Liberation and “Emergent Situations”:
Theological Discourse between (Christ’s) Life and Death

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Theological Practice in the Colonial *Ordo Salutis*

Redemption is not and has never been simply “other worldly.” Since the 15th century explorations—voyages rooted in the attempt to circumnavigate the Muslim empire as part of the Crusades—the social and material orders of redemption and damnation have become racially configured. As Gomes Eannes de Azurara, the 15th century chronicler of the Portuguese slave trade, stated:

> And so their [Africans captured and sent to Europe as slaves] lot was now quite contrary to what it had been, since before they had lived in perdition of soul and body; of their souls, in that they were yet pagans, without the clearness and the light of the Holy Faith; and of their bodies, in that they lived like beasts, without any custom of reasonable

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> beings—for they had no knowledge of bread and wine, and they were without covering of clothes, or the lodgment of houses; and worse than all, through the great ignorance that was in them, in that they had no understanding of good, but only knew how to live in bestial sloth.[1]

Slavery was salvific in that their "lot was now quite contrary" to their previous existence in perdition. For de Azurara, this previous, almost natural black damnation was a visibly present negativity or absence: before their encounters with Europeans, the Africans lacked light, bread, wine, clothes, homes, knowledge of the good, and human productivity. Redemption through enslavement was thereby a process of transferring populations from a realm governed by privation (evil and death, that is, blackness) into a realm ruled by life (light, whiteness).

This racialized schema of redemption, what this paper terms the colonial *ordo salutis*, has been modified, critiqued, rearticulated, implied, disavowed and challenged during the past five hundred years of European and now North American attempts to secure global domination. To give an example from the nineteenth century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, nearing the end of his life, sketched an overtly racialized drama of imperialist redemption in his outlines for his grand synthesis of human knowledge, the "Opus Maximum." As J. H. Haeger explains, for Coleridge, racial "variation results from a form of physical debilitation the causes of which are fundamentally moral."[2] Although all have become degenerate, not all are equally degenerate. To use Coleridge's words, "We may unhesitatingly assert—the Human Species consists of an

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[1] Gomes Eannes de Azurara, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, trans. C. Raymond Beazley and Edgar Prestage (London: Hakluyt Society, 1896, 1897) in Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1932) 1:30. Quoted by Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987), 71.

[2] J. H. Haeger, "Coleridge's Speculations on Race," *Studies in Romanticism* 13 (1974), 338. This essay presents and comments on five (at the time) unpublished fragments on race. Subsequent citations will be given in the main body of the paper.

Historic Race—and other Races" (343). The "Historic Race" is the ideal human race, from which all have departed. However, one race—the Central Race, the Caucasians—closely approximates this Historic Race. Redemption occurs through God's providential ordering of this Central Race: it is through the Central Race that all other races are elevated. Haeger summarizes Coleridge's view, stating that it is "the Judeo-Christian religious dispensation" in the Central Race that saves humankind from "degeneracy" (348). The Central Race, on its own natural power, could not redeem the other races. It is only through grace, through Christ, that the Central Race can perform its salvific purpose. As Coleridge says, "man can only solve the natural by the Supernatural" (346). Through Christ (supernatural grace), the Central Race becomes the Historic Race, the ideal humanity, and draws all degenerate and decaying others into its own, vibrant life.[3]

In the 20th century, Frantz Fanon accurately describes this colonial *ordo salutis*, stating that the "final aim of colonization was to convince the indigenous populations that it would save them from darkness."[4] To achieve this salvation, the darkness or damnation itself had to be named, that is, discursively produced: "for colonialism, this vast continent was a den of savages, infested with superstitions and fanaticism, destined to be despised, cursed by God...Colonialism's condemnation is continental in scale."[5] In the words of Edward Said, the "Western conquest of the Orient was not conquest after all, but liberty...[It was] a Christian mission to revive a dead world, to quicken in it a sense of its own potential, one which only a

[3] A more extensive elaboration of Coleridge's colonial *ordo salutis*, as well John Milbank's contemporary restatement of it in the language of culture, can be found in the author's unpublished master's thesis, "A More Benevolent Empire: Milbank, Coleridge, and the Racial Politics of British Theology" (M.T.S. Thesis, Duke University, 2009).

[4] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 149.

[5] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 150.

European can discern underneath a lifeless and degenerate surface."[6] The dead, degenerate, lifeless, condemned, damned world that was Africa (Fanon) and the Orient (Said) was something only the colonizers could overcome, coming as they did from the antithetical space of redemption and life. Redemption is here a concrete social structure, a pattern in which certain bodies conceived as damned are brought to life (or, if they refuse, left in the death that is considered to be naturally their own, and, if they actively fight back, put to death). In the succinct phrasing of Talal Asad, "In Christian civilization...redemption is dependent on cruelty or at least on the sin of disregarding human life."[7]

This historical and contemporary entanglement of redemption and (neo)colonialism raises numerous problems for Christian theological reflection. How does one speak of the God who creates, redeems, and sustains *life* when life itself is coded as "white" and positioned over against the colonized as wretched, wasted, decaying, damned, and dying?[8] How does one interpret not only the genocidal logic of this redemption but also the sustained production of suffering and agony? As Fanon remarks, the "aim sought" by "the colonial system" is "the continued agony [rather] than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture."[9] Instead of

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[6] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979, 1994), 172.

