
Public Theology and Diakonia of Reconciliation: A Postcolonial Perspective

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In the aftermath of decolonization, World Christianity is marked by a paradoxical phenomenon. On one hand, it decolonizes Christianity in Europe and North America while, on the other hand, we see the expansion of growing and rejuvenated churches in Asia and the Global South. Owing to demographic changes related to this growth, a polycentric map is required to interpret World Christianity. According to statistics in 2000, most Christians live in the Global South (Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania), accounting for 60%. By 2015, the Global North's Christian population fell to 32.2%. By 2050, it is estimated that 77% of Christians will live in the Global South.¹

This perspective on global demographic changes broadens “the horizon of the classical church historiography,” and considers “the multitude of local initiatives, specific experiences and varieties of Christianity in very diverse cultural contexts.”² Polycentric structures serve as the foundation for a post-Eurocentric notion of bringing attention to voices from various centers and from the margins, who speak from different perspectives.

Given this polycentric scenario, historical-sociological research into prophetic diakonia makes an important contribution to postcolonial studies of God's mission beyond Empire, as conducted within the context of World Christianity.

Moltmann and diakonia in the aftermath of colonialism

A theology of diakonia is a critical, constructive reflection and social scientific clarification of the word of God. It shifts the missional church to a prophetic profile aimed at serving God's reconciliation within the world by embracing planetary life in the ecological theatre. Jürgen Moltmann, in keeping with this viewpoint, integrates prophetic diakonia into public theology through an eschatological lens of hope.

In *God for a Secular Society*, Moltmann examines the origins of the modern world during the early stages of European colonial rule in America. He commemorates 1492, when Columbus sought

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both God's Garden of Eden and Eldorado, the city of gold, at a time when colonial power laid the groundwork for the new world order that continues to govern our global system.

During with the European invasion, American civilization, including the Aztecs and Incas, was sacrificed to the conqueror's power. Indigenous peoples were baptized in Christian garb, but this colonization was sanctioned by an alliance of throne and altar for the purpose of Christian evangelism.

Columbus was inspired by messianic and apocalyptic expectations; many conquerors and colonial settlers emulated him in terms of economic exploitation, political dominance, and civilizing mission. Surprisingly, Adam Smith condemned European colonialism as inextricably tied to capital accumulation, which influenced Karl Marx's chapter on primitive accumulation in *Capital* (vol.1). This initial period of worldwide dominance marked a watershed moment in Britain's industrial revolution.³

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, Europe's wealth and global system of control were built upon the burden of the slaves imported from Africa to America. Gold and silver were sent from America to Europe first. Sugar, cotton, coffee, tobacco, and rubber then followed, and eventually industrial commodities and weapons to Africa. A transatlantic, triangular commercial system and slave trade persisted throughout the British Empire's territories in India and China.

3. W. Travis McMaken, *Our God Loves Justice: An Introduction to Helmut Gollwitzer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017).

1. Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christianity Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 4.

2. Klaus Koschorke, Frieder Ludwig, and Mariano Delgado, eds., *A History of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, 1450–1990: A Documentary Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), xxix.

Meanwhile, an apocalyptic fervor occurred among the Pilgrim Fathers and the religious immigrants who established North America by eradicating the Indians through an apocalyptic frenzy. There is a maxim that “Amalekites were molded by millenarianism.” A people from many nations (*e pluribus unum*; out of many, one) defines the distinct culture of the United States and the modern experiment for universal humanity, while remaining imprinted with manifest destiny, American exceptionalism, and civil religion.⁴

Given the historical background of colonialism, Moltmann calls for the insertion of God’s kingdom, influencing both liberation theology and public theology, while analyzing modernity and sub-modernity. He describes mission as an invitation to life and interfaith dialogue.

