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Postcolonial Imagination, Postmodernity, and Recognition of the Other

Postcolonial theory marks a challenge to the Western theory of rationality by critically analyzing the neocolonial or neoimperial reality in the colonial aftermath. Although "post-" denotes "having gone through," or "after" in a temporal, successive sense, postcolonial theory takes into account events in constant flux ensuing from the domination of empire. Postcolonial theory entails a project of recovering histories in order to subvert Western hegemony and heal colonized narratives.[1] The "once colonized world" is replete with hybridity and liminality as postcolonial people navigate the mixed and in-between nature of lives in the aftermath of empire.

Michel Foucault is a central mentor, together with Jacque Derrida, inspiring postcolonial critics to engage in colonist discourse of Orientalism for the deconstruction of the Western dominion system. Edward Said, deeply influenced by Foucault, undertakes groundbreaking work to uncover the discourse of Orientalism. Said's study of Orientalism, namely a Western style of domination of non-West, establishes the watershed of postcolonial theory, analyzing the ideological dominion of the West over the Orient.[2]

Given the postcolonial imagination in our postmodern condition, I seek to configure postcolonial public theology in a critical-hermeneutical manner. By way of analectical epistemology and social discourse, I seek to

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1. Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 8. See further Westhelle, *After Heresy*, xvi.
2. Said, *Orientalism*.

refine a theological or philosophical notion of God's speech event or Saying by the otherness of the Other. This project is driven by archeological hermeneutics, recognizing the locus of the Other. Its ethical responsibility is formulated in commitment to making the world a better place in light of the coming kingdom of God.

A project for the future becomes possible first of all from the act of *metanoia* from wrong steps and fatal mistakes in the previous colonial time. It is substantial to unfold postdevelopment rationality in transcending the limitations of modernity and public ethics by recognizing and rethinking the dignity of the Other from the standpoint of those fragile, broken, and victimized and through whose faces God continues to address.

The Enlightenment, Its Unfinished Project, and Postmodern Critique

Postmodern resistance wages war on totality, universality, and the metaphysical grand-story raised by modernity. For Lyotard, postmodernity is "incredulity toward metanarratives."[3] Under the dominion of the metanarrative, the specific, different, and unique narratives are reduced into a metaphysic of universal story, such that the voice of the Other is unnoticed, marginalized, and suppressed.

According to Jürgen Habermas, the project of modernity, as formulated in the eighteenth century, undergirds "the relentless development of the objectivating sciences, of the universalistic foundations of morality and law, and of autonomous art." This project also results in "[encouraging] the rational organization of social relations."[4] For Habermas, modernity's project is not yet finished, despite its shortcoming and setbacks.

Philosophically, the Cartesian principle of *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) set the agenda for the centrality of the human mind in subsequent centuries. Matter is only knowable in reference to what is known by the mind. In the narcissism of self-consciousness, *cogito ergo sum* reduces the diversity, plurality, and multiplicity of the world to the contents and rationality of our mind and that which can be deduced by mathematical demonstration.[5]

The Cartesian principle of the certainty of the "thinking I" culminates in Kant's critical philosophy. In his essay "What is Enlightenment?" Kant

3. Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, xxiv.

4. Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," in d'Entrèves and Benhabib, *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, 45.

5. Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 36.

quotes Horace's *Sapere aude!* (dare to know), insisting that the free exercise of human reason is fundamental to the distinctiveness of the Enlightenment.[6] Kant characterizes Enlightenment as the way out of immaturity, "man's exit from his self-incurred minority."[7] The Enlightenment has a motto, an instruction, and a heraldic device: *Sapere aude*, encouraging one to use one's own intelligence through the audacity to know. Since dogmatism and heteronomy are the illegitimate uses of reason, the modern attitude is seen as "an escape from self-caused immaturity"[8] through a critical consciousness in discontinuity with tradition, promoting a will to idealize the present. This implies a myth of progress that supports a colonial logic of white supremacy and burden in connection with the non-West.