[7] Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 86. In another context, and as another voice echoing the link between Christianity, redemption, and cruelty, Jon Beverly remarks, "romanticizing victimization would tend to confirm the Christian narrative of suffering and redemption that underlies colonial or imperialist domination in the first place." Jon Beverly, *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1999), 73.

[8] In the words of Frantz Fanon, "The colonist makes history. His *life* is an epic, an odyssey. He is invested with the very beginning. 'We made this land.' He is the guarantor for its *existence*: 'if we leave, all will be *lost*, and this land will return to the Dark Ages.' Opposite him, *listless* beings, *wasted away* by fevers and consumed by "ancestral customs" compose a virtually *petrified* background to the innovative *dynamism* of colonial mercantilism." Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 5 (emphasis added).

[9] Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 34. This statement finds contemporary affirmation in Achille Mbembe's work: "To live under late

delving into these questions directly, this paper will develop a theological framework for this problematic. In particular, the paper will draw on Raymond Williams's book *Marxism and Literature* to account for the materiality of Christian theological discourse on two different fronts. First, given this colonial history, Christianity must reckon with a kind of base-superstructure problematic: is the doctrine of redemption the cause or effect of the practices of domination? Williams's own reworking of the base-superstructure problematic, rooted in his account of language and literature, provides resources to elaborate a vision of theology as a matter of practical consciousness. Secondly, drawing on Williams's notions of emergent situations and structures of feeling, this paper will develop a liberationist account of Christian practical consciousness that clarifies and extends a theology of liberation in light of recent criticisms from womanist and postcolonial theologians. The paper will then offer a brief sketch of a Pneumatic Christology that undergirds this account of liberation and theological practice before concluding with reflections on theology as a component of creative practices for life.

The Practical Consciousness of Theological Discourse

In *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx famously wrote,

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force...The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.[10]

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modern occupation is to experience a permanent condition of 'being in pain.'" See Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (December 21, 2003): 39.

[10] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 172.

In the course of the development of Marxism, statements like this one became overly simplified, leading to the problematic division of, and relationship between, the material base and the ideological superstructure. In a kind of crude historical materialism, Marx is taken to mean that intellectual thought is simply the byproduct of material relations. The realms of culture, literature, philosophy, and theology would then simply be a kind of epiphenomenal occurrence that arises directly out of the economic structure of a given society. The material, economic "base" determines, that is, directly causes and gives rise to, the intellectual "superstructure." In terms of the theological problematic outlined above, the *colonial* order of domination gives rise to the *theological* articulation of redemption.

Raymond Williams notes that, unfortunately, "any modern approach to a Marxist theory of culture" has to begin with this proposition concerning a determining base and determined superstructure.[11] It is unfortunate because it is a misleading and problematic place to begin; yet, it is necessary given the historical development of Marxism. The notion of "base" glosses over the "dynamic and internally contradictory processes" (82) within any system of production; in actuality, the base is never a singular, cohesive, well-organized, and complete totality. Further, as Engel's himself clarified in a letter to Joseph Bloch, "the materialist conception of history" always stressed the "interaction" and dialectical relation of the base and superstructure in "the production and reproduction of real life."[12] However, as Williams points out, the dialectical interaction of base and superstructure is not enough. What is more clearly needed is the articulation of the irreducible social nature of all human life and hence of human thought: "social

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[11] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 75. Subsequent citations will be given in the main body of the paper.

[12] The letter was written in September 1890 and is quoted by Williams, *Marxism and Literature,* 79.

being determines consciousness" (75). To better understand this social determination of consciousness, it is necessary to move beyond the base-superstructure conceptualization altogether and bring in Williams account of language as a "practical material activity" (38).

The "turn to language" in theology is not a late-twentieth century phenomenon, associated perhaps with the influence of the later Wittgenstein, Gadamer, or Derrida. In fact, in that ominous year 1492, the scholar Anonio de Nebrija published a grammar of the Castilian language. Nebrija dedicated the work to Queen Isabella, noting that "language is the perfect instrument of empire."[13] This long and complicated history of Christian theology, missionary translations, the supplanting of Latin by European vernacular languages, the development of capitalist modes of production, and the spread of empire lies beyond the scope of this paper; yet, it is important to note that the numerous problems concerning the relationship of language to the social world did not arise merely from the influence of different philosophical positions but from the historical, social practices and struggles between a myriad of different parties and peoples.[14] This historical background is an important reminder that both language and theories about language are concrete, historical, social practices.

According to Williams—who provides his own historical, material account of the turn to language in philosophy—language becomes a particular point of concern once "activity" or "making" is excluded "from the category of 'objective reality'" (32). Without an account of the

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[13] See Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1993), 23.

[14] Besides Rafael's *Contracting Colonialism*, another helpful analysis of the colonial and missional context of these turns to language can be found in Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), especially ch. 3-5. For a broad overview of the turn to language in theological thought, though one that unfortunately excludes the material and colonial context, see Steven Shakespeare's chapter, "Language" in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, ed. Adams, Nicholas, George Pattison, and Graham Ward (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 105-126.

"practical material activity" that is signification (38), language is simultaneously separated from the world and from human practitioners. Idealism and materialism arise as efforts to close the gap between these now abstract concepts, "subject" and "object" (37). They always fail in these efforts as they proceed without the sphere in which language actually operates, the "practical consciousness which is inseparable from all social material activity" (38). The meaning of a linguistic "sign" is not simply determined by its function within a total linguistic system; nor is it grounded in the intentions of a speaker. Rather, signification is "the social creation of meanings through the use of formal signs." A sign is social but capable of being internalized (41). It is not static but dynamic (42) and this dynamic aspect of the sign allows for the creative elaborations and alteration of language by human users in particular social situations. Thus, when Williams declares that "consciousness...is social being" (42), he is referring to the fact that consciousness does not "make use" of an external language like a tool; consciousness arises and develops through language. The sign "is also part of a verbally constituted consciousness" (40). Yet, this social constitution of consciousness through language does not preclude human freedom. The social situation and the sign are dynamic and the use of language is shaped within and by the practical activity of social beings.

