

Postcolonial Theology. A Brief Introduction.

This topic has taken me to New York Union, Bangalore UTC, London LSE, Manchester Uni,, Dindigul Dalits. Joe Duggan convener of our international Postcolonial Theology Network will be staying with me in November

DEFINITIONS:

- ‘Colonialism’: settling lands with new residents, exploiting the land through military and administration.
- ‘Imperialism’: rules from the centre and extends power outwards.
- Post-colonial: what comes after colonialism (such a thing?)
- Postcolonial studies: learning from colonial experiences to understand dynamics at work today

A LOOK AT SOME MAPS:

1. Mappa Mundi. Tau shape. East at top to show Sun & Resurrection

Wm of Malmesbury – C12th English Chronicle:

“The world is not evenly divided. Of its three parts, our enemies hold Asia as their hereditary home – a part of the world which our forefathers rightly considered equal to the other two parts put together. Yet formerly our Faith put out its branches.... But now the Christians of those parts, if there are any left, squeeze a bare subsistence from the soil and pay tribute to their enemies, looking to us with silent longing for the liberty they have lost. Africa too, the second part of the world, has been held by our enemies by force of arms for two hundred years and more, a danger to Christendom all the greater because it formerly sustained the brightest spirits.. Thirdly there is Europe, the remaining region of the world. Of this region we Christians inhabit only a part... this little portion of the world which is ours is pressed upon by warlike Turks and Saracens; for three hundred hears they have held Spain and the Balearic Islands, and they live in hope of devouring the rest.
(cited in Ian M Higgins, Writing East)

C19 & C20 European expansion had the same mind?

2. Canterbury Mappa Mundi – English map

1025/1050 in Canterbury (British Museum)

Note enlarged Cornwall & and fighting figures (Norman and Saxon)

3. British Empire Map

I was taught – “the pink parts of the world belong to us.” 11 million sq miles.

Cecil Rhodes: “to be born an Englishman is to win first prize in the lottery of life.”

4. Modern ‘realistic areas’ map

Paints a different mind picture of our place

Ergo: Maps of the World are ‘mind-maps’ not simply geographical

The way we view the world often derives from our cultural history and the position we hold within that history. Two positions in particular (according to PT):

- Imperialist
- Subaltern – subjugated. (fuller definition later)

BUT IS IMPERIALISM OVER?

Feb 1960 Cape Town Parliament: Harold Macmillan PM speech.

The wind of change is blowing through this continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact.

(Affected Bexhill – ‘costa geriatrica’ – as Civil Servants returned from Empire.)

Many argue: Today there are better ways for GB to bleed colonies. So Imperialism is transmogrified but not finished!

- You can rule almost unseen using Economic power.
London collects global tribute as follows:
30% of global foreign exchange, 40% foreign equity.
- Military control is not guaranteed and can back-fire, so use Technology.
Add Technology to Economic power = globalisation (new imperialism?)
- After British Empire, Western attitudes remain dominant way world sees things
eg: World Rulers often educated at OxBridge. Also: USA uses its own individualistic understanding of Human Rights as excuse to invade territory.

This ‘attitudinal imperialism’ is where Postcolonial Studies come in:

THE INSIGHTS OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

Postcolonial Studies look at how western intellectual enquiry dominates how we see world around us. For example:

- There is an underlying us/them binary of us against Orient/Outsider/Stranger and sees these outsiders as backward, needing European guidance.
Development Studies are therefore on Western model – we are developed nations and they are the ‘undeveloped’ nations!
- We marginalise their epistemology.
Our way of knowing is proper, the epistemology of Others is relegated as ‘myth’ of ‘folklore’. So we relate their story and they become our objects (eg anthropological study).
“I can talk about you better than you can.” No need to listen.

- Western Capitalist emphasis on the individual denies the majority world its emphasis on the social (cf 'human' rights, when social cohesion or simple sharing is downplayed) So 'Identity' is individualised, whereas most subalterns experience themselves as Hybrid (I am Muslim but wear western clothes)
- Barber: Jihad vs McWorld (1992)
Do not be surprised if subjugated people refuse Globalisation, since they can see it as the new Imperialism. See us exploiting their oil and fighting our wars on their soil.
- In sum: Postcolonial Studies asks the question:
What do things look like from the perspective of the subjugated?

In this endeavour PCS has utilised Marxist-derived notions but reconstructed them as follows:

Gramsci enlarged Marxist Theory of History by inventing term 'subaltern' to mean: those who are displaced to margins of society and now lack human agency. (lit: below the other) *[In passing we note the difficulties with this and all language to describe the marginalised – even the word marginalised derives from western mind-set that there is a centre and that we are somehow at it.]*

Bhabha: following Gramsci's lead but now looks at 'social power' by which the subaltern might just gain social power and so subvert the social group who controls them. (Spivak had questioned a wide use of term subaltern and said it must be confined to those who have no social agency and will not get it!)

.... Interesting to note that Jesus 1: shares Postcolonial emphasis on 'marginalised'
2. introduces a new form of 'subversion' of Power, 3..preaches God's Option for the Subaltern.

POSTCOLONIAL THEOLOGY:

The discipline of Postcolonial Studies lays bare a whole host of issues for the Christian to address, and this is what Postcolonial Theology seeks to do:

1. Bible ? : (see for example Brueggemann in: Church as counter-culture. Suny 2000)

Tanach:

- 1.. Created against background of Empires
- 2..Then redacted by controlling class (Priestly, Deuteronomic etc)

Yet amazingly, God's option for poor still shines through.
eg Gottwald's work on Tribal invasion of the Canaan.