According to Robert McCarthy, the Kantian historical-developmental perspective justifies slavery as one of the evils which contributed to the advance of the human race through the diffusion of European culture. Innocent victims in history and society may serve as stepping boards providentially toward the kingdom of ends. In short, the end justifies the means.[9] On the other hand, the name of Darwin linked to social Darwinism and the eugenics movement had incorporated the "white man's burden" (Kipling) into the developmental model of laissez-faire capitalism and racism, which found its apex in Hitler's anti-Semitism and the horrors of the Holocaust.[10]

In critical view of the historical and social ramifications of Western modernity, Frantz Fanon maintains that the modern civilization of Europe has been built upon the burden of the sweat and dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians, and the yellow race.[11] The colonial discourse reveals the often neglected suffering, victimization, and subalternization of the non-Western world. Foucault argues that the Enlightenment project constitutes the self as autonomous subject, and upheld human self-invention for elevating the present as a formative stage for modern humanity. In exclusion of the non-Western other, he refers to the Enlightenment legacy as the "blackmail of the Enlightenment,"[12] as visible in the historical examples of colonialism, slavery, and exclusion of the Other.

As Thomas McCarthy contends, postcolonial neoimperialism, together with post-biological neoracism, continue to operate after the eventual

6. Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784), in *Basic Writings of Kant*, 135.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 140.

9. McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea*, 65.

10. Peters and Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation*, 52–58.

11. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 102.

12. Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," in Foucault, *Essential Foucault*, 51.

demise of formal colonies and scientific racism. The shift to neoimperialism and neoracism is mediated by power relations.[13] Such cultural pathologies remain hidden in all-inclusive conceptions of progress, modernization, developmentalism, and cosmopolitan universalism. It is necessary to undertake a multiple study of modernities in order to transcend such a defect and pathology. I find a multiple study of modernities helpful to conceptualize an integral transmodernity as one of the alternatives to the shortcomings of the Enlightenment project in the postcolonial world.

Postmodern Deconstruction and Hermeneutical Reorientation

Derrida's theory of deconstruction is applied to denounce the colonial discourse of representation which survives the death of colonialism. The development paradigm is driven inherently by the dialectics of domination according to a unitary process with a uniform future. Alterity and ambivalence are the effects of deconstruction, which ineluctably inhibits Western thinking about the Other. Decolonizing the historical and social imaginaries between ex-colonizers and ex-colonized is an ongoing process of deconstruction of the white myth of progress and development linked to the Western value of justice, dignity, and democracy. Derrida rejects colonial and neocolonial discourse as an attempt to construct a totality through exclusion or homogenization of the Other. Unlike Derrida's deconstructive orientation, Thomas McCarthy offers a reconstructive undertaking of postcolonial theory in his endeavor to articulate a critical theory of global development.[14]

In the undertaking of postmodern hermeneutics, David Tracy argues that both the Enlightenment model of rationality and the traditionalist model of heteronomy are inclined to destroy our capacity of interpreting the claims of the classics in a creative and refreshing manner.[15] In the philosophical tradition, Husserl's phenomenology begins its return to the thing itself by challenging modernist mathematization of the world, in which the world has become captive to technology. To salvage the world from its technization, Husserl introduces a phenomenological concept of lifeworld. In protest against scientific technization of the world, Husserl argues that the lifeworld is pregiven in every connection with others. The lifeworld was always there prior to science and objective critical thinking. It deals

13. McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea*, 7.
14. Ibid., 184.
15. Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 196

a powerful blow to Cartesian epistemology, because Descartes privileged mathematics as the cognitive method. To think of the world mathematically, that is, *mathesis*, Descartes argues that all things need to be mastered by calculation.[16] However, mathematization of the lifeworld leads inevitably to its colonization. We must be emancipated from the bondage of mathematization of the world.

The world horizons of human beings are different, since Europeans, Africans, and the Chinese have their truth and fixed facts, yet all in radically different manners. Despite all relativity, the lifeworld constitutes a universal structure beyond the relative condition. Human consciousness is affected and conditioned in the historical horizon of lifeworld and social location of cultural life. In my judgment, Husserl provides an insight into shifting consciousness of intentionality to historical effectiveness and social cultural location. Knowledge of what is taken for granted must be put in brackets, because it is socially constructed.

