcolonial perspective. I present three scholarly perspectives regarding Mark’s response to colonial power. These perspectives overlap and are meant as interpretive lenses rather than tightly defined categories.

I. The Gospel of Mark as Resistance Literature

The first perspective claims that the Markan narrative unambiguously resists Roman colonizers and the local collaborators of Rome. The Gospel of Mark is viewed as clear anti-colonial rhetoric, in which Mark speaks from a peripheral position and aims organize his audience to act against Roman oppression. The Markan narrative allows space for colonized peoples of varying social position to voice or act out concerns related to Roman occupation. Rome was only one of many imperial powers in Palestine/Galilee’s long history of subjugation. The cultural identity of the region had been repeatedly threatened, and this history of colonization and domination by foreign powers may have created an ambiance of anti-

---

53Moore, Empire and Apocalypse, 38.


55See Tolbert, Sowing the Gospel: Mark’s World in Literary-Historical Perspective. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989); Horsley, Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); and Hearing the Whole Story; and Myers, Binding the Strong Man.

56Samuel, 78.

57Joy, 63. See Horsley, Hearing the Whole Story, chapter 2, for an imperial history. Other foreign oppressors included the Aramaeans, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians.
colonialism within the people of Galilee. Resistance to imperial projects is found deep in the Jewish tradition itself, especially within the stories and traditions surrounding the escape from Egypt. Mark lacks “the snarling, fang-baring hostility toward the Roman state that possess Mark’s near-contemporary cousin, the Book of Revelation,” but certainly offers signs of resistance. Other scholars, however, maintain that the Markan text is not unequivocally anti-colonial.

ii. The Gospel of Mark as Literature which Reinscribes Colonial Power

This perspective claims that the author may have intended to resist colonial/imperial dominance, but ultimately reinscribes colonial/imperial power. Benny Liew argues that Mark copies, or mimics, the language and power of Roman Imperial ideology, resulting in “a colonial discourse that duplicates and internalizes the colonial ideology of the Roman colonists.” In exploring Mark’s portrayal of Jesus, Liew discovers that Jesus’ status as God’s only Son and heir results in “yet another hierarchical community structure.” Jesus has absolute authority in Mark, including power to define and direct the disciples. By attributing such absolute authority to Jesus, is Mark “deftly switching Jesus for Caesar?” Mark almost certainly borrows Roman ideology and terminology:

Mark’s opening words, ‘The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God,’ would have had the ring of a competitor’s claim on the devotion and loyalty of the people of the Roman Empire . . . the Markan evangelist presents Jesus as the true son of God and in doing so deliberately sets Jesus over against Rome’s quest to find a suitable emperor, savior and Lord.

Liew argues that Mark challenges the existing colonial order and presents the Kingdom

---

58Moore, Empire and Apocalypse, 32.
59Ibid, 14.
60Liew, “Tyranny, Boundary, and Might.”
of God as an alternative empire. He writes: “Mark’s politics of parousia, by promising the utter
destruction of both Jewish and Roman authorities upon Jesus’ resurrected return, is one that
mimics or duplicates the authoritarian, exclusionary, and coercive politics of his colonizers.”\textsuperscript{63}
Mark, then, effectively limits the ability of the colonized to have any power to act to change
their own situation, as they are entirely dependent on God’s action.\textsuperscript{64} In agreement with Liew on
this point, Stephen Moore says “in the end, Mark’s gospel refuses to relinquish its dreams of
empire, even while deftly deconstructing the models of economic exchange that enable empires,
even eschatological ones, to function.”\textsuperscript{65}

In contrast to the perspectives of Liew stated above, and in agreement with those
scholars who read the Gospel of Mark as resistance literature, some have argued that Mark
coopts Roman terminology and ideology as a means of resistance.\textsuperscript{66} This might be ‘catachresis,’
a process “by which the colonized strategically appropriate and redeploy such specific elements
of colonial or imperial culture or ideology. As such, it is a practice of resistance through an act
of usurpation.”\textsuperscript{67} Mark may be deliberately misusing Roman terminology for an alternative and
subversive purpose.

iii. The Gospel of Mark as Ambiguous with regard to Colonial Power

This perspective claims that Mark is a discourse that is somewhat ambivalent in its
response to colonialism/imperialism. It “accommodates and disrupts both its own native Jewish
and Roman colonial discourses of power.”\textsuperscript{68} There are portions of the Markan text which are
explicitly pro- or anti-colonial, yet the gospel as a whole denotes a certain ambivalence toward

\textsuperscript{63}Benny Liew, \textit{Politics of Parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually.} (Boston, MA: Brill, 1999), 149.
\textsuperscript{64}Ibid, 150.
\textsuperscript{65}Moore, \textit{Empire and Apocalypse}, 44.
\textsuperscript{66}Joy, 151.
\textsuperscript{67}Moore, \textit{Empire and Apocalypse}, 37.
\textsuperscript{68}Samuel, preface.
Rome, a simultaneous repulsion and attraction. In order to justify the interpretation of Mark as an intensely anti-imperial document, one must “aqua-glide over the intense ambivalence that can be shown to characterize and complicate Mark’s representations of empire.” 69 Those who interpret the gospel as uniformly anti-imperial underestimate the creative transcultural impulses and the dynamics of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity existing underneath the apparently antagonistic or affiliative surface structures of a post colonial text such as the story of Jesus in Mark. . .It may exhibit a complex process of appropriating and abrogating, mimicking and mocking, affiliating and repulsing, consenting and conflicting with both the native and the alien colonial discourses of power. 70

A more fruitful line of inquiry arises from a recognition of the intricate and often ambiguous nature of colonial relationships and power structures within the gospel, as well as the multiple responses available to colonized subjects. 71 Mark’s story of a colonized Jesus can be read as a discourse of a “minoritarian community under subjection and surveillance that tries to create a space in-between the Roman colonial and relatively dominant native Jewish collaborative and nationalistic discourses of power.” 72 Mark’s community is trying to find a space for itself between Roman colonial power and the segment of the Jewish population that seeks refuge by collaborating with Rome. Mark takes a culturally in-between posture, and his narrative reflects a variety of responses to colonial subjugation. The gospel characters variously accommodate and resist Rome and its local collaborators; imitate their oppressors “with a difference;” envision an alternative community; remain silent; or wait for God to act.

69 Moore, Empire and Apocalypse, 31.
70 Samuel, 86.
71 The face of Rome is shown explicitly only during Jesus’ trial in 15:1-39, and even then Pontius Pilate as a Roman official is ambiguously construed by Mark. See Moore, Empire and Apocalypse, 32-33 for possible interpretations of Mark’s ambiguous portrait of Pilate.
72 Ibid, 4-5.
III. Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman: Postcolonial Perspectives

24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” 28 But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” 29 Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. Mark 7:24-30 (NRSV)

a. History of interpretation

Postcolonial interpretations attend to the social and historical contexts under which a text was produced, and also to various layers in its history of interpretation. A postcolonial critical analysis of Mark 7:24-30 considers “the hierarchy of subject and object inscribed in the text, the circumstances that brought it forth, and the rhetorical function it performs.” It is not possible to offer a comprehensive summary of interpretations of this text, but I will briefly consider some issues in its history of interpretation that contribute to a postcolonial reading but do not necessarily arise from a postcolonial perspective.

The Syrophoenician Woman’s story occupies a pivotal position in Mark and Matthew, “strategically placed near the epicentre of change in the narrative.” Mary Ann Tolbert finds it significant that the story is in the middle of three healing stories (6:53-56, 7:24-30; 7:31-37) and sandwiched between the feeding of the five thousand (6:35-44) and the feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10). Rhoads’ narrative-critical exploration of the sequence of Jesus’ actions in the central chapters of the gospel also identifies this text as an important turning point in the

---

72Kwok, Discovering the Bible, 72.

73Ibid, 73.

75James W. Perkisn, “A Canaanitic Word in the Logos of Christ; or the Difference the Syro-Phoenician Woman makes to Jesus.” Semeia 75 (1996), 61-86 (65).

76Tolbert, Sowing the Gospel, 185.
plot, which Rhoads divides as follows:77

- a. Jesus feeds 5,000 Jews in Jewish territory
- b. Jesus heals the sick in Gennesaret
- c. Jesus is engaged in a controversy with Pharisees over clean/unclean
- d. Jesus teaches disciples that all foods are clean
- e. Jesus goes to unclean Gentile territory of Tyre and drives out an unclean spirit at the request of an unclean Gentile woman.78
- b. Jesus goes to Decapolis, another Gentile territory and heals a deaf/mute man

According to this chiastic plot, the turning point in the gospel is a discussion between Jesus and his disciples in which he declares all foods to be clean, thus overturning traditional understandings of clean and unclean. Immediately following that conversation, Jesus travels to Gentile territory (Tyre). There he is again challenged to respond to an unclean situation. According to Rhoads, the Syrophoenician Woman “develops the scenario of Jesus’ allegory so that she and her daughter now have a place in it” as ‘puppies’ who are allowed in the house, and permitted to clean up the crumbs dropped by careless children.79

Rhoads believes this episode is fundamentally about crossing boundaries. In the Markan narrative, conflict between Jesus and leaders of Israel centres on physical and social boundaries, specifically those related to purity. For the leaders, boundaries are “lines to be guarded in order to protect the holiness of God’s people against the pernicious influence of uncleanness.”80 Jesus redraws the boundaries between clean and unclean.81

Jesus’ morally disturbing response to a woman in need (7:27) has troubled scholars. Thiessen distinguishes three main ways that New Testament exegetes have tried to make sense

---


78Ibid, 348.

79Ibid, 357.

80Ibid, 363.

81Rhoads’ interpretation underestimates the number of boundaries that have been crossed in this story. For example, he claims that the gender of the woman does not matter to the narrative.
of Jesus’ rudeness. Biographical interpretations explain Jesus’ words in terms of his character or personal context, claiming for example that Jesus is tired or hungry and speaks a too-hasty word that he does not mean. Paradigmatic interpretations tend to see the woman as an example of a character whose faith is tried and tested. Salvation-historical interpretations focus on the woman, who despite being a Gentile, responds to Jesus’ teaching with faith and humility and illustrates the movement of Jesus’ mission from the Jewish people to the Gentiles. Martin Luther’s interpretation of this passage can be described as salvation-historical. The Reformers emphasised faith as a key to salvation, and the woman provided an example of faithful humility and a model of Christian virtue, in contrast to the Pope and other Church leadership. Luther praises her faithful persistence: “Christ is compelled to yield and listen to her and to praise her for her faith and perseverance.”

Thiessen finds none of these interpretations persuasive in terms of understanding Jesus’ initial reaction to the woman, asking “How can one refuse a request for the healing of child by saying that children are to be preferred to dogs?” He looks to the cultural context of the story for insight: “Jesus’ rejection of the woman expresses a bitterness that had built up within the relationships between Jews and Gentiles in the border regions between Tyre and Galilee.”

T.A. Burkill has traced the development of the story as told in both Mark and Matthew, as it reflects changing levels of tensions between Jews and Gentiles in the early Church.

In colonial era missions, the Syrophoenician Woman was upheld as a paragon of Christian virtue, subservient, humble, loyal, an ideal model for colonized people.

---

82Thiessen, 63.
83Kwok, Discovering the Bible, 77.
85Thiessen, 65.
87Kwok, Discovering the Bible, 78.
women especially were encouraged by white missionaries to identify with the Syrophoenician Woman as an example of Jesus’ love and care for ‘foreign women,’ this despite Jesus’ initial reluctance to help the woman. According to some missional interpretations, this passage “challenges the audience not to set limits of the universality of the good news of the kingdom of God.”

Feminist interpreters such as Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza want to make the woman “visible again as one of the apostolic foremothers of the Gentile Christians” Tolbert notes that the woman is “the only person in the entire Gospel of Mark to best Jesus in an argument.” In fact, the Syrophoenician Woman is the only female character who actually speaks in the Gospel of Mark. Tolbert compares the Syrophoenician Woman with Jairus (5:21-23, 35-43). Both request healings for their daughters, but while Jesus immediately answers Jairus’ plea, the woman receives a derisive rejection and is compared to a dog. Tolbert’s interpretation highlights the woman’s unconventional behaviour, “which initially draws the dominant male’s wrath, but by increasing boldness, cleverness, and basic moral correctness eventually subverts that wrath into agreement.”

b. Postcolonial readings of Mark 7:24-30

Postcolonial readings embrace insights gained from other reading strategies, while

---

88Ibid.
89Rhoads, 370.
93Ibid, 356.
94Ibid.
challenging those interpretations which fail to consider the colonial context of the biblical text(s), colonial echoes in subsequent interpretations, and colonialism/imperialism in the context of contemporary interpreters. Mark 7:24-30 must be read in the context of the whole gospel, which was produced in a colonial milieu and demonstrates a variety of responses to Imperial Rome. Postcolonial readings highlight themes of identity, representation, agency, land, resources (such as bread) and border crossing, and search for postcolonial motifs such as ambivalence, hybridity and Third Space. The encounter between Jesus and a Gentile woman, told in Mark and Matthew, has been a popular choice for postcolonial critics, including Sugirtharajah, Kwok Pui-lan, Gnanadason, and Perkinson whose interpretations are briefly described here.95

Sugirtharajah challenges a trend toward reading this passage missiologically. Missiological readings identify Jesus’ motive for journeying to Tyre as evangelism, and tend to focus on the woman as a “prototype of authentic faith.”96 He cautions that such a reading identifies members of other faiths as potential targets for evangelization. It was Jesus’ reputation as a healer that attracted the woman, although Jesus travelled to her territory, she sought him out. It is the evangelizer who is evangelized now. The Gentile woman tells the Jewish Jesus of God’s borderless hospitality that transcends cultural boundaries.97

Gnanadason looks at the story through the eyes of Indian dalit women who have been impacted by the Christian missionary movement.98 These dalit women have been considered polluted by a carefully crafted caste system that has excluded and oppressed them on the basis of


their pollution. Gnanadason suggests that the story of the Syrophoenician Woman, another polluted outsider, offers a message of salvation for dalit women.

Kwok Pui-lan also explores this passage with regard to its use as a basis for mission to Gentiles, especially peoples in Asia and other parts of the world who have been labelled ‘heathens’ or ‘pagans’ because of their adherence to other faith traditions. She believes that “the story of the Syro-Phoenician Woman brings into sharp focus the complex issues of the relationship between men and women, cultural imperialism and colonization,” and offers guiding questions for approaching this text:

How does an unknown Gentile woman’s story serve to legitimate the Gentile mission of the Christian Church? How can we interpret the story in such a way as to further the liberation of Third world women? In our postcolonial world, how can we reread the story so that we can respect one another as persons of different gender, race, religion and social origin?100

Kwok’s postcolonial reading of this passage challenges “the ideological construction of sameness and difference” by attending to the dense web of binary significations that are illustrated in this short story: “Jewish homeland/foreign lands, inside/outside the house, Jews/Gentiles, cleanliness/uncleanliness, children/dogs, woman/disciples, and faithful/unfaithful.”101 The Syrophoenician Woman becomes a “signifier of cultural, social, gender and ethnic differences, needed in the master discourse to name and display sameness and difference.”102

Perkinson brings insights from colonial discourse theory to Mark’s story of Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman, raising a soteriological question about “the possibility of the word of

99Kwok, Discovering the Bible, 71-2.
100Ibid, 72.
101Ibid. 78.
102Ibid, 74. Economic differences might be added to this list.
salvation issuing from an Other,” that is, someone other than Jesus Christ. He reads Mark contrapuntally as “a ‘discourse of power’ where the colonial voice of Jesus fails to silence the Canaanite subaltern voice from emanating and speaking for itself. Mark, by the very nature of its origin in the colonial in-between, interstitial space, cannot always prevent the subtle irruption of the Canaanite voice in its ranks.” Perkinsen raises interesting possibilities with regard to the potential power of the subaltern’s voice. However, in the context of a gospel that displays an ambivalent attitude toward Rome, it may be inaccurate to equate Jesus’ voice with that of the colonizer.

c. A reading to engage cultural difference, hybridity and Third Space

The postcolonial concepts of hybridity and Third Space offer unique insight into the encounter described in Mark 7:24:30. I claim that the meeting between Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman produces a hybrid Third Space in which healing occurs. In order to enter this space, both Jesus and the woman cross boundaries and negotiate cultural difference, particularly gender, race and socioeconomic status. My reading serves to illustrate the kind of encounter that may happen in preaching that addresses a variety of postcolonial subjects. Although the encounter described in Mark 7:24-30 is not an ecclesial encounter, it is an encounter between colonial subjects. This encounter is a vivid scriptural account of the productive possibility of the Third Space.

Whether or not an historical Jesus met an historical Gentile woman, I assume that Mark had a particular purpose in telling the story in a particular manner. With Kwok and Mieke Bal, I see the text not as a “transparent, immaterial medium, a window through which we can get a glimpse of reality” but as “a figuration of the reality which brought it forth and to which it

103 James W. Perkinsen, “A Canaanitic Word in the Logos of Christ; or the Difference the Syro-Phoenician Woman makes to Jesus,” Semeia 75 (1996), 61-86.
104 Samuel, 81.
responded.” That reality, as I claim here, was at least partially shaped by colonial experience. I do not attempt a systematic reading nor seek to produce a ‘correct’ reading of the text but rather to interrogate the text, to bring different questions, to find a space within the text to engage cultural difference. In this section, I interrogate the text according to two key aspects of postcolonial inquiry - geopolitical context and the representations of identity and power relationships. The following questions have guided my inquiry:

Where do I as a reader/interpreter stand? What is my own ‘colonial’ context? What is the colonial/imperial context of the text’s author, audience and characters? Does the text take a clear stance for or against it? How are the characters represented in terms of identity? How is difference constructed with regard to power, gender, culture, religion, age, socio-economic status? Has this text been used to justify colonial or imperial domination? Does the text encourage travel to distant and inhabited lands and how does it justify itself? What happens in the encounters, the ‘in-between’ spaces? What is at stake? Is this a text/perspective that I want to applaud and collude with, or resist?

a. Geopolitical Context of Mark 7: 24-20

A postcolonial reading recognizes the interconnectedness of land, people and power. Geography is more than a physical body, it is also a “page of intrinsically intertwined narratives of power and disempowerment.” Mark locates his story in the region of Tyre, a location which evokes historical and symbolic meanings. Tyre is recorded as a threat to Israel in several places in the Old Testament (Isaiah 23; Jer.47:4; Ezekiel 27, 28; Joel 3:4-8; Zech 9:2) A non-Jewish city, Tyre was an ethnically mixed border town in which Phoenician, Jewish and

---


106 Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation,* 129.

107 McKinley, xiii.


Hellenistic culture coexisted. Tyre was on an island, thus, despite its wealth, its territory was limited, and it relied on imports of food and other resources.

Tyre was a wealthy city that needed to buy agricultural produce from the hinterland. The Galilean hinterland and the rural territory belonging to the city (partly settled by Jews) were the “breadbasket” of the metropolis of Tyre... even in ‘normal’ times the farmers in the territory inhabited by Jews would often, and justly, have had the feeling of having to produce for the rich city-dwellers while they themselves lived in want.

This economic arrangement may have been a source of trouble between the inhabitants of the city and the rural peasantry. The inhabitants of Tyre are described by the Jewish historian Josephus as "notoriously our bitterest enemies" (Ap 1.13).

b. Identity/Representation in Mark 7:24-30

Mark identifies the woman as “a Gentile of Syrophoenician origin.” This woman is triply polluted as a female, Gentile, and the mother of a demon-possessed daughter. Her socioeconomic status is unclear. Thiessen suggests that she was wealthy, educated and a member of the upper class, in which case it is the woman who occupied the position of the dominant, as one who participated in and collaborated with oppressive dominating powers. In that case, Jesus’ initial refusal to heal her daughter could be construed as an act of resistance against the dominant. Yet Thiessen gives inordinate weight to socioeconomic status.

---

110 Thiessen, 68.
111 Ibid, 73. See Ezekiel 27:17 and 1 Kings 17: 7-16
112 Ibid, 74.
114 Matthew identifies the woman as a ‘Canaanite,’ a designation that carries a different set of associations, and triggers different memories in both ancient and contemporary interpreters than Mark’s term ‘Syrophoenician.’
115 Jesus and the woman appear to have language in common “With the aid of this native [Phoenician] language, a Syrophoenician could converse quite well with a Jew.” See Thiessen, 70.
116 Perkinson, 68.
Although the woman may have occupied a wealthier stratum, she remains Jesus’ other, “not only geographically, but sexually, racially and religiously, on the outside.”  Perhaps it is fair to say that the Syrophoenician Woman “stands at the boundaries of the privileged and the marginalised,” possessing relative power economically, yet disadvantaged by gender, ethnicity and religion.

Jesus also stands at such a boundary. He is “a traveller, whose divinity, class, race, and gender endow him with privilege and authority.” He is free to journey to another geographical location, but he is also a figure who has been rejected by those in authority, broken purity laws, eaten with outsiders, and occupies a low socioeconomic position. Mark identifies Jesus as the son of a carpenter (6:3). According to Crossan, in an agrarian society artisans such as carpenters ranked below farming peasants because “they were usually recruited and replenished from its dispossessed members,” those forced off their land because of natural or colonial calamity. Like the woman, Jesus is an outsider, and at least from the perspective of his more orthodox opponents, he too is polluted.

When Jesus enters the region of Tyre, he seeks privacy in a house. There is no indication that he enters the region to engage in missionary activity. The woman has heard about Jesus, and immediately finds him in a house, bows at his feet and begs him to cast out the demon possessing her daughter. Her haste indicates the strength of her need. She finds herself “in an impossible situation and cannot find any other solution than to forget tradition, neglect social custom, and rush ahead recklessly to Jesus.”

---

117Ibid, 69.
118Kwok, Discovering the Bible, 75.
119Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation, 146.
121Kinukawa, Women and Jesus, 59.
In addition to Jesus’ problematic response to the woman’s desperate plea, Thiessen notes another difficulty posed by Jesus’s words to the woman. Jesus’ rudeness aside, why does he respond to her healing request with an apparently irrelevant saying about ‘bread’? The geopolitical context and representation of identity may offer insight into the central metaphor of the story, bread and crumbs. ‘Bread’ carried certain connotations in the border regions, especially in the context of Thiessen’s construction of the economic tensions between Gentile inhabitants of the region, and Jewish peasants. If the woman is rich, then she may be eating at the cost of the labour and hunger of rural Jewish peasants. This perspective changes the impact of Jesus’ words to the woman: “first let the poor people in the Jewish rural areas be satisfied. For it is not good to take poor people’s food and throw it to the rich Gentiles in the cities.”

Who are the masters who sit at the table with their deserving children, and who are the dogs underneath? Musa Dube, in reference to Matthew’s text, says: “The Canaanite and her daughter . . . are undeserving ‘dogs’ who can only pick crumbs that fall from the table. These statements assert the racial and class superiority of Jesus as a member of the house of Israel and, conversely, the racial inferiority of the woman and her daughter.” Yet other interpretations are possible. It can be argued that the Israeliite peasants were treated like dogs by the Roman authorities, and by those Jewish leaders who collaborated with Rome and the urban elite of cities like Tyre, perhaps even the Syrophoenician Woman. The dogs would then be representative of Jesus’ community, forced to look for sustenance underneath the ‘master’s’ table. In that case, “Jesus’ household metaphor in which the bread goes first to the children of Israel would be

---

122 Thiessen notes that Matthew anticipates this exegetical problem, and redacts Mark’s story with the words “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt. 15:24), only then adding the saying about the food being thrown to dogs (61).

123 Thiessen is not suggesting here that this is what Jesus meant or intended. But this may be what ‘bread’ invoked in the border regions. This interpretation raises the possibility that Jesus was making an economic statement, rather than a missional or spiritual statement (75).

124 Dube, Postcolonial, 147.
understood by early listeners as a reversal of the reigning order.”

Hybridity and the Third Space

In this pericope, two social worlds collide. Thiessen argues: “a Hellenised Phoenician encounters a Galilean prophet.” The space between Jesus and the woman is not neutral space, it is “already filled with a particular discourse of domination,” and the Roman Empire is an unspoken presence in this space. The roles of Jesus and the woman are socially defined, and seem to make an antagonistic encounter inevitable. Colonialism often pits colonized persons against one another. Aside from gender and religion, “economic dependence, political expansionism and cultural distance provided a fertile soil for aggressive prejudices on both sides.” Yet this encounter breaks the limits of discourse that have been predetermined by social, religious and political boundaries, and results in transformation.

Ambiguity is an important factor in this interpretation, a factor that blurs the apparently fixed boundaries between Jesus and the woman. The relative power of these two characters is ambiguous in this text. Is Jesus, male and Jewish, a member of the master class or a colonized subject? In this particular situation, he holds more power than the woman. Even if the woman is wealthy and elite, she has a very sick daughter whom she cannot heal independently. She is at the mercy of rumours about Jesus’ power to heal, a power which is not limited or controlled by Rome. Yet they are both under the thumb of a greater political power. The power relationships in this story are multifaceted, resulting in a “complex dialogue of domination and

---

125 Hicks, “Moral Agency,” 83.
126 Thiessen, 70.
127 Perkinson, 74.
128 Thiessen, 76.
129 McKinlay makes an interesting observation in reference to the parallel text in Matthew 15. “For I, as reader, have already been told that Rahab is Jesus’ ancestor, and if Canaanites are strictly Other to Israel, the intriguing question arises as to whether there is a trace of Otherness, of Canaanite-ness, in the face of Jesus the Jew.” (107).
resistance,” in which “each of the two figures is simultaneously superior and subordinate in different registers.” The identities of Jesus and the woman remain ambiguous, blurred by a dense web of power relations.

*Boundary-breaking* is another important motif in this interpretation. Mark’s Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman each make a choice to enter into an exchange despite social and cultural proprieties. Mark allows the woman to do things she should not do, even to break the boundary of gender. Myers states: “unlike the approach of Jairus, her solicitation is an affront to the honor status of Jesus: no woman, and especially a Gentile, unknown and unrelated to this Jew, would have dared invade his privacy at home to seek a favor . . . ” The Markan Jesus does not dispute the freedom of this woman to cross cultural boundaries. He was a Jewish man, yet his views on ethnicity and racial boundaries were unorthodox. Jesus may himself have recognized the changeable boundaries of ‘otherness’ in Israel’s tradition: “On the question of the Other, the foreigner, the (biblical) narratives are decidedly inconsistent . . . Who is an outsider is perpetually negotiated.”

Jesus and the woman ignore multiple social and political borderlines, and act subversively. Their boundary-breaking results in a new space where healing occurs. In the end, the unclean daughter is healed. Such a healing, occurring across social boundaries, can be interpreted as an act of resistance against the social and political powers that seek to keep persons separate. According to Thiessen, the miracle of this story is not so much that the woman’s daughter is healed, but “in the overcoming of an equally divisive distance.”

---

130Perkinson, 74.
131Myers, 203-204.
132Joy, 150.
134Hicks, 80.
135Thiessen, 80.
Hybridity can be perceived as an act of protest against “the forces that attempt to shape social order in terms of the so-called unadulterated purity of religion and culture.”\textsuperscript{136} Hybridities break all the rules of purity, as evidenced by an aversion to hybridities in the history of Israel.\textsuperscript{137} When Jesus crossed boundaries of space and purity, bringing together clean and unclean, sinner and righteous, the religious authorities protested. In the Gospel of Mark, immediately before Jesus travels to Tyre and encounters the Syrophoenician Woman, he is engaged in a controversy with some scribes and Pharisees regarding eating with defiled hands (7:1-23). In that discussion, Jesus redefines defilement and impurity, and declares all foods clean, claiming that the words and actions issuing from an individual will make him or her unclean. It is perhaps no surprise that Jesus is willing and able to encounter a hybrid woman, in a hybrid territory, and participate in a healing that cleanses the ‘unclean.’ Postcolonial hybridity denies the possibility of unadulterated purity. Thus, the woman and Jesus were not crossing carved-in-stone boundaries, but recognizing fluidity and impurity as normative. Horsley argues that Mark’s audience may have struggled with the hybrid identity of non-Israelites who have become involved in the Jesus movement: “their identity, like the identities of many “postcolonial” people today, is hybrid . . . The “Greek Syrophoenician Woman” is representative of them, their participation in the Markan Jesus’ movement, and their interests.”\textsuperscript{138}

The Third Space. As Jesus and the woman choose to cross boundaries, they enter into a Third Space, a fluid and dynamic space in which healing and transformation occur. Mark 7:24-30 has been interpreted as a sign of God’s welcome to the outsider - the acceptance of the Gentile into Israel’s history of salvation. Yet Kwok Pui-lan argues against a too hasty ‘baptism’ of the woman as a Gentile Christian “without acknowledging the different culture and tradition

\textsuperscript{136}Han, “Mixed Blessings,” 37.

\textsuperscript{137}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{138}Horsley, Hearing the Whole Story, 213.
she represents.” We are quick to place the woman into familiar categories, but to do so reflects a reductionist and simplified understanding of cultural difference. It is not clear from the text that she chooses to change her religious affiliation or daily lived experience post-healing. She is healed despite her difference, despite the fact that she crosses boundaries and represents impurity. The choice, whether to follow Jesus or not, and on whose terms, is left in her hands. Envisioning this encounter as a Third Space encounter allows for the woman and Jesus to meet, to change each other, but not be incorporated into the same category or made same. They are allowed to maintain cultural difference. Ideological conflicts between these two individuals and the communities they represent have not disappeared, nor are they swept under the rug. Jesus does not object to the Syrophoenician Woman’s ‘right to signify,’ her right to represent herself on her own terms. This text demonstrates what may happen when space is made for conversation with one who is truly other.

As an illustrative category, Third Space provides food for thought, but must be approached with caution. Is the Third Space safe from colonization? Like a colonizer, Jesus has power over someone who is in the distance (the sick daughter), and he exerts control over the body of another without her consent or her permission. To be sure, the healing is a welcome and positive act, but it remains, in some ways, an act of control.

A postcolonial imagination offers space for such difficult questions, but the presence of difficult questions does not nullify the possibility of a space in which reconciliation and healing can occur. My interpretation of this passage recognizes that the speech of the other has power. The Syrophoenician Woman’s speech, “her saying,” enacts change and healing. Jesus’ last words to the woman are ambiguous. “For saying that, you may go - the demon has left your daughter” (7:29). It is not clear whose word actually caused the healing, only that the words

139 Kwok, Discovering the Bible, 82.

140 Perkinson, 77.
issued in the complex space between Jesus and the woman. This is a grace-filled ambiguity. While I affirm that healing comes from God, this passage also suggests that God works in and through unexpected persons and encounters.