New Testament:

Gospels:

Galilee subjugated by Rome and Judah. Jesus addresses the poor as Blessed and is intent on re-configuring nationhood.
We therefore have to look at the gospel stories afresh to unearth the originating source & meaning.

We would then note for example: (after Sawicki)

- Jesus distributes free fish & bread against Roman market economy and Jewish food tithes.
- Jesus disrupts Fatherhood/Motherhood ties – against post-Exilic lineage purity.
- Calls Matthew away from table
- Eats with those deemed sinners/outcastes
- Beatitudes against all Imperialist logic.
- Tussle with Demoniac 'Legion's addiction to self-mutilation~ typical symbol of subaltern malaise.

Epistles & Acts:

Outreach into Roman Empire hugely influenced by Graeco-Roman imperial structures – geographically, theologically and culturally.
(viz. strained ambiguity in NT about relationships with Rome and authority)

We have to ask where our beliefs may have been without these cultural/imperialist influences on and of the Bible.

2. Church ? :

Christendom:

Church has been modelled within Imperialist history issuing in Patronising clerical traditions.
(see Murray Williams: Post-Christendom; also see history of Liturgy)

Creeds:

determined within cut and thrust of imperial power struggles
(esp Alexandria vs Antioch)

Doctrines:

greatly influenced after 1054 by Roman and Constantinople imperial politics.

Attempts at Reform:

C16th Reformation – but still the imperialist mind-set prevails. (see Rethinking Christianity: Ward p107)

Church of England:

Initially an ecumenical project,
but mind-set remained imperialist and subjugated *non*-conformists.

Anglican Communion: adjunct of Empire and Commonwealth?

3. Missiology ? :

Problem: Christians are mandated to preach Gospel to world. How can this be done without imposing our culture? (relates to our earlier seminar on Christ and Culture)

Christians have helped export European mind-set to world (so that Xnity is resented by many in the 'east')

Church of England sold Christianity to British as a set of middle-class manners.

Ward: page 170

In other words
we have utilised 'mimicry':

Mimicry and Identity are strong Postcolonial themes.

Colonialism inculcates the imperialist's identity – you must imitate me. (I've even spotted an American base-ball cap on top of a turban!)

But the mimic becomes "almost the same but not White," and knows it!
(There is a similar dynamic in Imposter Syndrome in academia)

But note:

A: Jesus uses the device of Parables to subvert mimicry by telling tales which purport to mimic our usual ways of living and then twisting it round to Kingdom of God mind-set –
'almost the same but not quite' – there's the twist in the tail of the story.

B: Jesus specifically preaches against mimicry (Mk 10:40 Not so among you!)

4.. The 'Identity' of Jesus? :

In his person he does not mimic the ruler –

But thereafter his κενωσις and diaconal teaching is subverted by church which then offers us Jesus as Emperor/saviour, the Imperialist Alpha male - the autonomous self-made, self-mastering individual – who saves the disabled (creating subaltern dependents?). Fixing the failing or abnormal?

But on contrary, Jesus offers model of Slave as Liberator: deconstructs the map of power!

5.. The Identity of God? :

We've inherited lingering Imperialist picture of a Father/God looking down from above. Holy and apart.

The Triune reality of God busts open this binary notion.

St John's insistence on 'You in Me and Me in Father' means Jesus is not a subaltern of Father! And that makes us not subalterns of our Father God too.

God is the Other who is not outside.

Indeed, our mind-set and our language has to change because there is now no outsider/insider,

- No beyond for the safe God to be
- there is now only Mutually Assured Vulnerability.
- no separation of native/alien, white/black, pure/impure, spirit/matter, master/subaltern.

6.. Another way to put this is to say that Binaries are to do with creating Borders.

Another great theme of Postcolonial thinking is the notion of 'Borderlands' - Liminality: the creative liminal spaces that such outmoded binaries afford.

So while *we* negotiate at the boundaries between our binaries, Jesus transcends them and perceives the unity
– it demands again a change of language and mind-set (and behaviour! as in μετανοία.

So is introduced the Trinity. We triangulate to the truth because we can only come to the truth from different angles – not by contrasting binaries but transcending them.

(So is introduced Jesus as the ultimate Hybrid of Divinity & Humankind.)

7.. Nature of Theology? :

Most theological models have been constructed by West and exported as only method. But now new models have made an impact. For example:

Liberation Theology from Latin American Base Communities & Western poor.

- It taught west to listen to subalterns: e.g. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. (Friere)
- But it reduced oppression to economics.
- Also adopted binary rivalry of rich and poor.

Contextual theology

- takes local experience seriously against top-down impositions.
- But has it invested too much in specificity of roots and forgotten cultural flows?

Yet both have taught us that

*the truth of cultural power is best viewed from below
– which is the major thrust of Postcolonial Theology.*

8.. Pentecost

Empire has a built-in contradiction ~ its 'mixture' !

– It brings its binaries together and open, uneasy hybrids to new things.

Pentecost therefore possible in Jerusalem at festival time. (the whole Roman Empire was there)

each hearing “the Good News in their own language,”

– not Peter's ! for he is not an imperialist but fellow subaltern just like Jesus, the one who died at the hands of Imperialist Rome and its lackeys in Jerusalem.

9.. Was tun?

So our task as Church is not boundary enlargement but border crossing

Never to assume any synergy of Christ, Commerce, and Conquest.