Along this path, Heidegger and Gadamer take steps further in seeking an ontological, linguistic hermeneutics, challenging the methodical spirit of science and technology. Interpretation, as seen in light of a history of effect, inheres in human life in the public sphere because of the use of language in daily communication. Being historical implies that one's knowledge can never be complete and exhausting.[17]

Heidegger's concept of *Da-sein* (being-in, or being there), that is fundamentally being-in-the-world, marks the most telling critique of Descartes and Kant. The human being as a being-in-the-world is enmeshed in personal, social, and linguistic networks. Language as the house of being brings the human world into existence. Inspired by Heidegger's insight, Gadamer further refurbishes the notion of the history of effect or influence upon the individual life and understanding. The human relation to the world is thoroughly linguistic, hence intelligible and understandable. Given this, interpretation experienced as a fusion of horizons is of a dynamic and open-ended character in hermeneutical circle, breaking through the Cartesian-Kantian autonomous self.[18]

Following in the footsteps of Heideggar and Gadamer, Vattimo presents a constructive philosophy for the postmodern, hermeneutical condition. For Vattimo, Heidegger's notion of a *Verwindung* of metaphysics aims at weakening Being through the destruction of ontology.[19] A constructive

16. Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 36.

17. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 302.

18. Heidegger, "The Way to Language," in Heidegger, *Basic Writings,* 397–426.

19. Vattimo, *End of Modernity*, 11.

philosophy in hermeneutical reorientation seeks to incorporate a moment of deconstructive critique into a renewed meaning.

Sociological Analysis of Rationality, the Reality of the
Iron Cage, Divine Transcendence

In sociological analysis of the process of Western rationalization, Max Weber advances a notion of the selective affinity between the Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism. Weber saw the paradox of social rationalization in the development and institutional embodiment of formal, purpose rationality tied to Calvinist innerworldly ascetic of life, which finally has led to an "iron cage" transpiring in the process of the disenchantment of the world.[20] The legacy of the Enlightenment is an emphasis on the autonomy of human reason, human rights, and the struggle for a just society. This legacy has brought technological marvels and advancements in the twenty-first century, while it has also unleashed the exercise of instrumental reason that has resulted in human domination over the natural world and ecological devastation.[21]

In an analysis of the Western process of modernization, Max Weber introduces and examines the concept of purpose rationality. The rise of purpose rationality leads to the disenchantment of the world. This process of disenchantment has gradually led Western people to rely on the technological control of nature and society as well as a loss of meaning. In Weber's diagnosis, Western civilization, unfettered by the disenchantment of the world, has unleashed the one-sided development of human purpose rationality. Through human mastery over the external world, the Western form of reason has become instrumentalized, resulting in the state of the iron cage.[22]

Foucault shares Weber's diagnosis of Western civilization captive to the iron cage in his analysis of the panopticon that assures the automatic functioning of power. The panopticon is a machine in the center through which one sees everything without ever being seen. It produces the homogenizing effects of power, presenting itself as "a cruel, ingenious cage" and defining power relations in terms of human everyday life in a society.[23] It is

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20. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 181.

21. Lakeland, *Postmodernity*, 13.

22. For the term "iron cage," see Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 182.

23. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 205.

a new political anatomy, a technology in terms of the relations of discipline and mechanism.

Foucault argues that we live in this architectural apparatus, invested by its effects of power, bringing ourselves to a part of its mechanism. Both the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system are increased in political, economic, educational, military, industrial or medical spheres. Thus the accumulation of people and the accumulation of capital have come together because the techniques enabling the cumulative multiplicity of useful and amenable people accelerate the accumulation of capital. The technological mutations of the apparatus of production, the division of labor and the elaboration of disciplinary techniques retain very close relations. Consequently, the human body is reduced to a political force and maximized as a useful force.[24]

Enlightenment that discovered the liberties of human life also invented the disciplines. Foucault debunks the dominant discourse in the structured and networked interplay between power and knowledge in the religious institution, the political structure, ideological legitimation, and institutionalization. The correlative constitution of power and knowledge determines the forms and the possible domains of human knowledge in a given society.[25] Thus language or *episteme* constitutes the human self, rather than becoming the ultimate source and ground for language.[26]