Effective history and archeological scheme

Advancing Moltmann’s critical global lens, I utilize archeology as a methodological device to unearth past materials, including religious classics, folk wisdom, and the material life of the indigenous or marginalized. This is to be understood in terms of a genealogical analysis of alternative ways of knowing, dispersion, and power relations in the colonial order of things. This criticism functions as part of an effective historical regime that investigates religious discourse, the European metaphysics of origin, and faulty appraisals and computations. The genealogy of effective history and its archeological inquiry “disturb[s] what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified... Genealogy, however, seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations.”⁵

Effective history in the context of World Christianity reconstructs inculturation and interfaith interactions in terms of metanoia and self-critical renewal, emphasizing a humble attitude and deep learning of God’s mystery in the wisdom of world religions. Effective history, moreover, focuses on discontinuity, transition, and rupture. It breaks with a traditional history of meta-discourse that justifies strident forms of Western historical development, scientific technology, and capitalist modernity, especially the impact on the Western colonial project that is analyzed as the Scramble for Africa.

Scramble for Africa and the *Heart of Darkness*

What constitutes colonialism? Colonialism consists of numerous components, including economic strategy (a free trade type of colonial system), biopolitical governance in settlements against an indigenous majority, the relationship between metropolis and periphery, cultural hegemony, racial mixed relations of hybridity,

4. Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 9.

5. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” in *The Essential Foucault*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 1994), 356-357.

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and the religious sanction of colonial enterprises through a civilizing mission.

The Scramble for Africa was imperially bound to Western European colonization (1870-1914). In fact, it laid the groundwork for subsequent problems, including at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, the granting to Leopold II of Belgium—with the assistance of Henry Morton Stanley—to possess the Congo Free State (1885-1908) and its final unveiling of the heart of darkness.

Heart of Darkness, a novella by Joseph Conrad, condemns the brutal reality of colonial politics. Conrad lambasted the heavenly mission to civilize African lives which degenerated into the heart of darkness, a darkness characterized by the most heinous plunder and violence that infiltrated and disfigured the colonial conscience as a crime against humanity.⁶ Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, however, slammed Conrad’s book, labeling him a “bloody racist” for his dehumanizing depictions of Africans, while Maya Jasanoff, professor of history at Harvard, admitted that the bias of his period coexists with some “elements of exceptional clairvoyance.”⁷

Given these contentious arguments, it is critical to adopt a genealogical perspective of effective history that denounces the European civilizing project as a perpetrator of violence and dominance over people in the Congo Free State. The alliance between colonialism, economic exploitation (in the extractive form of the Congo Free State), political administration, and the heavenly civilizing mission reveals complex realities. To be sure, the “White Man’s Burden” and European civilization are shown to be the “Black Man’s Burden.”

The Christian character of capital accumulation may be recognized first and foremost in the preceding age of Spanish colonialism in the Americas, which was marked by a mercantilist type of extractive capitalism (the *encomienda* labor system). In essence, the Congo Free State represents a new type of extractive colonialism and civilizing mission that is sustained by an

6. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Blackwood’s Magazine, 1902).

7. Maya Jasanoff, “How Joseph Conrad Foresaw the Dark Heart of Brexit Britain.” <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/oct/28/how-joseph-conrad-foresaw-the-dark-heart-of-brexit-britain>

unrestrained and extreme revolution of avarice, colonial racism, and genocidal criminality carried out under indirect authority. European exploration is exposed as a form of appropriation and learning based on the indigenous knowledge.

This paradoxical finding problematizes the long-accepted European myth of discovery through interrogation. “You’re nothing but a cheat and a liar, Livingstone-I-presume. Without Africans, you couldn’t have done anything.”⁸ This terrible accusation does not, however, rule out Livingstone as a symbol of liberation. It does not disparage his strenuous efforts to eliminate the slave trade, which bolstered Zanzibar’s humanitarian stance in the 1870 treaty between Britain and Zanzibar; it indeed struck a fatal blow to the Arab slave trade.

Scientific racism and hegemonic discourse

In sociological explications of civilizing missions, social utility emerges as a form of politically loaded discourse in relation to social Darwinism. Social Darwinism was politically overheated during the period of colonialization and continues to function ideologically in both scientific racism and hegemonic rhetoric; it resurfaces today under the guise of sociobiology, or a genetically determinist view of racial hierarchy, misogyny, sexism, and inequality.

A clarification of social Darwinism helps to apprehend how collective consciousness is imbricated with power strategy and economic exploitation; it is used in the pathological justification of racial politics and social hierarchy, which reappears in the demand for apartheid and a genetic determinism of human life in terms of a militant atheism.