This social constitution of consciousness arises within social formations that are themselves partial, contradictory, in transition, and replete with tensions and conflicts. In Lacanian terms (though distanced from the structuralist vision of language), the rise to self-consciousness in the symbolic represses but never eradicates "the real."[15] Drawing on Kristeva's

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[15] See Jacques Lacan, "A Love Letter" in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 149-161. For a theological development of Lacan's notion of the real that draws out the connection to social repression,

distinction of the semiotic from the symbolic, language as the practical consciousness of human beings—and thus as irreducibly social—is also irreducibly linked to desires, drives, instincts, and *jouissance.*[16] The "semiotic chora," defined as the "nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated," generates and negates the subject of language.[17] The practical consciousness of the linguistic subject is not the activity in the world of a self-sufficient, transcendental subject. It is social as well as instinctive and somatic. If "history is a made up of modes of production, the subject is a *contradiction* that brings about practice because practice is always both signifying and semiotic, a crest where meaning emerges only to disappear."[18] Within a structuralist understanding, the subject emerges as an effect of this signifying process that is broached/breached by the semiotic: the subject is "absent *within the position* out of which social, historical, and signifying activity unfolds."[19] Kristeva's account allows a vision of creative practice in which the subject, in virtue of this absence, is never master of or mastered by social and historical processes (including the social

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see Joerg Rieger, *Remember the Poor: The Challenge to Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), especially ch. 3.

[16] *Jouissance* can be translated as "pleasure," in particular "sexual pleasure," but the term has a much broader range of meaning in French, especially as developed in the psychoanalytic tradition. For some of the difficulties involved in the translation and use of the term, see Jane Gallop, "Beyond the Jouissance Principle," *Representations*, No. 7 (Summer, 1984), pp. 110-115. The term is used in this paper to highlight the pleasure that is in excess to the symbolic (phallic) or hegemonic order, and thus a pleasure that disrupts, confronts, exceeds, and otherwise unsettles the established order, including the subjective identities forged within it. As Gallop says, "If jouissance is defined, as it is by Barthes and the [French Feminist] women, as a loss of self, disruption of comfort, loss of control, it cannot simply be claimed as an ego-gratifying identity, but must also frighten those who 'know' it" (114).

[17] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 25.

[18] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 215.

[19] Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 215. On the pairing breach/broach, see the "Translator's Preface" by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Corrected Ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), lxxxvi.

nature of language). Though working with different accounts of language, Kristeva and Williams mutually complement each other here. Williams helpfully stresses the social and productive aspects of signification, such that the structuralist account of the absent subject position is not taken to be a universal linguistic phenomenon but is itself based in particular social configurations—and their contestation. Kristeva presses Williams's account further by emphasizing that this social, material practice of signification is breached/broached by the semiotic.

This emphasis on the semiotic and the repressed real will help clarify and extend Williams's own account of oppression within and repressed exteriority to the dominant, hegemonic order (the colonial *ordo salutis*), which in turn will allow a more precise articulation of a theology of liberation.[20] Before moving forward, however, it is worth transferring the foregoing account of language into the specific field of theology. Theology, even in its most abstract form, is a work of language and hence constituted within and by practical consciousness. In effect, a sharp split between praxis and theory is displaced insofar as it rests on the abstract split between base and superstructure, or objective reality and private subject (whether individual or ecclesial).[21] Further, and here one has to argue directly against the postliberal stance, this practical consciousness is not merely a matter of reflecting on the inner logic of Christian

[20] Williams distinguishes class exploitation (domination) from "exclusion" from the social (human) community. This distinction should not be taken to imply two disconnected or fundamentally discrete and separated modes of oppression. However, it is helpful in noting how oppression can function both through relationships of subordinated inclusion (waged laborers to capitalist class) and exclusion (those whose labor and hence lives are considered redundant and unnecessary for the current system). See Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 126.

[21] For another "erasure of the traditional boundary between theory/politics" coming from the side of "theory," see Homi K. Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," in his *The Location of Culture*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 28-56; the quotation comes from p. 45.

practices or the "grammar" of doctrinal beliefs, as if Christianity (and its attendant beliefs and practices) were complete, self-enclosed, bounded totalities.[22] Rather, and this marks the transition towards a theology of liberation, Christian theology as a matter of practical consciousness is a clarification of, witness to, and participation in God's continuing work of liberation through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.[23]

Liberation as Emergent Situations

The so-called end of history and collapse of metanarratives are themselves the hegemonic codes of neoliberalism.[24] In this setting, liberation itself can become an empty keyword deployed on behalf of these neo-imperialist agendas. Reflecting on these problems, Ivan Petrella suggests that "the central challenge Liberation Theology must now face, therefore, is how to give a vague

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[22] See Kathryn Tanner's critique of postliberalism in her *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