**Conclusion**

The Gospel of Mark should be read as a text which was written, and has been interpreted, in a colonial/imperial context. A postcolonial reading of Mark 7:24-30 clarifies some of the colonial/imperial factors at work in the encounter between Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman. Their encounter can be conceived as a Third Space encounter in which two colonial subjects enter into conversation, accompanied by both divine and imperial presence. These subjects subvert colonial discourse, and thus participate in a healing event. The next chapter continues to reflect upon this Third Space as a space in which God-in-Trinity interrupts colonial discourse and thus reorients ecclesial discourse.
Chapter Three: Jürgen Moltmann’s Social Doctrine of the Trinity

Introduction

This dissertation is concerned with the development of a postcolonial homiletic which critiques colonial reality, and moves toward new possibilities for ecclesial relationships. Postcolonial theory has contributed a body of knowledge about historical and contemporary manifestations of colonialism/imperialism, and has provided key insights into colonial discourse and relationships among colonized and colonizing peoples. It has not yet directly addressed the nature of ecclesial relationships, nor the unique eschatological hope that is characteristic of Christian faith. I argue that the Trinity, particularly as it is portrayed in Moltmann’s theology is the source of ecclesial identity and the milieu of ecclesial discourse. Like all theological proposals, Moltmann’s doctrine contains certain ambiguity, inconsistency and contradictions, yet it is a creative and distinctly trinitarian perspective which can partner with postcolonial theory in order to inform a postcolonial homiletic.¹

Jürgen Moltmann and other 20th century theologians have sought to reestablish the Trinity as a vitally important doctrine for faith and ethics.² Moltmann offers a creative proposal for contemporary trinitarian theology. Entering into dialogue with an “ecumenical fellowship of

¹There are areas of tension and incongruity between Moltmann’s theology and postcolonial perspectives. For example, postcolonial theory questions grand narratives such as that described by Moltmann in relation to the Social Trinity, and deconstructs eurocentric theologies such as Moltmann’s. Despite possible objections, Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity is palatable to Western readers/preachers, and may allow them to enter into a conversation which might seem initially unfamiliar or threatening. In many ways, it is a useful partner for postcolonial theory.

theologians from the past,” he proposes a social doctrine of the Trinity that critically reexamines traditional trinitarian theologies and interprets all of human history from creation to eschatological consummation in terms of Trinity. God’s life in Trinity has implications both for human social and political realities. The nature of the relationships among the Persons of the Trinity, and the representation of these relationships in theological discourse will impact ecclesial relationships at the local and global level. Ecclesial community will, to a certain extent, pattern its behaviour based on its construction of God’s nature, insofar as Christians tend to construct social reality based on their theology. Traditional monotheistic formulations of the Trinity have been used to justify totalitarian governance in Church and society, including colonialism/imperialism. Moltmann views the God revealed in scripture as a Social Trinity, a fellowship characterized as a non-hierarchical fellowship and reciprocal indwelling. Compared to traditional trinitarian doctrines, this Social Trinity is “a more life-giving and liberating doctrine of God, more congenial to both feminist and postmodern sensitivities, closer to the biblical witness to Jesus, one with his Abba and the Spirit.” This fellowship is “open and

---


7Moltmann, *The Trinity*, 191-92, also 197.

inviting to all of creation and to humankind in particular, who is uniquely destined to be the Trinity’s counterpart in fellowship.”^9 Conceived in this way, the Social Trinity is other-oriented. Trinitarian Persons are oriented to one another, and their love is directed to human others. Human love may then circulate toward divine and human others.

Colonialism/imperialism are social and political realities that negatively impact local and global ecclesial relationships. The practices of colonialism and the ideology of imperialism problematise the participation of humanity in the divine fellowship, and distort human relationships by discouraging or attempting to forbid discourses of love and friendship. Beyond merely interrupting or resisting colonial power, a postcolonial homiletic will proclaim the possibility of transformation through divine intervention. In the words of Miroslav Volf, “a genuinely Christian reflection on social issues must be rooted in the self-giving love of the divine Trinity as manifested on the cross of Christ.”^10 I maintain that a reflection upon colonialism as it impacts preaching and ecclesial relationships should be rooted in such self-giving Trinitarian love. Christian preaching addresses a community that emerges from, participates in, and reaches toward the Triune God. I claim that Jürgen Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity works alongside postcolonial theory to deconstruct colonial discourse, and thus reorients ecclesial discourse. A postcolonial homiletic will benefit from a non-imperialistic theology that encourages disengagement from destructive colonial behaviours and attitudes which distort genuine relationship with others.

Following a general introduction to Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity, this chapter proceeds according to what I have identified as four key elements of social trinitarian discourse: freedom, mutual self-giving, self-differentiation, and openness. I have borrowed

---


these terms from Moltmann, but have developed them here as an original frame to illustrate points of departure with more traditional trinitarian theologies, to highlight the other-oriented nature of social trinitarian discourse, and to form the basis for a social trinitarian deconstruction of colonial discourse.

Secondly, this chapter argues that human relationships are created in *imago trinitatis*, and there exists a positive, yet imperfect, correlation between Trinity and ecclesial community in terms of *kenosis*, *perichoresis* and differentiation. “True human fellowship is to correspond to the Triune God and be his image on earth. True human fellowship will participate in the inner life of the Triune God.” This participation is the basis for both ecclesiology and missiology.

Thirdly, this chapter describes postmodern deconstruction, and claims that the social doctrine of the Trinity, along with postcolonial theory, deconstructs four colonial tendencies described in chapter one: domination, separation, homogeneity and fixedness. This deconstruction results in a reorientation of colonial discourse toward freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness - a reorientation, indeed transformation, that is made possible through God’s life in Trinity.

---


12In chapter four, these terms are a lens through which to view other-oriented preaching.


Finally, this chapter will offer an original constructive metaphor for postcolonial ecclesial encounters. “Perichoretic Space” is a hybrid concept which incorporates the Social Trinity’s reorientation of colonial discourse, *perichoresis*, and Homi K. Bhabha’s postcolonial Third Space. While it is not an ecclesial encounter, the encounter between Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman (Mark 7) described in the previous chapter aptly illustrates Third Space. Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman find themselves in proximity to one another, such that a Third Space opens between them, a space in which reconciliation and healing are made possible. These Third Spaces open up at points of contact between postcolonial subjects located in the Perichoretic Space. Perichoretic Space, and its corresponding Third Spaces are dynamic spaces of struggle, reconciliation and hope in which Christian relationships are continually re-created by the kenotic love of Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. This love reorders discourse, and enables local and global Christian communities to encounter one another in a creative process of self-giving and other-receiving. Although the Perichoretic Space is a space of hope, it is not a neutral space- it is filled with points of tension, and particular discourses of domination. In this space, the Trinity funds an “ongoing process of transformation.”

I. Jürgen Moltmann’s Social Doctrine of the Trinity

Moltmann’s social doctrine seeks to “unite all things with God and in God,” in and through the incarnation of Jesus Christ which is “constitutive of the divine life in all eternity.” God redefines power in terms of love by entering our history as Love itself, Love that is committed to its other. Moltmann employs the doctrine of the Trinity as an interpretive strategy for scriptural narratives. This ‘trinitarian hermeneutic’ weaves a “complex tapestry of

---


biblical texts” in order to develop the roles of the Persons of the Trinity.\textsuperscript{18} Scripture testifies to humanity’s experience with the trinitarian fellowship.\textsuperscript{19} The Old Testament prophets revealed a God who “goes out of himself, entering into the people he has chosen,”\textsuperscript{20} and is wounded by their sins. Drawing on the work of Abraham Heschel, Moltmann interprets the ‘Spirit of God’ which rests upon the Old Testament prophets as evidence of divine self-differentiation: God is one, and only, but not ‘monistic.’\textsuperscript{21} The New Testament “talks about God by proclaiming in narrative the relationships of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, which are relationships of fellowship and are open to the world.”\textsuperscript{22} God does not reveal Godself, but the Son, who is “not identical with Godself.”\textsuperscript{23} Jesus is the revealer of the Trinity, and it is through Jesus’ revelation that we come to understand God as Creator.\textsuperscript{24} Jesus’ baptism and call, proclamation and ministry display a trinitarian form - the events of Jesus’ life take place through and in the Spirit and the presence of the Creator.\textsuperscript{25} “Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, is the concrete visibility of the TriuneCreator God among us.”\textsuperscript{26}

The cross is at the centre of the Trinity,\textsuperscript{27} and is, in summary form, the history of “God with us” and “God for us.”\textsuperscript{28} Moltmann describes the death of the Son as an \textit{intra} trinitarian event: “What happened on the cross was an event between God and God. It was a deep division

\textsuperscript{18}McDougall, 69.
\textsuperscript{19}Moltmann, \textit{The Trinity}, 19.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid, 25.
\textsuperscript{22}Moltmann, \textit{The Trinity}, 64.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid, 86.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid, 70.
\textsuperscript{25}Ibid, 74-75.
\textsuperscript{26}Wells, 14.
\textsuperscript{27}Moltmann, \textit{The Trinity}, 83.
\textsuperscript{28}Moltmann, \textit{The Church}, 96.
in God himself, insofar as God abandoned God and contradicted himself, and at the same time a unity in God, insofar as God was at one with God and corresponded to himself.29 The event of Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection altered the relationship between Son and Creator, suggesting that God is changeable, capable of suffering and imperfect insofar as God is open to creation and willing to suffer pain for its redemption.30 This “doctrine of theopathy” is important for Moltmann’s social doctrine.31 Greek philosophy excluded any notion of a God who could suffer, a notion that has influenced the Christian doctrine of God, even more than Christ’s passion.32 Christian theologians have attempted to hold together a suffering Son with a non-suffering Creator, resulting in a powerful contradiction.33 Yet the very heart of Christian tradition is the suffering of Jesus Christ. Moltmann asks “How is God himself involved in the history of Christ’s passion? How can Christian faith understand Christ’s passion as being the revelation of God, if the deity cannot suffer? Does God simply allow Christ to suffer for us? Or does God himself suffer in Christ on our behalf?”34 If God is incapable of suffering, then Christ’s death is only a human tragedy from which God is absent, a belief that would signal the end of Christian faith.35 A God who is incapable of suffering is also incapable of love.36 Moltmann maintains that although God does not suffer in the same manner as created beings, “he suffers from the love which is the superabundance and overflowing of his being. In so far he is ‘pathetic.’”37 God’s suffering is an active form of suffering, a willingness to lay oneself

29Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, 244.
30Moltmann, The Church, 63.
31Moltmann, The Trinity, 25.
32Ibid, 22.
33Ibid.
34Ibid, 21.
36Ibid, 23.
37Ibid.
open to another in passionate love.\textsuperscript{38}

Moltmann maintains that it is only possible to talk about God’s suffering if one employs trinitarian terms.\textsuperscript{39} God longs for God’s ‘other,’ divine and human, not out of some divine deficiency, but because of a “creative fullness” that longs to put “creative love into action.”\textsuperscript{40} God’s passion in and through Jesus Christ, communicated by the Holy Spirit, is central to understanding the discourse of love among the Persons of the Trinity, the manner in which that discourse is directed toward creation, and the manner in which creation participates in trinitarian discourse.

The following sections continue to describe the Trinity as it relates to four, highly interrelated aspects of trinitarian discourse, which I have derived from Moltmann’s doctrine: freedom, mutual self-giving, self-differentiation and openness.

\textbf{a. Freedom}

God the Creator is not distant or apathetic, but a suffering God who freely gives of self, making space within Godself for divine others (the Son and the Spirit), and human others. Moltmann understands God’s freedom in the context of God’s self-limitation. In effect, God limits Godself so that there was space for creation to exist, withdrawing “into himself in order to go out of himself.”\textsuperscript{41} Creation is preceded by the movement of God into Godself. This self-limitation, or self-humiliation is an act of divine restriction which makes creation possible.

God’s creative love is grounded in his humble, self-humiliating love. This self-restricting love is the beginning of that self-emptying of God which Philippians 2

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid, 25.

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid, 45-46.

\textsuperscript{41}Moltmann takes up the ideas of Isaac Luria who surmised that God’s inversion made possible the existence of a world outside God. Luria was a Jewish mystic who first developed the idea of \textit{zimsum} (a contraction or withdrawal of oneself into oneself) in the context of the Jewish doctrine of the Shekinah. In order to dwell in the temple, God contracts himself. Moltmann, \textit{God in Creation}, 87.
sees as the divine mystery of the Messiah. Even in order to create heaven and earth, God emptied himself of his all-plenishing omnipotence, and as creator took upon himself the form of a servant.\textsuperscript{42}

In this sense, we can understand the act of creation as more than calling life into being. The Creator creates by withdrawing into himself and making space for creation. The incarnation of the Son is part of God’s loving self-communication to the world, but also demonstrates God’s self-limitation: “The divine kenosis which begins with the creation of the world reaches its perfected and completed form in the incarnation of the Son. By entering into a finite world, God limits himself, his omnipotence. In becoming human, and making that human state “part of his own, eternal life,” he becomes the \textit{human} God.”\textsuperscript{43} God is free to limit God’s own omnipotence, and free to enter into relationship with humanity.

Traditional interpretations of the Trinity envision a hierarchical structure, according to which God the Creator is an absolute subject and supreme ruler of a fixed hierarchy. Moltmann interprets God’s revelation of the Trinity non-hierarchically. It unites God, with Jesus and “the life-giving Spirit, who creates the new heaven and the new earth.”\textsuperscript{44} According to this divine triunity, rule is “exercised through the co-working of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{45} It is communal, an attribute shared by all three Persons, and the nature of the rule is “determined in and through the dynamic movement - the changing relations among the three Persons.”\textsuperscript{46} Divine rule is neither a ‘monadic unity’ nor the ‘identity of a single subject’, rather it is the fellowship, or union, of the three Persons.\textsuperscript{47} The almighty God is not an archetype of

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid, 88.
\textsuperscript{43}Moltmann, \textit{The Trinity}, 118.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid, 197.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{46}McDougall, 81. Moltmann, \textit{The Trinity}, 92.
\textsuperscript{47}McDougall, 81.
\textsuperscript{48}Moltmann, \textit{The Trinity}, 92.
patriarchal power, but the parent of the crucified Son. God is not almighty power, but love....it is God’s “passionate, passible love that is almighty, nothing else.”\textsuperscript{49} God is defined through fellowship, not through power over property, but “through personality and personal relationships.”\textsuperscript{50}

Moltmann perceives that Jesus’ life, death and resurrection reveal God’s kingdom as a place of love and liberation in which God is merciful, “there are no servants; there are only God’s free children. In this kingdom what is required is not obedience and submission; it is love and free participation.”\textsuperscript{51} Love is the currency of divine fellowship - not unidirectional love which proceeds from the almighty God to Son, Spirit and creation, but love that is given and received multidirectionally.

In exploring the freedom of God in light of God’s suffering love, Moltmann takes issue with Barth’s concept of divine liberty, which claims that God has no “need of those whom in the suffering of his love he loves unendingly.”\textsuperscript{52} Moltmann defines true freedom as the “self-communication of the good,”\textsuperscript{53} the “power of good to go out of itself, to enter into the other being, to participate in other being, and to give itself for other being.”\textsuperscript{54} Through self-communication, God reveals God’s own being. This revelation proceeds not out of any compulsion but “out of the inner pleasure of his eternal love.”\textsuperscript{55} Moltmann perceives ambiguities in Barth’s analysis of freedom: “either God loves as one who is free, who could just as well not love; or his freedom is not distinguished from his love at all, and he is free as the

\textsuperscript{49}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50}Ibid, 192.
\textsuperscript{51}Ibid, 70.
\textsuperscript{52}Ibid, 53. See Karl Barth, 10.
\textsuperscript{53}Moltmann, \textit{The Trinity}, 55.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid, 57.
\textsuperscript{55}Ibid, 58.
One who loves.”\textsuperscript{56} In the sense that God is love, and needs the world in order to be Godself. God cannot contradict the truth of God’s own identity.\textsuperscript{57} The God revealed in the Triune fellowship exhibits freedom in the friendship offered to humanity; through suffering, sacrifice, and by allowing men and women the opportunity to be free by paying “the price for their freedom.”\textsuperscript{58} For Barth, God’s freedom is the choice to love or not to love.\textsuperscript{59} For Moltmann, freedom and love coincide.\textsuperscript{60}

These attributes of the Social Trinity are rooted in the freedom of the Persons of the Trinity to love one another and creation. Freedom is found through a community of solidarity, not through oppression, dominance and hierarchy. This is love that suffers freely on behalf of another and invites a free and joyful response from creation rather than a response formed in fear or because of subjugation. Such a vision of trinitarian freedom does not support or justify human domination, nor hierarchical inter-human relationships. The discourse of the Social Trinity creates the possibility of freedom, equality and solidarity.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{b. Mutual self-giving}

Moltmann’s Social Trinity locates God’s very existence in community, as ‘Triunity’, or three-in-one. As discussed above, God is not a solitary, self-sufficient Lord who rules over Son, Spirit and creation, but a Creator in need of both the divine and created other. The Creator eternally loves the Son, who is a ‘like,’ but not identical, divine being.

If God is to be understood as love, rather than simply one who loves, then God must be

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid, 53.

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid, 56.

\textsuperscript{59}Barth, section 28.

\textsuperscript{60}McDougall, 77.

\textsuperscript{61}This does not imply that humans are equal to the Trinity. Rather, the Persons of the Trinity are co-equal, and God has created us to live in human communities of equality.
thought of as a Trinity, as a fellowship of love within Godself. Moltmann writes: “Love cannot be consummated by a single solitary subject,” therefore, “if God is love he is at once the lover, the beloved and the love itself.”62 The Persons of the Trinity, while differentiated, dwell within one another. Here Moltmann borrows the ancient concept of perichoresis.63 The Persons of the Trinity move within one another, and “offer each other reciprocally the inviting room for movement in which they can develop their eternal livingness.”64 Each Person makes space within for the others, making themselves ‘inhabitable.’ “Consequently we should not talk only about the three trinitarian persons, but must at the same time speak of the three trinitarian spaces in which they mutually exist.”65 The inner-trinitarian perichoretic love reaches toward and around each Person of the Trinity, and flows out toward the human other, as ultimately evidenced by the incarnation and the cross. The relationship between God and the world is also experienced as mutual indwelling. God indwells creation, and creation is drawn into the very centre of God.

Creation is a part of the eternal love affair between the Father and the Son. It springs from the Father’s love for the Son and is redeemed by the answering love of the Son for the Father. Creation exists because the eternal love communicates himself creatively to his Other. It exists because the eternal love seeks fellowship and desires response in freedom.66

This divine love, or agape, “has overcome any distance between God and creation and reconciles creation into the reciprocal relationships of divine philia.”67 A hierarchical relationship between God and creation is replaced with “a pattern of relationality which

---


63 Moltmann defines this as “a movement from one to another, to reach round and go around, to surround, embrace, encompass.” *Experiences in Theology*, 316.

64 Ibid, 318.

65 Ibid, 319.

66 Ibid, 59.

corresponds to that of the trinitarian life itself.”

This non-hierarchical view of divine-human mutual hospitality suggests that “the Creator finds space in the fellowship of creatures. The creatures find space in God. So creation also means that we are in God and God is in us.”

The Social Trinity continually crosses the boundary between itself and creation in an ongoing process of self-giving: “it is of the very nature of God’s power to be in a constant state of donation, always turned out from itself, always giving and forgiving.”

c. Self-differentiation

Traditional theologies have emphasized unity to the exclusion of any differentiation amongst the divine Persons. Although conceptions of God as supreme substance and absolute subject were designed to safeguard divine unity, “the representation of the trinitarian Persons in a homogeneous divine substance, presupposed and recognizable from the cosmos, leads unintentionally but inescapably to the disintegration of the Trinity in abstract monotheism.” If one stresses the subjecthood of God, then “the unity of the absolute subject is stressed to such a degree that the trinitarian Persons disintegrate into mere aspects of the one subject.”

Moltmann ponders how we will understand the world if God is neither supreme substance nor

---

68 McDougall, 108.

69 Moltmann, “Creation, Covenant and Glory,” in History of the Triune God, 133. This view has drawn criticism (see McDougall, 109.)

70 Cunningham, 144.


72 Ibid, 17. Several critics caution that Moltmann’s social doctrine succumbs to tritheism. See McDougall, 98; Karkkainen, 115; Thomas F. Torrance, The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1996), 247; Gerald O’Collins, The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity. (Malwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 158. Due to his emphasis on the distinctiveness of divine personhood, it is easy to envision three separate or independent subjects. Moltmann is aware of the potential for such criticism and insists on perichoresis as the ‘unity of the triunity’ - “Interpreted perichoretically, the trinitarian Persons form their own unity by themselves in the circulation of the divine life.” The Trinity, 175.

73 Moltmann, The Trinity, 18.
absolute subject, but rather “triunity, the three-in-one.” He says:

The Western Tradition began with God’s unity and then went on to ask about the Trinity. We are beginning with the Trinity of the Persons and shall then go on to ask about the unity. What then emerges is a concept of the divine unity as the union of the tri-unity, a concept which is differentiated and is therefore capable of being thought first of all.

This concept of tri-unity is based in Moltmann’s identification of the activities of the Creator, Son and Holy Spirit in the world. He highlights the distinct roles of the Persons of the Trinity in salvation history, roles which both reveal and constitute the being of the Trinity. For example, if the Son was sent by the Trinity to die on the cross (Romans 8:32; Galatians 2:20), then we must necessarily understand that the Triune God is differentiated, that there are multiple divine subjects, who suffer in different ways according to the relationships of each to the other. The Persons of the Trinity exist in relationship, having divine nature in common; “but their particular individual nature is determined in their relationship to one another.”

The divine Persons indwell one another, but they are not absorbed into one another, nor do they consist of one, homogenous substance. The Persons are together the one name of God, “so different that they are named one after the other, and are joined with each other through the narrating ‘and.’” This interpersonal union is a “form of mutual indwelling and participation that not only preserves but also creates personal distinctions.” Social trinitarian theology images God as unity-in-diversity, “in eternity this process of self-differentiation and self-

---

74 Ibid, 10.
75 Ibid, 19.
76 McDougall, 78.
77 Ibid.
79 Ibid, 17.
81 McDougall, 81.
identification."^{82} Here we return to *perichoresis*, as an expression of this divine vitality - an eternal life process which takes place in the Triune God through the exchange of energies. The Persons of the Trinity live in one another and dwell in one another. They are bound by a circulation of love. Perichoretic unity preserves plurality rather than erasing it.^{83} Thus, unity emerges out of the particularity of the divine Persons and personal differences remain.

**d. Openness**

Instead of a static and fixed Trinity, Moltmann perceives a dynamic relational model,^{84} according to which Persons of the Trinity are neither complete in themselves nor fixed in their identities. In perichoretic fashion, each Person is open to the other, and makes space for the other. The Trinity opens to creation as the created other is drawn into fellowship. Trinitarian love is not restricted to eternal circulation among the divine Persons. Moltmann writes: “The life of God within the Trinity cannot be conceived of as a closed circle - the symbol of perfection and self-sufficiency.”^{85} The Trinity sends the love of God into the world, and is open to receiving the love of creation.

In Jesus Christ, the world was confronted with its tendency “to close itself down to the possibilities of the future.”^{86} Jesus Christ opened the way to a new present and future for humanity in the inner-life of the Trinity. The sending of the Son to suffer and die on behalf of the world was made possible because God exists in an open relationship to the world. The sending of the Spirit opens up the history of the Trinity to the history of the world. Believers are

---

^{82}Ibid.


^{85}Moltmann, *The Church*, 56.

^{86}Bonzo, 13.
integrated into trinitarian history through the Spirit, in the experiences of baptism and fellowship, becoming participants “in the eschatological history of the new creation. Through the Spirit of the Son they also become at the same time participants in the trinitarian history of God himself.”

Salvation is the opening of the Trinity for the purposes of receiving and unifying the whole creation. According to Moltmann, “If one conceives of the Trinity as an event of love in the suffering and the death of Jesus - and that is something which faith must do - then the Trinity is no self-contained group in heaven, but an eschatological process open for men on earth [sic], which stems from the cross of Christ.” The eschatological implication of this openness, this divine indwelling, is “the messianic hope for a future in which all of creation will be transfigured into the dwelling place of God.” Through baptism, the “trinitarian history of the kingdom of God is an eschatologically open kingdom now.” Men and women are drawn into God’s trinitarian life, which holds open the possibility of change and transformation in the present, and eschatological hope - not only a hope for another world, but transformation for this world. Communities in imago trinitatis are incomplete. They are not self-enclosed nor self-sufficient units with fixed identities, but rather exist in relationship, are subject to change, and are open to God, to one another, and all creation.

---

90 McDougall, 83.
93 Jenson, 121. See also Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 118, for a discussion of ‘open friendship’.
II. Correspondence between divine and human community

The previous section described some characteristics of God’s life in Trinity, and described the nature of the discourse of the Social Trinity. Moltmann “links divine social relations and human intersubjectivity,”\(^{94}\) claiming that the relationships among the distinctive Persons of the Trinity offer an archetype for human relationships. Moltmann’s *analogia relationis* intimates that the Social Trinity reflects not only who God is, but also “who human beings in *imago Trinitatis* are called to become.”\(^{95}\) To be in the image of the Trinity is first to be *imago Christi.* “As God’s image, human beings are the image of the whole Trinity in that they are “conformed” to the image of the Son: the Father creates, redeems and perfects human beings through the Spirit in the image of the Son.”\(^{96}\) In the Person of Jesus Christ, “divine life is able to be copied...he makes visible the perichoretic relationships of the Trinity.”\(^{97}\) For Moltmann, the Trinity is the basis of human ethics, rooted not only in God’s action toward the world, but in God’s very nature, revealed most fully in Jesus Christ. At the centre of Moltmann’s theology is the assertion that “the norm for humanity is always the kenosis of Christ.”\(^{98}\)

Despite Moltmann’s emphasis on ethics, he does not provide concrete ethical suggestions for the Christian life. The reader who “pores over the six volumes of Moltmann’s *Messianic Theology* anticipating a detailed social trinitarian program is bound for disappointment.”\(^{99}\) Moltmann counters these critics by emphasizing the impossibility of speaking adequately to all contexts given the diversity of experience in the Church, preferring

---

\(^{92}\) Bonzo, 6.

\(^{93}\) McDougall, 102.


\(^{95}\) Bonzo, 8.

\(^{96}\) Ibid, 106.

\(^{97}\) McDougall, 137. Paired with postcolonial perspectives, it is possible to envision a more concrete social trinitarian ethic.
that readers “imagine what is necessary in their situation.”

The question remains: does the Trinity provide an ethical norm for human community? Nicolas Federov once posited “the Trinity is our social program,” viewing the resurrection as an event that raised humanity to a new level of participation in the divine life that provides ethical imperatives for human relationships. Others claim that a correspondence between trinitarian community and human relationships is false. Any comparison between divine and human relationship is necessarily limited. “We as creatures cannot copy God in all respects.” Yet, as Volf argues, the very fact that we are created for relationship with the Triune God, and in the image of the Triune God should lead us to seek a certain correspondence to God, albeit imperfect. Human beings are manifestly not divine...trinitarian concepts such as “person”, “relation,” or “perichoresis” can be applied to human community only in an analogous rather than a univocal sense. As creatures, human beings can correspond to the uncreated God only in a creaturely way. An analogy comparing human and divine fellowships does not prescribe or perceive “a one-to-one correspondence between the patterns of fellowship that constitute the inner divine life with those that can be actualized within the human community,” but is a flexible comparison or archetype. Moltmann writes: “Just as the three Persons of the Trinity are ‘one’ in a wholly unique way, so, similarly, human beings are their imago Trinitatis in their

100 Moltmann, “Forward” in McDougall, xiii. Moltmann’s comment here is consistent with postcolonial theory’s insistence on the specificity of context.


102 For example, see Ted Peters, God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993). See also Matthew Bonzo for an insightful reflection on the problems of grounding a social program in Moltmann’s Social Trinity.

103 Peters, God as Trinity, 186.

104 Volf, “The Trinity is Our Social Program,” 404.

105 Ibid, 405.

106 McDougall, 119.
personal fellowship with one another.” 107 Thus, the inner-trinitarian community is an archetypal community which humans reflect only in part.

This correspondence between human and divine occurs within a messianic space, the ‘already and not yet,’ recognizing that human likeness to God “is both an ever-present reality and an unrealized promise.” 108 In the present, the Trinity is an active agent in the ongoing transformation of the Church. Moltmann understands human nature as dynamic:

Eschatologically understood, human beings are in transition from an original state of closed selves who have been abandoned to their own devices to full membership in the giving relations of trinitarian life. This transition of humanity from forsaken to fulfilled depends upon God in Christ ‘contradicting the contradiction’ and founding the analogy between divine life and creational life that allows the reproduction of divine perichoresis among the already fallen human community. 109

Humanity exists in a state of transition between creatio originalis and creatio nova, a process of creatio continua. 110 The Triune God is present in the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit continually acts to shape human community in the image of the Trinity. Moltmann writes: “If we discover the creatio continua between creatio originalis and nova creatio, we shall perceive the unremitting creative activity of God as an activity that both preserves and innovates.” 111 In the Church, individuals together form the Body of Christ, and it is through baptism that “believers are publicly set in Christ’s fellowship; and through baptism in the name of the Triune God they are thereby simultaneously set in the trinitarian history of God.” 112 To be set in the trinitarian history of God is to participate in an integrative process of mutual indwelling (perichoresis), self-giving (kenosis) and self-differentiation.

107 Moltmann, God in Creation, 241.
109 Bonzo, 85.
110 See Moltmann, The Trinity, 209; God in Creation, 208-209.
111 Moltmann, God in Creation, 209.
112 Moltmann, The Church, 226.
Divine community and interdependence “is brought to bear on the relation of men and women to God, to other people and to mankind as a whole, as well as on their fellowship with the whole of creation,” leading to a view of human personhood characterized by mutuality and interdependence, in which ‘being’ itself is shared. Bonhoeffer writes: “God’s own life therefore provides a pattern for the life of his creation as an intricate community of reciprocal relationships,” according to which all living things “live in one another and with one another, from one another and for one another.” The perichoretic love of the Trinity extends toward humanity, which is drawn into the very centre of Trinity, into the “space conceded by God.” There arises the possibility of perichoretic, kenotic ecclesial relations, in which persons are interrelated and love overflows from one human person to another.

Unlike the reciprocal indwelling of the Persons of the Trinity, perichoresis in the human community is vulnerable to discourses of power and sin. Human relationships are uncertain and unpredictable. Only eschatologically can humanity hope to transcend historical realities and enter into divine perfection. In the here and now, however, when humanity is drawn into this circular movement of the eternal divine love, the potential arises for human relationships characterized by mutuality, hospitality, and generosity. I understand perichoretic love to be the basis of both ecclesial unity and mission of the Church. The unity of the Christian Church is trinitarian unity: “It corresponds to the indwelling of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Father. It participates in the divine Triunity, since the community of believers is not only

---

113Moltmann, The Trinity, 19.
114Wells, 179.
115Bauckham, Theology of Jurgen Moltmann, 185.
116Moltmann, God in Creation, 17.
118Bonzo, 39.
fellowship with God but in God too.”119 This is the unity described in Jesus’ prayer in John 17:20-22.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, be one in us; so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Mission is an action of the Triune God in which humans participate. I understand mission in a broad sense, inclusive of the manner in which local Christian communities care for others - Christian and non-Christian, near and far. It is an act of self-giving love that flows out toward one’s other. This view of mission arises out of the ecumenical consensus of the twentieth century which established the importance of the Missio Dei for a theological understanding of mission. Letty Russell offers a useful synopsis of mission as Missio Dei rooted in the Trinity:

God’s sending action is the work of the economic Trinity in caring for God’s world house, the oikos. Through this action Christians come to know God’s presence, and speak of God within God’s self (the immanent Trinity) as a dynamic relationship of love and sharing between God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. The mission is God’s and the calling of the Church is to participate in that mission as a postscript on God’s love affair with the world.120

According to Volf, the ecclesial self is always ‘inhabited’ or ‘indwelled’ by others.121 In this sense, one is always “qualified by others.”122 “The self is shaped by making space for the other and by giving space to the other, by being enriched when it inhabits the other and by


120Letty Russell, “God, Gold, Glory and Gender: A Postcolonial View of Mission,” International Review of Mission, 93 (2004), 42. Moltmann collapses the traditional distinctions between the immanent Trinity (God in himself) and economic Trinity (God for us), suggesting that they “form a continuity and merge into one another.” Moltmann, The Trinity, 152. This does not equate the relationship of God-in-himself and God-for-us, but it claims that his relationship with the world has an effect on the internal triune relationship. In the final eschatological event, the economic Trinity will “be raised into and transcended in the immanent Trinity.” (161).