Sociobiology, for example, has increased in popularity in South Korea. It is used to (re)establish racial superiority, cultural exceptionalism, and militant atheism against religion. Following the genome project in 2001, controversy emerged concerning genetic reductionistic views of culture and religion.

In the South Korean public sphere, therefore, it is critical to engage in public mission to address the problematic sociobiological regime in the scientific community by scrutinizing its proponents in terms of material interests and power dynamics, as well as by comparing their arguments to neoliberal alliances with a social Darwinist politics.

Craig L. Nesson takes issue with the challenge of sociobiology, arguing: “[w]ith self-reflective consciousness we can either shape a culture to maximize our sociobiological impulses to self-interest or we can construct a culture that fosters altruistic and the common good. Religion can do either, for example, white Christian nationalism or the Great Commandment for neighbor love.”⁹ The public role of religion becomes crucial for countering sociobiological urges toward egotism and white nationalism; it

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The grace of justification and the life-world

During my tenure with the Wartburg Theological Seminary faculty, I learned from my student Andrea Cain, who proposed a ballerina metaphor as a compelling paradigm of missional–diaconal theology. I elaborate on this metaphor of dance for a prophetic theology of diakonia. It stands out as the Magna Carta in Matthew 25 because of its fundamental solidarity with the poor and recognition of “the others.”

The Reformation teaching of the grace of justification is inextricably linked to *theologia crucis* and reconciliation, both of which include the cultural life-world and the web of life. The grace of creation relates to reconciliation, and Jesus Christ’s resurrection fulfills the prolepsis of a new heaven and earth.

This interrelated perspective on creation, reconciliation, and prolepsis reframes the meaning of *theologia crucis* in an evolutionary–ecological setting. Theologically, a style of dancing is defined as an invitation into the presence of God who entered the historical life of Jesus Christ and continues to reign in the reconciled world through the word and the power of the Holy Spirit.

This component focuses on the Reformation teaching of the gospel as the living voice of God (*viva vox evangelii*), which can be heard outside the boundaries of the Christian church in an irregular and secular fashion.¹⁰ This position runs counter to a sociobiological approach to human understanding based either on biological determinism or disguised social Darwinism, which reduce politics, economics, culture, and religion into the gene myth.

8. Marlene NourbeSe Philip, *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (Toronto: Mercury, 1991), 62.

9. Craig L. Nesson: “Theological Anthropology and Sociobiology,” <https://youngsung.org/scholarly-engagement/>

10. See also the work of my former student Raymond Carr, a Harvard research associate, who articulates a responsive form of dance to the musicality of God as a way to “(re)structure insight into the meaning of blackness in America.” *The Dancing Monk and the Rhythm of Divine Life* | Harvard Divinity Bulletin.

The Living Word of God in its universal spectrum

The God of Israel allowed non-Jewish people (*ereb rav*; Exod 12:38) to take part in God's grace of accompaniment and emancipation. God's covenant with Israel includes ecological promises as well as an invitation, summoning all living beings to God's banquet of life, as evidenced by the Noahic covenant.

The ecological web of life describes all living species as the mask of God (Luther). There is no becoming without perishing and there is no perishing without fresh becoming in the intelligible and intelligent cosmos. This reciprocating mode of being in the world is a never-ending and self-sustaining cycle (Gen 8:22).

The whole is only in part. Therefore, the part is *wholly* in the complete, which encompasses the network, pattern, and system in life circles. Evolution is an essential component of God's first creation of light and day (t=0), which resonates with the discovery of cosmic microwave background radiation. This is critically examined in Steven Weinberg's *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe*.¹¹

A public theology contributes constructively to the dialogue between science and religion, rejecting a theory of young earth creationism as a counterfeit based on day-age theory and twenty-four hours. In *Wonderful Life*, Stephen J. Gould, an American paleontologist and evolutionary biologist, provides a fascinating look at the structure of evolutionary theory in terms of punctuated equilibrium,¹² as seen in Ezekiel's vision of the resurrection of the dry bones.

The prophetic vision unfolds against the historical backdrop of Israel's disenfranchised and despairing life in Babylonian exile, reinvigorating prolepsis for the resurrection of life. Additionally, I believe this prophetic-utopian vision extends to the meaning of God creating a human being in God's image from the dust of the ground and blowing the breath of life into his/her nostrils (Gen 2:7).