[23] This threefold work is related to two other threefold analyses of the church and theology. In Karl Barth's formulation, "The criterion of past, future and therefore present Christian utterance is thus the being of the Church, namely Jesus Christ, God in [God's] gracious revealing and reconciling address to [humankind]. Does Christian utterance derive from Him? Does it lead to Him? Is it conformable to Him?" Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I.1: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, ed. T. F. Torrance and G. W. Bromiley, trans. G. W. Bromiley (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 4. Secondly, it draws from James Cone analysis of the three tasks of the church: the proclamation of, sharing in, and visible manifestation of God's historical liberation of the oppressed. See James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th Anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 138-139. Finally, the phrasing takes into account a dispute within liberation theology regarding whether theology is fundamentally a reflection on praxis or praxis itself. For instance, Ada María Isasi-Díaz critiques both Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutiérrez for claiming that theology is a second or separate step from praxis: "we do not see our writing of *mujerista* theology as a reflection on praxis" but as itself a liberating praxis. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha / In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology,* 10th Anniversary Ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.), 180. Theology is not simply a matter of clarification of praxis but is itself praxis, a participation in and witness to the activity of God among the oppressed, marginalized, and excluded.

[24] Two classic expressions of this thesis are Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1990) and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

notion of 'liberation' socio-political and economic content."[25] Given that the sharp divorce between theory and praxis is an untenable philosophical abstraction, the specification of content must involve both a clarification of the very notion of liberation as well as the identification of certain points of contention, struggle, opposition, or antagonism in which this notion of liberation is embedded and clarified. In an effort to provide this clarification, this paper will develop and elaborate Raymond Williams's notion of "emergent situations."

The notion of emergent situations should be interpreted within the broader struggle to account for the dominance of and potential opposition to a particular hegemonic cultural formation. Hegemony, for Williams, is

> a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and the world. It is a lived system of meanings and values...It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society (110).

Hegemony is the common sense of a culture; it is the horizon that allows a specific interpretation of the world to be deemed natural and renders any experience of what is "beyond" the horizon almost unthinkable and inexpressible.[26] The forms of domination and subordination within the

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[25] Ivan Petrella, "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy: The Making Over of Liberation Theology, a Queer Discursive Approach" in *Liberation Theology And Sexuality*, ed. Marcella Althaus-Reid (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 36.

[26] The language of "horizon" comes from Bernard Lonergan as developed by M. Shawn Copeland in her book, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010). Quoting Lonergan, she says, "By horizon, I mean, 'a maximum field of vision from a determinate standpoint.' What and who is outside the range of that field is eliminated from my knowledge and interest, care and concern" (13). She connects "horizon" to "bias" to articulate the limitations of thought and experience induced through racism. Copeland cites Lonergan's essay, "Metaphysics as Horizon," found in *Collections*, 2nd ed., rev. and aug., *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan,* vol. 4, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 198. By elaborating "horizon" within the context of hegemony, this paper seeks to push her analysis of racism beyond the lingering cognitive emphasis of "bias" and into a stronger material and cultural setting.

hegemonic order do not need overt justification as the hegemonic shapes the very perception of oneself and one's world. This extension of hegemony into the total sphere of lived experience does not preclude opposition but actually opens it up: the hegemonic "has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified" (112). At each point of its restatement and renewal, it opens up points through which it can be "resisted, limited, altered, [and] challenged by pressures not at all its own" (112). These counter-pressures can present alternatives that are ultimately absorbed within the hegemonic order: for instance, punk rock becomes a kind of fashionable individualism; hip hop artists become capitalistic entrepreneurs. The struggle for analysis is thus to "distinguish" between these alternative yet concordant cultural forms and others that are "independent" and irreconcilable to the original or adaptive form of the dominant culture (114). More sharply stated: since the cultural forms themselves are never complete or static, the political and theological struggle for liberation arises out of the effort to push these cultural forms beyond the possibility of incorporation and towards a "break" (114) within and from the dominant order.

Emergent situations move beyond novelty and resist or contest their incorporation into the hegemonic order. Given that systems of domination always "select from and consequently exclude the full range of human practice" (125), the emergent situations frequently arise from what is excluded from the dominant social order. This insight represents a particular gain in that liberation theologies often produce a vision of liberation that is actually a struggle for a more effective inclusion within the dominant order. For instance, black liberation theology, rooted as it was in the Black Power movement, often continued what was the fundamentally reformist agenda of Black Power: the formation of a separate, black political party for the sake of adequate

representation of black (male) concerns in representational democracy.[27] Womanist theologians have noted that this focus on political liberation also continued the *patriarchal* formation of the political as both masculine and public, and thus separated from the private and domestic sphere.[28] By focusing on the emergent, Williams draws attention to the fact that what the dominant system excludes is often "seen as the personal or private, or as the natural or even the metaphysical...since what the dominant has effectively seized is indeed the ruling definition of the social" (125). The emergent arises thus within and between class domination (oppression inside) and marginalization (exclusion outside) and represents a fundamental negation of the dominant order.

Given its position in opposition to and frequently outside the social forms of the dominant cultural order, emergent situations arise on the edge of what can be articulated; they are more frequently "lived and felt" (132) prior to their overt articulation. Williams's conceptualizes this lived and felt aspect of a cultural break with the hegemonic system as a "structure of feeling." If the emergent situation is identified as a clearly articulated oppositional

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[27] See the classic statement, Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power : The Politics of Liberation in America*. Vintage ed. (New York: Vintage, 1992). For example, they write: "The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: *Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks*. By this we mean that group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society" (44). James Cone describes his initial formation of black liberation theology as the "theological arm of Black Power" in his "Black Theology and the Black Church," printed in *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Vol. I, 1966-1979*, 2nd Rev. Ed., ed. James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 268. I owe this interpretation of the Black Power Movement as fundamentally reformist—and Martin Luther King, Jr. as the true radical—to Theodore Walker, Jr.