122Ibid, 11.
sharing of its plenitude when it is inhabited by the other, by re-examining itself when the other closes his or her doors and challenging the other by knocking at the doors.” In this sense, perichoresis involves ‘making room,’ a profoundly hospitable act.

For Volf, the image of ‘embrace’ captures the possibility of making space for the other within oneself. Although human beings cannot be internal to one another, cannot indwell one another in the same manner as trinitarian Persons, they can participate in an analogous process. Just like the open arms of Christ on the cross, “open arms are a sign that I have created space in myself for the other to come in and that I have made a movement out of myself so as to enter the space created by the other.” This process recalls God’s self-contraction in order to make space for creation. Although humans do not in any sense ‘create’ one another, they may need to restrict or limit their own self or freedom in order to allow for the other to be truly liberated. Such embrace depends on an attitude of equality and reciprocity, a willingness to recognize the other as other, and as a person of value. Love which ‘makes space’ for the other may be suffering love, it may require sacrifice of self or decentralizing oneself, so that “we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes.” The passion of Christ involves “self-giving love which overcomes human enmity and the creation of space in himself to receive estranged humanity. The same giving of the self and receiving of the other

\[123\] Volf, “The Trinity is our Social Program,” 410.
\[124\] Ibid, 409.
\[125\] Volf, After our Likeness, 213.
\[126\] Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, 141.
\[127\] Moltmann, God in Creation, 87; The Trinity, 60.
\[128\] See Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “A New Mestizaje/Mulatez: Reconceptualizing Difference,” in E.S. Fernandez and F.F. Segovia (eds). A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 203-219 (212). Given the power imbalances inherent in colonial/postcolonial relationships, it is necessary to think carefully about what is reasonable for human persons in terms of giving and receiving. Those who have acted as oppressors are invited to give of self without expecting a reciprocal action on the part of the oppressed. See chapter five for more comments on self-giving and power inequalities.
are the two essential moments in the internal life of the Trinity.”⁵¹²⁹ Christ’s passion opens the possibility for humans to receive one another and overcome enmity. Self-giving does not involve loss of self. Rather, as the self gives something of itself, it limits itself in order to be expanded by the other.

Humans love one another in a profoundly different way than God loves humanity. God loves the world which is a result of God’s own creative activity. Indeed, creation is a part of Godself. Human beings encounter one another as an already existing reality. . . “they cannot love existing reality without coming to identify that reality as something distinct from themselves.”⁵¹³⁰ Thus recognizing difference is essential to the act of love. Volf envisions a human community in which relationships are based on a dynamic of self-donation and self-differentiation. They involve giving oneself fully to others in order to form bonds of community, all the while creating the free space in which individual identity is both recognized and flourishes. In other words, trinitarian fellowship does not commend homogeneous human communities that erase personal differences. It fosters human fellowships of “diversity in unity,” in which individual potentials are realized and differences may abound.⁵¹³¹

Any analogy between human relationships and divine relationships is strictly dependent on grace and God’s prior self-giving. As Moltmann writes, “the analogy in which God’s creatures ‘correspond’ to him and give him delight, only comes into being when God blesses what he has created.”⁵¹³² Humanity can only mirror trinitarian life because God the Trinity has revealed itself. Humanity can only practice self-giving love because of gracious, trinitarian self-giving. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are set free to imagine and

---

⁵¹³²Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 77.
pursue human relationships which reflect the Triune God.133 As we are renewed, liberated and transformed by God’s actions, our estrangement from others “has been, is being, and shall be overcome.”134

The Trinity is the source of the Church’s common life, and the image in which the Church is created. Despite engagement with other, damaging discourses, ecclesial communities are continually drawn into the divine embrace, into trinitarian discourse. The Trinity is the source, sustainer, and model for ecclesial identity and relationships within the local and global Church. In the kingdom of glory, the community will be perfected in the “unhindered participation in the eternal life of the Triune God himself, and in his inexhaustible fullness and glory.”135

### III. Moltmann’s Social Doctrine as a Deconstructive Lens for Colonialism

The Church participates in trinitarian discourse, yet it also participates in other discourses relating to human power and willfulness. Though created in *imago trinitatis*, the Church is an imperfect reflection. It is in need of the continual transformation and recreation of trinitarian love that acts to reorient discourses of power toward life-giving discourses.136 Even though the image of the Trinity within human community is distorted, the Trinity remains the source and goal of ecclesial identity and discourse. The Social Trinity, then, provides a “theological norm for right human relationships and social and political structures that correspond to the kingdom.”137 We can fruitfully measure ecclesial discourse by its

137McDougall, 18.
correspondence, or lack thereof, to trinitarian discourse. Colonial discourse is inconsistent with
the Church in *imago trinitatis*. The discourse of the Social Trinity essentially deconstructs
colonial discourse, and reorients ecclesial discourse toward freedom, self-giving, self-
differentiation and openness. Following a brief introduction to the practice of postmodern
deconstruction, I engage in a social trinitarian deconstruction of colonial discourse.

**a. Postmodern deconstruction**

Literary deconstruction, introduced by French philosopher Jacques Derrida, refers to a
type of textual criticism which proceeds by questioning fixed hierarchies within a text. Applied
more broadly, deconstruction refers to “an event, provisionally described as reading, writing,
and thinking that undoes, decomposes, unsettles the established hierarchies of Western
thought.”

The act of deconstruction challenges the relationship between ‘signifier’ and
‘signified’ by claiming that there is no necessary connection between the two. Assuming that
all reality is a social construction, deconstruction “de-centers that which has been constructed to
be central.” Postcolonial criticism employs deconstruction insofar as it challenges the literary
and cultural ‘texts’ emerging from colonialism and asks how they are enmeshed in colonial
ideologies.

---

A.K.M. Adam. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000), 55-61 (56). For homiletic perspectives on deconstruction see John
S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), and
Abingdon Press, 2008), 146-149; Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching and the Other: Studies of Postmodern Insights*. (St.
Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2009), chapter 3; Ronald J. Allen and Barbara Shires Blaisdell and Scott Black Johnston
(eds.), *Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos*. (Nashville, TN:
Abingdon Press, 1997); Robert Kysar and Joseph M. Webb, *Preaching to Postmoderns: New Perspectives for


140Ibid, 28.

Every interpretation or construction of the world contains “deep ambiguity, relativity, inconsistency, and contradiction.” Deconstruction draws attention to the arbitrary, ambiguous and “disastrously inadequate” nature of language, and the effect of language on human perception and action. Deconstruction challenges binary oppositions and simple distinctions used to differentiate between entities, giving preference to the second term, and demonstrating that the first term is dependent on the second for its meaning. Theologian Edward Farley describes how language affects our relationship to others:

In and through language, we render the other marginal, invisible, or such an absolute threat that anything we do to that other is justified. In and through language, we lie, deceive ourselves, insult and reduce the beauty and mystery of nature to what is utile . . . The language of oppression, of reductive behaviour, of various idolatries settles on societies and on individual consciousness like a pall. Redemptive transformation will surely not take place if it bypasses the way our language whitewashes our institutions and guides our exploitative agendas.

Deconstruction can lead to redemptive transformation if applied with theological discernment. In deconstructing our agendas and exposing hidden power dynamics which limit

---

142 Allen, Preaching and the Other, 51.

143 McClure, Otherwise Preaching, 5.

144 In pairs such as white/black, male/female, centre/margin, the first term tends to be understood as normative, while the second term is treated as ‘other,’ or derivative. Adam, 29.


146 Deconstruction should be applied with caution to theological enterprise, as it can be perceived to question the authority of the biblical text. McClure, “Deconstruction,” 146-149 (147). If all language is fraught with ambiguity, is anything to be relied upon? “If every important symbol within a community is deconstructed, a community’s symbolic universe may be destroyed. “Introduction: Varieties of Postmodern Theology,” in Varieties of Postmodern Theology, ed. David Ray Griffin, William A. Beardslee, and Joe Holland, SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 3-4. Discussed in Allen, Preaching and the Other, 70. If this occurs, deconstruction can effectively decentre communal identity to the extent that chaos and uncertainty replace self-identity. Thus, says Allen, deconstruction must be accompanied by construction: “People need a place to stand that offers a positive vision of life,” (ibid). See also Allen, Blaisdell and Black, Theology for Preaching. These authors differentiate between “deconstructive postmodernism” which results in a radical relativity, and “constructive postmodernism,” which seeks to salvage a positive vision of life even while critiquing modernity (17-19).
the freedom of ourselves and others, a path to justice and freedom may be opened. Deconstruction makes space to ask questions from different angles, challenges assumptions, and opens up the field of inquiry to other voices, reminding us to listen more carefully for the whisper of the Triune God. Ultimately, deconstruction is a necessary tool for theological reflection.

b. A social trinitarian deconstruction of domination, separation, homogeneity, and fixedness

Moltmann’s social trinitarian theology locates human community in the space of the divine community. The social doctrine of the Trinity deconstructs colonialism by “overturning and displacing” the preferred terminologies of colonial discourse described in chapter one, hierarchy, separation, contempt for otherness and fixedness, with other terms consistent with social trinitarian discourse described above, freedom, mutual self-giving, self-differentiation and openness. I proceed by arranging colonial and trinitarian terms in opposition and privileging the second, social trinitarian term.

---


148 I am grateful to David S. Jacobsen for this insight. For further discussion of deconstruction as a guard against idolatry, see Allen, Preaching and the Other, 69-70.


150 The social doctrine of the Trinity might also be fruitfully deconstructed according to various criteria, such as its eurocentric bias, gender exclusivity and at times, a reinscribing of hierarchy.
**Domination / Freedom**

Colonial discourse is a discourse of domination and oppression. Colonizers maintain moral, sexual, religious and political control through a variety of violent means. The power of the dominant group is legitimated by an assumption of superiority that justifies the right of one group or nation to maintain power over another. The freedom of the dominant group to rule and retain control is perceived to be dependent on the limitation of subaltern freedom. It is argued that colonial discourse places both colonized and colonizer in a situation of captivity. The freedom of all is limited by the roles to which each are assigned. Thus, neither group is free to narrate their own histories or identities, they are held captive by the system itself.

Trinitarian discourse is a discourse of freedom, a “creative passion for the possible.”

The doctrine of the Trinity, conceived as a non-hierarchal, power-sharing community defined by freedom, emphasizes the differentiated unity of the Persons of the Trinity. Human freedom is unceasingly desired by God, and true human freedom is found within the Trinity. In the modern era, freedom has been defined as “lordship, power and possession.” The ‘lord’ is free, all others are under domination, and therefore not free. Unlike some traditional doctrines of the Trinity, a social trinitarian view of God’s freedom seeks to undermine a divine archetype for “earthly rulers, dictators and tyrants” to justify oppressive rule. God’s liberty is revealed in friendship and love for humanity, not his lordship and power over humanity. Human community in the image of the Social Trinity desires to be free from domination and oppression, and desires the freedom of the others. Humans are free, not compelled, to respond to the Triune God and to one another in freedom. Moltmann argues that the word ‘free’ has the same root as ‘friendship.’ In mirroring the love of Trinity, humanity is truly free. The free person is not

---

152 Ibid, 56.
153 Ibid, 197.
154 Ibid, 56.
the one who dominates, but the one who loves. Human communities ordered by Triune love
need not maintain strict hierarchies, nor expect one person or group to have dominion over
another. Rather, the norm is self-limitation in order to expand the freedom of the other. In
limiting oneself for the sake of the other, one experiences true freedom:

when I open my life for other people and share with them, and when other people
open their lives for me and share them with me. Then the other person is no
longer the limitation of my freedom; he is an expansion of it. . .That is the social
side of freedom. We call it love and solidarity. In it we experience the uniting of
isolated individuals. In it we experience the uniting of things that have been
forcibly divided.155

In analysing the relationship between knowledge and power, Moltmann suggests that in
the modern world, ‘knowledge is power.’ To know something means to master it, have control
or dominion - to know something or someone is to take it into our possession, to conquer or to
dominate.156 This corresponds to the manner in which colonial discourse uses knowledge as a
weapon of power.157 To define others is to have power over others. Moltmann suggests another
meaning for ‘knowing,’ a sense of wonder rather than a desire to conquer or dominate.

By knowing or perceiving one participates in the life of the other. Here, knowing
does not transform the counterpart into the property of the knower; the knower
does not appropriate what he knows. On the contrary, he is transformed by
sympathy, becoming a participator in what he perceives.158

Moltmann argues that ‘trinitarian thinking’ will result in a change in modern reason from
“lordship to fellowship, from conquest to participation, from production to receptivity.”159
Knowledge ceases to be a weapon of control, and becomes a conduit for fellowship. Identity is
not bestowed by those in power, but identity is formed in relationship. According to

155Ibid, 216.
156Ibid, 9.
157For a detailed analysis of the relationship between knowledge and power in a colonial context, see Said, Orientalism.
158Moltmann, The Trinity, 9.
159Ibid.
Moltmann’s construction, a community shaped by the Social Trinity will define people “through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession.” Human identity is established according to each person’s location in the very space of the trinitarian fellowship.

**Separation / Mutual Self-Giving**

Colonial discourse constructs oppositional relationships and maintains boundaries between colonized and colonizer, different races, genders, religions, classes and castes. Boundaries are frequently maintained by violence which has physical, psychological and material consequences. The Triune God has overcome distances and boundaries between divine and human, between and among human communities. While colonial projects have guarded against hybridity in order to maintain cultural purity, trinitarian life is perichoretic. Trinitarian love crosses artificial boundaries, and leads to spaces of contact and encounter. The discourse of the Social Trinity frees individuals and groups for mutual participation and fellowship. “As long as freedom means lordship, everything has to be separated, isolated, detached and distinguished, so that it can be dominated. But if freedom means community and fellowship, then we experience the uniting of everything that has hitherto been separated.”

While colonial discourse emphasizes opposition, trinitarian discourse emphasizes connection, unity, mutuality and hospitality, in terms of making space within oneself for the other. Moltmann’s relational, interpersonal understanding of God in Trinity contributes to a “relational view of human personhood as intimate interdependence and mutuality.” Just as God is God only in relationship, so human beings are true human persons only in relation to God and to one another: “The isolated individual and the solitary subject are deficient modes of being human, because

---

160 Ibid.

161 Ibid, 216.
they fall short of likeness to God. Nor does the person take priority over the community. On the contrary, person and community are two sides of the same life process.”

Separation among persons and communities precludes self-giving, as it is impossible to enter into reciprocal relationships, give of oneself or enter into the suffering of another if strict boundaries are maintained. Within the bounds of the Social Trinity, however, “true love is the unselfish surrender to another person or other beings for their own sake. Reciprocal kenotic love sustains the world.” Self-giving in human fellowship is patterned after Jesus’ ministry and his proclamation of the messianic kingdom. While such self-giving love may take different concrete expressions, for example, as acts of hospitality, repentance, or resistance to social injustice, what unites all of these things is their spirit of radical inclusivity and infinite generosity. Such works of love are infused with the same spirit of freedom and passion for life that characterize the Triune fellowship.

Colonial discourse is an essentializing rhetoric which overemphasizes differences among persons and groups in order to justify subjugation and ‘divide and rule’ policies. The Social Trinity seeks to know and understand others instead of forcing identity or definition on others. Groups are then free to define themselves, even while they recognize interdependencies with other groups.

**Homogeneity / Self-Differentiation**

As noted above, colonial discourse seeks to build and maintain boundaries between and among groups by overemphasizing and essentializing difference. Simultaneously, colonial

---


164 McDougall, 162. Although this is a wonderful vision for humanity, Moltmann does not adequately consider the consequences of self-giving for those who have been oppressed or forced to ‘give’ of self in order to sustain a colonial/imperial power.

discourse devalues otherness, and seeks to suppress cultural difference. All cultures and races are compared to, and perceived to fall short of the dominant group which considers itself to be normative. Unity is enforced, and comes at the cost of social and cultural expressions of subaltern groups.

Trinitarian unity is not an oppressive form of unity which demands homogeneity, but a unity-in-diversity that values differences among individuals and groups. In order for love to proceed toward one’s other, there must be personal distinctions between self and other. Yet the boundaries among persons are permeable. Differences then, become a basis for unity. “The very thing that divides them becomes that which binds them together.”\(^\text{166}\) God is both unity and multiplicity, and is therefore the ground of both in human existence.\(^\text{167}\) Christologically, *perichoresis* describes the interpenetration of the human and divine nature. Moltmann uses the analogy of Moses’ burning bush to describe such interpenetration - the fire was in the bush, but the bush was not consumed.\(^\text{168}\) Anthropologically, this means that others can exist within us and not consume or erase the self. There are boundaries which distinguish persons, but these boundaries are porous and fluid, and highly relevant for the production of meaning. In Moltmann’s words,

> We are who we are not because we are separate from the others who are next to us, but because we are both separate and connected, both distinct and related; the boundaries that mark our identities are both barriers and bridges. . .Identity is a result of the distinction from the other and the internalization of the relationship to the other; it arises out of the complex history of “differentiation” in which both the self and the other take part by negotiating their identities in interaction with one another.\(^\text{169}\)

\(^{166}\)Moltmann, *The Trinity*, 175.


\(^{169}\)Ibid, 66.
**Fixedness / Openness**

Colonial discourse attempts to fix all reality according to the world view of the dominant group. The language of the empire is considered normative, and all other voices are derivative. In addition, colonial and imperial systems are portrayed as a natural and permanent ordering of human life in a manner which shuts down the possibility of change. Boesak argues: “globally, we are confronted with an ideology that claims to be all powerful, without any alternative, and hence without any possibility of challenge or change.” This is true for all involved in colonialism/imperialism. When colonizers take up the mantle of oppressor, colonial discourse maintains that there is no alternative, no possibility for release, no hope of change, or reconciliation between oppressors/oppressed.

The discourse of the Social Trinity opens up new possibilities, and disputes the hegemony of empire. True love and true power originate within the context of Trinity, all other powers which claim totality are revealed to be idols. The empire’s story is not the whole story, and there is room for the voice of the subjugated other. Trinitarian discourse is a discourse of hope, which opens the present to the possibility of the future, as God is continually reaching toward creation in order to recreate and transform the present: “God’s deepest nature....is discerned by focussing, not on God’s inner trinitarian, communal life but on God’s ‘eccentric,’ ‘centrifugal’ reaching out to the world in love.” The Social Trinity has the potential to transform the nature of physical and emotional space: “In ‘closed societies’ space

---


becomes the frontier that shuts in and shuts out. In ‘open societies’ the frontiers become permeable and turn into bridges of communication with others and with strangers.”

IV. Encounters in the Perichoretic Space: A Metaphor

This chapter has introduced Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity in its orientation to freedom, mutual self-giving, self-differentiation and openness. I have argued that ecclesial relationships, in the here and now, correspond imperfectly to the relationship among the Triune God, and I have described a social trinitarian deconstruction and reorientation of colonial discourse. Christians, local and global, share faith in Jesus Christ, and are unified by the indwelling of the Triune God, yet there are significant differences within the Church, not least geographical, historical, racial, and economic. As described in chapter one, colonial discourse continues to lurk in the interstices of the global Church, particularly within partnerships among Western churches and Tricontinental churches, and among those with various experience of colonialism/imperialism within local congregations. When colonial discourse enters ecclesial discourse, it threatens the Church’s ability to hear and respond to the gospel. It can place some Christian churches at the mercy of other, more powerful churches. It can link ‘unity’ to the practices of faith belonging to a particular culture, and name as deviant those which are different. Colonial discourse can close imaginations to the possibility of reconciliation and interfere with the eschatological hope of full perichoresis. These are just some of the ways that colonial discourse can distort ecclesial discourse. The following paragraphs sketch the contours of a metaphor for encounters among postcolonial Christians, and describe the Social Trinity’s action in interrupting and reorienting ecclesial discourse away from colonial memory and toward trinitarian identity. Boff states: “the trinitarian vision produces a vision of the Church that is more communion than hierarchy, more service than power, more circular than pyramidal, more

loving embrace than bending knee before authority.”¹⁷⁵ Beyond merely interrupting and reorienting discourse, the Social Trinity continually re-creates the Church. In this metaphor, “Perichoretic Space,” I seek to adapt social trinitarian theology, postcolonial hybridity, and Third Space, in order to imagine a space of encounter in which postcolonial subjects are transformed by the embrace of the Triune God.

**Locating the Perichoretic Space: The Church in Trinitarian Embrace**

The Social Trinity is a fellowship of self-giving and other-embracing love that circulates within the divine fellowship and moves toward creation, drawing creation into its very centre. Moltmann’s theology accounts for the opening of a space within Godself, a divine self-emptying (*kenosis*). At the moment of creation, God withdrew into Godself in order to make space for creation: “The precondition of divine creativity is the yielding of an empty space within the perichoretic communion.”¹⁷⁶ I argue that it is in this space that the Church exists - a Perichoretic Space at the very centre of the Trinity, surrounded, embraced and indwelled by the Persons of the Trinity. The Perichoretic Space, is a ‘hybrid’ space in which human and divine indwell one another; past, present and future meet; and colonial discourse encounters the discourse of the Social Trinity.¹⁷⁷


¹⁷⁵Bonzo, 46. In Moltmann’s words, “The created world does not exist in the ‘absolute space’ of the divine being, it exists in the space God yielded up for it through his creative resolve. The world does not exist in itself, it exists in the ceded space of God’s world-presence.” *God in Creation*, 156.

¹⁷⁷For theologies that address hybridity and ecclesiology, see Westhelle, *The Church Event*; and Christopher R. Baker, *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking*. (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007). Westhelle views the Church as a hybrid space which exists between the old and new aeons. It belongs to neither, but is adjacent to both. He uses the Greek word *chora*, “which etymologically means to lie open, listen, be attentive, be ready to receive” to describe this sense of the Church as a “space between spaces.” (128).
Creatio Continua

The Church is able to occupy this space because of God’s gracious action in creating a space within Godself for the created other, the suffering love of the Triune God made manifest through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the reconciling movement of the Holy Spirit. To the extent that God withdrew into Godself in order to make room for creation, this is a space that is separate from God. It is a space from which God has withdrawn in order to give humanity freedom, and it is thus a space that is prone to sin and discourses of power. Yet it is a space that remains within God.178 Into this space, comes the “perfected self-communication...the second person of the Trinity incarnate.”179 Jesus Christ, differentiated from God yet unified with God, encounters humanity and becomes the “linchpin, swivel, flip or turning point between creatio originalis and creatio nova, as he both bears the burden of godforsakenness and reveals the way of overcoming such forsakenness.”180 We find ourselves somewhere between the old creation and the new, a place between “past and future, the cross and the resurrection, history and promise. This in-between stage is creatio continua.”181 The space is not finished, yet the consummation of God’s coming kingdom is already present in the Perichoretic Space.182

Creatio continua represents the ongoing action of the Triune God to transform the created other that dwells at its centre. In the Perichoretic Space, the Church is called into being, named and identified by the Triune God. It is decentred and destabilised, prepared for a future beyond its present imagining. In reclaiming our trinitarian identity, we are reminded of who we

178 Bonzo, 53.
180 Bonzo, 6.
181 Ibid, 58.
182 Vitor Westhelle interprets eschatology as a spatial reality, rather than a temporally deferred reality, saying “the kingdom is already topologically nearby even if people have not fully and resolutely stepped over into where it already is.” *The Church Event*, 127.
are, and enabled to speak our authentic language - the discourse of the Social Trinity, which is the *lingua franca* of the Perichoretic Space.

**The Space between Us: Third Spaces within the Perichoretic Space**

The Perichoretic Space at the heart of the divine communion is the arena in which all ecclesial encounters take place. Within the Perichoretic Space, the ecclesial community is engaged in a “transforming process” in which there is potential for isolation to become community, and for oppression to become fellowship.¹⁸³ The centripetal pull of divine love brings us into proximity with our ecclesial others, including other postcolonial subjects who occupy the same ‘Church’ space, yet embody different cultures, histories, memories, and ethnicities. Some encounters are face to face encounters. For example, Christians literally come face to face with others who share the same worship space on a Sunday morning. Other encounters are more imaginative, such as proximity to Christians across the globe, insofar as the Church is a body that transcends geographical space. These encounters are initiated when Christians bring to mind global others, for example, in photographs, in appeals for aid, in prayers, as well as occasionally more literal ways, by communicating directly via telephone, internet or post, greeting visitors or travelling to visit partner churches. This proximity of self and others, understood individually or corporately, creates a space ‘in-between.’ These spaces are infused with particular discourses of domination in the form of historical memory, cultural difference, anxiety, suspicion, fear, attraction and repulsion. Christians differentiated from one another in a positive sense insofar as each person or group is uniquely created and endowed, but also negatively, insofar as persons are separated by cultural, financial, and biological boundaries. Colonial discourse is an antagonistic discourse that strives to dominate the other, separate one from the other, suppress difference and fix all reality in an unchanging way. It strives to keep

¹⁸³Bonzo, 90.
these spheres apart, eschewing hybridity or mixedness. Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman have come together in the same space, they are proximate to one another, but they still represent separate spheres. Tension is evident in their encounter, as indicated by Jesus’ initial rejection of the woman’s plea for help. The tension exists at least in part because of the coming together of two different social worlds, including power imbalances and ambiguities related to race, gender, economics and geographical region, and the presence of Rome. Such encounters can be conceptualized pictorially as:

Each circle represents an individual or group as they encounter one another in the Perichoretic Space. They are clearly separated from one another, and the space in-between represents antagonistic discourse. These encounters may occur among any combination of persons or groups. In the case of Mark 7: 24-30, the primary encounter is between Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman, two colonized subjects. Third Spaces, however, may occur between colonizer’s, or between person or groups who live in the midst of empire but are not easily described as colonized or colonizer.

Trinitarian love, in contradiction to the inequality, separation, segregation, homogeneity, and essentialism of colonial discourse, creates the possibility of a Third Space in which hybridity, cultural impurity, boundary crossing and mixedness are permitted. Not only is hybridity permitted, by the grace of the Triune God, hybridity can lead to healing and transformation. Thus, the boundaries and spaces and gaps between us are opened up as a Third Space in which God transforms the boundaries among groups and individuals. Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman engage one another in conversation despite their profound differences
and the presence of political, cultural and religious boundaries. A new, hybrid space opens between them that challenges any notion of cultural purity, and in which a healing word is spoken and the woman’s daughter is made well. Although it is unclear in the text from whom the healing word issues, I interpret the healing to indicate divine presence and power at the point of contact between Jesus and the woman. This Third Space encounter can be conceptualized as:

The separate circles have come together to create an overlap (represented by the darker centre). While there is still tension and potential antagonism, this is a hybrid and ambiguous space in which communication becomes possible, and the relationship may be moved in a more positive direction through conversation and the presence of the Triune God.

Ecclesial Third Space encounters are located within trinitarian space, thus they are not limited to the human persons or groups involved. Rather, they are ‘indwelled’ by the Triune God, and thus opened to a trinitarian discourse that deconstructs all other discourse. Third Spaces do not belong to one or the other, to the Tricontinent or to the West, to the colonizer or colonized or observers, they belong to God-in-Trinity.\(^{184}\) Centre, middle and periphery are dislocated because all are loved equally by the Triune God, and are equally dependent on trinitarian grace.

Christian self-understanding, and understanding of others, is related to perception of the

nature of divine community and the perichoretic/kenotic love of the Triune God both in divine circulation and the manner in which it reaches toward humanity. In these Third Spaces, our identities, and our understanding of others’ identities are formed and reformed through complex interactions among self, others, and the Triune God. Identity is not fixed, but is open to change and transformation, engaged in a continuing process of ‘becoming.’ The very presence of others in this space will change how we define ourselves. For example, input from those who have been colonized challenges the dominant Western construction of self. The Syrophoenician Woman speaks, and challenges Jesus’ spoken construction of Israel. We come to see ourselves through the eyes of others, which may lead to a new and profoundly different understanding of who we are, as well as our perception of both history and the future. The binaries and antagonism inherent to colonial discourse are not reflective of the reality of colonial experience which is varied and ambiguous, nor are they sustained by trinitarian discourse. Instead of being defined in opposition to others, or in terms of sameness or homogeneous identity, we are defined by imago trinitatis. Instead of confronting others as oppressed/oppressor, the possibility arises for us to become engaged in a common struggle against the structures of oppression and domination that attempt to hold all of us captive. Rather than the violent resistance and counter resistance of colonialism/imperialism, the suffering love of Trinity draws us toward one another, and invites us to imitate the love that suffers with and for others.

In Third Space encounters, we are invited to give of ourselves to our ecclesial others (self-giving), and make space for them within ourselves (other-receiving). As the Triune God changes the nature of colonial discourse, and heals the wounds of fear and anger that may exist between us, others may reciprocate by giving of self, and receiving us into themselves. The power of God, working in these spaces, creates the possibility of friendship. Moltmann views

---


186 See Jefferess, 47.
friendship as a relationship of self-giving that is characterized by freedom, respect, affection and loyalty.

Both friendship and love are grounded in the experience of trinitarian love as it is directed toward human beings. In the friendship extended toward the stranger and in the love of the neighbour, human beings reflect the Trinity’s gift of love that has been first offered with infinite generosity to humankind.\[187\]

Such friendship may be practised across cultures, by groups or communities as well as individuals: “Communities which are divided in space and time recognize one another through their identity in Christ and the common Spirit. They will therefore experience this common identity and make it visible through friendship and fellowship with one another.”\[188\] While human relationships rarely work this way, in the space of the Social Trinity it is possible to imagine these friendships as an alternative to antagonistic or violent encounters.

**Ecclesial Discourse “In-Between”**

Third Space encounters within the Perichoretic Space do not banish colonial discourse once and forever, but deconstruct colonial discourse, and unmask it as idolatrous. The Trinity’s act of *creatio continua* alters and reorients colonial discourse toward a more profoundly trinitarian discourse. In the ‘in-between’ Third Space, even as it is located in the relative safety of Perichoretic Space, there is tension and risk. While humanity’s participation in divine *perichoresis* is without risk, “creaturely *perichoresis* exists under a different set of conditions than that found within inter-trinitarian life...when a human person gives of herself to a different Other, the response of the Other is neither predictable, safe, nor risk free. Rejection and violence are distinct possibilities in a creation characterized by strife and isolation.”\[189\] Anger, fear and suspicion inspired by colonial discourse do not simply evaporate, and there is a need for

\[187\] McDougall, 144.

\[188\] Moltmann, *The Church*, 343.

\[189\] Bonzo, 126.
active ecclesial participation in identifying and working to ease both relational and material effects of colonial discourse. Apology and forgiveness are not inevitable in the Perichoretic Space, but the action of God makes reconciliation possible. It is a safer space in which to practice self-giving and other-receiving. As Bonzo argues: “Just as the oppressed find protection, rights and community, the oppressors find judgment, forgiveness and the offer of fellowship.”

