

## Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Contexts

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**Abstract:** *Postcolonial studies has been introduced to biblical studies, theology, and more recently to preaching. This article portrays postcolonial preaching as a locally rooted and globally conscious performance that seeks to create a Third Space so that the faith community can imagine new ways of being in the world. Postcolonial preaching must be done in the context of decolonizing worship, taking consideration of the use of symbols, liturgical texts, hymnody, scripture, and time and space. The author discusses how the preacher can engage the performative in postcolonial biblical studies and deal with heteroglossia in intercultural congregations.*

Postcolonial studies was introduced to biblical studies in the mid-1990s and to theology in the early 2000s. Postcolonial theory has raised our consciousness about the politics and rhetoric of empire in the Bible and theological tradition, in Eurocentrism and colonialist assumptions, in hidden and submerged voices, and in the plurality and diversity within Christian traditions. Several practical theologians have employed postcolonial insights in pastoral care and counseling, ministry, and missional practices.<sup>1</sup> However, relatively little has been written so far on how postcolonial studies might open up discussions in homiletics,<sup>2</sup> though several volumes have offered postcolonial perspectives on worship.<sup>3</sup>

Over the past several decades, much has changed in the discussions on the nature and function of preaching, the role of the preacher, and the form and rhetoric of the sermon in homiletical theory. The emphasis has shifted from the preacher as God's messenger delivering divine truth to God's people, to one that celebrates mutuality and solidarity between the preacher and the congregation.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, North American societies have become more culturally and religiously pluralistic because of immigration, travel, refugees, and diaspora. This paper explores issues of postcolonial preaching in intercultural contexts, discussing preaching in the hybrid church, preaching and decolonizing worship, engaging the performative in postcolonial biblical criticism, and preaching and heteroglossia.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Postcolonizing God: New Perspectives on Pastoral and Practical Theology* (London: SCM, 2013), and Melinda A. McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories: Toward a Postcolonial Pastoral Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Pablo Jiménez, "Toward a Postcolonial Homiletic: Justo L. González's Contribution to Hispanic Preaching," in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. González*, ed. Alvin Padilla et al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 159–67, and Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns, *Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives* (London: Equinox, 2011), and HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Story and Song: A Postcolonial Interplay between Christian Education and Worship* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

## Postcolonial Preaching in the Hybrid Church

Christian community can be intercultural in many ways. For example, as the global cities have become the crossroads of global migration, an urban church in a metropolitan area may have parishioners coming from diverse racial and national backgrounds. Some Black and Hispanic/Latino churches have members from a number of African and Latin American countries and must negotiate commonalities and differences in multiple ways. Even in a seemingly racially homogeneous church, such as a Korean American congregation, members of different generations may speak different languages and relate to the mainstream white culture in various ways. Both in our faith communities and in the wider society, more and more people are living in intercultural realities. As a result of colonialism and slavery in the past and globalization in the present, cultures are not isolated from but are intertwined with one another. I have defined “intercultural” as “the interaction and juxtaposition, as well as tension and resistance when two or more cultures are brought together sometimes organically and sometimes through violent means in the modern world.”<sup>5</sup> This intercultural approach allows us to theorize identity, experience, agency, and justice through a cross-cultural lens.

An important contribution of postcolonial theory is the challenge to the myths of racial or national purity, homogeneity of identity, and monolithic culture. Homi K. Bhabha uses the term “hybridity” to describe the intermingling of cultures, particularly in a colonial context. For him, hybridity is different from multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, which liberals embrace and celebrate. For hybridity focuses on “the ‘inter’—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.”<sup>6</sup> Bhabha has called this in-between space the Third Space, which transgresses binary logic and questions narrowly defined identity politics. Postcolonial hybridity and the emergence of the Third Space challenge narratives of modernity based on colonialism, class, and patriarchy and any attempts to define the other based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other indicators.<sup>7</sup>

Christopher Baker builds on Bhabha’s theory to elucidate the characteristics of the hybrid church in the city. Studying emergent patterns of church-based communities that are involved in urban regeneration and civil renewal in England and the United States, Baker noticed important themes and implications for what he calls Third Space ecclesiology.<sup>8</sup> These church-based communities had constructed a local performative theology that was keenly aware of how global forces impinge upon the histories, experiences, and memories of locality. For Baker it is “performative,” which means it is pragmatic and committed to delivering outcomes. These communities hold the tension of local and global identities, which is an important form of hybridity in our global society. Instead of constructing rigid boundaries and narrow identities, these communities develop blurred identities to make room for all members, and to build coalitions with other faith groups and non-governmental organizations. In terms of structure, these communities exist in the hybrid spaces between the solid church and the liquid church. The solid church is associated with institution, hierarchy, and formal procedures, whereas