[28] Emilie Townes effectively repositions the political from within the sphere of everydayness: "It is in this everydayness that 'we the people' are formed. And we, the people of faith, must live and be witness to a justice wrapped in a love that will not let us go and a peace that is simply too ornery to give up on us—not even in the vice grip of the fantastic hegemonic imagination as it serves as handmaid and manservant to the cultural production of evil." Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 165.

cultural form, the structure of feeling operates at the stage of "pre-emergence" or "pre-formation." It is not feeling against thought, or the semiotic against the symbolic, but rather "thought as felt and feeling as thought" (132), what Kristeva terms the dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic. This affective thought is "social and material" (131) but at the edge of and pressing beyond the dominant seizure and control of the social world (the symbolic). As both Williams and Kristeva note, aesthetics and art are frequently the point at and the mediums through which this pre-emergent affectivity breaches/broaches the semantic, linguistic, symbolic order.[29] It is a "structured formation at the very edge of semantic availability" (134) and thus also a destructuring or deconstructive movement against but within the symbolic, the hegemonic order.[30]

Emergent Situations, Liberation, and Postcolonial Theologies

This foregoing account of emergent situations and structures of feeling provides an articulation of liberation that takes into account criticisms by womanist and postcolonial theologians. For instance, by linking liberation to emergent and pre-emergent situations, one can emphasize God's work to provide resources for survival, health, healing, and wholeness as itself antagonistic to the dominant cultural order (which is predicated on the dismemberment and uses

[29] This sentence is worded to avoid the bourgeois notion of authorial or artistic individual creation. Yet, this caution is not intended to simply invert the emphasis, as if the affective and semiotic bypassed individual creativity. Following Williams's discussion of authors, it is an attempt to highlight "the truly social in the individual, and the truly individual in the social" (*Marxism and Literature,* 197).

[30] See Derrida's famous account of structure and deconstruction, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in his *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1978), 278-293.

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of black women's flesh).[31] Further, this emphasis bypasses concerns of homogenizing or romanticizing a particular oppressed group, like black women, in that the emergent situation is not something that just spontaneously arises but is itself actively produced in the concrete practical struggles and practical consciousness of particular persons (including their failures). This active production also clarifies that the emphasis on divine activity in emergent situations is not an action that eradicates human agency but includes it. As Gustavo Gutiérrez points out: "true liberation will be the work of the oppressed themselves; *in them*, the Lord saves history."[32] This vision of history is rooted in the theological commitment—that is, the faith—that in the struggles, tensions, breaks, incorporations, failures, and renewed antagonisms that mark and make history, God is identified with, present among, and at work for the oppressed and excluded.

In the past twenty years, liberation theologies have been critiqued by those situated within "postcolonial" studies for its binary, oppositional analysis. Although these postcolonial political theologies recognize that their roots lie in these earlier theologies of liberation, it is commonly believed that these theologies of liberation are insufficient for postmodern times. For

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[31] The phrase "resources for survival" comes from Delores Williams's womanist engagement with and challenge to black (male) liberation theology. See Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995). For an account of how "the black woman was reduced to body parts" within the structure of capitalistic white supremacy, see M. Shawn Copeland's essay "Body, Representation, and Black Religious Discourse" in *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse*, ed. Kwok Pui-Lan and Laura E. Donaldson (New York: Routledge, 2001). The quotation comes from p. 184. Hortense Spillers distinguishes "flesh" from "body," stating that "before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography...Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies—some of them female—out of West African communities in concern with the African 'middleman,' we regard this human and social irreparability as high crimes against the *flesh*...If we think of the 'flesh' as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard." See Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

[32] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, Rev. Ed., trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 120, emphasis added.

instance, in the introduction to *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, the editors write that

> By the 1990's, these theological methods began to recognize complications that early liberation movements did not face: the oppressive dynamics internal to oppressed communities; the ambiguous and shifting complexities of national, cultural, even sexual identities; and the difficulties of creating sustainable coalitions—including coalitions with progressives who do not embody a specifically oppressed identity. At the same time it began to realize that the very modern Marxist style of oppositional analysis—the purely oppressed revolting against the merely oppressive—offered limited resources for addressing the complexities of postmodern power structures.[33]

The editors suggest that the binary opposition, oppressed versus oppressor, ignores the diversity and complexity of oppression. Drawing on Homi Bhabha, postcolonial theologians tend to emphasize a "hybridity" that cuts between the binary opposition of oppressed and oppressor. Yet, this emphasis on hybridity in postcolonial theology often departs from Bhabha's own, more oppositional, analysis. Given the frequency of these criticisms, and the connection to the emergent as arising from both oppression and various forms of exclusion, it is worth developing the negative or oppositional element in Bhabha's account of hybridity and negotiation.

For Bhabha, hybridity challenges the colonial "rules of recognition" by introducing ambiguity.[34] It is not simply a genealogical question of being from "two" (or more) cultures (162). As he states, "what is at issue in the discourse of minorities is the creation of agency through incommensurable (and not simply multiple) positions" (331). Hybridity is not simply the mixed, the multiple, the interstitial, or the ambiguous itself. Rather, hybridity arises within and

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[33] Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Rivera Mayra, eds., *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 4-5. The assertion that theologies of liberation were not aware of the difficulty of forming coalitions with non-oppressed groups is clearly false: James Cone, for instance, was in fact quite wary of it.