Notions of hybridity and Third Space must also be employed with caution. As Parry reminds us: “To speak of metropolis and colony as inhabiting the same in-between, interstitial ground, occludes that this territory was differentially occupied, and that it was contested space, being the site of coercion and resistance, and not of civil negotiation between evenly placed contenders.” Although we may desire to enter Third Spaces with neighbours or global partners, we must not forget the power inequalities, lest we reinscribe the very intrusive act of colonization itself. Acknowledging the complexity of colonial relationships, those that occupy relatively marginal positions might be reluctant to enter the same ‘in-between space’ with those whom they perceive as oppressors, just as those implicated in colonial oppression may be reluctant to face those who perceive themselves to be victims.

While this metaphor locates the whole Church, including the PCC, within the Perichoretic Space, to engage in these Third Space encounters involve a certain degree of intentionality. Just because we sit beside someone in the pew, or have an awareness of a global other, does not mean we automatically engage. For example, in engaging with one another, Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman as colonized persons intentionally enter into a Third

---

190 Braxton comments, “reconciliation is often depicted as an embrace or hug that overcomes hostility. But hugging a person bleeding profusely without attending to the gaping wound, is more of a kiss of death than a hug to end hostility.” See “Paul and Racial Reconciliation,” 417-418.

191 Bonzo, 93.

192 Parry, A Materialist Critique, 19.
Space encounter, and participate in a discourse that defies the norms of colonial discourse, even as the Roman Empire also hovers around that space. While power inequalities and differences remain, each is allowed to operate freely. At their point of contact arises the possibility of healing. Such a possibility, I claim here, occurs because God-in-Trinity inhabits Third Spaces, and acts toward reconciliation and healing.

Creation has not yet been fully reconciled. The Perichoretic Space provides possibility and hope, and continuing re-creation that opens the possibility of humanity coming fully to itself. In this space, the Triune God gives us a hope and vision of fellowship that leads to a particular orientation to others - a desire for others to be free, for mutual exchange, for a valuing of difference, and an openness to the voice of others, human and divine. When our ears are filled with the discourse of a loving Trinity, we begin to long for a discourse of love rather than discourses of power. Moltmann writes: “Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it.” Colonial reality does not reflect the perichoretic ideal - it is therefore to be called into question by the ecclesial community in communion with the Triune God. This invites a willingness on the part of Christians to repent for conscious or unconscious colonial collaboration. At times we will stand in judgement of the past - not because we know better, but because we exist at the heart of the Triune God, where we have witnessed a better way and been empowered to live in the *imago trinitatis*. In the context of Trinity, we are connected not only to one another in the contemporary global Church, but also to others, across time and space, who sit at table in the Kingdom of God. The ecclesial space transcends the here and now, transcends time and space. It is in this perichoretic, eschatological space that “the Church dares to celebrate that which it does not possess, to ‘represent’ that which it does not own, and to proclaim a word that is not of this world.”

---

193 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 21. Bonzo suggests that the fellowship of the divine community results in “a questioning of all reality that does not reflect the ideal of *perichoresis* as trinitarian life.” (91)

194 Westhelle, *The Church Event*, 120.
Conclusion

Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity casts a theological vision of the Triune God that is profoundly other-oriented. Christian community is created to be in the image of the Trinity. Although ecclesial space falls short of this image, especially as it engages in colonial discourse, God-in-Trinity works continually to reshape the Church into a community defined by freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness. I have described the Perichoretic Space as the location of the Christian Church. Within the Perichoretic Space, Third Spaces open up as we encounter others. These are ambiguous spaces in which God acts to transform and heal divisions caused by colonial discourse. The next chapter turns to other-oriented homiletic literature, seeking wisdom for the practice of preaching in the Perichoretic Space.
Chapter Four: Other-Oriented Homiletic Literature

Introduction

Drawing on Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity and key insights from postcolonial theory, I have begun to develop the metaphor Perichoretic Space in order to imagine a unique space for postcolonial preaching. Embedded in this space at the heart of Trinity, we encounter ecclesial others in literal and imaginative ways. The discourse of the Social Trinity is profoundly ‘other-oriented.’ Love and concern for others characterize the inner-trinitarian relationships as well as the relationship of the Trinity to creation. Ecclesial encounters are vulnerable to colonial discourse, and we are separated from others by particular discourses of domination. A Third Space emerges between self and others, similar to the Third Space of postcolonial theory, yet inhabited by the Social Trinity which reorients ecclesial discourse away from colonial discourse, toward patterns of loving generosity and hospitality.

This chapter deals with trajectories in homiletical thought related to a “theological-ethical movement toward the other.”¹ A number of homiletic proposals have demonstrated a concern for others by honouring the perceptions and participation of listeners, encouraging responsibility to and for others, and making space for the voices which traditionally have not had a place in the preaching process. A postcolonial homiletic will continue the trajectory of other-oriented homiletics, contributing an explicitly social trinitarian framework,² and attending

---

¹John S. McClure, Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 12.

²For McClure, ‘other-wise’ homiletics is “in every aspect, other-inspired and other directed. It is homiletics that strives to become wise about other human beings - to gain wisdom about and from others for preaching.” Other-wise Preaching, xi. McClure’s ethic is rooted in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. While I highly value McClure’s work, I want to distance myself from his terminology in order to create a unique proposal which is both theologically based and includes a broad range of homiletic perspectives. Ronald Allen notes that Levinas grounds his respect for otherness in ethics rather than ontology, while “Traditional theology grounds ethics
specifically to the presence of colonial discourse in the ecclesial space and the practice of preaching.³

The ‘turn to the other’ has gained momentum in the field of homiletics in recent decades.⁴ The primary period of interest here is the New Homiletic and beyond, beginning with David Randolph’s *A Renewal of Preaching* (1969).⁵ The New Homiletic refers to a variety of homiletical methods and perspectives which emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, partially in response to societal changes, especially in North America, which rendered the ‘old homiletic’ less than satisfactory.⁶ Homiletic concern for the other did not begin with the New Homiletic,⁷ but New Homiletics approached preaching in a markedly different way than previous homiletics. Particularly important for the current discussion is the New Homiletic’s

³The homiletic proposals discussed below do not name colonialism as a significant concept for homiletics, with the possible exception of González, whose theological position is inherently shaped by the reality of colonialism. See Jiménez, “Toward a Postcolonial Hermeneutic.”

⁴John McClure argues that this movement toward the other “has been the most significant way in which homiletics have thought about preaching outside of and beyond the New Homiletic movement since the early 1980’s.” Other-wise, 12. While homiletics has become increasingly, and perhaps more explicitly, other-oriented ‘outside of and beyond’ the New Homiletic, I argue that there are other-oriented aspects of the New Homiletic, as will be discussed below.


⁷For example, prior to World War I, the Social Gospel movement applied Christian ethics to social problems. This movement was characterized by an optimistic understanding of human potential to solve social crises and topple evil institutions. O.C. Edwards Jr., *A History of Preaching*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 734.
understanding of preaching as an event in which listeners are active participants rather than passive recipients, and its recognition that truth and experience are contextual rather than universal, ideas which are discussed below in relation to social trinitarian freedom, mutuality and differentiation.\(^8\) New Homileticians laid foundations for subsequent other-oriented homiletic proposals.\(^9\) While drawing on its relational categories in their own theories,\(^10\) emergent postmodern homileticians critiqued the tendency of the New Homiletic to leave too much of the interpretative task in the hands of the preacher, its overconfidence in the preacher’s ability to effect corporate and individual change, and its failure to recognize the limitations, inadequacies and ambivalence of language.\(^11\) The New Homiletic is at least partially shaped by postmodernity, an era to which the bulk of other-oriented preaching, social trinitarian theology, and postcolonial theory belong.\(^12\)

\(^8\)Ronald Allen notes that while the New Homiletic approached sermons in intuitive and aesthetic ways, it “largely shared the modern supposition that a sermon should create or evoke a single, coherent experience or idea.” *Preaching and the Other*, 131. McClure critiques the New Homiletic because of its reliance on “interchangeable experience.” *Otherwise*, 51.

\(^9\)The New Homiletic continues to be influential, and most of the other-oriented proposals discussed below are indebted to the groundbreaking work of New Homileticians. For example, while Lucy Rose critiques the New Homiletic, she implies that her own work was made possible by contributions of scholars such as Craddock and Lowry. See *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), “Preface.”

\(^10\)David Lose contrasts the relational categories of the New Homiletic with the informational categories of the ‘Old’ homiletic. See “Whither Hence, New Homiletic,” paper given in Dallas, Texas, at the Preaching and Theology Section of the Academy of Homiletics (December 2000), 255-65 (256).


\(^12\)McClure argues that ‘other-wise’ preaching is a postmodern approach that has exited the world of the New Homiletic, although he identifies ‘otherwise’ homiletic perspectives are hybrids of modernity and postmodernity (xi). Paul Scott Wilson suggests that the New Homiletic “reflects wider cultural changes that affect all denominations in the transition from modernity to postmodernity,” and argues that the New Homiletic accommodates postmodernity’s critique of modernity, *Handbook of Preaching*, 401. Elsewhere, Wilson views the New Homiletic and postmodern homiletics to be synonymous. *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*. (St. Louis. MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 137. I believe that both the New Homiletic and ‘other-oriented’ preaching are hybrids of modern and postmodern perspectives. For homileticians that explicitly address the postmodern context for preaching, see McClure, *Other-wise Preaching*.; Ronald Allen’s *Preaching and the Other*; David Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Ronald J. Allen and
While my primary focus is the New Homiletic and beyond, this chapter begins with a brief outline of movements that pre-date the New Homiletic but are especially relevant to other-oriented preaching. These include the pastoral care movement, American civil rights, and South American liberation movements. I will describe my approach to prophetic preaching literature as it relates to the development of a postcolonial homiletic. Secondly, the chapter will engage other-oriented homiletic proposals arising out of the New Homiletic and beyond, employing social trinitarian discourse as a lens through which to view and evaluate these proposals. While most of these proposals have not been explicitly grounded in either postcolonial theory or trinitarian theology, I argue that these homileticians implicitly or explicitly critique or deconstruct domination, separation, homogeneity and fixedness by honouring freedom, mutual self-giving, self-differentiation and the ‘openness’ of language and knowledge in ways consistent with both social trinitarian and postcolonial discourse. Thirdly, with reference to postcolonial theory and the Canadian postcolonial context, this homiletic literature is evaluated in light of its potential contribution to a postcolonial homiletic. Finally, the chapter discusses the possibilities and limitations of the application of postcolonial theory and social trinitarian theology to the practice of preaching.


Feminist movements in the 20th century have also impacted other-oriented preaching, but their impact is felt in homiletics most strongly after the advent of the New Homiletic. Several feminist proposals are considered in Section II below.

I. The ‘Turn to the Other’ in Homiletic Literature

The pastoral care movement in homiletics demonstrated an awareness of listeners through an incorporation of pastoral counselling and preaching. Drawing on popular psychology, this preaching addressed the concrete life situations of hearers, assuming that sermons should begin with what is important and relevant to the individual in the pew. Harry Emerson Fosdick is the preacher most associated with this movement. His preaching centred on the personal problems of people, and functioned as “personal counselling on a group scale.” Fosdick believed that “every sermon should have for its main business the head-on constructive meeting of some problem which was puzzling minds, burdening consciences, distracting lives.” This movement continues to be influential.

While the pastoral care movement focused on the individual, other movements focused on social and corporate experience. The 1960's saw the height of the Civil Rights movement in the United States, and African American preaching aimed to enlist hearers in the cause for justice and freedom. Such preaching responded to, and inspired massive social change. David

---

15This movement coincided with a pastoral counselling movement within pastoral theology, and began in the early 20th century. For overviews of this movement, including its value and challenges, see Edward’s chapter “Pastoral Counselling through Preaching” in Edwards; and Alyce M. McKenzie’s article “Popular Psychology and Preaching” in Wilson, Handbook of Preaching, 404-406. David Buttrick, commenting on the “rise of the personalist pulpit,” suggests that this movement reduces God’s divine agenda to our psychological well-being, drives prophetic engagement from the pulpit because of a preoccupation with individual rather than social concerns, and may result in a neglect of social disadvantaged others. See “Preaching, Hermeneutics and Liberation,” in Standing with the Poor: Theological Reflections on Economic Reality, edited by Paul Plenge Parker. (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1992), 95-107, and A Captive Voice, 108.


17Edwards, 667.


20This movement relates to African American Liberation theologies that developed in the 1960's and 70's. See Kysar and Webb, 109. The sermons of Martin Luther King Jr. addressed the needs of the African-American community according to a liberative scriptural hermeneutic. For example, A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from
Randolph suggests that preaching has “helped to establish and enrich the civil rights movement,” and civil rights preaching contributed to the renewal of preaching insofar as preachers used sermons to interpret current events. In this sense preaching is “the event in which a congregation makes a fateful decision and sees its future open before it.” Although preachers were by no means unanimous in their responses to racial turbulence, a strain of preaching arose which was “intended to be prophetic, to rally Christians to work for social justice.”

During the 1960's, South American theologians developed a new liberation theology which “sought to unmask the ideological forces that kept poor people oppressed and to proclaim God’s solidarity with those who suffer.” Kysar and Webb note that “the early colonialists often forbade the native peoples of South America to read the Bible for themselves.” Liberation theologians encouraged native peoples not only to read, but also to interpret scripture.

*the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran, (New York: Warner, 1998). Kelly Miller Smith draws on MLK’s preaching in arguing that preaching is a “viable means for addressing critical social issues.” *Social Crisis Preaching.* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 3. Edwards notes that the civil rights movement affected white churches as well, inspiring a type of racial justice sermon intended to purge racism from white American churches (731). As noted in chapter one of this dissertation, there are parallels and historical overlap between slavery, racism, segregation and colonialism. Another other-oriented aspect of homiletics in the 18th and 19th century was anti-slavery preaching. See, for example, Charles Wesley, Charles Finney, Lyman Beecher, John Jasper, and Frederick Douglass.

21Randolph, 2-3.

22Ibid, 3.

23Edwards summarizes these issues noting that this movement was an heir of the Social Gospel movement (732-733). In the 1960's, prophetic preaching was less optimistic, but shared with the Social Gospel movement a sense of a “Christian duty to improve society and assumption that preaching could help effect such change.”(735). Edwards suggests that the preaching of William Sloane Coffin is the best exemplar of this trend. (735). For example, see William Sloane Coffin, *A Passion for the Possible: A Message to US Churches.* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993).

24Pablo Jiménez, “Liberation Criticism,” *Handbook of Preaching*, 45. The work of González and González, discussed below, is an example of liberation homiletics.

25Kysar and Webb, 111.
The field of homiletics has generated a vast literature related to prophetic preaching.\textsuperscript{26} Especially relevant here is prophetic preaching that is other-oriented, especially when it is concerned with the deep structures of human community and the promise of healing and the possibility of ‘a repaired form’ of human relationship.\textsuperscript{27} A postcolonial homiletic will have a prophetic character insofar as it will name evil and bear witness to the Trinity’s presence and action in the world, and trinitarian love and passion for others. It will speak in favour of freedom, mutual self-giving, self-differentiation and openness both to God’s unknown future and to one’s neighbours, and against those things which inhibit such trinitarian community.

Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm roots prophetic preaching in the preaching of Jesus himself, arguing that his preaching effects reconciliation, not only between God and humanity, but among human persons.\textsuperscript{28} Our prophetic preaching, she argues, also seeks reconciliation. A postcolonial homiletic has the prophetic task of proclaiming the power of the Triune God to overcome destructive colonial discourse.

A postcolonial homiletic concerns ecclesial identity. Brueggemann contends “prophetic ministry has to do not primarily with addressing specific public crises but with addressing, in and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having an alternative vocation [as Christians] co-opted and domesticated.”\textsuperscript{29} While the preacher may challenge

\textsuperscript{26}Tisdale finds no unanimity among homileticians about the definition of prophetic preaching, and some homileticians use the terms social issues, justice and liberation interchangeably. *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach.* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 3-6. These overlapping and varying categorizations indicate the complexity of the terms themselves, and the multifaceted nature of prophetic, ethical, or social justice oriented homiletic proposals. For a multifaceted discussion of preaching and ethics, see Art Van Seters, *Preaching and Ethics.* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004). See also Charles Campbell’s Introduction to Part 3 of the *New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching,* “Ethics and Preaching,” 115-117.


attitudes and behaviours, prophetic preaching is a pastoral task\textsuperscript{30} which aims to assist the community “to claim (or reclaim) significant aspects of its identity and mission.”\textsuperscript{31} Such preaching criticizes dominant systems and discourses that conflict with God’s purposes as revealed in scripture; and seeks to energize a community of faith for engagement in the world through a mutual process of discernment with a preacher who stands in solidarity with the community.\textsuperscript{32} The task of naming existing reality and imagining an alternative reality consistent with life in Trinity is not accomplished via the ‘voice of one calling in the wilderness,’ but is a collective task of the gathered community. An alternative reality cannot be imagined only by those who benefit from the current reality, but must be imagined in partnership with those who suffer at the margins.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Aliens, Life in the Christian Colony: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know that Something is Wrong} (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), and \textit{Preaching to Strangers} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992); Charles L. Campbell, \textit{Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), and \textit{The Word Before the Powers} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). While a public theology is an important task for a postcolonial Church, the focus here is on ecclesial identity and community. Homiletic perspectives aiming prophetic critique outside of the Church, or those dealing with individual morality are less relevant here. My emphasis on social systems means that I do not explore homiletic proposals related to topical preaching, or preaching that addresses specific social issues.


\textsuperscript{31}Allen, “Relationship Between the Pastoral and Prophetic.”

\textsuperscript{32}Some prophetic preaching proposals reinforce a kind of hierarchy or domination, viewing the preacher as a ‘lone ranger’ who claims to speak for God without a sense of mutuality or solidarity with listeners. David Jacobsen suggests that this “individualistic view of the prophet...is alive and well in the way many mainline preachers think implicitly about the task of prophetic preaching. See “Schola Prophetarum: Prophetic Preaching Toward a Public, Prophetic Church,” \textit{Homiletic} 34:1 (2009), 12-21. The prophet is the righteous individual trying to reform the primitive system.” (15). Philip Wogaman’s emphasis on the prophet as one who speaks on behalf of another, and grasps the mind of God, is a good example. See \textit{Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). Another example is Marvin McMickle’s image of the preacher as the one who wears the ‘mantle’ of prophetic preaching. See \textit{Where have All the Prophets Gone? Reclaiming Prophetic Preaching in America} (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002).

\textsuperscript{33}Art Van Seters suggests preaching should shape ‘prophetic churches’ rather than individuals - churches which act in the world to call attention to inequality, oppression and injustice, and name an alternative reality. \textit{Preaching as a Social Act: Theology & Practice}, edited by Art Van Seters. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988), 251. For a discussion of the role of prophetic transformation see Fred Craddock, \textit{As One Without Authority}.
A postcolonial homiletic proclaims eschatological hope that is rooted in trinitarian openness to the human community, and the promised transformation of the created order. Rather than emphasizing prophetic certitude and fixed world views, Wesley Allen views prophetic preaching as a call to uncertainty, a call to a sense of the limitedness of humanity, which leads to a pronounced emphasis on the centrality of God, and humanity’s absolute dependence on God.\textsuperscript{34}

**II. Other-oriented Homiletics since the New Homiletic**

The following sections explore the manner in which homileticians, after the emergence of the New Homiletic, have explicitly or implicitly advocated freedom, mutual self-giving, self-differentiation and openness.\textsuperscript{35} In so doing, these homileticians effectively deconstruct the domination, separation, homogeneity and fixedness of colonial discourse in a manner consistent with social trinitarian discourse. Each section begins with an overview of the ways in which the field has approached that particular theme, and describes several homiletic proposals particularly enlightening for a postcolonial homiletic. While I perceive a certain commonality among homileticians in each section regarding the themes of freedom, mutuality, difference and openness, homileticians approach these themes from a variety of homiletic perspectives and theological commitments. Those whom I have considered in a singular category frequently critique and challenge one another. This structured review of other-oriented homiletic literature will lead into a postcolonial analysis of the literature in Section III. This analysis will discuss


\textsuperscript{35}The boundaries between categories are intended to be highly porous rather than restrictive, and one category frequently overflows into others. This is especially true with regard to homiletics that emphasize mutual self-giving and self-differentiation. As Trinh T. Minh-ha writes: “Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak.” *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism.* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1989), 94. I am imposing this structure on the literature - not all homiletic proposals fit neatly.
the possibilities and limitations of existing homiletic thought for the development of a postcolonial homiletic.

a. Freedom vs. Domination

Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity, and postcolonial discourse, deconstruct oppression and domination by privileging freedom and equality. Which preaching has resisted or challenged the hierarchical structures of power, domination and captivity that mimic colonial discourse and inhibit the freedom and equality found in God’s life in Trinity? How have representatives of the New Homiletic and other homiletic perspectives envisioned preaching as a task that contributes to freedom and equality within human community?

The relationship of preacher to congregation has historically been asymmetrical and hierarchical. The New Homiletic moved toward more symmetrical power relationships, “the preacher comes down off a pedestal and stands under the word with the congregation.” David Randolph acknowledges that both preacher and listener are “apprehended by the power of the living God.” Fred Craddock narrows the gap between preacher and listener by describing preachers as members of the congregation, using words such as ‘vulnerable’ and ‘democratic.’

Egalitarian relationships are an important component in the proposals of Lucy Rose and John McClure. Other homileticians have addressed domination and hierarchy in society related to gender, race, disability, socio-economic status, among others. Susan Bond, Mary Donovan

36 Traditional approaches to preaching tend to envision the preacher in a hierarchical relationship to listeners, who passively receive the preacher’s words.

37 Rose, discussing the role of preacher and listener in ‘transformational’ perspectives on preaching (61).

38 Randolph, 76-77.

39 Craddock, As One Without Authority, 82 and 55 respectively.

40 McClure’s Roundtable Pulpit, and Rose’s Sharing the Word are discussed below as they relate to the participation of the listener. Rose argues that the New Homiletic did not go far enough to close the gap between preacher and listener. Christine Smith also critiques traditional understanding of the preacher’s authority. Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 44-47.
Turner and Mary Lin Hudson, and John McClure and Nancy Ramsay encourage preachers to “script new, non-oppressive theologies that will defend against theological ideas that may condone abusive power and increase the likelihood of suffering.” Kathy Black wants to resist oppression by including those who have been excluded in traditional homiletics. She argues that persons with disabilities are often ignored or misrepresented in the preaching process. This is especially true with regard to the interpretation of biblical texts containing characters who are blind, deaf, mute or paralysed.

Andre Resner edits a volume related to unjust economic systems. James Childs offers a theological view of justice as a primary purpose for ministry. Walter Burghardt explores how Protestant and Catholic traditions have responded to justice concerns, in the hope of aiding congregations to recognize the justice issues in their own contexts. Below I take a closer look

---

41 John McClure, “From Resistance to Jubilee: Prophetic Preaching and the Testimony of Love,” *Yale Institute of Sacred Music Colloquium: Music, Worship, Arts*, Vol. 2. (Autumn, 2005), 1. Susan Bond seeks a way to preach an adequate Christology amidst the variety of options, and proposes a ‘theology of salvage’ which seeks common grounds amidst the fragmentation of women’s christologies. *Trouble with Jesus: Women, Christology and Preaching.* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999); John S. McClure and Nancy Ramsay edit a volume which addresses issues of violence by exploring themes such as radical evil, the empowerment of victims and survivors, the systematic nature of violence, and the impossibility of remaining detached from the issues of domestic violence if one wants to promote healing. While acknowledging that speaking about such violence is difficult, “preaching is crucial to the act of speaking out about injustice, pain, and suffering in the church” (2). *Telling the Truth: Preaching about Sexual and Domestic Violence.* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1998). Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson argue for a revisionist feminist theology. They employ the metaphor of ‘voice’ and claim that women should begin a search “for a new theological language, new liturgical language to describe her experience of life, love, God, salvation, redemption, joy as true and good (91). *Saved from Silence: Finding Women’s Voices in Preaching.* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999).


43 Black contends that preachers habitually elevate the status of Jesus and emphasize the lowliness of the disabled person, or ignore the disability/healing issue altogether. By considering the “lived reality and experiences of persons with those particular disabilities when preparing sermons on these texts,” the people that Jesus healed and cared for will once again be included and valued in today’s faith communities (180).


at four proposals which address hierarchy and domination in ways which I perceive to be particularly informative for the development of a postcolonial homiletic.

First, Walter Brueggemann’s perspective on prophetic preaching criticizes the ‘old’ or existing ordering of reality, and proclaims a new vision of reality according to the reign of God. Speaking against the status quo in favour of God’s ‘new thing’ involves recognizing ways in which things are not as they ought to be, and calling for change. He advocates prophetic resistance against the claims of empire. In describing the role of preacher in relation to the situation of the Church vis a vis Western hegemony, he claims that the ‘script’ of white, male Western hegemony and its “advantage of certitude and domination” has failed. As the Church is increasingly exiled to the margins of Western society, preachers are “no longer chaplains for national legitimacy,” and are free to practice “dangerous criticism” of the empire. This criticism asserts that “the empire is incongruous with Yahweh’s governance and that the central claims of empire are false - it cannot keep its promise of life.” Criticism, however, is complemented by the evocation of an energizing alternative consciousness and perception.

Second, Charles L. Campbell envisions preaching itself as nonviolent resistance to the domination of the world by ‘principalities and powers.’ Preaching is shaped by the life, death

---


50 Ibid, 121.

51 Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*.

52 Campbell, *The Word before the Powers*. 
and resurrection of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{53} Jesus’ ministry was characterized by resistance to the powers, and thus the purpose of proclamation in the Church is to continue this shaping of the Christian community into a community of resistance.\textsuperscript{54} The Church is then free “to live faithfully in the face of the powers of death.”\textsuperscript{55} Campbell notes that this process can be fraught with ambiguity, especially for preachers who enjoy power and privilege. “Preaching often participates in acts and systems of domination that involve harmful forms of psychological, spiritual and physical coercion that must be considered violent . . . at a subtler level, preachers have often used language in ways that support and sustain the Domination System.”\textsuperscript{56} In resisting the powers of death, violence and evil, preachers can expose the powers for what they are, and proclaim the hope of liberation from oppressive powers.

Third, for Christine Smith, preaching involves a public, theological naming of reality.\textsuperscript{57} By harnessing the power of publically proclaimed words, preaching “calls persons to claim the fullness of their own created worth and the worth of all creation,” and “enables the demonic powers of hatred and injustice to be exposed and dethroned.”\textsuperscript{58} Smith looks at “systems and ideologies” that are part of a reality of oppression which is “radical evil,”\textsuperscript{59} envisioning three interrelated aspects of preaching: weeping, as we are put in touch with our deepest passions in a world of oppression and suffering;\textsuperscript{60} confession, as profound truth-telling in the face of

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid, 90.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55}Ibid, 188.  A typical PCC congregation might disagree about what constitute ‘powers of death.’
\textsuperscript{56}Ibid, 83.
\textsuperscript{58}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid. Smith includes handicappism, ageism, sexism, classism, racism and heterosexism as manifestations of radical evil.
\textsuperscript{60}Ibid, 4.
oppression, and resistance against evil. Preaching aims at the transformation of an unjust and oppressive world. “It is nothing less than the bold, fearful, interpretation of our present world, and an eschatological invitation to a profoundly different, new world.”

Fourth, Justo González and Catherine González express the concern of liberation theologies to encourage the poor and traditionally powerless to interpret scripture within the frame of their own experience. The rich and powerful tend to interpret scripture in a manner which underscores their own power and influence, a practice which González and González consider largely unconscious, but nevertheless results in oppression, marginalization, persecution and colonization. Preachers should approach scripture with a hermeneutic of suspicion that asks “what are the oppressive biases which find subtle expression in this writing? What view of reality and of God’s purposes does this writing espouse, perhaps without even being aware of it?”

González and González address relatively powerful white, American male preachers who preach liberation for the poor and oppressed, and are thus in danger of announcing a gospel for which they themselves have no need: “precisely because such agents of liberation have never

---

61Ibid.
63Christine M. Smith, “Preaching: Hospitality, De-Centering, Re-membering, and Right Relations,” in Jana Childers, ed. Purposes of Preaching. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 91-112. In Preaching as Weeping, Smith comments that she does not envisions sermon which embody weeping, confession and resistance as ‘social issues’ sermons, nor does she desire preachers to preach ‘prophetically.’ Rather, she hopes that preachers will “make little distinction between pastoral and prophetic, individual and social” (163).
65González and González, The Liberating Pulpit, 13-15. For example, in North American society sin tends to be viewed from an individual perspective, and social justice is ignored. Such interpretations place Christian theology at the service of the powerful (23).
66Ibid, 46. Also with regard to lectionaries, commentaries and traditional interpretations.
experienced the bondage they now address, it is easy for them to oversimplify the problems and misunderstand the situation, both in its causes and in its cures.”67 Instead, ‘powerful’ preachers are called to recognize the need for liberating gospel in their own lives, not to live out of the experience of the oppressed other, but rather to discover “in what ways he is oppressed, and learn about how the same system which oppresses others also oppresses the seemingly powerful.”68 A subversion of power roles, in which the ‘powerful’ are taught by those of lesser power, can lead to liberation for the oppressed and the oppressor.69

b. Mutual self-giving vs. Separation

Social trinitarian discourse seeks to heal the divides and schisms created by colonial discourse, and rejects colonial separation in favour of communion with others. In similar ways, postcolonial theory looks toward the possibility of healing for communities ravaged by colonialism/imperialism. The divisions within the Body of Christ, whether caused by colonial discourse or other destructive discourses, can be addressed in preaching. Richard Lischer argues that preaching has a ‘reconciling imperative.’70 How has the field of homiletics addressed themes of mutual encounter and self-giving in Christian community? Preaching happens in the midst of relationship. Preachers and hearers have need of one another, and need of others not necessarily physically present in the preaching process.71 Preaching takes place in the context of


68González, Liberation Preaching, 52. The powerful live under a subtle bondage, “sufficiently rewarded that we do not notice our lack of freedom.” (26)

69Ibid, 27. This emphasis on the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed links to the section on separation/mutuality below.

70Lischer, 132. I will discuss Lischer’s view in chapter five.

71“Becoming aware of others pushes us to name our assumptions and to think critically about them. The presence of others may open us to possibilities for life that we have not previously identified.” Ronald J. Allen,
the Sacraments of baptism and communion, and so the “wider community” of the Church is both the local and global Church. Although sermons address the specific situation of hearers, the context of a sermon is the whole Body of Christ scattered throughout the world and preaching should not ignore this catholic context.