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<sup>5</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, “Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 38, emphasis his.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Baker, *The Hybrid Church in the City* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 125–35.

the liquid church is dynamic and adaptable, relying on networks and relationships. These communities also display a greater understanding of a spectrum of different types of hybridity—some do not challenge the status quo while others aim to subvert and destabilize the center. Baker recognizes that the Third Space is a difficult space to inhabit, with both potentialities and dangers. He writes, “This is the paradox of the Third Space; that just as it creates new potential identities and methodologies for all sections of society, but especially churches and other faith groups,” it also “creates the climate of fear of encountering the Other, who is now more in our midst than ever before.”<sup>9</sup>

Drawing from Baker’s work, I would portray postcolonial preaching as a locally rooted and globally conscious performance that seeks to create a Third Space so that the faith community can imagine new ways of being in the world and encountering God’s salvific action for the oppressed and marginalized. Traditional homiletical theory understands the purpose of preaching as persuasion or transmission of the sermon’s truth and message to the congregation. This understanding presumes that there is a gap between the preacher and the congregation, and that “the preacher has some insight or belief that the congregation needs to understand and accept.”<sup>10</sup> Preaching as performance does not concentrate on the preacher, but calls for greater focus on context and the rich convergence of performer, situation, setting, audience, and society. As some speech act theorists, such as J. L. Austin, have pointed out, utterances are not mere words, for they perform actions and have outcomes.<sup>11</sup> Through speech act and gestures, the preacher as performer seeks to act or consummate an action, to construct new realities, and to perform or signal possible new identities.

As both globalization and localization intensify in our contemporary world, it is critical for the preacher as performer to understand multiple subjectivities and belongings among members of the congregation. She must avoid defining identity based on territorial essentialism (e.g. Asia or Africa), cultural essentialism (e.g. Confucian), or racial essentialism (e.g. Black), because identity is fluid, porous, and hybrid, and is constantly shifting. With migration, international travel, and diaspora, we have to speak of identity not only in terms of multiplicity, but also translocality. Eleazar S. Fernandez says, “The translocal is a self that is porous to the interweaving of the many localities in the self. This person is locally rooted and globally winged. A translocal is one who experiences the interweaving, the tension, and the possibilities of one world of many worlds.”<sup>12</sup> Like a jazz player or a *bricoleur*, the preacher has to create or construct her performance from a diverse range of traditions and bring disparate elements together. Biblical scholar Tat-siong Benny Liew exhorts postcolonial critics to draw “resources available from various sites and transits liberally and flexibly, without pledging to any cultural, racial, or national canons or canonical standards, for the sake of justice making.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>10</sup> Rose, *Sharing the Word*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

<sup>12</sup> Eleazar S. Fernandez, “Orchestrating New Theological Overtures: Heterogeneity, Dissonance, and Fluidity vis-à-vis Imperial Monophony,” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 3, no. 2.1 (January 2012): 9, [http://www.raceandreligion.com/JRER/Volume\\_3\\_\(2012\)\\_files/2%2013%201%20Intro.pdf](http://www.raceandreligion.com/JRER/Volume_3_(2012)_files/2%2013%201%20Intro.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Tat-siong Benny Liew, “Introduction: Intervening on the Postcolonial,” in *Postcolonial Intervention: Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 15.

Since the aim of postcolonial preaching is to create a subversive Third Space, the preacher must dislodge the audience from common sense (which usually serves the status quo) and challenge the legacy of colonialism and the logic of empire. Sarah Travis describes the tasks of decolonizing preaching as follows:

These include recognizing difference and diversity within the listening community and beyond, naming colonialism/imperialism as a past and present reality, speaking against the damaging and destructive patterns and discourses that have emerged within colonial/imperial projects, and coming to terms with the relationship between Church and empire.<sup>14</sup>

To accomplish these tasks, preachers can learn from some of the approaches used by postcolonial theologians, including questioning Eurocentrism in biblical studies and theology, changing signifying practices, creating oppositional readings, questioning ideologies shaping gender, race, and class, lifting up marginalized or subjugated voices, and committing to anticolonial and anti-globalization theory and praxis.