Those who adopt Foucault's genealogy of knowledge and power as a critical frame of reference find a neocolonial regime of power/knowledge in a theory of development or modernization in the aftermath of colonialism. A theory of modernization is a central strategy of modern power rather than a path to emancipation from such power.[27] The Western notion of universal reason is internally linked to relations of power. What is rational is right and true for everyone to follow. Disciplinary strategies are embedded in power relations, which are driven to subjugating, normalizing, and dominating non-Western peoples. Local traditions and their indigenous and practical knowledge are disqualified in the development paradigm. A need is required for outside assistance from already developed societies whose agencies, officials, and experts are vested with power/knowledge. A top-down authority and knowledge system is inherently structured to propel development; hegemony of reason is exercised and secured by the power structure. Foucault's genealogical strategy is to debunk and subvert the

24. Ibid., 221.
25. Ibid., 27–28.
26. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 386–87.
27. Escobar, *Encountering Development*.

constitutive Eurocentrism of discourse like development, modernization, or progress. Such metadiscourse entails complicity with technologies of neoimperial power.[28]

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno analyze the historical process tied to the domination of instrumental reason, arguing that it brought humankind into a new kind of barbarism.[29] They name Christianity, idealism, and materialism as accountable for the barbaric acts that have been perpetrated in their names in matters of power, self-interest, and dominion. The dominance of nature through scientific progress is the basis of the philosophy of Enlightenment. According to Francis Bacon, scientific knowledge is instrumental in mastering the world of nature. Nature is disenchanted through the rule of computation and utility for the sake of the ideal of Enlightenment.[30]

Performing a totalistic critique of instrumental reason, Horkheimer's suspicion of Western reason leads him to a search for the transcendent God as the hope for humanity and the world dominated by instrumental reason. Religious and moral longing for the transcendence of God finds its impetus in Horkheimer's critique of human reason for the sake of God's radical alterity. Divine transcendence implies God's Future as the hope of preventing human reason from being instrumentalized and even captive to the iron cage.

Given this, proleptic theology, which is driven in hermeneutical frame of reference and postmodern holism, deserves attention. Ted Peters presents this hermeneutical task as a theological response imbued with the project of reinterpreting the original meaning of biblical narratives and symbols, making them meaningfully relevant for the new situation. To advance a postcritical hermeneutic, Peters considers the reconstruction type of wholeness in contrast to the deconstruction type of postmodernity. Implying that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, a holistic understanding of human reasoning or imagination includes both thinking and feeling, comprehending the human being in a context of meaning.[31] This epistemology endorses the epigenetic-evolutionary view, according to which the sum of reality, in the synthesis of the new with the old materials, is creating a new emergent in the course of evolution.[32]

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28. McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea*, 181–82.

29. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xi.

30. Ibid., 6.

31. Peters, *God—the World's Future*, 15–20.

32. Smuts, *Holism and Evolution*, 89.

The new wholes are the center and creative source of reality. This holistic perspective helps us cultivate an eschatological consciousness of the yet to be consummated whole of future. God's radical transcendence must be sought in a proleptic-messianic notion of God's coming future as the source of the whole, awakening our consciousness in longing for the future. God's determined whole has been revealed ahead of time in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Peters' approach to postmodern holism aims at recovering meaning, inspiring our longing for God's transcendence as God's coming Future. In the act of belief in the transcendent God, our life is reoriented in this world toward the divine Future, redeeming the world from the iron cage.

Given this, I undertake a revisionist interpretation of the postcolonial world in terms of a new critical method in seeking non-colonial or transmodern resources in the past and the present and also challenging the neocolonial reality in light of God's coming Future.

Archeological Hermeneutics, Social Discourse, and Meaning-Event

In an attempt to undertake a dialectic of decolonization, "archeological" is a technical term which implies unearthing the past materials, religious classics, wisdom, and life of people marginalized and voiceless by Western tradition and history. "Hermeneutics" means one's interpretive engagement with tradition, history, and texts, as well as social discourse in one's contemporary location through sharing, conversation, and empathy.

Foucault defines discourse in terms of a group of statements or a group of conditions of existence.[33] The statement is the basic unit of discourse, making proposition, utterance, or speech acts meaningful. Discursive formation shapes the background knowledge and every understanding of meaning. In discourse analysis Foucault's "outside" position assumes an anti-humanist and structuralist form. Foucault runs short of excavating a deeper meaning underneath discourse in terms of one's preunderstanding, which is influenced and shaped by one's history, ethos, and social location.