In the past few decades, preaching has moved from “being authoritarian to being relational” and has become “more collaborative and done in less isolation,” emphasizing connection, interdependence, and responsibility to others. The New Homiletic addressed the participation of the listener in the sermon. Listeners are not dependent on the preacher, rather “the preacher trusts the experience, abilities and vision of those in the pews,” resulting in a sense of “interdependency.” David Randolph’s *The Renewal of Preaching* argues for more participatory models of preaching which include the experience of others: “Preaching as a one-man affair [sic] is a thing of the past, to be replaced by that kind of participatory experience in which those present know themselves involved, even though only one man may be vocalizing at the time.” Fred Craddock advocates “giving disciplined time and attention to the interpretation of one’s listeners,” by which he means getting to know the listeners in formal and informal

---

*Thinking Theologically: The Preacher as Theologian.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 62, writing about theologies of otherness. Kathy Black reminds us that “we are all interconnected and depend on one another and the created world for survival. Who we are influences who others are, and vice versa.” *A Healing Homiletic*, 41.

72 Catherine and Justo González. “The Larger Context” in *Preaching as a Social Act*, 29-54 (31). See also Van Seters, “Afterword: Selected Lines on an Extended Canvas,” in *Preaching as a Social Act*. Christians are linked sacramentally, across time and space “at the same time this sacramental connection is geographically global; it is spatial. The congregation is open to the world, and preaching should address the community of faith throughout the world.” (240)

73 González and González, “The Larger Context,” 31. Jeter and Allen note that preachers have an opportunity to teach the congregation about multiple cultures. See *One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching for Different Listeners in the Congregation*. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2002), 114.

74 Edwards, 801, quoting personal correspondence from Don M. Wardlaw dated April, 2000. These more relational models contrast somewhat with the therapeutic models of Harry Emerson Fosdick, which focus on the psychological rather than social realm. See Edwards, 809.


76 Randolph, 7.
ways, and also through empathetic imagination, which he defines as “the capacity to achieve a large measure of understanding of another person without having had that person’s experiences.” According to Craddock, inductive preaching lets listeners complete the sermon, not by simply implementing that which the preacher says must be done, but by completing the “thought, movement and decision making in the sermon itself.” The preacher resists “the tyranny of ideas” and “imperialism of thought and feeling,” opting for a more democratic sharing which “respects the hearer as not only capable of but deserving the right to participate in that movement.” Such preaching can foster congregational engagement, says Lucy Rose, because it invites the congregation to “formulate their own meanings, reflect on their own experiences, confirm or recognize their faith commitments, or create their own performances of the text in response to the sermon.”

Poetic, evocative language also enables listeners to “work out their own meaning in a give-and-take with the Spirit.” Narrative sermons invite the listeners to accompany the preacher on a journey of interpretation. “The sermon’s end is not the worshippers’ arrival at the preacher’s proposed resolution, but their arrival at their own provisional resolutions or resting-places on the journey.” Story-sermons can be preached in an open-ended way, so that they do not impose the preacher’s meaning, but rather allow the congregation to draw their own

---


78 Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 65.


80 Rose, 114. Rose also critiques this preaching as not going far enough to narrow the gap between preacher and congregation (78).


82 Rose, 115.
conclusions and meanings. Stories about others told in the context of a sermon can bring distant others into the local imagination. The experience of others, then, can enlarge the world view of listeners.

John McClure and Lucy Rose introduce collaborative approaches to preaching which value mutuality and interdependence. McClure describes a sovereign style of preaching which arranges the preacher and listener in a spiritual hierarchy. While inductive forms of preaching have contributed to mutuality in the pulpit, he argues “neither sovereign nor inductive forms of preaching adequately address the need for a genuinely communal approach to discerning and articulating the truth claims of the gospel in preaching.” McClure includes members of the congregation in the sermon preparation process, enabling them to “claim as their own the ideas, forms of religious experience, and theological vision articulated from the pulpit.” Church members are invited to cross boundaries and connect with others who “live in very different

---

83See Richard A. Jensen, Telling the Story: Variety and Imagination in Preaching (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980). Jensen introduces a “metaphor of participation” according to which the stories of preaching should involve listeners by offering them an experience (131-132).

84The challenges of representing others in sermons is discussed in detail in chapter 5.


86McClure, The Roundtable Pulpit, 32. This traditional model (exemplified by Calvin and Barth) lacks an appreciation of the experience of the hearer, and “usurp[s] the congregation’s power to discern, interpret, and practice the Christian faith” (33). McClure notes that there are positive aspects to this traditional hierarchical arrangement, in that it promotes social cohesion and a sense of communal identity (34).

87McClure, The Roundtable Pulpit, 45.

88Ibid, 7.
situations” within the congregation, or outside. The rotating, representative group from the congregation gather as equal partners to share different perspectives aimed at creating a space for the Word as “emergent communal reality.” The preacher acts as a host, welcomes the gifts which guests bring to the table, listens in on “the ways that a congregation is ‘talking itself into’ becoming a Christian community,” and learns from them something which may transform the preacher’s own interpretation, and thus the sermon.

Lucy Rose’s *Sharing the Word* is another conversational proposal which values connectedness rather than separation. This proposal resists a one-way flow of power, authority and knowledge from preacher to congregation, and contrasts with kerygmatic and transformational preaching styles which privilege the role of the preacher over listeners.

Rather than transforming the listener(s), facilitating an encounter with God, or transmitting knowledge or faith, Rose believes that the goal of preaching is to gather the community around the word so that the community may experience for themselves a transforming encounter with God. The conversation includes:

- those who preach and those who do not,
- those who are confident in matters of

---

89Ibid, 13. In seeking out the stranger, we are not being merely inclusive or seeking to make preaching more relevant, but rather we are cultivating within the “theological imagination of our Christian communities an understanding of the other, the stranger, as the potential bearer of wisdom and insight, rather than the bearer of values that are threatening.” (17-18).

90Ibid, 55.

91Ibid, 50.

92Ibid, 23, 29.

93Rose, 90.

94Ibid. Kerygmatic preaching assumes that it is possible to preach “the primitive and essential core of the gospel,” that the Word of God is an active participant in preaching, and that God speaks a saving word in the preaching event (37). Listeners are thus passive recipients of a kernel of gospel truth. Transformational models view the preacher as one who has experienced transformation through an encounter with God, and passes on that experience to passive listeners (59).

95Ibid, 98. Rose shares this perspective with Christine Smith, who rejects the capacity of the preacher to transform, positing instead that authority and power belong to the community. Preaching is rooted in mutuality and connectedness. See *Weaving the Sermon*, 47, 52, 57.
faith and those who find themselves awkward and unsure . . . Conversational preaching seeks to gather together these voices - local and global, past and present - paying particular attention to those that have been drowned out by the din around the round and rectangular tables of our world. Paying particular attention to the whispers and pauses where people’s voices have been missing.96

Our stories are always too small, and therefore need to be enriched by divine mystery and the depths of human experience.97 This means that preaching is never complete in itself, it is about “tentative interpretations, proposals that invite counterproposals, and the preacher’s wagers as genuine convictions placed in conversation with the wagers of others.”98 For Rose, the critical issue in conversational preaching is not the orthodoxy of the sermon, but whether the “central conversations of the Church as the people of God . . . upbuild the communities of faith in their local and global configurations, and whether they respect and invite the voices of the silenced, the disenfranchised, the poor and women.”99 Although one person voices the sermon, the preacher is not alone: “The one speaks the language of the community of faith in its historical and global configurations. The one speaks with, among, and sometimes on behalf of others because she or he has already in countless prior conversations been speaking with, among and sometimes on behalf of others.”100

Lucy Hogan begins her book *Graceful Speech* by situating the roundtable proposals of McClure and Rose with the context of trinitarian theology which describes a relational, self-communicating God.101 In Hogan’s interpretation:

God is seated at the table, the God who calls us to speak and fills us with grace.

---

96Ibid, 4-5.

97Ibid, 6. See also James Childs who writes: “we need more than one set of eyes to see the whole picture,” *Preaching Justice*, 45.

98Ibid, 100. This idea of ‘proposal’ connects with testimonial preaching, discussed below.

99Rose, 106.

100Ibid, 111.

101Hogan, 5.
There is the preacher, who prepares and delivers the sermon. And there is the listener who receives the preached word of God. Each is an active, essential member at the table. We have been called by the triune God to gather at the table in a relationship of radical equality, echoing the relationship of the three-in-one.  

O. Wesley Allen’s *Homiletic of all Believers* is a response to enlightenment epistemology in North American culture. He views the sermon as an integral expression of the congregation’s ongoing theological conversation, rooted in an ecclesiology that sees the Church as a community of conversation. The goal of this ongoing conversation is communal conversion, a “turning together” toward the divine presence. Allen envisions a “covenant of egalitarian reciprocity” at the heart of the Church. Participants will listen to one another, and ‘proclaim’ their own experience and interpretations in a tentative manner which leaves space for the experiences of others. The preacher is an equal participant in this struggle to make meaning of God, self, and the world. “The pulpit is not a lectern at center stage but a chair placed at the edge of the conversation table.” The preacher does not have sole access to the Word of God. The word is active, present and accessible in the life and experience through the congregation at large.

---

102Ibid, 11. Hogan claims that the doctrine of the Trinity “grounds everything we are, everything we do, and everything we say. It, therefore, is the grounding for our theology of preaching.” (10). Despite this claim, Hogan does not significantly discuss the Trinity in later chapters.

103O. Wesley Allen, 4.

104O. Wesley Allen quotes Susan Bond, who argues that ecclesiology “is not always an immediate consideration for homiletical theorists. Homileticians tend to think first of the nature of the sermonic content. . . relatively little attention has been given to the relationship between homiletical theory and the broader corporate vocation or identity of the community of believers.” Susan Bond, *Contemporary African-American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style*. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 16. Charles Campbell and Lee Ramsey also focus on ecclesiology. Wesley Allen criticizes McClure’s ‘roundtable preaching’ because it places conversation in service to the sermon, instead of the sermon serving the ongoing conversation of the congregation, (10).


106Ibid, 27.

107Ibid, 58.

108Ibid, 44.
Jeter and Allen wrestle with the possibilities for preaching in congregations with diverse memberships. In such congregations, the sermon can become “the literal speaking and listening center of the Church.” By learning about the characteristics of listening groups in the congregation, the preacher can give voice to the variety of perspectives and experiences, assisting various groups in hearing and understanding the gospel and one another. The preacher does this by a process of “mutual critical correlation.” The goal of this process is to aid the preacher to understand the plurality of the gathered community, and to express that plurality in a way which will “enhance the possibility for the hearing of the gospel in its fullness and force.”

In *Word on the Street*, Saunders and Campbell contest the power of economic oppression and emphasize the communal nature of preaching by literally putting preachers into the space of the other. The preacher is part of a movement that resists the principalities and powers which aim to “distort reality and create structures of oppression in the world.” Through a variety of ministries among the poor and homeless in inner-city Atlanta, preachers come face to face with their economic others. In these encounters, students of preaching learn from the poor and homeless, and discover how reading scripture with and among the poor radically alters the

---

109 Jeter and Allen, *One Gospel, Many Ears*. The appendix lists thirty-five categories of listeners - including gender, theological orientation, cultural setting, social location etc.

110 Ibid, 3.

111 Ibid, 3.

112 Mutual critical correlation involves three dimensions. First, the pastor “correlates the gospel with values, thoughts, practices, ideas and communication preferences of a given group.” In the second dimension, the preacher names the ways in which the gospel calls for change in thought, word, and deed. In the third dimension, the preacher takes insights from the tradition and contemporary situations to reformulate the congregation’s understanding of the gospel. Jeter and Allen, *One Gospel, Many Ears*, 10. See also Ronald J. Allen, “Preaching as Mutual Critical Correlation,” in Jana Childers, ed. *Purposes of Preaching*.

113 Jeter and Allen, 13.

114 Saunders and Campbell, 9.

possibilities for interpretation. Campbell and Saunders note that practising solidarity with the poor will not ‘fix’ the problem of poverty, but such solidarity enacts the reality of God’s reign. The impetus for such personal encounter is rooted in an understanding of God’s solidarity with humanity as the foundation and model of Christian life, and the basis for future hope:

As the ground and focus of Christian hope, divine solidarity and self-giving love also serve as the basis for our participation with God in the reconstruction of human space. It is important to nuance this carefully, however. We do not accomplish the reconstruction of human space and relationships by our own efforts. God’s solidarity with us in the cross has already shaken the foundations of the world, making a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21), reconciling us in one body (Ephesians 2:16), and thereby fundamentally reshaping the whole created order. Our role is to discern and participate with God in this reality.

c. Self-differentiation vs. Homogeneity

The discourse of the Social Trinity is a unifying discourse insofar as it seeks to bring together that which has been separated by destructive social discourses such as colonial discourse. Postcolonial theory also critiques the systems and actions that act to essentialise identity and maintain boundaries. In terms of ecclesiology, the perichoretic unity of the Social Trinity incorporates a plurality of subjects, yet permits personal difference. Love is always directed toward an object, an ‘other,’ and in this way particularity and otherness are honoured as necessary aspects of unity. The goal is not “to create undifferentiated unity which ignores difference but to allow the other to be other.” Historically, ‘unity’ and ‘community’ have assumed a certain degree of homogeneity, forming community by “trying to appease individual

116Campbell and Saunders, 90.
117Ibid, 169.
118Ibid, 168.
119McClure, The Roundtable Pulpit, 43. David S. Jacobsen and Robert Kelly root this possibility of honouring the other in the Lutheran doctrine of justification: if we are saved already, we don’t have to worry about securing our own salvation. Our identity rests in God, thus “The other - who also exists before God by grace alone - is free to be other, and thereby the impossible possibility of dialogue with the other is open.” Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 25.
differences, promoting, at most, a common belief or common perspective held by all individuals.”

The conversational and collaborative proposals discussed above assume that listeners, even within the same worship space, have unique experience and contexts. How have homileticians valued diversity and otherness in a manner consistent with trinitarian differentiation? In what ways has preaching in the last four decades resisted the notion of ‘universal human experience,’ and enforced homogeneity of colonial discourse by highlighting particularity, and the social location of preacher and listener?

Writing about the contextuality of sermons, David Randolph claims that a sermon is “an address to a particular people at a particular time in a particular place; it is not a general word to the universe.” Gardner Taylor recognized that the preacher’s experience is not universal. Regardless of text, the sermon is influenced by the perceptions and personality of the preacher. Narrative preaching proposals acknowledge a plurality of stories, and that stories of the Bible, stories of the tradition, and stories of the people collectively form a ‘shared story.’ Stories arise in contexts, and narrative preaching can invite the experience of others into the sermon. Imaginative and poetic language, in addition to allowing the listener to participate in making meaning, also leave room for a diversity of experience. Story-sermons can introduce listeners to a variety of other perspectives, calling attention to the differing ways that others experience reality. In 1970, Charles Rice wrote about imagination as “that habit of mind which can move from one’s own situation into a new frame of reference, enriching both “worlds” by

Chopp, 81.

Ibid, 45.


See David Buttrick’s article “Story and Symbol: The Stuff of Preaching,” in What’s the Shape of Narrative Preaching: Essays in Honor of Eugene Lowry. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008).

Rose, 6.
the very movement.”

David Buttrick’s phenomenological approach recognizes that “events, things, experiences - all must be variously named,” thus acknowledging a plurality of perception. Several homileticians have particularly emphasized the significance of social location and particular context. These approaches perceive truth to be multifaceted and subjective, and they acknowledge and welcome plurality and diversity in the Church. Insofar as proclamation is spoken out of a particular context and social location, it can only ever be partial and “relatively adequate.”

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale’s *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* considers the local community of faith in terms of its unique culture and sub-cultures. There are differences within a given congregation and among congregations, in that each congregation has a unique culture. Tisdale urges preachers to become students of congregational culture, acting as ethnographers or

---


126 See David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1987), 8. David Greenhaw describes Buttrick’s recognition of the contextuality of being “The subjective me that is “in here” is not isolatable from the social milieu in which I have been and continue to be formed as a person. The me is a me in culture and context, shaped and constituted by relationships with others and an environment.” “The Formation of Consciousness, in *Preaching as a Theological Task,* 7. Tisdale critiques Buttrick’s approach as being focussed on “the universals of human experience.” *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 19.

127 See other works on contextual preaching, especially Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching.* Mitchell addresses the African American Church, claiming that successful black preachers use language and ideas that resonate with black cultures. See also Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching in the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective.* (Valley Forge: PA: Judson Press, 1999); *Saved from Silence* by Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson, whose metaphor of ‘voice’ emphasises the particularity of women’s experiences. Ronald Allen highlights differences in age and social location with the congregation. See *Preaching for Growth.* (St. Louis, MO: CBP Press, 1988), 49-52, and *Preaching and the Other,* chapter 4 for a perspective on preaching, social location and postmodernity. Richard L. Eslinger places the interpretation of scripture within a particular community of faith, and resists the notion of universal truth. See *Narrative and Imagination: Preaching the Worlds that Shape Us.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995).

128 For a discussion of preaching and religious diversity, see Joseph Webb, *Preaching and the Challenge of Pluralism.* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998). He says: “Most of us sense, whether we acknowledge it openly or not, that the Old Gospel, with its “us versus them” missionizing mentality needs to be laid to rest, once and for all.”

129 Chopp, 92.
cultural anthropologists “skilled in observing and in thickly describing the subcultural signs and symbols of the congregations they serve.”\textsuperscript{130} She suggests ways that a preacher can identify and exegete the symbols which are specific to a particular local congregation, those things which are distinctive in terms of a congregation’s “subcultural identity” and the “world view, values and ethos” which inhabit that identity.\textsuperscript{131}

Lucy Rose turns to feminist biblical scholar Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza to describe the particularity of the location of preaching. Schüssler Fiorenza reiterates that all experience is interpreted and shaped by context, that is time, space, culture and socialization. Preachers should not speak as though their own experiences were “paradigmatic for Christian God-experience today.”\textsuperscript{132} She calls for preaching that broadens the “experiential and interpretive basis for proclamation” by taking seriously the diversity of experience and articulating the experience of the whole people of God, including women and the poor.\textsuperscript{133}

Rose contends that ignoring diversity of experience or making claims about ‘common human experience’ can result in “an imperialism that names as “common” or “human” what is particular and limited . . . Those who are marginal or outside the norm are the first to recognize just how particular and limited [are] such statements and ‘facts’.”\textsuperscript{134} Rooted in the personal experience of the preacher, conversational preaching acknowledges that others’ experiences are legitimate.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{130}Tisdale, Preaching as Local Theology, 60.

\textsuperscript{131}Ibid, 77.


\textsuperscript{133}Schüssler Fiorenza, “Response,” 52.

\textsuperscript{134}Rose, 128. Mary Catherine Hilker discusses the importance of self-definition and “the power to name one’s own experience.” This process of ‘naming grace’ from the perspective of various social locations and contexts is a manifestation of God’s grace insofar as revelation is “disclosed in human experience.” See Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination. (New York: Continuum, 1997), 179-80.

\textsuperscript{135}Rose, 129.
James Nieman and Thomas Rogers examine how churches have responded to increasing cultural diversity within congregations. They discover that people hear preaching in different ways depending on cultural factors. Thus culture is a significant construct for preaching. By entering into conversation with congregants of various cultural identities, a preacher can find common ground among the various identities, and facilitate cross-cultural conversation from the pulpit.

Eunjoo Mary Kim’s *Preaching and Globalization* names globalization as a new context for preaching. Kim develops a method for transcontextual preaching which “goes through and beyond locality to engage in a global world, where local contexts become interwoven.” Kim builds on Tisdale’s *Preaching as Local Theology*, and Nieman and Rogers’ *Preaching to Every Pew*, proposals she labels ‘intracontextual’: “their methods try to interact primarily with the concerns and ideas emerging from a local context (or congregation).”

Kim’s theology of humanization is concerned with the liberation of all creatures and the restoration of community “in which all human beings live in solidarity as the image of the Triune God.” This liberation and restoration are based on the “the Triune God’s openness to and loving inclusion of radical otherness.” Transcontextual preaching recognizes that congregations are not internally coherent wholes, but “share multiple heritages and

---


137 Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010). Kim urges preachers to critically evaluate globalization lest it become a new form of colonialism. This is particularly informative for the development of a postcolonial homiletic because of a certain overlap between colonialism and globalization. As described in chapter one, globalization can be perceived as a neocolonializing phenomenon that suppresses difference.

138 Ibid, xii. Perception of globalization depends on one’s social location (26).

139 Ibid, 16.

140 Ibid, 54.

141 Ibid, 51.
Preachers need to be intentional and strategic about nurturing a shared congregational identity. Transcontextual preaching takes seriously the different ways in which listeners hear, and incorporates these differences into a shared identity by guiding listeners toward a “point of value” or “vision of global future.”

Transcontextual preaching is accompanied by a transcontextual hermeneutic that views both the text and one’s reading partners as other. When preachers read “through and beyond others,” they enter into a liminal space, which Kim describes as a creative space in which new values, worldviews and differences can be experienced. “One way to stretch beyond our boundaries is to have direct and indirect dialogue with people whose social and personal situations are different from our own. By reflecting on our fragmentary knowledge of the truth as a result of interacting with others in a wider world, we can broaden the horizons of our knowledge and experiences of the truth.” Kim offers the image of a kaleidoscope which relies on the importance of aesthetic sensitivity for identifying a common point of value: “transcontextual preaching moves us beyond our horizons to the beauty of the kaleidoscope, in the presence and power of the Spirit.”

142Ibid, 54.
143Ibid, 55, 61.
144Ibid, 87.
145Ibid, 100, 109.
146Ibid, 66.
147Ibid, 69. Kim borrows the term “liminal space” from anthropologist Victor Turner: Dramas, Fields and Metaphors. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 237. To read “through and beyond” others is to read text and context ‘interpathically’ (to attempt to join others in their worlds), 70, by employing a communitarian reading of the text (to read with a mixed group of people), 73, and using a paradigmatic interpretation of texts (to view texts “as discourse capable of creating multiple meanings” rather than a single meaning), 77.
149Ibid, 109. Kim’s kaleidoscope metaphor provides an aesthetically pleasing visual image of what human relationships can look like in a “common space” made more habitable and beautiful by the juxtaposition of difference.
d. openness vs. fixedness

The openness of the Persons of the Trinity to one another and to creation deconstructs fixed and unchanging identities such as those favoured by colonial discourse in favour of dynamic relationships. How has the field of homiletics challenged notions of fixed meanings or essentialized identities in a manner consistent with social trinitarian discourse? How has it acknowledged the dynamic nature of reality, and the negotiation and ambiguity at the heart of language and relationship, in a manner that can leave room for others?

Language is powerful, and can create new worlds in human consciousness, but language is also irrevocably biased and limited, “fallen, freighted, vested with the interests of its users.” These limitations of language preclude “the preacher’s discovering an intention, voice or experience that purports to be the text’s intention, the voice of God, or a paradigmatic gospel experience.” The openness I have described in relation to the Social Trinity is illustrated effectively by a collection of testimonial homiletic proposals. These proposals suggest that the Word itself is not fixed or final. It is open to transformation and may change in new contexts.

---

150Rose, 81. While the New Homiletic and the New Hermeneutic recognized the power of language to shape meaning and experience, it did not adequately address the potential dangers of language.

151Rose, 83.

152While I focus on testimonial perspectives here, other homiletic proposals also value openness. For example, Don Wardlaw writes about static versus tensive language that “risks ambiguity on the wings of metaphor, image, parable fable and simile.” He suggests that tensive language creates new possibilities for the hearer. In contrast to concrete language which leaves less room for interpretation, imaginative language is open to transformation. “Introduction: The Need for New Shapes,” in Preaching Biblically, edited by Don M. Wardlaw, 11-25 (19). See other references in previous sections relating to the New Homiletic and imaginative language. David Lose’s work on confession also relates to ‘openness.’ See Confessing Jesus Christ and “Reaping the Whirlwind: Preaching after Modernity,” Paper presented to the Academy of Homiletics, Toronto, ON, 1998. www.homiletics.org. Lose argues that postmodernity contains the possibility of speechlessness. Christianity must speak aloud its confession of ‘truth,’ keeping in mind that “A confession, by nature is inherently fragile, open to suspicion, revision, and even conversion.” “Reaping the Whirlwind”, 10. John McClure locates a sense of freedom and openness in African American preaching, especially in the “celebration” that occurs in much of black preaching. See “From Resistance to Jubilee,” 2.

Rebecca Chopp pries open the very structure of language itself, in search for a theological transformation of that which orders life in terms of two opposing terms (i.e. man/woman). Criticizing and transforming the social-symbolic order makes room for otherness, specificity, difference and solidarity. Freedom requires that systems, including language, be transformed “with visions of new ways of being human.” “Words themselves are fixed neither by their essences or by their self-referentiality, but by their context, the cultural practices in which they are used, by the interest of the persons using them, and by one sign’s relation to other signs.” The Word as “perfectly open sign,” is set free from any fixed meaning. “The Word/God is the sign of all signs, connected, embodied, open, multivalent, all the things a sign can most perfectly be, but the Word/God is this in the perfection of all perfection and thus, in full openness, creativity and gracefulness creates, sustains and redeems all words in their ongoing process of signification.” Words are to be understood contextually, in relation to one another, “and always open to new signification and meaning.”

Chopp views proclamation as an “anticipatory freedom.” To proclaim the kingdom is to “realize its disruptiveness that calls into question secured identities, entrenched narratives, self-protected existential beings.” Proclamation, then, is a discourse of emancipatory freedom which criticizes and transforms “the established relations of sin, oppression, distortion and

155 Ibid, 7.
156 Ibid, 11.
158 Chopp relates the open history of the Trinity to the Word as perfectly open sign (33).
159 Ibid, 31-32.
161 Ibid, 59.
suffering.”

To proclaim is to declare that God is open, that language is open, that closed systems and totalities have been permanently disrupted.

Anna Carter Florence’s *Preaching as Testimony* contends that “preaching in the testimony tradition provides us with a historical, biblical, theological, and homiletical memory of women’s preaching.” Preaching as testimony “changes the subject” of preaching away from those who have occupied the central spaces of public preaching, such as the ministerial office, toward those who have “seen and believed the liberating power of God’s Word and who then risk proclaiming the truth of the gospel.” This shift locates authentic and authoritative preaching not in the ecclesial centre but “in particular situations of struggle and trial at the margins.” By refusing to privilege one set of experiences over another, testimonial preaching ‘opens’ preaching to the multitude of voices whose collective experience is the living God.

Calling on Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of testimony, Florence argues that testimony is the basis for Christian interpretation, “a distinctively Christian way of speaking and knowing.” A witness narrates an event, and it is only on the basis of that narration (testimony) that hearers can make a judgement about the truth of the event. If a preacher acts as a witness,

---

162 Ibid, 67.

163 Florence, xxvi.

164 God is the subject of preaching, but God chooses to be known in and through human experience.

165 Florence, xxvi. Florence also draws on the work of Rebecca Chopp, claiming that preachers are most authoritative when they are de-centred, speaking from the margins instead of approved centres of authority, such as ordained office. The Word as perfectly open sign denies the order of things as defined from the ‘centre’, and embodies perfect freedom found in Jesus Christ. (101)

166 Ibid, xxv.


168 Florence, 63.

169 Ibid, 62.
then preaching is not the proclamation of an absolute truth. There is no such thing as absolute truth, “there are only fleeting glimpses of the truth we see and confess in Jesus Christ, the truth that encounters us, in concrete human experiences, by the grace of God.”\textsuperscript{170} As testimony, a sermon makes a claim or confession rather than professing absolute certitude.\textsuperscript{171} Testimonial preaching allows others to interpret God’s action for themselves. It admits that others have encountered God in the world, that they have something to say about what they have seen, and that they have authority to tell the truth about what they have seen and what they believe about it.\textsuperscript{172} This testimony is always provisional, because words are not sufficient to describe such an encounter.\textsuperscript{173}

Florence draws on Walter Brueggemann’s \textit{Theology of the Old Testament}\textsuperscript{174} in which he argues that testimony is a profoundly biblical way of speaking and knowing.\textsuperscript{175} Israel’s core testimony is that God is good and powerful, but also that God is hidden, surprising and unpredictable. Faced with this “endlessly elusive” God, Israel can only tell what they have seen, heard and believed about God,\textsuperscript{176} a testimony that is partial and provisional. The biblical texts provide a countertestimony to Israel’s own core testimony.\textsuperscript{177} One’s testimony about God remains open to the countertestimony of others, and this story of God’s life with us is never

\textsuperscript{170}Ibid, 65.

\textsuperscript{171}Ibid, 65. This may be similar to what Rose calls a ‘wager’ or ‘proposal’.

\textsuperscript{172}This links to collaborative and conversational models which value the manner in which the ‘whole people of God’ have authority to name God’s action in the world.

\textsuperscript{173}Florence, 68.


\textsuperscript{175}Florence, 74.

\textsuperscript{176}Ibid, 70-71; Brueggemann, \textit{Theology of the Old Testament}, 311.

\textsuperscript{177}Israel makes a claim about God, but God acts in ways which call Israel’s claim into question, and Israel’s others also tell what they have seen and heard. This results in a kind of deconstruction of Israel’s testimony. Ibid, 72; Brueggemann, \textit{Theology of the Old Testament}, 331-32. Thus, Israel’s experience of God can be held open - acknowledging tensions, disjunctions and inconsistencies without having to be synthesized into a unified view. Florence, 75.
complete. This kind of testimonial proclamation re-orders everything by creating new relationships in and among the spaces between “words, Word, and life.”

Brueggemann, in *Cadences of Home*, writes about the necessity of “open” language for Christians who are in “exile.” Exile describes the current social situation in the West, especially “our loss of the white, male, Western, colonial hegemony,” a loss which Brueggemann perceives to be deeply disorienting. He envisions the biblical text as an alternative to the text of the enlightenment, a biblical script not about universal claims, but local and specific texts that nurture an alternative imagination. The preacher is tasked with proclaiming a multifaceted reality by inviting listeners to consider the multiple contexts of scripture and questioning the all-encompassing nature of one’s present context. Listeners are invited “to resee and redescribe” their own settings, which may in turn contribute to transformed actions. Thus the hearing of a *counterscript* invites me to a *countercontext* that over time may authorize and empower *counterlife.* Testimony is a local and particular claim that speaks to the openness of truth and the possibility that new truths may arise which contest dominant claims.

It is an utterance that is playful, open, teasing, inviting, and capable of voicing the kind of unsure tentativeness and ambiguity that exiles must always entertain, if they are to maintain freedom of imagination outside of the hegemony. Such utterances do not yield flat certitudes that can be everywhere counted upon. Rather they yield generative possibilities of something not known or available until this moment of utterance, so that new truth comes as a telling, compelling

---

178Ibid, 100.

179Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 16. This loss is related to the “discourse of loss” which I discussed in chapter one. See especially Brueggemann’s chapter entitled “Testimony as a Decentered Mode of Preaching.” See also *Finally Comes the Poet: During Speech for Proclamation.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), in which Brueggemann writes “poetic speech can break open new worlds (3).

180Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 31. In the post-Constantinian era, preaching had to speak certitudes that could undergird the claims of an empire - resulting in propositional preaching stemming from and aiming at certitude. The three point sermon is ‘profoundly hegemonic,’ in that “the problem is universal, the solution is clear and everywhere known, the new possibility is everywhere available.” (40)

181Ibid, 35-36.

182Ibid, 57.
surprise.¹⁸³

III. Evaluation of Other-oriented Homiletics from a Postcolonial Perspective

The proposals described above address questions of power, separation, difference, and totalities, concerns shared by a postcolonial homiletic. In addition to the trinitarian framework described in chapter three, a postcolonial homiletic will contribute an explicit emphasis on the realities of colonialism/imperialism, and the manner in which colonial discourse enters the preaching process. This section enters into dialogue with the proposals discussed above, asking about their implications for preaching in a postcolonial ethos, to postcolonial subjects, in light of postcolonial theory.

a. Balancing Power

Homileticians have addressed questions of domination and hierarchy - the relative power of preacher and listener, rich and poor, male and female, as well as the power of empire and social systems. Yet few have dwelt on the presence of empire and the inequality and violence produced by colonialism/imperialism, which are built on an assumption of inequality between colonizer and colonized. Postcolonial thinking challenges the philosophical, theological, and political structures which have permitted this inequality, while recognizing that encounters between those of greater and lesser power are fraught with ambiguity.¹⁸⁴ Preaching rooted in a postcolonial perspective will explicitly name colonialism/imperialism as a context for preaching and a source of power imbalance and violence, and practice “dangerous criticism” of empire,

¹⁸³Ibid., 57.

¹⁸⁴For preachers in the West, this ambiguity increases as Western churches find themselves increasingly marginalised within Western culture, while still possessing significant power relative to their global brothers and sisters.
tradition, and even the Church. When approached via the social doctrine of the Trinity, this represents the “public, theological naming of reality” advocated by Christine Smith.

Power complicates Canadian preaching at multiple levels. Some congregations or some members of congregations “benefit from the oppression of others and may actively or passively participate in maintaining systems of oppression.” There is a sense, however, in which ‘powerful’ Canadian Christians are also held captive by colonial discourse, or ‘principalities and powers,’ or oppressive systems. All are negatively affected by colonial discourse. In different ways, all are held captive by oppressive systems, and need to be liberated. Canadian Presbyterians are experiencing a collective loss of social power, the “discourse of loss” discussed in chapter one. The presence of power inequalities and multiple oppressions in the local and global ecclesial space requires coming to terms with one’s own relative power, between preacher and congregation; among congregants in a given church; between local and global churches and a desire to repent of “power over.” Confession as profound truth telling will lead to honest reflection both about the impact of colonial discourse in the past and in the present, as well as our conscious or unconscious participation.

---

185Brueggemann, Cadences of Home, 116. Luke Powery wonders whether postcolonial criticism may question the preacher’s authority by equating the preacher to colonist “in that [preachers] have the power to speak while others sit, listen and obey, without a voice.” “Postcolonial Criticism,” in Wilson, Handbook of Preaching, 160. I respond that there are times, past and present, when particular preachers have abused authority, or devalued the authority and experience of hearers. Postcolonial criticism provides an opportunity to reflect on authority, scouring texts for colonial influences, including the manner in which Jesus is represented by the gospel writers and other biblical authors. I would argue that if we do not expose colonial strands within the biblical texts, we are not adequately preaching the gospel.

186Smith, Preaching as Weeping, 2. It is important to ask how the identifying and ‘naming of reality’ may be a shared task rather than based only on the perception of the preacher.

187Allen, Preaching and the Other, 76.

188Campbell, The Word before the Powers, discusses the captivity of the powerful to the Domination System or ‘Powers.’ See also González, Liberation Preaching, 52.

189In the colonial context, the West has assumed not only that it has special access to truths about God, but also that God has ordained and blessed the hegemonic centre. Dominant Western theological interpretations have pushed aside any marginal interpretations. A necessary correction occurs when the margins are allowed to talk back to the centre - effectively de-centring the location of theological discourse.
Charles Campbell views preaching as a form of non-violent resistance. Brueggemann advocates “truthful speech” as a means of breaking the silence imposed upon victims by the Domination System. This resistance is crucial for a Church that is coming to terms with the reality of past and present manifestation of colonialism. Preaching as non-violent resistance and as a response to colonial discourse is a means of resistance that avoids the violence of anti-colonial sentiment advocated by critics such as Franz Fanon. The Word of God, as it is present in preaching, resists and defeats colonial discourse not by sword, but by a healing word that emerges in the space between postcolonial subjects.

Liberation theologies claim that God is located most fully at the margins and invite those at the centre to become students of those who dwell at the margins. In some ways, the Church today is already located at the margins. However, I perceive that despite the Church’s discourse of loss, most white, Canadian preachers are still closer to the centre of power than to the margins. A hermeneutic of suspicion regarding written texts, as well as conversation with others, will create the possibility of a multidirectional flow of power and knowledge in preaching. Canadian preachers can learn a great deal from listeners and other preachers who

---

190 Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*.


192 There is some tension between postcolonial and liberation theologies. Sugirtharajah argues that liberation theologies tend to homogenize ‘others,’ fails to recognize a variety of oppressions, and engages in dichotomous thinking. See *Postcolonial criticism and Biblical Interpretation*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002)

193 See Chapter 1.

have suffered a profound experience of colonialism/imperialism, or observed such suffering.\footnote{See Jiménez, “Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic.” He comments on the necessity for a postcolonial homiletic to arise within the Hispanic community, which can ‘denounce and unmask the colonial ideologies that undermined our people.’ He argues that the writings of Justo González are foundational for an Hispanic postcolonial homiletic (167).}

The liberation preaching of Justo and Catherine González is significant for exploring the manner in which preaching can assist the ‘powerful’ to participate in the liberation of the oppressed.

b. Embracing Community

Homiletic perspectives that place particular emphasis on community and mutuality recognize that our lives are enriched by plurality and diversity. We have need of others, human and divine. Our stories are completed by God’s story, and the stories of others. Colonial discourse separates individuals and communities, under-representing the degree to which colonized and colonizer are dependent on one another for their identity.

A postcolonial perspective will caution that conversations should be approached in full awareness of power differentials. Although descriptions such as ‘multi-vocal’ or ‘pluriphonic’ are frequently used to describe models of conversation which include others, “it should be pointed out that in our postcolonial world, all the voices are not equal and some cultures dominate center stage, with the power to push the rest to the periphery.”\footnote{Kwok Pui-lan, Postcolonial Imagination, 42. For example, North American congregations may consist of immigrants with a national experience of colonialism, as well as individuals or groups which belong to formerly colonizing nations. The rhetoric of colonialism aims to convince the colonized persons of their inferiority, and the superiority of the colonizers. This sense of inferiority may be internalized, which creates a power imbalance at the ‘roundtable.’ Allen, Thinking Theologically, 75.} Justo González notes that a growing number of people are coming to reject the self-image imposed on them by colonizers. The colonized, who have believed what they have been told about themselves by their oppressors, are now wanting to define themselves. This process has led to the demise of international colonial empires and continues among those who have been colonized.\footnote{González, Liberation Preaching, 12.} Our conversations with others near or far will be affected by history, and by present
misunderstandings, stereotypes and half-truths. Others might perceive us as implicated in their oppression as collaborators of colonial power because of our skin colour or ethnicity. We may harbour suspicions or stereotypes about others. On all sides, then, there are barriers that might prevent or problematize our willingness to enter conversation.

While Lucy Rose advocates the participation of preachers in a web of conversations, she does not describe how these conversations come to life in the sermon itself. Preachers have occasion to speak on behalf of others. Is it possible for preachers to accurately represent others? In what manner can we talk about the experiences and identities of others? From a postcolonial perspective, preachers must consider carefully the manner in which we represent, describe, or characterize the identity and perspectives of others. We can only speak on behalf of others if we are already in conversation with them, which involves learning from and listening to others.  

Yet what we know, or think we know about others may be affected by a sense of cultural superiority. It is necessary, then to advocate a posture of humility and self-awareness as we approach such conversations with others in the local congregation, or global ecclesial arena.

Collaborative homiletic proposals do not adequately explain how we might conduct conversations with those who are geographically distant. However, there are many possibilities for local preaching to be enriched by global conversation. Social networking that is accessible in most corners of globe, a plethora of literary and artistic offerings, and increasing travel make it possible to encounter others, literally and figuratively, in ways that will enhance mutual understanding, and contribute to the preacher’s ability to speak about the needs and perspectives of others. Cultivating a lively imagination will facilitate encounters across borders and boundaries.

---

198 See Rose, 111.

199 For example, González and González, recognize the importance of relationships in the Church catholic, but do not provide a guideline for how such conversations might occur. Another danger is that cross-cultural conversations will only occur within the academy, and seldom filter into pastoral settings.
c. Liberating Difference

In acknowledging and reflecting upon the diversity of the local and global Church, sermons challenge notions of universal human experience and common ecclesial experience, recognizing that others may not share our interpretations of God. Colonial discourse measures other cultures according to the values and perspectives of colonizers. Preachers are invited to name their own context - personally, theologically, economically, ecclesially - and consider how that context shapes their assumptions, values, interpretation of scripture, and interpretations of God’s action in the world. Christine Smith argues “all preachers should be able to not only describe their social location, but also articulate significant ways in which their social location influences their biblical hermeneutics, their theological thinking, their pastoral sensitivities, and their homiletical methodologies.” She perceives that preachers from marginalised ethnic or cultural communities are usually better able to articulate social location than Canadians or Americans of European descent, who experience privileges because of their class and ethnicity. For this group, it is an act of justice to name and articulate one’s social location, and “to take responsibility for the limited, prejudicial, and often oppressive dimensions of one’s human identity in relation to the rest of humanity.”

While some homileticians have addressed the diversity of the listening process, they have not recognized the variety of colonial experiences within a particular listening community. Preachers may need to exegete the listening community in order to gain an understanding of how

---

200I have borrowed the subtitle Liberating Difference from Letty Russell. See Just Hospitality, chapter 3.

201Christine M. Smith, Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives. (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1998), 2. She edits a volume in which authors-preachers contribute perspectives on justice from a variety of social locations. Smith believes that Euro-American voices dominate the field of homiletics, and argues that radical change is needed if “one cultural perspective completely dominates an entire theological field” (1).

202Ibid, 3.

203Jeter and Allen; Nieman and Rogers. See also Kim, Age of Globalization, 87.
different individuals and groups have been affected by the colonial process. An understanding of the cultures within and beyond particular and local congregations will enable preachers to reflect the reality that globalization has radically altered the meaning of ‘local.’ “It is not realistic to assume that the congregational culture is static or limited to its locality.” Tisdale’s approach assumes that “each congregation is a unique subculture, is an integrated unified whole comprised of various elements represented by verbal and nonverbal signs and symbols.” Culture, however, has been reinterpreted in the postmodern context, according to what Kathryn Tanner calls “a postmodern stress on interactive process and negotiation, indeterminancy, fragmentation, conflict and porosity.” The spaces within and between cultures are filled with tensions and ambiguities, a reality at least partially addressed by postcolonial terms such as hybridity and Third Space, and by the notion of God’s self-limitation in Moltmann’s social doctrine.

d. Opening to the Other

Testimonial proposals invite preachers to leave room not only for the voice of others, but also for God’s unknown future. God has the freedom to do a ‘new thing’ beyond our imagining. A refusal to privilege Western experience over other voices is consonant with these models which stress the agency of others, and the eschatological agency of God. Our representations of the needs, experiences and identities of others are not definitive or complete but are open to correction and contradiction. The ambiguity of language is not limiting but enabling within the horizon of God’s unknown future.

---

204 See Tisdale, Preaching as Local Theology.
205 Kim, Age of Globalization, 9.
206 Ibid, 7.
207 Kathryn Tanner, Theories of Culture: Guides to Theological Inquiry. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 42. It may be simplistic to expect a preacher to navigate these complexities in the role of ethnographer - this role implies that the preacher has a superior perspective. Tanner notes this superior perspective was central to modern practices of anthropology and “one of its major goals was to aid the administration of colonized people as manageable wholes” (43), discussed in Kim, Age of Globalization, 7.
The preacher’s witness or testimony can break the silence about oppression and injustice, contradicting the myth that one group contains and controls the “whole truth.” Colonial powers insert their own story into the story of others: “Anglo-European colonialism defined, changed, and re-defined the cultural identity of colonized people.”

As discussed above, preachers should be cautious about how we name and represent others. There are limits to our ability to fully know others, let alone speak for others, and it is possible to leave a space within the preaching task for others to challenge the constructions of the centre, and define themselves. Practical considerations mean that in our sermons, ‘subalterns’ can rarely speak for themselves in a literal way. However, the sermon can be open to countertestimonies which supplement or challenge the always partial truths of the preacher. Even if these countertestimonies are not spoken aloud, the preacher can acknowledge their existence. As Brueggemann states, “countertestimony can break the silence of oppression which is enforced by the establishment, and contest dominant ‘truths’ through an appeal to openness and hope.”

IV. Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic: Possibilities and Limitations

The past four decades have resulted in numerous constructive proposals for egalitarian, communal, diverse and dynamic preaching. This trajectory of other-oriented preaching sets the stage for a postcolonial homiletic. To date, homiletics has not dealt with colonialism/imperialism in a significant or sustained manner. I have proposed that it is possible to bring two very different, yet compatible perspectives together to inform the practice of

---


210For this and other insights, I am indebted to a presentation by Walter Brueggemann the Homiletics and Biblical Studies panel discussion on “Testimony and the Personal” at the Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, Atlanta, GA. (November 2010). Unpublished paper entitled “The Risk of Testimony.”
preaching in Canada’s postcolonial context. Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity, and postcolonial critical perspectives each contribute to the postcolonial homiletic described in the next chapter. Each has limitations. While Moltmann’s theology demonstrates a hopeful vision for the transformation of ecclesial community in the present and in the future, it lacks adequate attention to the concrete political and material realities of life in the postcolony. Moltmann does not specifically address issues related to colonial/imperial reality, and his theology is a Eurocentric theology produced from the perspective of one who occupies a position of power. Postcolonial theory, on the other hand, attends to both political and material realities. Although postcolonial biblical scholars and some theologians have begun to address the manner in which postcolonial perspectives can reshape our interpretation of God and God’s word, it does not provide enough of a theological foundation for preaching which is, after all, a theological task. It is a political theory, and thus multi-faceted, with little agreement even about the definition of its key terms. Last but not least, both Moltmann and postcolonial theory tend to employ dense language that may require translation in order to be immediately useful to busy preachers.

Conclusion

Together, Moltmann’s social doctrine and postcolonial theory are able to project a fascinating image of Perichoretic Space - a space which is imperfect and ambiguous, yet open to the action of God, and to the potential of the human community created in *imago trinitatis*. Neither is an antidote for the sins of colonialism/imperialism, but in combination, social trinitarian theology and postcolonial criticism can offer an effective critical stance for homiletics. While I contend that human beings have a certain freedom to treat others with love and respect, anything we do to address colonialism/imperialism is possible only because of the Trinity’s prior grace and divine self-giving, and its desire to embrace us and lead us into deeper communion with one another.
Sealed to the Triune God, and informed by postcolonial perspectives, the sermon is a space in which relationships may be torn from their colonial anchors; where diversity and openness are joyful rather than threatening, a space in which we might lose ourselves, only to find one another in the perichoretic unity of Trinity. It is in this space that a postcolonial homiletic will emerge.
Chapter Five: A Postcolonial Homiletic

Introduction

I have argued that postcolonial theory, Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity, and other-oriented homiletic proposals implicitly or explicitly critique social systems which suppress, oppress, ignore or erase the other. A postcolonial homiletic continues the trajectory of other-oriented preaching in its critique of social systems and discourses of power, particularly recognizing that preaching today takes place in a context that has been partially constructed by colonialism/imperialism. Sermonic discourse participates in the construction of local and global ecclesial discourse. A homiletic critique of colonial discourse arises in part from postcolonial theory, but also from the Church’s location at the centre of the Trinity. A postcolonial homiletic proclaims the good news of the Triune God and urges the Church to wait in hope for God’s future action.

This chapter develops a postcolonial homiletic relevant for the practice of preaching in a postcolonial context, specifically the context of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.¹ Building on the spatial metaphor developed in chapter three, and interacting with other-oriented homiletic perspectives, this chapter asks ‘What does it mean to preach in the Perichoretic Space?’² I have envisioned the Perichoretic Space in the centre of the Trinity, the space in which the Church dwells. As we encounter others in the Perichoretic Space, Third Spaces open up between us in

¹I assume that the teaching of preaching influences the practice. Where appropriate, I comment on the implications of a postcolonial homiletic for seminaries and theological colleges.

²Jeter and Allen discuss “perichoretic preaching,” in their book One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching for Different Listeners in the Congregation. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2002), 121-24. They suggest that such preaching involves a variety of different perspectives in sermons. While not inconsistent with their understanding, my metaphor Perichoretic Space is distinctly trinitarian and postcolonial, and attempts to incorporate a broader array of preaching options.
which identity is negotiated and God works to heal and transform. Thus Third Spaces are embedded in the Perichoretic Space. They represent moments of encounter with human and divine others. In the Perichoretic Space, preachers cultivate a postcolonial imagination in themselves and in their listeners. As noted in chapter one, a postcolonial imagination desires disengagement from the colonial syndrome and seeks to imagine a new way of interpreting the past and the present. The perichoretic and kenotic love of the Triune God enables the ecclesial community to disengage from the colonial syndrome and adopt a particular orientation to others, thus potentially transforming human relationships in the temporal and eschatological realm. Preaching is an important aspect of the continual process of decolonizing ecclesial space and discourse which is advocated by postcolonial theory, and made possible because of the transforming action of the Trinity. The Social Trinity invites preachers and listeners to participate in healing the Body of Christ that has been torn and bruised by the violence of colonialism/imperialism.

This chapter begins by situating the preaching event in the Perichoretic Space, where it responds to the action and discourse of the Triune God. The ecclesial community is located in the Perichoretic Space, thus preaching does not invite listeners to *enter* the Perichoretic Space, but to *recognize* or *remember* the Church’s trinitarian context, to inhabit it more consciously, and to learn again to speak the discourse that is the Church’s authentic language. When we encounter ecclesial others in the Perichoretic Space, there emerges a Third Space between us. Preaching proclaims the good news that we who are already dwelling in the Perichoretic Space have been invited by the Trinity to enter into Third Space encounters. Indeed, the sermon itself can function as a Third Space in which ecclesial relationships damaged by colonial discourse are continually recreated by the perichoretic, kenotic love of the Trinity. While Third Spaces are vulnerable to the destructive tendencies of colonial discourse, they are also spaces in which the discourse of the Social Trinity acts to reorient colonial discourse toward freedom, self-giving,
self-differentiation and openness. In a postcolonial context, preaching that faithfully attends to social trinitarian and postcolonial discourse entails sustained reflection on subjects such as human and divine power dynamics; knowledge and representation; tension, risk, weeping and confession; re-creation, reconciliation and hope.

Secondly, this chapter identifies possibilities for homiletic Third Space encounters, arguing that postcolonial hermeneutics, creative conversation, and testimonial preaching are concrete practices of the postcolonial imagination for sermon preparation, delivery, and reflection in the PCC and other denominations. Through these practices, and under the guidance of the presence of God-in-Trinity, preachers and listeners may come to a fuller understanding of self and others, which can result in a transformed praxis. Sermon excerpts demonstrate the application of these practices.

In the PCC, preaching occurs in a worship space inhabited by a variety of postcolonial subjects. These ‘subjects’ participate in the missio dei, and are sent into the world to engage with local and global others who inhabit various postcolonial spaces. This chapter specifically concerns preaching that either addresses a PCC congregation composed of a variety of postcolonial subjects, and/or relates to partnerships among PCC churches and Tricontinental churches. A postcolonial homiletic is relevant for individual sermons and for preaching which nurtures congregational identity over time. While sermons addressing topics such as global mission, aid, development, racial diversity will benefit from a postcolonial perspective, all preaching, regardless of subject matter or text, will be strengthened by social trinitarian discourse and a postcolonial imagination.

---

I. Preaching in the Perichoretic Space

a. Preaching as an invitation to Perichoretic Space

Perichoretic Space is a metaphor that envisions the space surrounded by the Persons of the Trinity as the context in which the Church is located and ecclesial relationships are nurtured. Ecclesial community exists only because of the outpouring of God’s love toward creation. It is a temporal and fallible community constructed not only by trinitarian discourse, but by the particular historical discourses in which it has developed and continues to dwell. It is a global Church, linked to others across time and space.

Preachers exist in this Perichoretic Space, and address particular communities of listeners also dwelling in the Perichoretic Space. The first task of a postcolonial homiletic involves an act of theological imagination. It calls on preachers to develop an awareness of their own location in the Perichoretic Space, their trinitarian identity, and the potentially transforming power of the Social Trinity’s discourse. As preachers learn to discern and respond to the discourse of the Social Trinity, they are gifted with an enlarged and profoundly other-oriented vision of the Church. Having experienced for themselves the transforming power of trinitarian discourse, preachers invite listeners into deeper awareness of their collective location in the Perichoretic Space, and their identity in *imago trinitatis*.

The manner in which preachers represent the relationships among the Persons of the Trinity, as well as the orientation of the Trinity to the created order, will contribute to the listener’s perception of self and others. Moltmann’s social doctrine of the Trinity differs from traditional theologies, and thus preaching in the Perichoretic Space may involve introducing, or at least reinforcing, a social trinitarian image of God and God’s power.\(^4\) Sally A. Brown lists

\(^4\)Michael Pasquarello has developed a trinitarian theology of proclamation. Pasquarello argues that “Christian preaching is unapologetically doxological in proclaiming the glory of the Triune God, the divine mystery who is the source, means, and goal of all our feeble attempts to bring Christ to speech.” *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 37. He does not reference Moltmann’s social doctrine. See also Lucy Hogan, *Graceful Speech: An Invitation to Preaching*, (Louisville, KY:}
some of the reasons that preachers avoid preaching about the Trinity. For example, the language of the Trinity can be awkward, it is challenging to preach doctrine, and some preachers find it difficult to identify the relevance of Trinity for congregational life. As I have argued, the social doctrine of the Trinity is profoundly relevant for ecclesial life. However, it is a complex doctrine that relies on masculine terminology. Preachers will need to reflect carefully upon the images and names for God that are found in scripture, as well as the manner in which they represent God in sermons. For example, a social trinitarian theology problematises the language of Lordship and Kingship. Despite these challenges, it remains essential for preachers to speak of Trinity, “stammering if they must, but refusing to be silent about the God who is being-in-communion, power-in-mutuality, unity-through-difference.” The following sermon excerpt addresses the significance of the Social Trinity for congregational life.

Some might wonder whether it actually matters very much at all. Does the Trinity really matter for someone suffering from cancer, or wading through infertility, or grieving the too-soon death of a loved one? Why should we spend time talking about an abstract concept that seems so distant from the challenges of daily life? We might be tempted to dismiss this mysterious reality of God as three-in-one and one-in-three as mathematical nonsense or unnecessarily complex theological baggage. But I want to say that the Trinity does actually matter in our daily lives. It is not simply a concept to be learned or a term to be understood.

---


Sally A. Brown, “Speaking Again of the Trinity,” Theology Today, 64 (2007), 145-148 (146). She also notes that “any preacher prepared to speak again of the Trinity in preaching must come to terms with the problem of language.” (154).

Brown, 155.
It is much more than a word or a doctrine. The Trinity defines our very existence as Christians. It is a distinctive and unique reality that sets Christianity apart from any other faith, and defines for us who God is, and who we are. We are baptized and blessed in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is the gospel in a nutshell, it is the way that God comes to us - As a parent, who creates, A son who redeems us, A spirit that sustains us.

God exists as a community of persons, living within and around one another, pouring out themselves for one another, Love overflows from one aspect of God to another, and then it overflows the bounds of even that divine relationship and it soaks us with profound and refreshing love. This fountain of love is an inexhaustible stream, never diminished, never drying up. It is constant and trustworthy. It cannot be quenched, even by death itself. It is the most powerful relationship in the world. and it shapes us into a community that mirrors the awesome self-giving love of God-in-Trinity. Real life, good life, is found in the holy community, in the space between Creator, Son and Holy Spirit. To follow Christ involves a commitment to live within that holy space, To accept an incredible invitation to live within the circle of God’s love. Here, in this congregation, we practice. In this church, we practice living in Trinity. We practice self-giving generous love.
This is the great dress rehearsal.
What we do here, in this building,
is a practice run for everything that we do outside of this building.
God has invited us to be a unique kind of community,
sent the Holy Spirit to keep us from stumbling,
to bind us together,
to draw us back into the circle when we have stepped outside.
We will live into this trinitarian invitation
when we listen intently for the Spirit’s prompting.
When we love one another more than we love ourselves,
when we seek the good of the whole community,
even when it costs us our lives.\(^7\)

In chapter three, I argued that the discourse of the Social Trinity deconstructs colonial discourse. Preachers can draw upon this deconstruction in order to mirror the reorientation of colonial discourse toward freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness.\(^8\) If the discourse of the Social Trinity is normative, then colonial discourse is derivative. “If the image of God is the ultimate reference point for the values of a community, then the structure of the Triune symbol stands as a profound critique, however little noticed, of [patriarchal] domination in Church and society.”\(^9\) In the Perichoretic Space, preachers search their own sermons, culture, experience and ecclesial relationships for colonial discourse. A postcolonial homiletic “asks preachers to honestly critique their traditions, naming ways Christianity and Judaism have participated in the oppression of some of their own people, and to honestly state what must be

\(^7\)Sarah A. N. Travis. “Mathematical Nonsense,” Trafalgar Presbyterian Church, Oakville ON, Trinity Sunday, 2011.

\(^8\)Allen, Preaching and the Other addresses the usefulness of deconstruction for preaching, arguing that the preacher walks a delicate line between helping a congregation identify a reliable Christian world view, and recognizing that some aspects of a Christian world view can be deconstructed. (71).

resisted and changed about the traditions to make them more just.”

Within the fellowship of the local and global Church, as well as in their own ministries, preachers may uncover evidence of power imbalance, inequality, domination, the devaluation of otherness, as well as those ways in which Christians close their minds and hearts to hope and possibility for change. Preaching in the Perichoretic Space names colonialism/imperialism in both past and present; exposes colonial discourse in the Church and beyond; and proclaims the manner in which the Triune God deconstructs and reorients colonial discourse. In the Perichoretic Space, preachers are free to critique empires and colonial discourses, all of which are revealed to be illusory in the face of the Triune God. A sermon given by Desmond Tutu illustrates how the preacher’s theological vision works to deconstruct colonial discourse as it is located in the apartheid system. He contrasts apartheid with the biblical priority of reconciliation:

Do I still need to demonstrate that apartheid is evil after all that I have said about the centrality for the Bible of unity and reconciliation? ...The Bible declares right at the beginning that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. I showed why this fact endows each person with a unique and infinite value, a person whose very hairs are numbered. And what makes any human being valuable therefore is not any biological characteristic. No, it is the fact that he or she is created in the image and likeness of God. Apartheid exalts a biological quality, which is a total irrelevancy, to the status of what determines the value, worth, of a human being. Secondly, the chief work that Jesus came to perform on earth can be summed up by the word “Reconciliation.” He came to restore human community and brotherhood which sin destroyed. He came to say that God has intended us for fellowship, for koinonia, for togetherness, without destroying our distinctiveness, our cultural otherness. Apartheid quite deliberately denies and repudiates this central act of Jesus and says we are made for separateness, for disunity, for enmity, for alienation, which we have shown to be the fruits of sin.

Tutu explicitly names apartheid as contrary to God’s purpose for humanity. Preachers may point to the nature of God-in-Trinity in order to demonstrate how colonialism/imperialism is contrary
to a Christian theological vision. In the PCC, for example, a particular sermon might name the ongoing effects of cultural imperialism upon First Nations peoples, or the continuing presence of racism in the Church and society. The willingness of PCC congregations to tolerate or even participate in these realities can be contrasted with the Church’s invitation to participate in God’s life-in-Trinity.

To locate ourselves in this space of hope is to live out an alternative to empire. One of the tasks of postcolonial preaching is to announce the trinitarian alternative to colonial reality, both as a possibility in the present and a hope for the future. Trinitarian fellowship is a viable alternative for ecclesial life at both the local level and the global. Listeners are invited to reject discourses of power and consciously adopt the discourse of trinitarian love. The possibility of such an alternative is profoundly good news for those whose lives have been limited by colonialism/imperialism. Through the centripetal pull of the Social Trinity that continually draws creation toward itself, Christians of all times and places are placed in proximity to one another in the Perichoretic Space. Such proximity creates connection between and among Christians, and deconstructs boundaries constructed by colonial discourse. Sermons are able to affirm this connectedness as well as naming the particular ways in which we are called to mutual care and responsibility. Sermons may also deconstruct boundaries that colonial discourse has constructed between self and other. In proclaiming the possibility of Third Space encounters, which permit hybridity and mixedness while preserving difference, preachers counter the claim of colonial discourse that we are forever separated from others by virtue of race, class, gender, or wealth.\(^{12}\)

In speaking about congregational responses to lawsuits related to Residential Schools, Marilyn Legge suggests “White congregations often resist or reject the idea that healing and

\(^{12}\text{My sermon below entitled “The Space Between Us” attempts to deconstruct traditional views of boundary maintenance, and encourages listeners to risk encounters with others while acknowledging the challenges of doing so.} \)
justice include them too, or do not feel morally obligated or otherwise moved to participate in seeking right relations and a shared future.¹³ Some may argue that they cannot be held responsible for violent acts of colonialism in the past, and thus bear no responsibility for participating in healing or reconciliation. Others may simply be unaware of the negative impact of colonialism/imperialism on others, local and global, past and present. By pointing to the presence of others in the same space of Trinity, preachers affirm our interconnectedness and responsibility toward others, and the communal need for responsibility and reconciliation.

The sermon, located in the Perichoretic Space, is a site of contact not only among human persons and divine Persons, but among a variety of human participants - preacher, listeners, and others not physically present, yet occupying the same space of Trinity. In this sense, the sermon itself is a Third Space, a space arising in-between preacher and listener, listener and listener, listener and other, distant Christians. Paul S. Wilson’s understanding of imagination is instructive here: imagination entails “the bringing together of two ideas that might not otherwise be connected and developing the creative energy they generate.”¹⁴ The Third Space is a space of creative energy, brought about when we are brought together with others in the Perichoretic Space. Third Spaces, are multifaceted and complex, and prone to ambiguity. They are formed not by the tensive energy of two ‘poles,’ but by the energy created when two or more multifarious groups, cultures or individuals encounter one another in the presence of the divine.