The creation of Third Space is to enable both the preachers and listeners to imagine new ways of being in the world and to discern God's grace for the victims of history and the marginalized. The authority to speak and preach cannot reside in one person—usually in the pastor—but should be shared among members of the community. The separation of the preacher from the community could reinforce clericalism and the notion that the expert knows best. Instead, the postcolonial approach is “multivoiced, dialogical, and polycentric,” as theologian Christopher Duraisingh says.<sup>15</sup> The responsibility of preaching can be rotated among ordained and lay leaders, and others can and should be trained and equipped to take up the task. In a reversal of empire, those who are not given voice by society should be given the space and be empowered to share their stories and God's action in their midst.

Preaching as performance is political when it does not reinscribe power dynamics in the church and society but seeks, rather, to change and subvert them. As the work of Judith Butler has shown, the performative, including gestures and speech acts, produces results and constructs social reality. For her, identity is not something inborn or natural, but is acquired through repeated performances, which can be challenged and queered.<sup>16</sup> Butler has increasingly focused on the performative in the political and she has worked with her colleague Athena Athanasiou, a Greek feminist theorist. Commenting on the mass protests such as the Occupy movement, Athanasiou says these public gatherings enable and enact a “performativity of embodied agency” for social and political changes.<sup>17</sup> The participation in these gatherings involves corporeal vulnerability of fatigue, weariness, and police repression, but also “a shared affective economy of motivation, endurance, changeability, and vitalization.”<sup>18</sup> I have written elsewhere about

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<sup>14</sup> Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Duraisingh, “Towards a Postcolonial Re-Visioning of the Church's Faith, Witness, and Communion,” in *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Ian T. Douglas and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Church Publishing, 2001), 337.

<sup>16</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 178.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

how the church can learn from the Occupy movement.<sup>19</sup> The Christians I have interviewed who participated in the Occupy movement have experienced the presence of God in ways they have seldom experienced in the traditional church. The liturgy, the songs, and the preaching are often so patterned and routine they seldom stir people's imagination or touch their deepest feelings. It is little wonder that people in the pews are sometimes called "God's frozen people." For the church to be relevant and faithful to its prophetic calling, it needs to recover the "performativity of embodied agency" in preaching and worship.

### **Preaching and Decolonizing Worship**

Postcolonial preaching as performance does not take place in a vacuum, but in the matrix of Christian worship. Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns have applied postcolonial inquiries to the study of worship, including liturgical texts, symbolic contexts, hymnody, the use of Scripture, and time and space. They aim to expose "the issues of ideology and colonial agenda of western Christianity," and to problematize "the issues of language, imageries, symbols and representation in our liturgical/worship texts and symbols."<sup>20</sup> For example, they point to the ubiquitous use of the imageries of light and darkness in key texts and symbols in the classical Western liturgical tradition. Privileging light over darkness can lead to the marginalization of dark-skinned people, and the reinforcing of negative racial stereotypes. Their study also demonstrates that "much of European hymnody advances the cause of European colonialism." Victorian hymns were imperialistic, and many of them focused on empire and Christian militarism.<sup>21</sup> Many of these hymns, unfortunately, found their way into hymnody in many parts of the world and are still sung in translated versions. In the conclusion of their study, Jagessar and Burns call for more conscious reflection on liturgical rites and worship, with an openness to tradition—its authority and ambiguity—and a concomitant commitment to subject it to questions of colonial and postcolonial concerns.

Postcolonial preaching must take into consideration the totality of the worship experience, and the communal environments in which the preaching occurs. The preacher needs to pay attention to the use of sacred space, liturgical texts, symbols, architectural design, and hymnody. A tall pulpit placed far and separate from the congregation reinforces the authority of the preacher and her distance from members of the community. Also, the effects of liberative and subversive preaching are undermined by the singing of nineteenth-century triumphant, missionary hymns. The message of God's inclusive love for all is compromised by the use of androcentric language and images, which marginalize women's experiences. The pale-skinned Jesus and his disciples portrayed in the stained glass windows, together with predominant Western symbols and ambience in many churches, will also work against intercultural emphases in worship and preaching.

The preacher must be self-reflective about how her role, persona, rhetoric, style, and gestures might either hinder or further the cause of decolonizing worship. For example, in many traditions, the pastor or the preacher robes or puts on particular

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<sup>19</sup> Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 111–32.