[34] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 162. Subsequent citations will be given in the main body of the paper.

contests colonial authority. In the colonial sphere, authority is predicated on "modes of discrimination." In the effort to dominate the colonized through systems of recognition, separation, classification, and hierarchical arrangement, these modes of discrimination actually proliferate differences that exceed the colonial classificatory system. Colonial discourse itself produces a confrontation that is not the self versus its other but "the self and its doubles" (159). Thus, colonial discourse is predicated on but makes impossible a structure of recognition in which "the other" is contained, distinct from, thoroughly subjected to, yet in the process of becoming identified with (the same as) the colonial power.

This aporia, in which the discursive attempt to produce a total "other" depends on a system of discrimination that continually produces doubles instead of others, surfaces in Christian colonial theology around the issue of conversion.[35] For instance, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's colonial *ordo salutis* imagines both the eventual eradication of racial differences (through intermarriage and moral improvement) and their preservation in the eschaton (such that the lower races move towards the Central Race which is always moving ahead, and thus maintains its separation and distance from these other races, that is, maintains its identity as the Central Race).[36] The Christian imperialist project is built on this policing of differences, such

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[35] The chapter in which Bhabha provides an extensive discussion of hybridity in *The Location of Culture* is, quite appropriately, a chapter on religion in the colonial situation, in particular, the struggles of missionaries in their attempts to convert locals. "Signs Taken For Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," 145-174.

[36] See Haeger, "Coleridge's Speculations on Race." One finds this same aporia in the writings of John Milbank. In the course of one essay, itself an aggressive restatement of the basic Orientalist posture, Milbank states that the idea of "an essential Christianity that could be expressed in non-Western cultural terms...is just nonsense." Yet, he ends that same essay with the claim that "we should indeed expect to constantly receive Christ again, from the unique spiritual responses of other cultures." John Milbank, "The End of Dialogue," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009). The two quotations can be found on p. 292 and 300, respectively.

that differences are produced, overcome, and preserved all at once. Hybridity, for Bhabha, haunts this colonial procedure through its "*ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery" (165). It is neither the same nor the other but "less than one and double" (171). Mimicry and hybridity challenge colonial authority through these proliferations of differences that are within and yet resist assimilation to the dominant order. This plurality or multiplicity is the creation of agency not by virtue of simply being multiple but rather through exploiting its incommensurability with the dominant hegemonic order. The power relation itself operates on a binary that presupposes but renders impossible two stable subject positions. The multiplicity of or hybrid space between positions is *oppositional* without presupposing the necessity of stable identities (self and other).[37] Yet, hybridity is not itself oppositional by virtue of its genealogical background; it is rather a mode of engaging in opposition, and a particular kind of opposition that is produced within and by a particular form of colonial authority.[38]

Bhabha frames this oppositional element as "negotiation" to distinguish it from a Hegelian "negation" that attempts to draw in and overcome the object through a "redemptive" act of sublation (38). Hybridity operates as an unresolvable ambiguity that prevents the movement of a dialectic: it refuses a position on either side (the thesis or antithesis). Negotiation, however, proceeds from the recognition and contestation of "the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the *name* of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced

[37] "They are *binary* rather than (or as well as) *hybrid*." Beverly, *Subalternity and Representation*, 129. Beverly's discussion of this oppositional element in subaltern movements does not adequately capture how this opposition functions within Bhabha's own work.

[38] See Hortense Spillers's reflection on the "latest avatar of the reification of race" as represented by a multi- and bi-racial student association in her brief essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Too" *Trans-Scripts* 1 (2011), available online, http://www.humanities.uci.edu/collective/hctr/trans-scripts/2011_01_02.pdf, accessed May 5, 2013. The quote comes from the final sentence on p. 3. Spillers notes that "what amounts to demographic data and genetic input is here transliterated into terms of human and ontological value, and that is precisely the rebarbative boomerang of the old race concept" (2).

only in the moment of differentiation" (51). Turning back to Williams's account of emergent situations: the hegemonic order presupposes and must effectively deny (by naturalizing) certain exclusions and closures from the social order. The hegemonic defines what counts as social or political but demands that this definition be accepted as *natural* and thus not actually excluding anything. It produces an *exteriority* to the social while demanding that this exteriority accept and reproduce its own—their own—exteriority.[39] The emergent situation arises from this exteriority to the social (the symbolic) in that it refuses its exclusion and does so outside of the linguistic control of the dominant order. The situation of emergence does not seek inclusion, that is, movement from the other to the same or from the exterior to the interior, but rather utters and issues a break that is simultaneously within and beyond the hegemonic order. Nevertheless, in this account, as in Bhabha's, there is, to put it bluntly, a clear enemy, what Williams terms "the hegemonic order" and Bhabha "colonial authority."