The presence of the Trinity, around and within Third Spaces, leads not only to creative energy, but also to the possibility of creative redemption. I perceive the sermon to be a Third Space in which meaning is made and ecclesial discourse is altered. Preachers point to the presence of both human and divine others in the Perichoretic Space, facilitate encounters through the practices of the postcolonial imagination described below, encourage listeners to


engage in Third Space encounters, and celebrate the hope of transformed discourse. Through
the continual recreating action of the Trinity in this space, Christians are called and enabled to
engage in acts of hospitality and generosity - making space within themselves to receive others,
and pouring out love and mercy upon others. Third Spaces, however, are ambiguous. As points
of contact among human persons, they are vulnerable to discourses of power - thus it is
necessary to consider issues related to knowledge, power and representation.

b. Knowledge, power and representation

While located at the centre of God’s life-in-Trinity, Perichoretic Space and
corresponding Third Spaces are human spaces filled with particular discourses of power. Even
as the Trinity orients us toward others and inspires us to self-giving and other-receiving love, the
ecclesial community will require assistance in understanding, representing, and responding to
others. Preachers can provide this assistance. In order to respond adequately to discourses of
power, preachers should develop an understanding of their own social location, the social
location(s) of their hearers, and the location of others within the global Church.\textsuperscript{15} One of the
purposes of this is to come to an understanding of how empire is experienced by global partners,
but also by those in the pews.

A preacher’s awareness of social location will include an awareness of his or her relative
power, and how power is affected by geographical location, age, race, gender, and education,
among other factors. Preachers bear authority in relation to listeners, and this authority is
increased or decreased according to the relative status of preacher and listener. PCC preachers
carry less social authority than in the past, yet they are still relatively powerful when compared
to some other Canadians. In terms of wealth and global power status, preachers in Canada are

\textsuperscript{15}These locations/positions are not static, but “multiple, and with varying degrees of mobility.” Alcoff,
“The Problem of Speaking for Others,” http://www.alcoff.com/content/speaothers.html. The self is constituted by
“multiple intersecting discourses.”
more powerful than their Tricontinental counterparts. A preacher’s grasp of his or her own relative power and authority will have an impact on the manner in which he or she is able to respond to others, and represent others in sermons. In terms of coming to understand listeners’ social location(s), preachers can examine congregational and denominational life for power inequalities, and the manner in which these power inequalities are displayed in daily reality. Power structures are layered and complex, and complicated by the multiple oppressions experienced by many. In fact, one could argue that all are oppressed by power structures. In any given congregation, there may be recent immigrants who belonged to churches in their native lands that were ‘planted’ by PCC or other Canadian missionaries. What assumptions and perspective do they bring to their experience in the pews? What are the power imbalances that exist within the global Church, for example, between the PCC and its global partners? What assumptions do white Canadians of European descent bring to the process? How listeners of different cultural or racial background perceive one another?

Understanding the location of others within and beyond the congregation will be facilitated by postcolonial hermeneutics and creative conversation as discussed below. As preachers seek to know others, however, such knowledge should be carefully derived. Our knowledge of others is always partial and incomplete, and must be informed by the manner in which others, near and far, construct and represent their own identities. In the Perichoretic Space, knowledge about others is negotiated and multidirectional.

Even as preachers take care to gain adequate and accurate knowledge about others, there remains the problem of representing others in sermons. As preachers always speak to a reality greater than themselves, they cannot avoid speaking for, or about others. Mary Louise Pratt, in her book *Imperial Eyes*, reflects on the practice of travel writing in the eighteenth century, and how books by Europeans about non-Europeans constructed subjects in the minds of a reader.\(^{16}\)

Preachers also create and produce others in the minds of their listeners, although in a different manner than eighteenth century travel writers. The proliferation of media means that listeners and preachers come to the worship space with preconceived notions about others, from news reports, movies, and other sources. Thus, the preacher ‘produces’ subjects not as the sole authority, but in conjunction with a variety of other sources. The preacher may confirm, dispute, or create an alternative subject in the minds of listeners. In my own experience of preaching about Bhil Christians in India, I realized I was unintentionally perpetuating a stereotype of poor, helpless, uneducated persons entirely dependent on the guidance and benevolence of the PCC and other Canadian churches. I was ‘creating’ these subjects in the mind of my listeners, and inadvertently constructing the PCC as central, and the India Christians as peripheral. The dissonance between my representation, and the reality I encountered in India led me to reconsider the words I chose to speak about my Indian friends. A postcolonial homiletic seeks to honour the reality of others, and problematise the process by which we ‘create subjects’ by paying attention to social location of self and others, by listening to the voices of others, and the way others contradict our perceptions and representations. In speaking about or for others, we do so according to our own perspectives and biases. Alcoff argues: “I am engaging in the act of representing the other’s needs, goals, situation, and in fact, who they are, based on my own situated interpretation.” Preachers cannot escape the problem of representing others. Yet we can strive to be as accurate as possible, and be clear that we speak out of our own biases and limited knowledge. We cannot every really know others, even in the Perichoretic Space. The other remains somewhat a mystery, and it is important to honour that mystery. Rather than trying to tame or demystify otherness, we can leave room for the mysterious presence of human and divine others.

---

17 Alcoff, 4.
c. Tension, risk, weeping and confession

Encounters in the Perichoretic Space occur in the midst of trinitarian embrace. The Perichoretic Space and corresponding Third Spaces belong to God-in-Trinity, and all are welcome regardless of history or experience. Human beings, however, remain broken and tempted by destructive discourse. Thus, the Perichoretic Space is not an entirely safe space. Even at the invitation of the Holy Spirit, some may be reluctant to enter into the same space as others. Encountering others can be threatening and dangerous, especially when those who have experienced the violence and oppression of colonial discourse come face to face with others who are associated with colonial power, or for those who feel guilt or dissonance about their involvement or lack of involvement in colonial processes.18

The self-expression of others which they choose to communicate may not be ‘authentic.’ It may be coloured by mistrust, mimicry, and self-protection. Those who have been particularly victimized by colonial discourse may be reluctant to reveal too much to those whom they perceive to be more powerful, even oppressive. In Kathryn Stockett’s novel, “The Help,” a young white woman, “Miss Skeeter,” wants to interview black maids in 1960's Jackson Mississippi in order to show “the point of view of the help.”19 This was an unusual, perhaps unthinkable idea in a time and place where racial segregation and discrimination against blacks was normative. Miss Skeeter’s New York editor decides the project won’t work, asking “what maid in her right mind would ever tell you the truth?”20 In that instance, it was dangerous for the maids to tell the truth about their white employers. In a sense, telling the truth about ourselves gives power to others, something we may wish to avoid in order to retain power. In The Help, the maids overcome their fear, and truth-telling leads to a redemptive experience for the main

18This is especially problematic when relatively powerful Euro-American preachers are inviting others to enter this space. Whether or not to enter the Third Space must be a free choice.


20Ibid, 106.
In the Perichoretic Space, an abundance of difference may contribute to anxiety and insecurity. There may be anger and accusations. As we encounter others in this space, or at the roundtable or on the street, we may hear things about ourselves which may surprise us, or even things we do not wish to know. In such situations, if ‘truth’ arises in the space between us, it does so because the Spirit interprets and translates across boundaries and differences. While we may perceive danger in this space, it is a space surrounded and infused by the transforming and creative love of the Triune God, and thus a space that it is possible to utter truths, name fears, and re-imagine tension as an opportunity for creativity.

This is a space for weeping. In proximity to one another, we see and hear the suffering of others. We weep for the manner in which a desire for power and control has led to violence and oppression. The sermon itself becomes a Third Space in which we not only learn about the suffering of others, but may come to experience it for ourselves in a deep and passionate way.\(^{21}\) This experience may be uncomfortable for both preacher and listeners. Yet as we suffer with and for others, we mirror the kenotic love of God-in-Trinity.

This is a space for confession. Smith observes: “In the act of preaching we strive to speak the truth about life in the perpetual hope and abiding belief that such truth, as devastatingly ugly and as frighteningly beautiful as it is, is precisely what we bring to be offered, confessed and transformed by God in the sacred act of preaching.”\(^{22}\) This truth, however, “always occurs in relation to God’s revelation of the truth and our baptismal identity, because who we are in Jesus Christ is as much the truth about us as our complicity in the sin of the

\(^{21}\)Christine Smith argues that in order to weep passionately, we must experience pain for ourselves. *Preaching as Weeping*, 163. See also Justo González’s claim that sincere, white male preachers must experience the pain and struggle of the hermeneutic circle. *Liberation Preaching*, 193.

\(^{22}\)Smith, *Preaching as Weeping*, 5.
Confession is an antidote to silent complicity: “Remaining silent in the face of our acknowledged complicity is not an option for a Church such as ours who professes Jesus Christ as Lord of our time and our history.” There are times when this will mean that preachers “confess that Christianity is deeply implicated in the violence of the world,” and name out loud the complicity of the Church in the imperial process. This may be a risky business, especially for Canadians who benefit from imperial relationships, including global markets. In confessing, preachers speak on behalf of the gathered community, for both oppressors, victims and observers, and facilitate a process of contemplating apology and restitution. A sermon prepared by Rev. James Scott, a minister of the United Church of Canada on the twentieth anniversary of that denomination’s apology to Native Peoples, names the difficulty of apologizing and seeking to repair harm that has been done.

Real apologies that are sincere and authentic are difficult to give because they accept responsibility and carry a commitment not to continue to harm. So it was an important thing that our church did 20 years ago, to admit that, "We did not hear you... We imposed our civilization... We tried to make you be like us... We helped destroy the vision that made you what you were."

That's tough to face and tough to admit. In the 1986 Apology, our church went to those who had something against us and admitted our wrong. It was a good start, but as the Elders knew, an apology is only the beginning. It is not reconciliation. The hard work of reconciling lies in the living out of the apology.

This sermon exemplifies the manner in which preachers can ‘name out loud’ the sins of a particular community, while acknowledging that confession and apology are only step along the road to reconciliation. This particular sermon does not focus on the Trinity, yet it is the Trinity that enables the community to desire to confess and apologize for wrongs committed. While the

---


25 Lischer, 146.

preacher and gathered community speak words of contrition, it is the work of the Trinity that is able to reconcile those who have been separated by colonial discourse, and bring about healing.

d. Trinitarian Embrace: re-creation, reconciliation and hope

While acknowledging the ways in which humans have ignored, oppressed or destroyed others throughout human history, preaching in the Perichoretic Space affirms that God has another purpose for humanity. The hope - the certainty - that God will ultimately work all things for good is a hope which can reshape the distorted communities of the present age. God-in-Trinity continually pursues and embraces us, an embrace that anticipates what is to come. “In the eschatological notion of God’s new order are images of an indeterminate future that can correct the blindness of our determinate perspectives.”27 This hope affirms, along with postcolonial theology, that ‘such a post is possible.’28

Richard Lischer writes about the “reconciling imperative” of preaching.29 God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19). Lischer states: “what God has done, on both a macro- and microcosmic scale, is reconciliation.”30 In Bonhoeffer’s words, “we are separated from one another by an unbridgeable gulf of otherness and strangeness which resists all our attempts to overcome it by means of natural association or emotional or spiritual union. There is no way from one person to another.”31 Yet preachers proclaim our reconciliation to the

---


28Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner and Mayra Rivera, eds., *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), xi.

29Lischer, 132.

30ibid, 132.

Triune God through Jesus Christ. This is a reconciling action that continues within the human community. As Lischer notes, “The reconciling sermon begins with pastoral discernment of the way things are. And the way things are is that many of us are living in the presence of our enemies. We preach reconciliation amidst a jumble of unfinished business, among people who are beginning new lives willy-nilly without having completed the old.”32 Thus we can only preach toward reconciliation,33 in faith that reconciliation is part of the Triune God’s creatio continua.

The Perichoretic Space is a space of forgiveness. In God’s mercy, we are freed from our past sins, and freed for a new kind of identity defined by the self-giving, other-receiving Love of the Trinity. In this space, preachers proclaim God’s forgiveness, as well as issuing the gospel invitation to forgive one another as we have been forgiven. As we encounter human others in the Perichoretic Space, forgiveness becomes a distinct possibility. To borrow an image from Lischer, I imagine that as we come face to face with others, “in the combustion of word and touch, miniature ‘new creations’ are exploding around the sanctuary.”34 Not only within the sanctuary, but all over the global Church, wherever colonial discourse lurks, it is potentially pushed aside by these ‘explosions’ of grace and forgiveness. This message of reconciliation and forgiveness is vital for postcolonial preaching:

Too many gospel sermons do not make the ultimate gospel gesture by celebrating God’s reconciliation of enemies in the church and the world. Which means that such sermons have no basis on which to encourage their hearers to seek the appropriate level of reconciliation in their lives. They come very near the true end of words, but fall short of its glory.35

Reconciliation and recreation are embodied in sermons through the proclamation that we

32Lischer, 144.
33Ibid, 148.
34Ibid, 151.
as a Church are not limited to what we have been, and that God is continually recreating. In the Perichoretic Space, preachers look for and point to signs of transformation, reconciliation and forgiveness in the Church and world. In October 1967, Jürgen Moltmann preached a sermon for World Communion Sunday based on Galatians which addressed Christian identity and divisions in the Church.\textsuperscript{36} Fear and anxiety cause humanity to divide into groups of ‘equals,’ often to unite against a common foe. This sermon points to the possibility of new creation for the Church. Moltmann speaks of the love of God in Jesus Christ, which is the source of true human freedom:

\begin{quote}
\small
it is a love which seeks the lost and creates new life where otherwise hate kills everything. Through Christ we learn of this new creative love because we experience it only in Him. If we are recreated to a new life because of this love, we are enabled to love our enemies. I think this is the creative reality of the Christian community. Here our boundaries are infiltrated and the walls of separation men themselves erect from mutual isolation are raised.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

He names the Church as the “advance guard of the coming new world of God,” and goes on:

\begin{quote}
\small
It is true that what we are able to realize in this life are fragments beginning with only very small steps, but it belongs to the vision of the Christian hope to see the fragments of the coming whole: in the ambiguous beginning, in the unequivocal perfection, and in the earthen vessel, the beauty of the coming kingdom of God. What we are able to realize as kindness and peace in our Christian community is always very human and puny ....but at the same time, this reality is a sacrament of great hope for the future.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

Richard Ward, in a sermon delivered to the Academy of Homiletics, offers a vision of a hope that transcends the imperial history linked to the Great Commission in Matthew 28.\textsuperscript{39} This excerpt points to a hope that the future will be built on something other than colonial discourse:

---


\textsuperscript{37}84.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid.

The future is other than what has been prepared and produced by the past.
I think that is what Jesus was trying to tell his disciples
at the close of Matthew’s gospel
Sins can be forgiven
The oppressed can be set free
The poor can be cared for
The forgotten can be remembered
The abuses can be stopped
Swords can be beaten into plowshares
Promises given can be promises kept.\footnote{ibid.}

\section*{II. Preaching and the Postcolonial Imagination}

This section outlines three ways that sermons can cultivate a postcolonial imagination, drawing both preacher and listener into Third Space encounters with local and global others. These practices, postcolonial hermeneutics, creative conversation and testimony, help preachers identify and subvert colonial discourse as it appears in the Church and in the world. They recognize the brokenness of humanity’s ‘now’ but also celebrate the promise of ‘not yet,’ that God has a better future prepared. Through these practices, preachers can amplify the discourse of the Social Trinity, which draws us into relationships of freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness. These practices concern the manner in which preachers interpret text and context; foster communication with others within the sermon; and testify about the power of the Triune God while leaving room for the voice of the other.

In the context of the PCC, sermons are usually delivered by a singular preacher. While this dissertation is concerned primarily with the manner in which preachers engage in these practices, and anticipates sermons delivered by one person, these are practices for the Church as a whole. Listeners have an active role in the preaching process as conversation partners, as respondents, as interpreters, as theologians, and as those who choose to encounter others in the Third Space. In their own study life, listeners can engage in postcolonial hermeneutics, they can
have creative conversations with others, and they can testify to their faith and experience while leaving space for the testimony of others.

**a. Postcolonial hermeneutics**

A postcolonial interpretive strategy for sermon preparation provides a critical paradigm for reflection upon historical and contemporary colonial discourse. Postcolonial perspectives offer useful insight into the essential interpretative tasks of preaching, which include interpreting the historical and contemporary context, as well as the biblical text.

**I. Re-viewing historical and contemporary contexts**

Colonialism and imperialism have engaged in systematic and sustained devastation of the other across the globe. By attending to historical processes of colonialism/imperialism, and the contemporary post-colonial context, preachers can identify colonial discourse in the world. It is helpful for preachers to have a working knowledge of modern colonial processes, and how those processes relate to the nation in which they reside and the denomination they serve. For example, PCC preachers should have a broad understanding of Canada’s colonial history and the implication of the PCC and other Christian denominations in that colonial history, as well as the colonial/imperial history of global ecclesial partner churches. Employing postcolonial hermeneutics, preachers examine ecclesial space, past and present, in order to identify times when others have been oppressed, dominated, or denied agency in their own lives.

---

41Laura E. Donaldson, “Postcolonialism and Bible Reading.” *Semeia* 75 (1996), 1-14 (2).

Richard Ward wrestles with Jesus’ “Great Commission.” In this sermon, he suggests that the future imagined by the Gospel is not the future of empire, yet in many ways, disciples have sought to create a Christian empire. Ward asks:

How do we live out our commission—now?
When we are living with the effects of a church
That too often could not resist the temptation to empire
And had a part in oppressing God’s poor and displacing God’s other children?

We have come to ask this question of ourselves and of each other in this meeting
How do we prepare ourselves, our students, and our institutions
For a more faithful future?

We are here not only to meet with each other
But we are here to meet a living Christ
The Christ that meets us here is keeping a promise to be with us
The Christ is a veteran of the struggle to work out a relationship with the Church
In a relationship where sometimes Christ has even been the victim of the Church
But still Christ meets us here—in grace—to commission us

Christ meets us in this text not simply to show us a global perspective
But to show us the very Body of the Global Christ
To remind us this week that the Body of Christ has AIDS
It is being raped and murdered in the Congo
And suffers starvation in the Sudan
It is addicted and languishing on the reservation
It is serving the victims of corporate greed out of churches, shelters, and agencies
With little more than five loaves and two fish

It is praying daily for the return of responsible, responsive government
This is the Christ that presents the brokenness of humanity to God
And brings about God’s redemption and God’s justice
This is the Christ who needs disciples to make disciples
To baptize into God’s realm and not the Empire
To teach the way of Jesus in the world

This is the Christ who commissions us
And promises to be with us—til the end of the age.

A postcolonial imagination will lead preachers to retell history with an eye to what has been
ignored or suppressed, inserting the history of those whose story has not been told. A sermon by Jeremiah Wright identifies imperial projects of the United States, as well as Israel and South Africa, in a manner that must have been shocking to many listeners, especially as it was preached a few days after September 11, 2001. This sermon serves as an extreme example of ‘dangerous criticism,’ and a warning about the cycle of hatred that arises from violent acts. Yet it effectively retells American history from the point of view of those whose lives have been negatively affected by U.S. imperialism:

We took this country by terror away from the Sioux, the Apache, the Iroquois, the Comanche, the Arapaho, the Navajo. We took Africans from their country to build our way of ease and kept them enslaved and living in fear. Terrorism. We bombed Grenada and killed innocent civilians, babies, non-military personnel; we bombed the black civilian community of Panama, with stealth bombers, and killed unarmed teenagers and toddlers, pregnant mothers and hard-working fathers. We bombed Qadaffi’s home and killed his child. Blessed are they who bash your children’s heads against the rocks. We bombed Iraq... We’ve bombed Hiroshima, we’ve bombed Nagasaki, we’ve nuked far more than the thousands in New York and the Pentagon and never batted an eye. Kids playing in the playground, mothers picking up children after school, civilians, not soldiers, people just trying to make it day by day. We have supported state terrorism against the Palestinians, and black South Africans, and now we are indignant. Because the stuff we have done overseas is now brought into our own front yard.43

Preachers approach scriptures from within a particular context and with particular expectations and assumptions. Listeners will hear sermons according to their context, expectations and assumptions. The space of North American preaching is a hybrid space characterized by globalization, cultural diversity, world travel and global power inequality. “Colonizing and imperialising powers, as we now know, have a chameleon-like capacity for persistence,”44 and continue to shape the identity and experience of preachers and listeners.

43Wright, “The Day of Jerusalem’s Fall,” September 16, 2001. United Trinity Church of Chicago. Based on Psalm 137:7. This sermon was delivered at United Trinity Church to a mainly African-American congregation. It was later disseminated via various media outlets, and heard in whole or in part by listeners for whom it was not originally intended. It would have been heard differently by listeners depending on their context.

44Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation, 197.
With regard to colonialism/imperialism, a particular listener may hear, interpret and respond to a sermon according to their personal experience. For example, a First Nations listener may hear a sermon based on the exodus narrative differently than a non-native listener. A black listener of South African origin might hear a sermon on racial reconciliation differently than a white listener of South African origin. Taking into account the variety of colonial/neocolonial experiences present in congregations, especially in an age of diaspora, preachers may to a limited extent predict and prepare for the proliferation of meaning derived from their words by a diverse congregation. We cannot know the totality of “the effects our speech generates,” yet through conversation with others, we can “discern at least some of the possible effects.”

Preachers, then, can learn about the context for reception, asking questions about the possible or probable effects of sermons upon listeners. For example, “what historical memories, what colonial discourses are spoken or unspoken in a worship service in which a white preacher stands up to speak to a congregation composed of Carribean, Guyanese, African and Indian congregants?”

ii. Postcolonial reading strategies

In biblical history, there’s not one word written in the Bible between Genesis and Revelation that was not written under one of six different kinds of oppression, Egyptian oppression, Assyrian oppression, Persian oppression, Greek oppression, Roman oppression, Babylonian oppression. The Roman oppression is the period in which Jesus is born.

Postcolonial reading strategies for biblical texts are an important tool for preachers in a postcolonial context. By employing a modified form of postcolonial biblical criticism in sermon preparation, preachers can identify colonial discourse within the text and adequately

---

45Alcoff, 17.

46The section below entitled ‘creative conversation’ will describe some of the ways that preachers can learn more about the manner in which preaching is heard and interpreted by listeners.

consider the imperial context of the biblical text. “Trying to understand Jesus’ speech and action without knowing how Roman imperialism determined the conditions of life in Galilee and Jerusalem would be like trying to understand Martin Luther King without knowing how slavery, reconstruction and segregation determined the lives of African Americans in the United States.”

Postcolonial biblical criticism entails “not only a systematic accounting of Christianity’s participation in imperialism, but also that individual congregations actively become involved in a more direct manner.” By employing postcolonial scriptural interpretation in sermons, listeners are challenged with a new way of interpreting the text and the contemporary situation.

The following questions are designed to challenge both the text and the preacher from a postcolonial perspective, and to provide a relatively simple aid for developing sermons that reflect a postcolonial imagination and a social trinitarian theology. They can supplement whichever exegetical method the preacher regularly employs. I include those used in my study of Mark 7:24-30 above, with additional questions in italics designed to aid the movement from text to sermon, with reference to the sermon’s location in the Perichoretic Space.

**Exegetical Questions to engage a Postcolonial Imagination**

1. Where do I as a reader/interpreter stand? What is my own ‘colonial’ context?
   *In what way am I/my listeners enmeshed in an imperial system?*
   *What is the context of my audience?*
   *Which ‘others’ does this text challenge us to respond to?*

2. What is the colonial/imperial context of the text’s author, audience and characters?
   Does the text take a clear stance for or against it?
   *Do I perceive, in the text, or in my reaction to the text, engagement in colonial discourse that seeks to dominate, separate, homogenize or to close off future*

---


49 Donaldson, *Postcolonialism and Bible Reading*, 2.
3. How does the author represent the identity of characters? How is difference constructed - power differentials, gender, culture, religion, age, socioeconomic status? How will I represent these identities and differences in my sermon?

4. What happens in the encounters, the ‘in-between’ spaces between textual characters? What is at stake? How will my sermon function as a space in which listeners can encounter others on their own terms? Might this space be threatening or dangerous to my listeners? Can this space be made safe? What is the Triune God doing in this space to effect reconciliation?

5. Has this text been used to justify colonial or imperial domination? Does the text encourage travel to distant and inhabited lands and how does it justify itself? Does this sermon encourage any kind of colonial or imperial domination? Does this sermon encourage action that impinges on the land or culture of others?

6. Is this a text/perspective that I want to applaud and collude with, or resist? In my sermon, will I take a stand against the colonial oppression in the text, and neocolonial/imperial realities in our world?

These questions guided the development of the following sermon, which is designed to demonstrate a postcolonial reading strategy, and also illustrates the Third Space encounter between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman. In this Space, Jesus and the Woman meet each other, but also the presence of Rome and the healing possibility of God.

In today’s gospel reading, Jesus is far from home. He has entered the Gentile region of Tyre, He is a stranger here.

---

50 Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation, 129.

51 Judith McKinlay, Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004, xiii. I argue that Christian preachers should decide whether to collude or resist based on whether the text/perspective is consistent with a Social Trinitarian perspective. Does the text advocate freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation, and openness to God and to others? These are not the only categories for describing the Social Trinity, but they serve as a useful framework.

A stranger because he lives somewhere else, 
but also because of his Jewish blood. 
He enters a house, seeking solitude. 
Yet his presence is detected by a woman whose daughter is ill. 
This woman comes to him, 
falls at his feet, and begs him to heal her daughter - 
to cast out the demon that has possessed her. 
Earlier in this gospel, Mark lists dozens of healings, 
a man with an unclean spirit, 
Simon’s mother-in-law 
A man with leprosy, 
a paralysed man, 
a man with a withered hand, 
a great crowd of diseased, desperate souls at the seaside. 
A man who is possessed by a demonic spirit 
the daughter of Jairus, a leader in the synagogue. 
And a woman who haemorrhaged for twelve years. 
In all of these cases, and more, Jesus doles out healing without a second thought, 
But not this time. 
This time is different, this situation is different. 
This woman who is desperately seeking help for a sick child, 
hears Jesus respond to her plea saying: 
“Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food 
and throw it to the dogs.”

The woman doesn’t miss a beat, 
doesn’t appear to be shocked or intimidated by Jesus’ response. 
She talks back to Jesus, 
respectfully, but firmly, 
reminding him that even dogs 
are allowed to come into the house 
and eat up the crumbs that children drop on the floor under the table. 
Even dogs deserve to be fed. 
Her words prompt Jesus to seemingly change his mind, 
and he assures her that the demon has left her daughter, 
She goes home, and discovers her child restored to health.

Despite the happy ending, 
this story is challenging and disturbing - 
it doesn’t sound like the Jesus we know and love! 
Why does he hesitate to heal? 
Why does he talk about bread when the woman has asked for healing? 
And why does he compare this woman and her child to dogs
that must wait to eat until the children of the house
have had their fill?

Although the story of this woman’s encounter with Jesus
is told in two gospels,
and has been preached for two millennia:
although she is the only woman in Mark’s gospel actually gets to speak:
we do not know her name.
She is a Greek woman, from Syrophoenicia.
defined only by her ethnicity and place of origin.
Which gives us a clue about the importance
of place and race in this narrative.
This is a story about an encounter between two very different characters.
On the one hand, we have Jesus - a Jewish male,
a underclass carpenter,
who is going about challenging oppressive Roman governance.
On the other hand, a woman, who is Greek,
associated with a culture that benefits from Roman governance.
Neither one of them are powerful in the grand scheme of things -
he is a poor Jewish revolutionary,
she is a woman, and the mother of a demon possessed daughter
in a time in which mental illness made one an outcast.
Jesus has power over her because he is a man,
and because she obviously views him as the one
who is capable of healing her daughter.
The woman has some power in comparison to Jesus -
She is an inhabitant of a region
that colludes in the oppression of his people -
especially when poor Jewish peasant farmers were forced
to sell their produce to the wealthy inhabitants of Tyre
and go hungry themselves.

This encounter, then, is not a neutral, easy meeting.
It is an encounter that is filled with history, with politics,
with power inequalities and societal expectations.
Jesus and the woman meet at a boundary between cultures -
and both cross boundaries in order to occupy the same space -
in order to have a conversation, to challenge one another.
Jesus crosses into the woman’s geographical territory,
and the woman crosses the threshold of the house in which he is staying
in order to ask for help.
When they meet, they bring all of their baggage with them -
political, religious, and cultural.
When the woman asks for help,
Jesus responds by saying that the children should be fed first.
The Jewish people, the children of God, should be looked after before Greek Gentiles.
After all, Gentiles are considered unclean according to Jewish tradition.
His words name the contentious boundary between them -
His words bring out into the open all that baggage strewn about in the space between them.
Although it may not make his words any less disturbing to you and I, he is naming out loud, the reality of the situation, and how very difficult it is to encounter others who are very different from ourselves -
even for Jesus Christ it was difficult to cross the boundary that separated him from this woman, to enter into a conversation with someone with whom he had no business, and who had no business seeking him out.

Yet here they are, a Jewish man and a Gentile woman, engaged in a conversation, already having broken all the rules of social propriety, all the boundaries that are in place to ensure that people remain in their own place. When the woman talks back to Jesus, when she challenges his assertion that children be fed before the dogs, she is also challenging a religious structure that seeks to keep people separate, that affords salvation and mercy and help to one group over another.

In the course of this conversation and the subsequent healing, both of them, Jesus and the unnamed woman, reveal through their words and actions the reality that healing and blessing are to be found during boundary-breaking encounters. Jesus and the woman remain different from one another, yet the space between them is transformed from a space of animosity and opposition, to a space of mutual respect and healing. This is a space of overlap, in which these two persons meet one another, but also encounter the vicious threat of empire. Most importantly, it is at this point of contact, in this space between them, that God is working to heal and reconcile. This is a space that belongs to the Triune God - a space in which each are invited to give of self make space for the other.
An article in the Toronto Star tells about a Pakistani village plagued by sectarian violence.\(^5\)

The Muslim and Hindu inhabitants of this village have lived in mutual hatred - raping one another’s women, slaughtering one another’s cattle, refusing to even shake hands.

Yet one day, a man named Bachu Ram, made a decision that changed everything.

A young Muslim mother lay dying from severe blood loss, desperately needing a transfusion of o-negative.

Ram, a Hindu, offered to donate his own blood - an offer that horrified the Muslim community to the point that several of the men stormed the clinic in order to stop the transfusion.

Yet the doctors were clear that this transfusion was the only way to save a life.

One of the leaders of the Muslim community said “I don’t know what came over me. I remember thinking that here we were refusing to even shake hands with the Hindus and he was willing to give us his blood. It was a marvellous thing he did. It was the turning point of my life.”

Today, the Hindu and Muslim men drink tea in one another’s homes. the women travel together and sell cotton together, they visit each other’s worship spaces.

The intermingling of blood, through one man’s willingness to cross a forbidden boundary, led to transformation and healing for the whole community.

I’m sure there are still painful memories, still remnants of the old suspicions, these things will not simply disappear. Yet it matters that these two groups have entered into a similar space, in which their relationships can be nurtured in conservation with one another.

The space between ‘us’ and ‘them’ between ourselves and others, between cultures and nations is filled with memories and history, with power inequalities and multiple differences.

Yet in these spaces, God is present, acting amidst the tension and discomfort

to create new ways of thinking,
new possibilities for relationship.
This is the space of Trinity,
in which Creator, Son and Holy Spirit surround us
with a creative love
that overcomes past hatred, misconceptions,
stereotypes, suspicion,
and opens us up to one another.
Crossing boundaries is not easy - even for Jesus Christ,
Yet healing and wholeness is to be found
when we offer ourselves to others,
and make space within ourselves,
within our community for others.