<sup>20</sup> Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 49.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–53.

clothing or vestments.<sup>22</sup> Some, such as Presbyterian priest Jeffrey J. Meyers, argue that robing or putting on special clothing will emphasize the office of the pastor (or the preacher) and deemphasize the personality of the person in the pulpit. The preacher plays a symbolic role in worship, and the robe does not set him or her above the congregation; rather, it sets him or her apart because of the unique office the pastor or preacher plays in leading Sunday worship. Robing adds dignity and reverence to worship and makes the preacher look less like a CEO in formal business attire.<sup>23</sup> However, robing or wearing special clothing also has the danger of reinforcing a two-class system—clergy and laity—and a hierarchical structure. Moreover, in some traditions, the vestment or clothing reflects vestiges of empire and colonial authority. Glauco S. De Lima, Anglican bishop of San Paulo, Brazil, notes,

Beyond the very order and linguistic sources of our worship, even our clothing bears witness to a colonial origin. In the vestments and trimmings of the clergy, for example, on the bishop's surplice, the sleeves finish up at the cuffs in the same way as those of the noblemen in the British court.<sup>24</sup>

Even when the majority of Anglicans now live in the global South and more women being ordained, with a few even becoming bishops, the vestments have not changed much. It is important for the preacher to remember that she assumes certain roles and projects a certain persona when she robes or wears special clothing, since there are both expectations of and projections from the gathered community. If she chooses to wear the robe or vestment, she must be clear in her mind on why she is doing so and on how such a gesture will facilitate or hinder her postcolonial preaching. She should also explain the reasons to the congregation.

Traditionally, preaching means delivering a sermon behind the pulpit. Many books on homiletics provide guidelines and hints for the development of sermon forms, narrative structures, and rhythm and cadence of delivery.<sup>25</sup> But preaching a sermon is monological and, as such, does not create a plurivocal and dialogical community.<sup>26</sup> Except in the case of gifted preaching, listening to a sermon can be monotonous and boring, especially for young people who have grown up with mixed media in a digital age. Preaching as performance emphasizes the act as an art form; hence, it can borrow from different creative styles, such as dialogue, storytelling, dramatized presentation, skit, street theatre, call and response, and mixed media with images and music. In addition to using words, the preacher can evoke memory of the past and can inculcate new values and understanding through intentional movements, gestures, music, habits, and affects in the creation of new communal environments. Instead of delivering a

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<sup>22</sup> Martyn Percy discusses the development of vestments and clerical collar in *Clergy: The Origin of Species* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 88–91.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey J. Meyers, "Why Does the Pastor Wear a Robe?" *Theologia*, <http://www.hornes.org/theologia/jeffrey-meyers/why-does-the-pastor-wear-a-robe>.

<sup>24</sup> Glauco S. de Lima, "Preface," in *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Richard L. Eslinger, *A New Hearing: Living Options in Homiletic Methods* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987), and Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Burns makes some suggestions to make preaching more dialogical in *SCM Studyguide to Liturgy* (London: SCM, 2006), 88–90.

lecture-style sermon taught in the academy, preachers can learn from creative forms used by the common folk, and in popular religiosity. Justo L. González writes, “Most Hispanics do not see the sermon as a text, but rather as an event.”<sup>27</sup> An example is a sermon for Good Friday preached by Virgilio Elizondo and Patricia Elizondo in a dialogical form. The sermon included the voices of the narrator and the preacher, and between each section, a popular hymn in the Hispanic congregation was sung.<sup>28</sup> Virgilio Elizondo writes, this sermon “demonstrates that preaching is a lively way of doing ‘teología en conjunto’ [doing theology as a group].”<sup>29</sup>

Postcolonial preaching challenges Eurocentric styles of worship and preaching methods. Much has been written on how Black culture and preaching style are important for the vitality and empowerment of Black congregations. For example, Henry H. Mitchell focuses his study on the use of storytelling, role-play, spontaneous dramatization, imaginative elaboration of biblical stories, and preaching styles rooted in African American culture. He accentuates the idea of preaching as performance by discussing the use of mannerisms, musical tones or chanting, rhetorical flair, and slow delivery in preaching.<sup>30</sup> Evans E. Crawford turns his attention to a particular style of African American folk preaching: call and response. Rooted in West African tradition, the call and response style accounts for the musicality of speech in Black churches. In some churches, as the preacher speaks, the choir responds with a low rumbling hum to the musical intonations of the preacher. Crawford calls this “hum thoughts.”<sup>31</sup> In other styles of call and response, members of the congregation respond with sounds and gestures, and unburden their hearts with a “Preach!” or “Have Mercy!” or “Truly!” Both the preacher and congregation are engaged in creating a multivocal and lively performance that transgresses the speaker-listener model seen in most white churches.<sup>32</sup> Black female scholars have also discussed the gifts of Black women preachers and their struggles to overcome institutional sexism and gender bias.<sup>33</sup> Besides Black preaching, other preaching styles in racial and ethnic minority churches have also been studied. For example, Eunjoo Mary Kim analyzes the use of silence, indirect communication, and the spiral-form sermon in Asian American preaching.<sup>34</sup> Justo L. González and Pablo A. Jiménez discuss the history, character, and methodological issues of preaching in the Hispanic congregation, and illustrate the discussion with samples of sermons.<sup>35</sup> These different preaching styles, however, are seldom analyzed in white, mainstream texts on

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<sup>27</sup> Justo L. González, “Standing at the Púlpito,” in *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching*, ed. Justo L. González and Pablo A. Jiménez (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 57.