For both Williams and Bhabha, this confrontation is not simply the Fanonian Manichaean desire to take the place of the colonizer but rather breaks open and refuses closure within any available symbolic order. As Bhabha states, "the corollary is that there is no first or final act of revolutionary social (or socialist) transformation" (45). This continual work of liberation depends on refusing, forestalling, bypassing, and otherwise blocking its incorporation into the hegemonic order. Accordingly, its own performance draws from the clarification of an antagonism, though one that refuses to be confined to, that is, ultimately, determined by, the dominant system and its

[39] One can change "exteriority" to its political name "criminality" and understand the function of the criminalization of the poor and nonwhite in the U.S. in the 20th and 21st century.

invention of its own (subordinate) other.[40] And, though there is this antagonist relation and negation, as Frantz Fanon forcefully exclaims: human behavior "is not only reactional." Humankind is "an *affirmation*...Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity. But [humankind] is also a *negation*. No to...the exploitation of [human beings]. To the massacre of what is most human in [humanity]: freedom."[41] The situations of emergence stems from a positivity, Fanon's affirmation, that arises within and exceeds a field of negation, that is, arises from the thoughts, desires, drives, and *jouissance* of those oppressed within or excluded from the dominant (symbolic) order.

This pre-emergent cultural form "at the very edge of semantic availability" pushes liberation theology beyond a systematic procedure or rationalized form.[42] Reflecting on her efforts to render theology "indecent," Althaus-Reid critiques liberation theology for its overly rationalistic form. She asks,

> Was not the attempt to use ideological analysis in order to disentangle theology from spurious class interest itself a desire to rationalize theology? And rationalization produces a certain aesthetic: like the buildings of Le Corbusier, the liberationists were serious, pragmatic writers.[43]

Althaus-Reid highlights how the articulation of (and therefore witness to and participation in) liberation functioned within a highly rationalized and organized form. She worries that the popular theologians functioned as intermediaries, drawing from while also policing the life

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[40] As Fanon says, "We shall demonstrate furthermore that what is called the black soul is a construction by white folk." See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), xviii.

[41] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 197. The terms humankind, human beings, and humanity all substitute for the use of "man" in the translation.

[42] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 134.

[43] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 61.

forces and drives of the impoverished peasants. It was a kind of "terror of the voice of the voiceless" that led the popular theologian to demand that the imaginative and creative readings of Scripture produced by the masses be subordinated to a rigorous method and the established teachings of the church.[44] Althaus-Reid here echoes Kristeva and Williams in the view that the formation of these emergent situations is frequently connected to aesthetic or imaginative practices that exceed, disrupt, and reconfigure the hegemonic order. The eagerness to impose a rigorous, rationalistic form represented an attempt to draw these forces *into* the dominant hegemonic order instead of exacerbating and extending their critical break from that order. In the final section of this paper, this disruptive and aesthetic facet of emergent situations will be clarified christologically. It is worth stating that this Christological element is not being "added to" or "correlated with" this previous account but rather has developed in dialectical relationship with the preceding account. Stated more simply, the question at the outset and all along has been a question about interpreting the activity—the work—of Jesus Christ in the world today.

Christ, the Spirit, and Life in Zones of Death

This brief exploration in Christology can be situated between three quotes from three different theologians. The first comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's lectures on Christology, in which he states, "When the Counter-Logos appears in history, no longer as an idea, but as 'Word' become flesh, there is no longer any possibility of assimilating him into the existing order of the human logos."[45] The second quotation comes from Mayra Rivera's reflections on

[44] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology*, 130.

[45] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (New York: Harper, 1978), 30.

Sophia: “the transcendence that Sophia represents is neither absent nor untouchable, but a challenging closeness that is always beyond grasp.”[46] Finally, in *God of the Oppressed*, James Cone states, “God’s Word is a poetic happening, an evocation of an indescribable reality in the lives of the people.”[47] To weave these three quotes together: Christ is not an idea (or “symbol”) but a person in flesh who stands within and yet remains unassimilable to the dominant order.[48] This disruption of the symbolic through an ungraspable presence is a poetic event, a communal happening in which the lives of the people are inspired by the Spirit who breathes life into and sustains this fleshly God.

The life of this enfleshed God arises within and on the underside of an imperial order, Rome. Marked a bastard child, that is, one born outside of and in violation of the patriarchal order, this child is nurtured, grows, and is continually changed by his community, in particular its women.[49] His life and ministry is marked by both the imperialist power of death, the cross, and his own “ministerial vision of life in relationship.”[50] Jesus’s life is worked out *in the space between* life and death. The cross is not simply an unfortunate consequence of his redemptive life but is something towards which Jesus deliberately moves. In the Pauline language, Jesus enters “the form of the slave” in that he comes into the world of sin and evil in which one’s desire for life is perversely used to subject one to an economy of death: the master defers the slave’s death,

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[46] Mayra Rivera, “God at the Crossroads: a Postcolonial Reading of Sophia” in *Postcolonial Theologies,* 202.

[47] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev Ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 17.

[48] In binding this Christology to Rivera’s Sophiology, this paper is not attempting to absorb and domesticate Sophia within the Logos but rather aims to keep Christ’s identity *open* and *ecstatic*, that is, rendering the Logos as breached/broached by the Chora (Sophia).

[49] Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology,* 44-48.

[50] Delores S. Williams “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption” in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2006), 31.

over which he claims power, in exchange for the use of the slave's life (for whatever purposes the sovereign master deems fit). Jesus is born into this economy of death and thus his willing embrace of the scandalous death on the cross is part of his contestation of this imperial order. As Jesus enters into this "symbolic death," or death-bound life, he overturns its effects on his community by healing, casting out demons, forgiving sins, and reestablishing relationships.[51] Jesus situates life not in the realm of mastery but in the practices of desire and love that exceed the identities produced by social oppression.[52] Jesus's life-giving ministry exceeds the "bare life" that the dominant order struggles to impose on those it excludes; Jesus opens up, draws from, and shares the "fullness of life" that anticipates and witnesses to the resurrection.[53] It is a life that eludes the grasp of the dominant order and thus a life the imperial powers kill. The resurrection is the affirmation that this *life* precedes and exceeds the powers of death.