Humans and animals evolved from dust and will return to dust in the ecological cycle of life. God's Sabbath, at the pinnacle of God's creation, accompanies both the natural and the cultural life-worlds, driven as prolepsis of Jesus Christ by the light of new heavens and earth.

Constructive paradigm: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and modernity

A constructive position strives to articulate Christian mission through prophetic engagement with the effective historical regime for those subjugated in relation to a politics of recognition and the integrity of life-world.

Bonhoeffer deserves attention for shaping an emergent postcolonial theology of God's mission. In the postcolonial

11. Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

12. Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).

In the postcolonial setting, Bonhoeffer stands as a theological exemplar for modernity and the postcolonial challenges on a genealogical level, critically underscoring the necessity for an effective history of the oppressed within the anamnestic framework of *theologia crucis*.

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Bonhoeffer's theological thinking, influenced by his understanding of modernity, reckons with both the Enlightenment's concerns and modernity's challenges.¹³ Bonhoeffer interpreted human existence and ethical concerns as historical realities in dealing with our relationships with others, the natural order of things, institutions, and forces.¹⁴

The public theology of Bonhoeffer is distinct from liberation theology, which views modernity as a negative totality and attacks it with the slogan "under-modernity." Modernity is contrasted with under-modernity in a Manichean fashion. Liberation theology criticizes the impacts of dominance, colonialism, private property, and individual liberty.¹⁵

Gutierrez critiques Bonhoeffer for having limitations, since he does not see the protest movement of the poor or the labor movement in Bonhoeffer's works. As Gutierrez argues, Bonhoeffer's opposition to National Socialism did not lead him "to a deeper analysis of the crisis in today's society." Due to his preoccupation with the values of liberal society, "Bonhoeffer was less sensitive to the world of injustice upon which that society was built."¹⁶

Gutierrez's critique of Bonhoeffer provides a regime of interrogation requiring further clarification. Bonhoeffer provides a critical appraisal of modernity and its blackmail. Through emancipated reason a human being is liberated from all forms of repressive authority and coercion. It ushers in the unparalleled rise of technology, which transforms humanity into a master of nature.

13. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Isabel Best, Lisa E. Dahill, Reinhard Krauss, and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 23.

14. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Douglas W. Stott, and Charles C. West (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 219-220.

15. Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), 176.

16. Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 229.

Bonhoeffer and Earthly Christianity

Bonhoeffer's analysis of modernity, as well as his this-worldly ethical orientation, can provide the means for an Earthly Christianity in contrast to colonialist and capitalist exploitation of the earth's resources. His vision of Christ as the incarnate God who is crucified—as well as the Cosmic Christ at the center of nature, humanity, and history—stands in radical contrast to systems that rule and devastate nature with disastrous consequences for the future of the planet.

Anyone who disrespects the earth does not mirror the benevolence of God, whereas those who love God regard God as Lord of the earth. According to Bonhoeffer, Darwin and Feuerbach were unable to rival the powerful language of Genesis because humans are a piece of earth taken from God's earth. Human beings are summoned out of earth into human life through God's living word and breath, not by the process of evolution. The earth becomes the mother of all living things, and our life is inextricably linked to her.

An image of God implies an image of biological and social relationships with people, as well as with the animal kingdom. This relationship has nothing to do with Darwin's concept of natural selection, the struggle for existence, or the survival of the fittest. Rather, God has handed over to earth and living creatures the power and work of upholding and maintaining the globe. This rhythm and strength in the planetary world are propelled only by God's freedom and guided by God's sustaining and upholding activity. "God, the brother and sister, and the earth belong together."¹⁷

Bonhoeffer's Earthly Christianity contradicts, therefore, the Fascist principle that technology and national economy can be used as tools for totalitarian tyranny, resulting in world war; it represents a terrorist technocracy dressed in religious garb of Gnostic anti-modernism, social Darwinism, and power-hungry nihilism. These results are anticipated in the idea of the orders of creation, which was warped and corrupted in the Nazi mysticism of nature.

My critical assessment of the Fascist principle throws Eric Metaxas' Bonhoeffer into bold relief.¹⁸ Metaxas has hijacked Bonhoeffer's antifascist theology to promote a counterfeit Christian Evangelical Nationalism, even equating the American fundamentalists with the Confessing Church in Germany.