<sup>28</sup> Virgilio Elizondo, “Seven Last Words,” in *Púlpito*, 89–94.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>30</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Act* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 88–97.

<sup>31</sup> Evans E. Crawford, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Jones notes that sometimes the dialogical or the call and response models can also reinforce the authority of the preacher and the context must be taken into consideration.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Teresa L. Fry Brown, *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women Proclaiming God’s Word* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003); Donna E. Allen, *Toward a Womanist Homiletic: Katie Cannon, Alice Walker and Emancipatory Proclamation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God: A Homiletic from an Asian American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 106–28.

<sup>35</sup> González and Jiménez, *Púlpito*.

preaching, which often focus on the preacher and the sermon, and less on the audience and the context.

### **Engaging the Performative in Postcolonial Biblical Criticism**

Postcolonial biblical criticism has made significant contributions to the field of biblical studies. R. S. Sugirtharajah writes, “What postcolonial biblical studies does is to focus on the whole issue of expansion, domination, and imperialism as central forces in defining both the biblical narratives and biblical interpretation.”<sup>36</sup> The Hebrew people and early Christians lived under the shadows of Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. The Bible lends itself to postcolonial and intercultural studies because it deals with the themes of travel, space and spatial construction, movement, boundaries, borderland, border-crossing, crossroad, indigenized women and population, ethnic formation, diasporic communities, rhizomic fragments, uprooting, displacing place, displacement, transplantation, international power relations, and globalization processes.<sup>37</sup> Several scholars have discussed the implications of postcolonial biblical criticism for worship and preaching. Jagessar and Burns apply postcolonial criticism to the questioning of the assumptions and biases of lectionaries, while Travis offers examples of how postcolonial biblical criticism can be used in preaching.<sup>38</sup>

I want to explore the performative aspect of postcolonial biblical criticism, in order to glean insights from it for postcolonial preaching as performance. Musa W. Dube, a Botswana biblical scholar and author of *Postcolonial Feminist Biblical Interpretation*,<sup>39</sup> has written a creative piece of work, entitled “The Unpublished Letters of Orpah to Ruth.”<sup>40</sup> In the beginning of the piece, Dube creates a scene telling the readers how the narrator has found Orpah’s letters. Several women were sitting outside around a fire at night, discussing the images of Africa on TV, and in newspapers and books. A young woman named Lesedi was among them, and though she had been offered a scholarship to study anthropology elsewhere, she had just returned to Botswana. Lesedi was offended by the portrayal of non-Western and non-Christian people as savage, childish, lazy, and sexually immoral in the anthropological books she had read. All the women around the fire agreed they should tell their own stories, and not let others define who they are. And even though the eldest Grandmother had been telling stories about their intelligent ancestors all her life, no one had ever written or published them. Lesedi said she had returned to write their stories, and spent day and night doing it, though she could find no publisher. The narrator of the story found the letters to Ruth in a box in Lesedi’s room labeled “NO PUBLISHER.”

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<sup>36</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>37</sup> Fernando F. Segovia discusses these themes in the Gospel of John, see “Johannine Studies and Geopolitical: Reflections upon Absence and Irruption,” in *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies*, ed. Tom Thatcher (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 281–306. These themes can also be found in other parts of the Bible.

<sup>38</sup> Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 71–85, and Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*, 109–26.

<sup>39</sup> Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Musa W. Dube, “The Unpublished Letters of Orpah to Ruth,” in *Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (second series), ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 145–50.



By creating this imaginative scene, Dube lifts up several important themes in postcolonial criticism. Since the publication of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*, postcolonial critics have paid much attention to the politics of representation.<sup>41</sup> Colonized peoples and people living in the global South have been portrayed as inferior, immoral, and lazy in order to justify Western colonization and control. The production of knowledge is closely related to power, and the native peoples do not have easy access to the means to publicize their own ideas. This reinforces the colonial ideology that the natives cannot represent themselves; therefore, the colonial West must represent them. In many cases, colonial knowledge about natives is taught to the natives as "objective" scholarship, so that they will harbor and internalize a biased view about themselves. But the natives are not passive, for they have constructed a counter-memory through their stories, told from generation to generation, and women have played a critical role in their remembrance.