When we read our sacred scriptures with postcolonial lenses, “these biblical writings
spur those of us who read them and study them to further conversations . . . reminding us that
‘gender’, ‘identity’ and ‘difference’ are always, and must always be, under negotiation.”
Luke Powery raises concerns about the application of postcolonial biblical criticism to homiletics,
suggesting that

Postcolonialism could be a force to destroy preaching, even criticizing the Bible
as a colonial resource to perpetuate imperial domination and abuse . . . This could
lead to preaching ourselves rather than the gospel of God expressed in Jesus Christ. In some biblical interpretations, Jesus may even be criticized for
operating like a superior colonial officer when he calls the Syrophoenician
woman a “dog” (Mark 7), though he too is colonized, revealing the impact of
colonial thinking on his mind.

Critiques such as these indicate that postcolonial hermeneutics must be applied with care in a
pastoral situation. Donaldson notes: “It is shocking and disorienting to be confronted with
angles of vision that contest dominant assumptions, making it impossible to interpret a story in
familiar ways.”

54 Ibid, 167.
55 Ibid, 160.
56 Donaldson, Postcolonialism and Bible Reading, 12.
have been clear victims of colonialism/imperialism, those who have been perpetrators, and those who have been innocent bystanders. While postcolonial criticism will lead to sermons that challenge colonial discourse, preachers must also consider that listeners may be hurt or confused by postcolonial perspectives. Others may feel that the preacher has misunderstood, or not gone far enough in addressing colonialism/imperialism. Such is the reality of preaching in the Perichoretic Space. We encounter a multiplicity of others, and proceed with caution as we attempt to name an alternative to colonial discourse. It is essential, however, that the preacher attempts to make this space as safe as possible by remaining vigilant about the impact of his or her words, and open to the concerns of others. Preachers should engage with listeners in meaningful ways outside of the worship service, through formal and informal discussions in which preachers are able to listen to concerns, and educate listeners about the preacher’s particular perspective vis a vis postcoloniality. For the preacher, a postcolonial imagination may be a uncomfortable acquisition. Not only will postcolonial interpretations challenge us to adjust our behaviour and identity, we will need to find new language and images to replace what is familiar and comfortable.

b. Creative conversation

A postcolonial hermeneutic for preaching prompts preachers to gather input from a variety of written and human sources in sermon development.\(^{57}\) Gandhi once said that “three-fourths of the miseries and misunderstandings in the world will disappear, if we step into the shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint.”\(^{58}\) This is true not only for adversaries, but also for the multiplicity of others that we encounter in the Perichoretic Space, those local and

---

\(^{57}\)This process resembles Fernando Segovia’s “hermeneutics of otherness and engagement,” an interpretive posture that seeks the engagement of others in critical dialogue. Segovia, Decolonizing Biblical Studies, 152.

global Christians with whom we engage in both imaginative and literal ways. By participating in conversations, and representing conversations in sermons, preachers “begin the slow, often tedious process of learning the presumptions, conventions and idioms needed to make the others’ views intelligible.” This process involves “both a willingness to listen to differences and a willingness to hear those differences in their fullness.”

Conversations in the Third Space allow preachers and listeners to hear God’s word as it emerges from others, providing an important corrective or reference point for assumptions of preachers and listeners, and the representation of these assumptions in sermons. For both preachers and listeners, this “involves remaining open to the idea that there are things we do not and will not know, and to the likelihood that we will not even know that we don’t know them.” Speaking about others, or speaking for others requires that we are already in conversation with them. Insights gained from these encounters may enable more faithful interpretation of scripture, as well as nurturing the relationships among Christians near and far.

A creative and imaginative proposal for responsibly perceiving others comes from Maria Lugones, who posits “playful world-travelling” as a means of loving others in a manner that resists erasure of difference. Writing from the perspective of the non-dominant Latina group in the United States, Lugones seeks to combat “arrogant perception” in cross-cultural/cross-racial relationships. “Arrogant perception” refers to a tendency to view and judge others according to our own perspective without adequately knowing or identifying with them. To perceive others


61Rose, 106.


in a loving way, “one must consult something other than one’s own will and interests and fears and imagination.”

This involves travelling to their ‘world.’ A ‘world’ is not a construction of a whole society, but is reflective of the space occupied by flesh and blood people - an image of a reality. By imaginatively, or literally, travelling into the worlds of others, we engage in a creative freedom which allows us to gain a greater understanding of “what it is to be them, and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Only when we have travelled to each other’s ‘worlds’ are we fully subjects to each other.”

This is a process of coming to know that others are real, animated beings who struggle and suffer and love just as we do. “World-travelling,” in the context of intra-Christian dialogue, may function to “purge out the ideological distortions that so often creep into theological thinking.” Over time, we may be graced with the ability to correct our distorted perceptions of God, of others, and of ourselves. Preachers can participate in world-travelling in a number of ways, including reading texts from marginal positions, through literature and art as described below, through prayer, reflection, careful thought and research. Although Lugones offers a tantalizing image, it is necessary to keep in mind the ambiguities of power which plague our perception of the other and the ‘world’ of the other. A postcolonial critique of her idea would caution that colonial/imperial powers have indeed travelled into the ‘worlds’ of others, with dire consequences for the colonized. Despite this reservation, Lugones makes an important point with regard to the importance of attempting to know others on their own terms.

Conversation with others can provide stories and images for sermons that bring distant others into imaginative proximity. Preachers can incorporate aspects of the wider context explicitly and implicitly in sermons by telling the stories of others, and considering how others

---

64Ibid, 7.
65Lugones, 401.
would hear and respond to our words. As Catherine and Justo González write: “In a Thanksgiving service, for instance, we must be ready to repeat in the presence of our Native American sisters and brothers whatever is said about the ownership of the land.”

David Buttrick also recognizes the possibilities for cross-cultural conversation, arguing that white Protestants must “be willing to learn from African-American preaching and from the declarative traditions of the Spanish-speaking community.” PCC preachers can read sermons by other preachers from other geographical and social locations, in order to better understand the context of other Christians, and gain a sense of how those communities interpret scriptural texts for preaching.

Works of fiction can assist PCC preachers to gain broader insight into the realities and legacies of colonialism/imperialism. When we read literature written by ‘others,’ we are challenged to enlarge the stories by which we live. “Stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history.” In a reversal of the one-way, top down flow of colonial discourse, relatively powerful preachers become students of less powerful others. Novels written by authors from all colonial and postcolonial contexts are widely available. Preachers, both by reading novels and sharing excerpts in sermons, can gain insight into particular social locations through the words of others. For

---

68 Buttrick, A Captive Voice, 112. So might African-American preachers and Spanish-speaking preachers learn from one another, and from other groups.
69 For examples, see Boesak, The Finger of God: Sermons on Faith and Socio-political Responsibility, translated by Peter Randall. (Johannesburg, South Africa: Ravan, 1979); Tutu, Hope and Suffering; González (ed.), Proclaiming the Acceptable Year, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1982).
70 Said, Culture and Imperialism, xii.
71 See González, Liberation Preaching, 27.
72 It is important to note that publishing is a non-democratic process. Novels do not reflect the experience of all people as not all writers have access to the publishing industry. Globally, access to literature and news resources is controlled by the corporate power structure.
example, diasporic authors such as Jhumpa Lahiri, give insight into the lived experience of hybridity which is very common in Canada, especially in urban settings. Others offer insight into the destructiveness of colonial discourse. A novel by an American medical doctor, Abraham Vergese, Cutting for Stone, tells the story of twin boys born to an Indian nun and British doctor in Ethiopia, a story in which the main characters themselves serve as an illustration of hybridity. Vergese offers significant insight into the experience of those at the receiving end of Western benevolence. Imagine a sermon about global mission or development that incorporates the story of an American doctor who visits the Ethiopian mission hospital:

Harris stared at the stack of Bibles by the wall. He hadn’t seen them when he first walked in. “We have more English Bibles than there are English-speaking people in the entire country.” Matron had turned from the window and followed his gaze. “Polish Bibles, Czech Bibles, Italian Bibles, French Bibles, Swedish Bibles. I think some are from your Sunday-school children. We need medicine and food. But we get Bibles.” Matron smiled. “I always wondered if the good people who send us Bibles really think that hookworm and hunger are healed by scripture? Our patients are illiterate.” ...She walked over to the door and beckoned him to join her outside. “Let’s take a walk,” she said. “Look,” Matron said when they were in the hallway, pointing to a sign above a door: OPERATING THEATER 1. The room was a closet, jammed full of Bibles. Wordlessly she pointed to another room across the way which Harris could see was a storeroom for mops and buckets. The sign above it read OPERATING THEATER 2. “We have only one theater. We call it Operating Theater 3. Judge me harshly if you will, Mr. Harris, but I take what I am given in God’s name to serve these people. And if my donors insist on giving me another operating theater...when what I need are catheters, syringes, penicillin, and money for oxygen tanks so that I can keep the single theater going, then I give them their operating theater in name.

In conversation with the matron of the hospital, ‘Mr. Harris’ learns that there is a

---

73Lahiri has written collections of short stories, as well as a novel entitled The Namesake that details the life a second generation immigrant whose parents are Bengali and now live in Boston, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003).

74For example, see Barbara Kingsolver, The Poisonwood Bible. (New York: HarperFlamingo, 1998).


76Ibid, 189.
disconnect between the actual needs of these Ethiopian people, and the manner in which
generous Westerners perceive those needs. Included in a sermon, this fictional conversation
might illustrate the necessity of being in conversation with others, especially those whom we
desire to help. This kind of conversation might thwart a tendency to paternalistic benevolence.
Sharing this story in a sermon offers food for thought about the actual needs of global others in a
non-confrontational manner.

Anna Carter Florence’s sermon entitled “At the River’s Edge” demonstrates the
effective use of fictional narrative within a sermon, as well as providing an example of
imaginative world travel. Florence tells the story of Pharaoh’s daughter who rescues baby
Moses from the bulrushes, even though she knows that he must be a Hebrew baby (Exodus 2).
Employing imagery and quotes from the novel and stage production of John Steinbeck’s The
Grapes of Wrath, and the film Gandhi, she takes listeners on a journey that moves them toward
others by highlighting the tragedies of ancient Israel, California during the Great Depression,
and pre-independence India. Arriving home again, listeners are faced with new decision about
the manner in which they will respond to others in their midst. Florence says:

When I was in New York last month, I went to see the new production of ‘The
Grapes of Wrath,’ John Steinbeck’s classic novel of the Great Depression. It’s a
story about an Oklahoma sharecropper family, driven off their land by big
agricultural interests and, like thousands of other desperate families, lured to the
promised land of California in hope of finding work. Of course, there isn’t
anything there but dirt-poor wages and strikes and corruption and starvation.
They lose everything except their dignity and the will to survive.

She goes on to quote directly from the novel, explaining what happens after a stillborn
baby is placed into the river by its uncle. Florence says: “Steinbeck’s novel makes a strong
statement: What does it take for us to realize things are skewed and wrong? What does it take

---

77 Anna Carter Florence, “At the River’s Edge,” in A Chorus of Witnesses: Model Sermons for Today’s

78 Florence, “At the River’s Edge,” 174.
for us to realize that we can do better, we can BE better? If a starving migrant worker doesn’t spark compassion in us, then will a baby in a box, or a basket, floating down the river?"\textsuperscript{79} The Egyptian princess, when she sees the baby Moses in the river, forges a connection with him that allows her to overcome her fear and prejudice, as she “stepped into the shoes” of the baby’s mother.\textsuperscript{80}

Florence goes on to tell about a scene in the film Gandhi in which Gandhi goes on a hunger strike in order to protest the ongoing violence among Hindus and Muslims.\textsuperscript{81} A man comes to Gandhi and confesses that he has brutally murdered a Hindu baby in the night in retaliation for his only son’s murder at the hands of the Hindus. “Gandhi thinks for a moment, then asks him:

“You are a Muslim?”
“Yes,” the man says, “I am.”
“Then what you must do,” Gandhi tells him,
“is to go out and find a Hindu boy whose father was killed last night.
Take him home and adopt him to be your only son, and raise him to be a good Hindu.”\textsuperscript{82}

By drawing on literary fiction and a movie script, Florence is able to lead her listeners into an encounter with others. While many works of fiction will be familiar to the congregation, it is important to make them accessible to those who have not read or watched them. Florence does this effectively, telling just enough of the story of \textit{The Grapes of Wrath} and the \textit{Gandhi} film to allow the listener to join in whether or not they are familiar with these works.

In the course of daily ministry, preachers have many opportunities to encounter others in meaningful ways. Pastoral visiting, which is an ongoing task for many clergy, allows for preachers to learn about the colonial history of families, and to discuss whether and how that

\textsuperscript{79}Ibid, 175.
\textsuperscript{80}Ibid, 176.
\textsuperscript{81}This is a movie made by Western media about an Indian situation. Thus, its characters have been filtered through a non-Indian lens, and representations may be distorted.
\textsuperscript{82}Ibid, 177.
history still affects them and their relationship with others. Bible studies, ‘roundtable’
gatherings such as those advocated by Rose and McClure, as well as church and community
social events allow preachers to gather information about how listeners are affected by colonial
diversity within the congregation, and how they perceive overseas partners. These encounters
with listeners are also occasions to gain feedback about sermons and test the preacher’s
perceptions against those of listeners. These encounters require a certain level of trust among
preachers and listeners. Preachers may rely, at times, on elders or other leaders in the church for
help in eliciting feedback, and learning about the manner in which colonial memory affects the
life of the congregation.

It is also important to note how cultural difference may cause challenges for these kinds
of conversations. Preachers should educate themselves about norms and expectations
surrounding body language, personal space, and levels of formality and politeness among
different cultural groups. These norms will vary at least in part dependent on the degree to
which a particular individual has modified their own expectations and behaviour based on the
Canadian context. Becoming familiar with these cultural norms may help to avoid
embarrassment, and nurture comfortable forms of intimacy for all involved.

It is possible for both preachers and listeners to have literal encounters with global
partners by spending time with visitors, inviting visiting partners to preach or participate in the
sermon; taking advantage of opportunities to travel to visit overseas partners. Facebook and
other social media offer an unprecedented opportunity to connect, instantly, with Christians all
over the world, including other preachers. What if we occasionally sent a sermon overseas for

---

83 In the PCC for example, such visits are an integral aspect of denominational culture. Representatives of
partner churches are invited to Canada for a number of meetings and special events. Canadian delegations also visit
partner churches, formally and informally. These partnerships are honoured liturgically by participating in the
World Day of Prayer, World Communion Sunday, daily prayer schedules, and the inclusion of world music in
worship. All of these point to literal and imaginative acts of solidarity and hospitality.

84 For example, I am in contact with a church in rural India via Facebook. Last time I visited we ate a
community supper in the dark because there was no electricity. There is, however, a proliferation of mobile
technology.
Again, however, it is important to note that in local and global conversations, not all voices are heard equally. The voices of some will be louder, and some will feel safer than others speaking up.\textsuperscript{85}

While sermons are usually delivered by a singular preacher, it is possible to invite others to participate in sermons in active ways. Tisdale comments “it is one thing to invite congregants to imaginatively enter into the world of another. It is another thing to invite someone....to talk from a first-person perspective about the issue and how it affects his or her life.”\textsuperscript{86} Similarly, sermons delivered by more than one person serve both as illustrations of ‘conversation’ and allow more than one perspective to be heard. As noted above, visitors from partner churches might participate in sermons, as might listeners representing various cultural groups.

Eunjoo Mary Kim includes a sermon in her book \textit{Preaching in an Age of Globalization} entitled “Remembering the Gift of God.”\textsuperscript{87} I have chosen this sermon in order to demonstrate the possibility for more than one voice to participate in the preaching task. This is a portion of a sermon written and delivered by Kim, who is a Korean-American woman, and her southern, white male colleague. The preachers go back and forth, sharing their experiences and perspectives on the text, Ephesians 2:11-22.

\textit{Preacher 1}. Isn’t it hard to live with people who are different? Ethnically, culturally, and religiously? What kind of strategies could be used for diversity?

\textit{Preacher 2}. The Letter to the Ephesians reveals that churches in Asia Minor adopted a policy of discrimination: Jewish Christians were insiders, and Gentile Christians were outsiders. . .Eventually, this policy of discrimination replaced the joyful sounds of the church with the disturbing noises of hammering and sawing, for the church began to build walls to divide the two groups, Jews and Gentiles, citizens and aliens, members of the church and strangers.

\textsuperscript{85}Again, however, it is important to note that in local and global conversations, not all voices are heard equally. The voices of some will be louder, and some will feel safer than others speaking up.

\textsuperscript{86}Tisdale, \textit{Prophetic Preaching}, 55.

\textsuperscript{87}Kim, \textit{Age of Globalization}, 113-120.
Preacher 1. Well, I think that we should not blame the churches in Asia Minor for their policy of discrimination, because even for us, diversity is not an easy topic. Like the early Christians in Asia Minor, we easily feel uncomfortable by those who have a different color of skin, or a different sexuality, or a different accent in English, or by those who speak a different language or live a different lifestyle. Naturally, we humans seem to have hostile biases toward people we consider ‘different,’ and try to build walls, consciously or unconsciously, to separate ourselves from them, to protect our vested interests and privileges rather than share them with “different” people. In fact, we hear similar noises of hammering and sawing as we build dividing walls even in our own churches and schools. Have you ever heard these kind of sounds?

Preacher 2. I think I have. Not so long ago in my hometown in the deep South, while the preachers in white churches were proclaiming in the pulpit that ‘there is neither Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:28) the ushers at the church doors were instructed not to allow people of color to enter the place of worship.

The two voices continue in this manner, and begin to imagine together a ‘new structure of this household of God.’ Preacher 1 continues: “I can see them hammering and sawing. Yet this time their hammering and sawing does not make an uncomfortable chill, discordant noise, but a delightful rhythmic sound with laughter and whistling, to the melody of a harmonious and joyful song of peace.”

The very act of including more than one voice in preaching points to the importance of community, the significance of honouring the others, which I have argued are significant aspects of life-in-Trinity. The sermon names the challenges of separation and division in Church and society in clear and concrete terms, and at the end speaks of the possibility that walls of division can be transformed.

c. Testimony

In chapter four, I argued that testimonial forms of preaching embody the openness of the
Social Trinit, in contrast to the fixedness of colonial discourse. I perceive that testimony can be an act of a postcolonial imagination, and essential to a postcolonial homiletic in two, equally significant ways: First, preachers testify to the discourse of the Social Trinit as they have experienced it, and also speak against the colonial discourse that contradicts it. Second, preachers leave room for the testimony of others which may itself deconstruct colonial discourse, but may also dispute the testimony of the preacher. Testimony is never complete in itself, but always open to challenge and change.

Preachers testify about their experience/perception of the Trinit in the world, a reality which casts a vision of human community which contradicts colonial discourse. Walter Brueggemann writing about the experience of the Israelite exiles in Isaiah 48: 6-20 says:

the exiles are to give an out-loud account of their own experience of Yahweh’s startling, decisive, transformative emergence in their life. Their work - for themselves and for others of reality. This text makes unmistakeably clear how much depends on faithful, courageous utterance that defies the established utterance of empire. This testimony intends to contradict and challenge other evidence, and to force the court to reconsider the heretofore settled assumption of the truth.90

Brueggemann’s sermon, “The Midnight of Power and Weakness” is a wonderful example of a sermon that testifies to the power of Yahweh, and thus serves as a countertestimony to the claims of empire.91 The sermon is based on Exodus 11: 4-8; 12: 29-32, in which all the firstborn children of Egypt are killed. Israel has been reduced to nothing more than a pitiful band of helpless slaves, without any clout and without enough significance even to be noticed in the empire. On the other hand, there is Pharaoh, mighty Egypt, the dominant superpower, the neighbourhood bully used to having his own way....thus the relative power of each is clear and unambiguous. Pharaoh will dominate, Israel will submit.92

Moses’ pronouncement that Yahweh will act at midnight to reverse the flow of power,
names Yahweh as an “untamed factor in the imperial process,” and serves as a countertestimony to Pharaoh’s testimony of total control. Pharaoh learns his lesson, and in an “awesome reversal of imperial policy,” Pharaoh sets Israel free and asks for Moses’ blessing: “Bless me, be a blessing to me, bless me as well.” Brueggemann, as preacher, allows Israel’s countertestimony against Egypt to be heard, as well as providing his own testimony about the power of God and the strength of God’s blessing: “This text is about the shattering of all old maps of power and control, the exposure of all assumptions of power and weakness that are mistaken. We may now discover that God has located the seeds of new life just where we would never think to look for them.” In a statement that testifies to the deconstruction of imperial power, Brueggemann says: “The drama of blessing...is also at work, according to God’s odd calculus, where the failed, emptied forms of power must come in petition to the hidden, unnoticed carriers of life.” Both text and sermon testify God uses God’s own means to defeat colonial power.

Recognizing that ‘our stories are always too small,’ the preacher leaves space for other testimonies which may augment, amend, or even contradict the testimony of the preacher. This process recognizes that responsibility for interpreting God in our midst lies not only with the preacher, but with the global ecclesial community. In this way, the community “speaks to itself - tells its Yahweh truth to itself so that it may maintain its freedom and distance from hegemony.” What follows is an excerpt from a sermon based on Matthew 18: 23-35. I delivered it in an Ontario PCC church shortly after I returned home from a visit to India. The story of the Kathiwara church serves both as a countertestimony to my and the congregation’s

---

98Ibid, 27.
99Ibid, 28.
91Ibid, 29.
92Rose, 6.
93Brueggemann, Cadences of Home, 53.
expectations about the limits of forgiveness and reconciliation, and also names the testimony of
the Indian community regarding God’s own forgiveness and power to shape the identity of the
Church.

There is a very small church
in a community called Kathiwara, in Central India.
About 4 years ago, there was some religious conflict in the area -
conflict which affected many of the Christian churches.
In the chaos, and escalating tension, this little church was burned.
Burned, not by strangers, not by foreigners, but by its own Hindu neighbors -
the neighbours that the Kathiwara Christians
met in the marketplace everyday.
I don’t understand all the ins and outs of how and why this happened.
But I listened to their story while I sat in that burned out church,
with its charred tin roof -
no furniture save the plastic chairs they brought for us to sit on.
Our hosts sang to us, and the air was electric with the Holy Spirit.
It was a moment of revelation, for me,
that these people managed to sing to God’s praise,
and to be faithful despite the hell that they had been through.
As I listened to them, I thought about how undeserving they were of violence.
How angry I would be if someone had damaged my church!
what if our beautiful pews and communion table were turned to ash
by our own next door neighbours?
When they finished their song,
and the notes still hung in the air, I asked them about their anger -
I just assumed that they were angry at their neighbours - how else could they feel?
Their answer, when it was spoken through the interpreter,
came as a shock to me.
No, they said. We are not angry.
We are Christian. We have been forgiven.
And so we forgive.
This besieged and humble community was so rooted in Christian identity,
so rooted in the self-giving generosity and mercy of the Triune God,
that they simply could not imagine any other way
to respond to an enemy except to forgive.
They understood themselves to be wrapped up in a divine embrace,
and the natural response for them was to draw others into the embrace -
in gratitude for God’s own forgiveness
and in continual hope that Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer will act
to repair what has been broken.99

This process of testimony and countertestimony, demonstrated by the above sermons, relates to the missional life of self-giving rooted in the Trinity,100 according to which divine and human persons are continually emptying themselves for others, seeking the other, and receiving the other. Anna Carter Florence discusses the manner in which the ‘threat’ of the other is neutralized by testimony:

As a preaching tradition, testimony is the enemy of ‘they.’ It does not allow ‘they’ to exist as the System’s henchmen. Testimony insists that difference, conflict, mess and uncertainty are part of life and faith; it insists that we tell one another the truth about this. Yet testimony also insists that difference and conflict, mess and uncertainty are no reason to be afraid! None of these is a ‘threat’ to us; none of these can separate us from God, as the System and the Deceiver would have us believe. Testimony banishes those fabricated fears, compelling us to come together so that we can tell and confess the power of God in our lives.101

In Brueggemann’s sermon and my own, the preacher represents both his or her own testimony, and the countertestimony of others. As often as possible, it is helpful for preachers to use the actual words of others’ countertestimony, to reduce the chances of misrepresentation. However, much of the time, preachers will just need to be diligent about representing others as fairly as possible. Our representations are imperfect, but it is still beneficial to insert the voice of the other into our sermons.

In the Third Space, in the midst of Perichoretic Space, our testimony and countertestimony are offerings we place in the hands of others, knowing that they may challenge us. The Word of God may challenge us. There are limits to our own knowledge, and there are some things we should not say about others in public speech. When we encounter others and

---

99Sarah Travis, “Forgiving the Unforgivable,” Knox Presbyterian Church, Oakville, Ontario (November 15, 2009).

100Brueggemann, “The Risk of Testimony.”

101Florence, Preaching as Testimony, 121. See chapter 7 for a useful discussion of practical ways to include testimony in sermons.
speak our own testimony, we are not acting as one witness against another. Instead, we are speaking our testimony and countertestimony into God’s own space, in the hope that a new truth will arise that is more than a hybrid or synthesis, perhaps the beginning of a new story. Returning to the story of Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman, I perceive it to be an example of testimony and countertestimony. Jesus testifies that the children should be fed first. The woman offers a countertestimony that amends Jesus’ own, claiming that there is enough for all. Both, by their very conversation, subvert the attempts of colonial discourse to separate and dominate. The reader is free to reconsider the ‘truth’ of the empire, that one race/class/gender is more valuable than another, and that healing is available only to a select few. In between the testimony and countertestimony there is a space in which healing occurs. It is a somewhat ambiguous healing; it is not clear whose testimony produced healing. Yet in their verbal give-and-take, God acted. The space between testimonies is a space of reconciliation, in which God can act to transform animosity or misunderstanding into mutual concern and openness. It is a space where God speaks, where God gathers us together despite, or perhaps because of, our fractured relationships. It is a common space in which all are decentred and relocated firmly in trinitarian identity. Even as we retain that which makes us unique, we are unified, and God grasps our hands and pulls us into the eternal perichoretic dance which is our true home.

Conclusions

If preachers are to develop a postcolonial imagination, postcolonial perspectives will need to become an integral aspect of teaching preaching at the level of seminaries and theological colleges, as well as in continuing education. This will entail that postcolonial theory and criticism be translated into accessible language. The diversity of colonial experience among

---

102 The sermon “The Space Between Us” beginning on pg. 211 demonstrates this type of subversion. By entering into the same space, Jesus and the Syrophoenician defy the attempts of both empire and closed social systems to keep them separate. They are also choosing to put aside the animosity between their respective communities that has emerged, at least in part, because of colonialism/imperialism.
seminary students should also be taken into consideration. In the process of educating preachers in seminaries and beyond, there is a need for the development of resources to support this kind of preaching. These might include lectionary helps, and worship resources, but also resources that will aid preachers in finding ways to engage in conversation with others, such as websites and opportunities to connect with global preachers.

A postcolonial homiletic, beyond participating in the transformation of ecclesial discourse, may also participate in a transformed praxis, especially with regard to physical and material realities. Colonialism/imperialism has had negative consequences for ecclesial relationships, but also material well-being. As the PCC and other churches struggle to care for poor, hungry and sick Christians and non-Christians, a postcolonial imagination will raise questions about the manner in which aid is procured, targeted and distributed. Preaching, as it arises in the Perichoretic Space, will lead both preacher and listeners into Third Space encounters with those who lack food, medical care, education and other resources. As ecclesial relationships are transformed, there arises the possibility that we will respond to the needs of others in a more effective and generous manner. The Perichoretic Space is a metaphor for self-giving and other-receiving, but that self-giving and other-receiving is not limited to the discursive. Brad Braxton reminds us that colonialism and slavery have left behind a flawed economic infrastructure in many formerly colonized nations: “in Ghana, a postcolonial approach to ‘resurrection’ that overcomes ‘death’ must take into account practical, tangible realities like the price of rice.”

Preaching in the Perichoretic Space reminds us not only of the Trinity’s desire for discourses of freedom, self-giving, self-differentiation and openness, but also that those who dwell within this space will experience life in all its abundance.

In the words of Christopher Baker, who has developed a Third Space ecclesiology for postmodern urban spaces, “the Third Space is often a difficult place to be; a place where we must
have the courage to face the Other in a mutual encounter, rather than hurling platitudes or insults from across the binary divide. It is, however, . . . a space of renewal, excitement and new opportunity.”

104 Preaching has good news for a postcolonial Church that remembers, and continues to endure, the negative consequences of colonialism/imperialism. Recognizing that colonial discourse inhibits Christian community, we affirm that the Triune God will ultimately overcome the domination, separation, homogeneity and fixedness of colonial discourse. The Triune God has given us a language and an image for ecclesial community that causes colonial discourse to be “remade in other images.”

105 Although the nature and possibility of the Triune God cannot ever be fully uttered, preachers attempt to speak an incomplete word that points toward a promise of fulfilment. We dwell within a sacred, perichoretic space, in which healing and transformation are possible, both in this world, and in the next. Here and now, we as a global Church gather around tables where Christ is the host, where we see one another face to face. Around these tables, conversations begin, memories are shared, tears are shed, and there is more than enough food for all. Around such tables, we hear the Word of God promising that we are not limited to what we have been. The best is yet to come.

104 Baker, 154.


Bibliography

Postcolonial Studies (Theory)


**Postcolonial Studies (Theology)**


-------God, Gold, Glory and Gender: A Postcolonial View of Mission. *International Review of


Postcolonial Studies (Biblical Criticism)


**The Canadian Context and the Presbyterian Church in Canada**

Paul Bramadat and David Seljack, eds. *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada.* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008.


Saunders, Anne. *Making Connections: The Bhil People of India*. The Presbyterian Church in


Trinitarian Theology


Herrick, Jennifer Anne. Trinitarian Intelligibility: An Analysis of Contemporary Discussions and
Investigation of Western Academic Trinitarian Theology of the Late Twentieth Century.


Luther, Martin. Luther’s Works, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1970.


Russell, Letty M. “Understanding the Trinity.” *Common Concern,* 102, (June 1999), 12-16.


---------‘The Trinity is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement.’ *Modern Theology,* 14, 3 (July 1998), 403-423.


Homiletics


--------Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei’s Postliberal Theology.


----------*Otherwise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press,


------*Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives*. Cleveland, OH: United Church


Abingdon Press, 2008.


Sermons and Sermon Collections


Travis, Sarah A. N. “Forgiving the Unforgivable.” Knox Presbyterian Church, Oakville ON. November 15, 2009.
-------“Mathematical Nonsense.” Trafalgar Presbyterian Church, Oakville ON. Trinity Sunday, 2011.
-------“The Space Between Us.” Trafalgar Presbyterian Church, Oakville ON. August 14, 2011.


Other Works


Hicks, J.E. “Moral Agency at the Borders: Rereading the Story of the Syrophoenician Woman.” *Word and World,* 23, 1 (2003), 76-84.


Perkisen, James W. “A Canaanitic Word in the Logos of Christ; or the Difference the Syro-Phoenician Woman makes to Jesus.” *Semeia* 75 (1996), 61-86.


Rhoads, D. “Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician Woman in Mark.” *Journal of the American Academy*