Foucault's concern is how to show the principles of meaning production emerging during various epochs (the Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment, and the twentieth century). This posture allows Foucault to focus on the role of discursive practices. However, unlike Foucault, the discourse statement (*episteme*) as such does not unilaterally generate the condition for meaning. Rather meaning takes place as event in the interaction of the

33. Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 117.

interpreter's horizon with the *episteme* and also in the critical analysis and investigation of the life connection with others. Given this, I maintain that discourse as structure should not necessarily be accepted as the epistemic origin or as essentially fixed, independently of socio-cultural reality as well as their economic-material basis.

I call this discourse-meaning connection a hermeneutical clearing-out of Foucault's archeological genealogy based on anti-humanism. An archeological hermeneutics incorporates Foucault's notion of discourse and power in critical hermeneutical frame of reference, with anamestic passion for *metanoia* from colonial and neocolonial wrong steps and driven through anticipatory power in light of the irruption of the kingdom of God in our midst.

This hermeneutical position runs in contrast to technological objectivity or colonization of lifeworld which overwrites Foucault's archeological genealogy of the totality of power. Discourse analysis can be justified on a hermeneutical circle, because every understanding comes from one's own preunderstanding within the spectrum of historical effectiveness and social location.[34]

If hermeneutics in the sense of Heidegger and Gadamer is oriented to tradition, history, and language in a historical sense, Foucault's genealogy is a form of synchronic interpretation with an eye to the strategic analysis of the interrelation of power, knowledge, and truth in the form of social discourse. For Foucault, the effective history, unlike Gadamer's concept of the history of effect, seeks to put everything in historical motion, dissolving an illusion of identity and continuity, with passion for refusal through the weapon of counter-hegemony against the metadiscourse of metaphysics. It is important for me to incorporate Foucault's effective history into the irregular notion of history as the otherness in my constructive hermeneutics of archeology.

Gadamer tends to minimize critical reasoning within the confinement of the history of effect while Foucault tends to maximize power structures outside the history of effect. Thus, Gadamer sidesteps the irregularity of history, while Foucault undermines the power coming from the history of effect. Nonetheless, at the archeological level, Foucault endorses the important locus of history as effect. For him, "History gives place to analogical organic structures." It is "the depths from which all beings emerge into their precarious, glittering existence." History is "the mode of being of all that is

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34. Kögler, *Power of Dialogue*, 201.

given us in experience." "History has become the unavoidable element in our thought."[35]

In this regard I find that Foucault's archeological epistemology does not necessarily counter a hermeneutical understanding of history as effect, conceptualizing the human being as linguistic being in the world. Although this archeological inquiry discards all the chimeras of the new humanism, it still retains language, discourse, and history, which shape and condition human life in the world. A history of effect, although often standing in tension with the discrepancy and irregularity of different and diverse histories, still influences one's own subjecthood.

The experience of language belongs to the archeological network, because language sets the task of restoring an absolutely primal discourse, expressing the discourse in approximation to it. Knowledge and language are interwoven in social discourse.[36] Thus, human being becomes being of discourse, which does not escape the historical, social circle of labor, language, and life. Through this, I critically revise Foucault's archeological genealogy through a hermeneutical reorientation toward God's act of speech through the Other and its domain of subjugated irregularity in anticipatory power of meaning. I thus attempt to clear-out of Foucault through a hermeneutical frame of God's speech event imbued with an anamestic passion of metanoia from a neocolonial reality.

Public Theology: Analectical Method and Speech Event

For postcolonial public theology, I take up Levinas's distinction between "saying" (living discourse) and "said" (written text) to develop postcolonial hermeneutics of intertextuality concerning God's saying in the otherness of the Other. *Dabar* in Hebrew means to speak, dialogue, and revealing related to the God of promise, transcendence, hope, and future. A hermeneutical reflection of God as the infinite horizon of speech-event comprehends a textual world of intertexuality embracing intratextual narratives and extrabiblical narratives of the social world through a dynamic process of the fusion of multiple horizons. It seeks to propel a critical and emancipatory ethic of social discourse in the context of power relations, employing a standpoint from, through, and for margins—thereby *massa perditionis / minjung*-subaltern.