The four letters that Orpah sent to Ruth, the younger Moabite sister, told about the origins of the Moabite people. Long ago after an earthquake in the land, Lot's children fled and sought refuge in Zoar, a small town in the southern end of the Dead Sea, and they multiplied into a people called Moabites. Because of a severe famine in Judah, Elimelech and Naomi came to Moab, and King Eglon offered them hospitality, so they settled there. Elimelech was very loyal to the King for this, and he was killed when he went to fight for the King's country during a war. The King vowed to bring up Mahlon and Chilion, the sons of Elimelech and Naomi, and betrothed his own daughters, Orpah and Ruth, to them. After King Eglon died, Balak, brother of Orpah and Ruth, succeeded him, but Mahlon and Chilion wanted to usurp the throne, so they murdered the king. Naomi became so distraught that she decided to return to her country with her daughters-in-law. Ruth had been close to Naomi since childhood and Orpah said it was right for Ruth to stay in Judah to take care of Naomi, an old childless widow. But Orpah followed Naomi's advice to return to Moab to take care of their widowed mother, and she later became the regent queen and priestess to her people. Orpah married a priest named Balaam, and they had a son named after Lot and a daughter named after Ruth, so that Ruth's name would not be forgotten in her own land. Orpah asked Ruth to tell her children about the stories of the Moabites, of their origins, of their hospitality, and of their struggles to survive.

In Orpah's letters, Dube uses the storytelling method to portray the history of the Moabites in a positive light, since the Hebrew Scripture often describes them negatively because Moab was often in conflict with its neighbor Israel. The letters tell the story from the side of Orpah, a minor and often forgotten character in the book of Ruth. Ruth's story is included in the canonical Bible and she is remembered as an ancestor of Jesus in the genealogy in Matthew's Gospel (1:5). But Orpah, who returned to Moab, was forgotten and she is never mentioned again in the Bible. The letters say Orpah and Ruth were princesses who lived in the royal court and were victims of the power struggles among their male kinsmen. After returning to Moab, Orpah became a leader of her people and officiated in religious duties, and she also bore two children. Even as Orpah's name was erased from Jewish memory, Orpah wanted Ruth's name to be remembered among her own people. Dube's storytelling demonstrates that the Bible can be interpreted from multiple perspectives, and she highlights the suffering of women and their children

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<sup>41</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

during war and political strife. By creatively imagining the history and voice of the subjugated Orpah, Dube contributes to a growing body of postcolonial biblical criticism that focuses on the stories of indigenous women and women living in the contact zone, women like Rahab, Ruth, Orpah, and the Syrophoenician woman.<sup>42</sup> Her storytelling offers a concrete example of postcolonial feminist criticism, which she says, must resist “both patriarchal and imperial oppression in order to cultivate a space of liberating interdependence between nations, genders, races, ethnicities, the environment, and development.”<sup>43</sup>

Another example of performative postcolonial criticism is my self-interview, “On Color-Coding Jesus: An Interview with Kwok Pui-lan,” published in one of the early texts of postcolonial biblical criticism.<sup>44</sup> I decided to use the form of interview that many other postcolonial theorists such as Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have used, which offers tremendous insights to their work and the background of their thinking.<sup>45</sup> In this self-interview, I playfully create a character “Quest” as the interviewer, since I want to discuss the contemporary interdisciplinary quest for the historical Jesus. The interview is conducted in a dialogical and colloquial manner:

**Quest:** Why are you obsessed with Jesus?

**Kwok:** I am not obsessed with Jesus, but I am obsessed with other people’s obsession with Jesus.<sup>46</sup> The mock interview discusses the work of the Jesus seminar, formed in 1985, to determine who Jesus really was and what he actually said. The participants cast colored balls to vote to determine which sayings are close to what Jesus actually said and which are less certain or were created by his followers. The interview proceeds to point out that the quest for the historical Jesus is a coded quest for origins. In the nineteenth century, the quest first took place in Europe, when Europe underwent tremendous changes as a result of the encounter with the colonized world. The current quest began in the United States around the 1980s and caught the attention of the mass media, and it was reported on National Public Radio, in *People* and *Time* magazines, and on TV.