Indeed, Bonhoeffer's Christ-centered worldly theology is deeply connected with his understanding of how to learn world history through the eyes of those who suffer and are victimized. This relates to doing justice to life in all its dimensions, from the perspective of "the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled."¹⁹ Bonhoeffer's theological

17. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 67.

18. Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet A Righteous Gentle Vs. the Third Reich* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

19. Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Prisons from Prison*, ed. Eberhard

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solidarity with the oppressed exposes Metaxas' corruption of Bonhoeffer's vision, being saddled with Far-Right ideological limitations that traffic in lies for political violence and profit.

Rather, Bonhoeffer's public theology is founded on the correlation between creation and reconciliation which underlines his focus on this-worldliness and ecological justice. The church is responsible for stewardship of all living creatures to serve God's life in the planetary web of life even as it maintains integrity in a sustainable community. In fact, Bonhoeffer's question: "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" can be broadened and expanded by asking the question, "Who is Jesus Christ in the Anthropocene?"²⁰

The blackmail of modernity and its incomplete legacy

The bourgeoisie's defense of reason against nature has evolved into a working hypothesis and an end in itself. This refers to the Janus-faced reality of blackmailing the natural world through technological computations. The bourgeois developed its position through a nobility of achievements, resulting in the birth of the class. However, behind the bourgeoisie arose the threatening masses, the fourth estate; it has no other name than the masses with its misery.²¹

The blackmail of modernity brings such unparalleled misery in the revolt of the masses, while the promise to human rights offers nobility of achievement to the bourgeoisie. This uprising reached its peak in National Socialism and Fascism. The working class was incorporated into the political propaganda of National Socialism and was mobilized as its army. "Centralized and absolute despotism, spiritual and social tyranny, prejudices and privileges based on social status, and ecclesiastical claims to power all collapsed before this attack."²²

The bourgeoisie and their utilitarian reason accepted dominance and power, while the underprivileged classes began to

Bethge (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 17.

20. Dianne Rayson, *Bonhoeffer and Climate Change: Theology and Ethics for the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2023).

21. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 118-119.

22. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 118.

rebel. The dark menace of the masses, the fourth estate, has loomed behind the bourgeoisie, causing their anguish. Western modernity in this paradoxical context has inherited the historical legacy of the French Revolution, including technology, mass movements, and nationalism.²³

Bonhoeffer's critical, genealogical analysis of the Enlightenment project and western modernity in the legacy of the French Revolution are intrinsically linked to his critical perspective of Fascism's alliance with the working class, which liberation theology entirely sidestepped. Even Hitler, during his early stage in power, formed a hidden alliance with Stalin, who instructed German communists to assist Hitler's Fascism.

In Bonhoeffer's mature theology, however, the complex unity of reason, the masses, and the nation contains the seeds of decay within itself. The yearning for absolute liberty has driven people to the brink of enslavement. Nationalism eventually led to war.²⁴ The dark side of the maturity of humanity manifests itself in the liberty of the individual as an absolute ideal, which paradoxically culminates in human self-destruction, technological devastation of the world, and nihilism.

At the end of modernity, beginning with the French Revolution, secular nihilism emerged in the form of western godlessness. The deification of the human being in the proclamation of secular nihilism is evident in the worldview of Bolshevism as well as in the infiltration of the secularist spirit into the Christian church.²⁵

In a nutshell, Fascist ideology becomes expressed as the modern totalitarian State's techno-biopolitics, a milieu which incorporates the age of colonialism during the mercantilist phase. It also reiterates racism, genocide, and civilizing mission as internal to the Congo Free State's approach toward non-Aryans. Seizing political power in a time of political economic crisis within liberal democracy, Fascist ideology domesticates the masses with nationalist fervor in religious garb to eradicate democracy in civil society and organize the working class to destroy the world through war.

Theologia Crucis in Anamnesis and Parrhesia

National socialism, religious nationalism, and socialist bolshevism were all prevalent during Bonhoeffer's period. In a genealogical analysis of the history of the oppressed, Bonhoeffer's *theologia crucis* can be observed in his concern for reparative justice for the dignity of innocent victims in the midst of biopolitical Fascism.