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35. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 219.
36. Ibid., 41, 43.

The analectical method begins with ana-logy, because *dabar* in a Hebrew manner entails ana-logy, which assumes an attitude of trust in the obedience of a disciple toward the Other.[37] The language of analogy finds its effectiveness in terms of approximation, tentativeness, and open-endedness. It provides linguistic imagination for interpreting the relation between God, humanity, and the world through a play of resemblance, which is driven by an endless and incomplete task of knowing and understanding what is similar. However, in endless quest for similitude, our experience of analogy could become deceptive, if its signifying function is confined only to a play of resemblance, undermining the language of social discourse.

Against this trend, the analectical perspective pays attention to the communicative dimension of God involved in our social discourse. In the Hebrew Bible, God is also understood as the One who is involved in the life of the public sphere. "The LORD is witness between you and me forever. . . . The LORD shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever" (1 Sam 20:23, 42). The biblical witness speaks of the presence of God in the midst of God's people and in the inclusion of the nations. God will dwell in their midst—Israel and the nations together (Zech 2:10–11; cf. Ezek 43:7; Joel 2:27). God's living discourse in Jesus Christ for all is to be seen in light of God's universal-particular reign, in which God's multiple acts of speech become significant throughout all the ages in their plural horizons driven by the universal-particular horizon of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, the analectical method is connected with God's speech event involved in the life of the public sphere and its dimension of social discourse. The integrative model between the analectical method and social discourse, driven in light of the hermeneutics of intertextuaity, entails an ethos of liberation and seeks to rewrite a history in privileging the standpoint of history's forgotten Other. To the degree that the dimension of living discourse is embedded within the analectical method, the Word of God can be received even by those who can misuse the word. God's Word and God's promise of presence are vulnerable. Despite this vulnerability, "the word of the LORD is truthful, and what he promises, he certainly keeps" (Ps 33:4). The Word as promise and future event poses the problem of understanding in spite of the limitations and vulnerability of human language in understanding the Word of God in light of God's Future.

The analectical method, framed within the relation between similarity and dissimilarity, is grounded in a dialectical interaction between appropriation, a critical or deconstructive critique, and reconstruction, while

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37. Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics*, 51.

recognizing the Other in reference to the interplay between power, knowl-
edge, self-interest, and dominion. Analogy and dialectic in an analectical
fashion sharpens and strengthens the hermeneutical spiral and its historical
effectiveness to be embedded within the Other's social location.

This perspective incorporates the social discourse of the *dissimilarity*
and *irregularity* in the life of those who are colonized and victimized. When
we see our current history and society in light of similarity, we must com-
prehend its other side of difference and dissimilarity in an archeological-
anamestic reasoning of the marginalized history and society in anticipatory
meaning from the in-breaking reality of God's coming in our midst.

Inculturation and Recognition of the Other

Public theology in the aftermath of colonialism entails a socio-critical and
hermeneutical reflection on colonial discourse and its hegemonic struc-
ture set within the religiously institutionalized framework. It sees colonial
discourse not only of the past but also of the current dominating discourse
critically in light of God, the infinite horizon of discourse-event. If faith
seeks understanding, it should be contextualized in deep conversation not
only with its own tradition but also with other traditions, which undergirds
a hermeneutical reading of correlation between scriptural reasoning and
other religious texts. Faith, understanding, and acquired meaning in a her-
meneutical open-ended circle belong to a semantic of God's narrative and
symbols supporting the ethics of discipleship.

Human life is suspended in webs of significance. Within such webs of
significance, culture is interpretive; in search of meaning in social, cultural,
and anthropological locations.[38] In a hermeneutical conversation with oth-
ers, a new meaning emerges, helping dialogue partners to better understand
their own traditions. A project of inculturation of biblical narrative seeks
fresh theological insights that learn from the newly encountered traditions
and the home tradition in light of the coalescence of multiple horizons.