**Quest:** Then why do the Americans have to search for origins?

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<sup>42</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*; Laura E. Donaldson, “The Sign of Orpah: Reading Ruth through Native Eyes,” in Brenner, ed. *Ruth and Esther*, 130–42; Kwok Pui-lan, “Finding Ruth a Home: Gender, Sexuality and the Politics of Otherness,” in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 100–21; Kwok Pui-lan, “Woman, Dogs, and Crumbs: Constructing a Postcolonial Discourse,” in *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 71–83; Laura E. Donaldson, “Gospel Hauntings: The Postcolonial Demons of Biblical Criticism,” in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Stephen D. Moore (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 97–113.

<sup>43</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, “On Color-Coding Jesus: An Interview with Kwok Pui-lan,” in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 176–88.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Joseph A. Buttigieg and Paul A. Bové, “An Interview with Edward W. Said,” *Boundary 2*, 20 (1993): 1–25; Jonathan Rutherford, “The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 207–21; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> Kwok, “On Color-Coding Jesus,” 176.

**Kwok:** The straight white males in America have made a lot of noises saying that they have lost a lot of ground to women, minorities, and gays and lesbians. The mass media in the US has played up the angry white male syndrome. Whenever the white males are not certain about their identity, they search for Jesus.<sup>47</sup>

The self-interview discusses important topics, such as the changing contexts of the historical quests for Jesus, Orientalism in the study of the Bible and other sacred texts, and the treatment of the Bible as fetish and a museum object instead of a living tradition. It asks Christians from the global South to liberate themselves from the European and Euro-American hallucinations, and to reimagine reading the Bible as diasporic adventure. Yet, the interview is conducted with humor and satire, poking fun at the work of scholars engaged in the quests. The lightheartedness of performance is a great way to say that we cannot take the historical quest of Jesus seriously as if anyone can really truly offer us the “real Jesus.”

Postcolonial biblical criticism has been done in creative and imaginative ways, especially by women. In these two examples using letter writing, storytelling, and interview, I have shown how preachers can learn from the ingenuity of postcolonial critics, and can use different methods to introduce postcolonial biblical criticism in lively and contextual ways. I have published dramatized Bible studies and sermons, which can provide additional resources and insights for preachers.<sup>48</sup>

### **Postcolonial Preaching and Heteroglossia**

If the aim of postcolonial preaching is to create a multivocal and dialogical faith community committed to justice, we have to attend to the issue of language in intercultural contexts. In urban global cities, it is increasingly common to have church members speaking different mother tongues and immigrants struggling with English or another colonial language. Many of them live in bicultural and bilingual worlds, speak the dominant language with an accent, and must negotiate and translate constantly between hybrid contexts. The Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the concept of heteroglossia, which refers to the co-existence of a diversity of voices, styles of discourses or points of views in a literary work, particularly in a novel.<sup>49</sup> For Bakhtin, as Andrew Robinson notes, “Even within a single perspective, there are always multiple voices and perspectives, because the language which is used has been borrowed from others.”<sup>50</sup> Bakhtin criticizes monoglossical language, which is closed or deaf to the voices of difference and supports centralized forces. Heteroglossia interrupts the dominant discourse with other voices, and celebrates diversity and folk and festive language. How might heteroglossia impact our ways of thinking about preaching and its cultural environment?

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>48</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, “Prologue,” in *Discovering the Bible*, ix–xvi, and “Epilogue,” in *Discovering the Bible*, 96–100; Kwok Pui-lan, “Worshipping with Asian Women: A Homily on Jesus Healing the Daughter of a Canaanite Woman,” in *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 236–42.

<sup>49</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Robinson, “Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia,” *Ceasefire*, <http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-1/>.

Acts 2 offers a powerful image of heteroglossia. On the day of the Pentecost, the Spirit descends on the disciples. Biblical scholar Frank Yamada notes that “they do not break into a meta-language, a single tongue,” but “*divided* tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other *languages*” (Acts 2:3-4).<sup>51</sup> The people who gathered in Jerusalem were quite diverse, for there were diasporic Jews scattered throughout the empire and other proselytes.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. . . [there were] Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs (Acts 2:5–11).

The crowd gathered was bewildered, “because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each” (v.6). Yamada says that this passage affirms that God “prefers the plural over the singular, languages over a single-tongue, [and] cultures over one defining culture.”<sup>52</sup>

The diversity of the crowd speaking in different tongues in Jerusalem is not unlike what we can find in today’s urban churches in global cities, where immigrants from different nations gather to worship together. Language continues to be an important issue in postcolonial studies. In *Not Like a Native Speaker*, cultural critic Rey Chow discusses racialization as an encounter with language. The colonized encounter with the colonizing language has racial overtones, and is associated with the severance with the mother tongue and with the deprivation of linguistic autonomy and integrity. But Chow argues, such an encounter also “offers a privileged vantage point from which to view the postcolonial situation, for precisely the reason that this language has been imposed from without.”<sup>53</sup> The discussion of the use of Black English in preaching is a case in point.