If history within an anamnestic frame of reference involves a genealogical study to unveil universal history as power and dominance, it breaks through "the way it really was" (Ranke) in concealing the brutal reality of mass violence and injustice. There is no room for the insignificant others as they are subdued by European reason and the modernist face of colonialism, as

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deployed through power and authority.

Walter Benjamin deserves to be mentioned here because he shares similarities with Bonhoeffer. Benjamin argues convincingly: "But a storm is blowing from Paradise" and "irresistibly propels [humanity] into the future to which [their] back is turned, while the pile of ruins before [them] grows skyward. What we call progress is *this* storm."²⁶ Benjamin saw German Fascism as the annihilation of reason, with biopolitical extermination carried out in the name of a racial ideology of progress and utilitarian collectivism or eudemonism.

History in this regard is no longer known for progress and enlightened reason. Its linear continuity is denounced as plots and fictions of the ruling class. The wreckage of the past and the sacrifice of the victim increase skyward behind the marching history of rationalization and the homogenization of all diversity into one.

In a similar vein, Bonhoeffer articulates a politics of the Messiah by emphasizing the gospel as an alternative to bourgeois faith in progress and its utilitarian individualism. He reacts against bourgeois self-satisfaction, which conveniently reverses the fundamental meaning of the gospel.

Messianic history necessitates a genealogical view for the sake of Christian discipleship from the anamnestic standpoint of Jesus Christ, the representative of those suffering or vanquished. The anamnestic reasoning of Jesus Christ—who is the risen Lord acting through the church and the world—is intrinsically tied to Christian eschatology with longing for a prophetic utopian vision of the new heavens and earth in our midst.

This epistemic stance helps us comprehend Bonhoeffer's meticulous consideration (*phronesis*) of ethical discourse as *parrhesia* in "What is Meant by Telling the Truth." The foundation for human speech to be genuine and concrete before God originates from God's assumption of a concrete form in the world. The discourse of *parrhesia* is not merely moral; it is as much a living thing as life itself, recognizing actual situations and thoughtfully considering them. The doublet "anamnesis and *parrhesia*" remains crucial for a public *theologia crucis* that underpins the immanent critique of history marching toward western progress by appreciating a Messianic politics of recognition.

23. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 120.

24. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 120-122.

25. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 119.

26. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 257.

In truth, modernity has a Janus face in bringing about profound change in human life and emancipation from religious superstition and control. However, it creates the reality of an iron cage or the social pathology of reification in the colonization of the life-world while justifying the neocolonial condition in today's environment. The reality of modernity is unsatisfying and incomplete, necessitating a meticulous exploration of reason, the subaltern, and emancipation in light of God's reconciliation with the life-world through Jesus Christ.

Bonhoeffer emphasizes Jesus Christ in dealing with the working class in his Christology lectures: "The church is an institution for promoting stupidity and the sanctioning of the capitalist system...Jesus the worker is present in the shops of the factories...He is in the midst of the working class, a fighter in the ranks of the working class struggling against the enemy, capitalism."²⁷

Having said this, Bonhoeffer does not completely reject the world's coming of age, but rather brings the gospel of reconciliation and *theologia crucis* to the incomplete legacy of modernity in favor of a politics of recognition, theology of the subaltern, and human rights in the postcolonial spheres of civil society.

Postcolonial mission beyond empire

In the colonial era, nation-states were the primary means to organize the global structure, pattern of culture, and Christian civilizing mission for the sake of the endless accumulation of capital, technological innovation, and the constant expansion of frontiers. This form of mercantilism continues to create the world according to its own image.

A western model of modernization is effective in the aftermath of colonialism, and its developmental logic continues to replicate western attitudes, values and institutions through industrialization, secularization and mass education. Modernization theory entails a notion of "blaming the victim," employing mechanisms designed to scapegoat the "others" in multicultural society. This theory has transformed into reality a global Empire whose power is revealed as biopower and scientific genetic technology in regulating social and cultural life as its interior side, while consolidating economic, political, and psychological forces.