In the biblical context God is revealed as the One who speaks. God's
speaking in person is identical with God's action in self-manifestation. In-
sofar as the Scriptures witness to the living Jesus Christ, who transcends
the written words and law, historical, scientific, and postcolonial criticism is
accepted on these hermeneutical grounds.[39]

If faith seeks understanding, it implies that the language of faith rein-
forces dialogue and communication in the experience and recognition of

38. Geertz, *Interpretation of Culture*, 5.
39. Ebeling, "Word of God and Hermeneutics," in Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, 318.

the world and in renewal of it in terms of proclamation, communicative action, and inculturation. Understanding and investigating the human words in the Scriptures can be done in light of the theological subject matter of the living and emancipating gospel about the kingdom of God. This perspective characterizes public theology as a form of hermeneutical activity which is engaged in the living word of God in connection with cultural life. In comprehending and contextualizing the word of God, we are not in a position to escape from history, society and culture as sites of effect, because it is out of the question to take an outside-hermeneutical position in light of the viewpoint of God's eye. Our understanding of God, revelation, biblical narrative, symbols, or doctrines is socially constructed, culturally conditioned, and linguistically expressed.

The concept of thick description (Clifford Geertz) is helpful in this regard. Culture is a context within which cultural linguistic systems of construable signs and symbols work together. It can be understandably, meaningfully, and intelligibly interpreted, that is, thickly described. Understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity and it engages multiple meanings of human behavior, gesture, and expression in different contexts.[40]

For the sake of thick description of the Word of God and Christian symbols, it is important to consider that all human behavior, language, and understanding are interconnected within history. All our words are, to some degree, polysemic, so that human discourse is undertaken in a diverse and different sense and accomplished within a context. Polysemy is the pivot and culmination of semantics, referring to the fact that a word has the character of an event, because it produces multiple meanings. For Paul Ricoeur, in the case of symbolic analogy or metaphor, a word is a cumulative entity, capable of engendering and acquiring new dimensions of meaning in different times and places.[41] This semantics integrates the context-sensitive skill of thick description into the hermeneutical ever-renewing process and circulation.

Coupled with its public ethical implication, the hermeneutical perspective of fusion of multiple horizons in the process of translation undergirds steps of interpretation: that is, appropriation of traditional and indigenous meaning for biblical narrative, critical distance from the alien and oppressive element and the backwardness of the tradition, and creatively self-renewed construction of biblical translation in an open-ended manner in terms of appreciation, deconstructive critique, and self-exposure, and

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40. Geertz, *Interpretation of Culture*, 14.
41. Ricoeur, "Structure, Word, Event," in Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 93.

self-renewal in dialogue with the biblical text and the other culture. The domain of untranslatability affirms translation as a process built on analectical similarity-in-difference. This hermeneutical long route keeps translation from any notion of translation reductionism or indigenous syncretism as seen in the postcolonial method of interpolation.

In the act of the covenant in the Genesis narrative, blessing is a key term testifying to God's work as the creator. God's election of Abraham does not exclude God's goodness to "nonchosen" people. Coupled with the blessing, promise is the most basic category that moves beyond what the creation provides. God makes promises even to Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 16:10–11; 17:20; 21:13, 18), becoming the advocate for their life and dignity in the wilderness.[42] Foreigners are expected and allowed to come to the temple to worship (1 Kgs 8:42–43). Concern for the poor and the widow and hospitality for the foreigner are indispensable parts of understanding the prophetic character of the biblical narrative.

In the Lucan account, Paul recognizes in Athens a religious concern, a reverence and awe, especially in their veneration of "the unknown God." Bearing witness to *solus Christus* in light of God's reconciliation in Christ, Paul is convinced that everybody lives, moves, and has her being in the universal reign of God (Acts 17:22, 27b, 28). Here we observe Paul's striking quotation of pagan writers: "For 'in him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring'" (Acts 17:28). Paul's concept of God's reconciliation with the world (Col 1:20; Phil 2:10; 1 Cor 15:22, 25, 28; Rom 5:18; 11:32; Rev 21:5, etc.) provides an insight for undertaking inculturation of the biblical narrative in the recognition of the Other.

In the narrative of the Samaritan woman (John 4:7–26) Jesus's radical openness to religious outsiders is displayed as he breaks down the barrier between Jews and Samaritans. God's love and compassion is obvious and manifest in Jesus's eagerness to welcome the signs of faith among people outside the house of Israel. Culture and cultural diversity will be redeemed and blessed for eternity rather than destroyed or wiped away (Rev 21:24).

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42. Fretheim, *Abraham*, 10.