Black English is the rich rendition of English spoken in the Black community, full of subtle shadings of sound, cadences, and color. For Henry H. Mitchell, a Black preacher must be able to preach in Black English in order “to touch the souls of Black folk with soul language,” and “to generate rapport with the congregation by means of an identity which is perceived as close.”<sup>54</sup> The kind of closeness and emotional support is not available in White-language preaching. He asserts, “No Black person can truly identify with a God who speaks only the language of the White oppressor.”<sup>55</sup> The use of Black language supports Black identity because it demonstrates that God’s message can be expressed by the language of the people. Yet, the use of Black language has pushback from middle-class Blacks, who think that the preacher should not use the language of the Black ghetto. Moreover, colleges and seminaries have trained Black clergy in standard white middle-class American English, with the assumption that “White is right.” The Black-culture churches find it difficult to understand or relate to trained Black clergy persons “preaching Whitese to them.” Mitchell’s hope is that the Black clergy can both

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<sup>51</sup> Frank M. Yamada, “The View from 2040: the Futures of Theological Education,” <http://mccormick.edu/assets/Inaugural%20Address.pdf>, emphasis his.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Rey Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Language as a Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 14.

<sup>54</sup> Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, 81.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 83.

preach Black English in Black-culture churches and use “standard” English when communicating with the larger community, so that the Black churches will not be isolated. In this sense, the preacher serves as a cultural translator between the two communities.

Language is also an issue in Latino congregations, as they are bicultural and bilingual in varying degrees: some are Spanish-dominant and some are English-dominant. There are also generational differences between the older and younger generations, with the older generation being less acculturated into the mainstream culture. González describes the various ways Latino preachers adapt to the bilingual contexts:

Many preachers preach in one language and summarize their sermon in the other. Some translate their own sermon as they go along. An increasing number are becoming adept at a style of preaching in which a few sentences are said in English, the next few in Spanish, and so on, and this is done in such a way that people who have very limited proficiency in one of the two languages can still follow the sermon.<sup>56</sup>

González says that we should not regard bilingualism as a problem to be overcome, because the church should look toward a future in which a great multitude will come from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9). The church serves as a subversive sign to the future when it finds ways to worship and live in multicultural and multilingual ways.

The issue of language multiplies in a congregation with people who come from different nations and cultures. Even though we cannot expect the preacher to be multilingual, he or she needs to develop cultural sensitivity in working with a diverse congregation. Since words, metaphors, and symbols are polyvalent and might mean different things in different cultures, the preacher needs to be careful in cultural negotiation. For example, the symbol of the dragon represents the Devil or something evil in the Bible and in the Christian tradition. The book of Revelation is replete with negative images of the dragon and slaying and throwing down the beast (12:9; 13:1-2; 16:13; 20:2-3). However, in Chinese culture, the dragon symbolizes power, strength, and good luck, and during the Chinese New Year, there is the dragon dance in Chinatowns in many cities.<sup>57</sup> The preacher can avoid cross-cultural misunderstanding if he or she is alert to the cultural backgrounds of church members. Opportunities for different groups of church members to share their culture with the congregation will promote dialogue and inclusivity.

Heteroglossia can be a threat but also a promise. In traditional homiletical theory, language is seen as transparent and meaning as stable. The task of the preacher is to impart to listeners the claim of the scriptural text or a message from God. In postcolonial preaching, preaching is a communal event, with the congregation participating and responding. The preacher needs to respond to the congregation—with its diversity and heteroglossia. As Edward Farley notes, “the world of preaching is not the safe and

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<sup>56</sup> González, “Standing at the Púlpito,” 61.

<sup>57</sup> Tat-siong Benny Liew mentioned the different understandings of the symbol of the dragon during his lecture “Haunting Silence: Failed Orality and Mark’s (Messianic) Secret,” at the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, October 2, 2014.

efficient world of applying verses and passages but the more muddy, unsafe, and uncertain world of interpreting the mysteries of faith.”<sup>58</sup> Heteroglossia is a promise, when different voices and discourses are brought to negotiate with one another, on how to best accommodate diverse perspectives. All are invited into the Third Space to examine the “inter” in our identities, languages, and cultures, and by doing so encounter the liberating grace of God in fresh ways.

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<sup>58</sup> Edward Farley, “Toward a New Paradigm for Preaching,” in *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture*, ed. Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 169.