To confront this problem, Jonathan Ingleby, a postcolonial missional theologian, has reframed the theology of God's kingdom beyond the Empire to emphasize a nonviolent yet confrontational (*parrhesaic*) approach. God's universal reign, locally embodied, calls for the unique stories of a particular locality and the social biography of local communities. A postcolonial theory of God's mission, therefore, does not leave the local, while seeking appropriate economic, political, and ecological strategies.²⁸ A postcolonial theology of mission problematizes the extent to which

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exclusion takes place—along with domination, foreclosure, and omission—when it comes to race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and ecology.

It is of special significance to dissect the numerous cultural realities entrenched in power dynamics, material economic interests, and the bureaucratic system. Culture does not merely shape religious thinking and contents; it controls and stratifies the *habitus* and reality of prejudice in a hierarchical fashion. This necessitates a detailed explanation of the lived experiences of those marginalized in various social contexts.

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Bonhoeffer remains crucial at this juncture because he defends civil democratic society and a politics of recognition, avoiding a wholesale critique of modernity. His analysis of the Janus-faced realities of modernity and under-modernity through the lens of effective history may be useful to postcolonial mission theology. Bonhoeffer's *parrhesia* discourse joins with *phronesis* to examine and explain multiple realities in an ethically responsible way that leads to solidarity, metanoia, recognition, and emancipation.

In a nutshell, Bonhoeffer encourages us as we advance God's mission beyond Empire, notably in postcolonial, post-apartheid, and post-minjung constellations. A public theology of God's mission acknowledges the multiple postcolonial realities that are strongly rooted in racism, despotism, and violence against the subjugated. With a preferential option for Jesus Christ, it promotes God's emancipatory mission toward solidarity, justice for the common good, and ecological integrity.

27. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Who Is Christ for US?* ed. Renate Wind, ed. and trans. Craig L. Nesson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 36.

28. Jonathan Ingleby, *Beyond Empire: Postcolonialism and Mission in a Global Context* (Milton Keynes: AuthorHouse, 2010), 70.

Concluding reflection

I have endeavored to expound missional theology in its prophetic form of diakonia to address the historical background of colonialism and civilizing missions. Reviewing such postcolonial problematics is indispensable to reconceptualize a public theology where God is reconciled with the world, speaking through the gospel, and beyond the boundaries of the Christian church. This constructive position supports a prophetic diakonia of reconciliation whose efficacy as a postcolonial mission theology extends beyond the Empire.

Jesus' solidarity with the masses of perdition (*massa perditionis*) or crowd (*ochlos*) invites them to the table for fellowship. The solidarity of the gospel acknowledges both Paul's devotion to faith community without discrimination and his sensitivity to the outcry of ecological materiality (Rom 8). From the vantage of a biblical prophet, the writer in Leviticus stresses God's diaconal care (Lev 19:9-18). The jubilee year remains an indispensable component of this social ecology which grants freedom and rights of protection for the stranger (Deut 10:17-18).

I have constructively applied Bonhoeffer's sociological insights to postcolonial mission theology beyond Empire and a prophetic diakonia of reconciliation. Bonhoeffer articulates the significance of sociological categories in his study of ecclesiology (*Sanctorum Communio*), in which the standpoint of the gospel is not value-neutral but takes into consideration relations between the Church and the Proletariat.

Bonhoeffer's sociological conception of church disrupts the delimitation between church and sect to address a wide range of social problems along a vast and complicated spectrum. "It [the social problem] includes the problem of the capitalist economic period and of the industrial proletariat created by it; and of the growth of militaristic and bureaucratic giant states; of the enormous increase in population, which affects colonial and world policy; of the mechanical technique... that mobilizes the whole world for purposes of trade, but also that treats people and labor like machines."²⁹

The church must ground its mission in the living voice of God. In doing so, it stands on the emancipatory word that Bonhoeffer discovered in Luther's prophetic, irregular thought. It stands with God. It stands for humanity; all human beings, both the crowds who cry to God and even the crowds who curse God.

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This model of public theology and postcolonial mission catalyzes its effective history to account for the notable ruptures and discontinuities that are predicted by the march of metahistory. This constructive position actualizes the Christian social imagination of a postcolonial theology of mission beyond Empire for a prophetic diakonia of reconciliation and politics of recognition for all human beings.

29. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. R. Krauss and N. Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 271.

30. Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd and Hans-Richard Reuter, trans. Martin H. Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 160, n. 59.