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[51] Abdul R. JanMohamed (through Richard Wright) argues that once the slave realizes that the threat of death is what gives the master power and maintains the whole master-slave relationship, the slave can embrace death, taking possession of it by putting his or her life on the line, and thus undercutting the master's power. This move to symbolic death (an embrace of death such that one is living with one's death) involves a bonding with death that is made possible by the economy of slavery itself: the power of death claimed by the master is constantly being displayed so as to ensure and stabilize the master's power. See his account in *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2005). I am deeply indebted to J. Kameron Carter for many conversations concerning these (and other related) matters.

[52] See Wonhee Anne Joh's articulation of the Korean word *jeong* in *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006). Though the term resists an adequate translation into English, she provides a gloss on the term, *jeong*, as signifying: "that which fosters life-giving relationality through the transformation of the heart...; the power embodied in redemptive relationships (xxiv; xxi). Though provocative and helpful, Joh ultimately does not adequately distinguish between the power differentials in colonial situations. For instance, Joh claims that *jeong* calls "us to identify ourselves with those whom we perceive to be the Other" (122); however, as Fanon reminds us, in the colonial situation "the white man is not only 'the Other,' but also the master, whether real or imaginary." See Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* 117, n. 24. As Lacan tersely puts it, "there is no Other of the Other." Lacan, "A Love Letter," 151.

[53] Liberation as oriented towards a "fullness of life" that includes feasting and celebration is discussed in Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha / In the Struggle*, 4.

The cross gives the "poetic happening" that is Christ's redemption a tragic, or blues sensibility. In the famous words of Ralph Ellison, the blues "is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism."[54] The "structure of feeling" that is on the edge of linguistic forms *and* produced from sites of oppression and exclusion, the mood and mode of theology written as a reflection on the work of the crucified and resurrected Messiah, carries this blues edge. This tragic or blues element is not the abandonment of hope or the dismissal of the possibility of liberation; rather, it is the realistically tragic recognition that the creative opening of a break within the dominant, hegemonic order is often guttural, a painful cry coming from the psychic and somatic terrors of the dominant order's claim to and exercise of sovereignty.[55] The resurrection life sustains this near-tragic, near-comic lyricism; or rather, the Spirit opens up, guides, assists, and invigorates our own struggles to create and sustain emergent situations in and against a world still predicated on an economy of death. Nevertheless, the blues mode is a tragic affirmation of *life* and thus not a denial of *jouissance*, desire, joy, love, and erotic connections. It does, however, refuse to predicate such experiences on the absence—the exclusion from history, from life, from space, from memory—of those who have and continue to suffer the psychic and

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[54] Ralph Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues," in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1972), 78-79. Quoted in Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 130.

[55] Fred Moten, *In The Break: The Aesthetics Of The Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): "Such blackness is only in that it exceeds itself; it bears the groundedness of an uncontainable outside. It's an erotics of the cut, submerged in the broken, breaking space-time of an improvisation. Blurred, dying life; liberatory, improvisatory, damaged love; freedom drive" (26).

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somatic tortures imposed on them through forces of oppression and exclusion, especially among those who contest the dominant (neo)imperialist order.[56]

Conclusion: Theology and Creative Practices of Life

Theology as a mode of practical consciousness participates in the present actions of the God in flesh who, through the Spirit, is within and beyond the present order, at hand but not graspable, opening points for abundant life within and beyond practices and structures of death. The foregoing theological account of liberation and the briefer Christological sketch provides the initial work towards but has not yet fully confronted the deeply problematic entanglement of Christian theology and the (neo)colonial *ordo salutis*. Further clarification is needed on the configurations of life, death, and suffering within this colonial order, especially as they developed out of modes of Christian life and thought. Additionally, there is more work to be done in filling in this Pneumatic Christology that accounts for and participates in God's entrance into and overturning of what Achille Mbembe calls "death-worlds," that is, "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*."[57] Reflection on the pneumatic inhabitation and inspiration of life in these zones of death, especially as it connects to bodies, geographical spaces, and

[56] At the time of writing, the hunger strikes of detainees at Guantanamo Bay strikingly exemplifies—embodies—this confrontation with the neoimperial powers of social death through an embrace of one's own vulnerability and possible death. Since slavery is "the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons," it is accurate to claim that this conflict in GTMO is one between slaves and masters in which the slaves are reclaiming power over their own lives by wagering their deaths (refusing to eat). For this definition of slavery, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 13.

[57] Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 40.

creative productions, is much needed as Christians strive to be faithful to and in solidarity with the ones through whom God is present and at work in the world.

Within this theological praxis, there is a role similar to that of theory in Williams's work: "it is the special function of theory, in exploring and defining the nature and the variation of [creative] practice, to develop a general consciousness within what is repeatedly experienced as a special and often relatively isolated consciousness."[58] Theological practice, as a participation in God's activity in forming and sustaining emergent situations, includes a theoretical modality that strives to clarify these creative practices, forge connections among diverse movements, and heighten the tensions with and antagonisms to the hegemonic order. This theoretical or reflective work is not a step back from engagement, which would reintroduce the theory-practice divide. It is a mode of participation in this work, that is, it is a creative practice rooted in a practical consciousness. Within this theological work, attention can and should be paid to the creative practices that are forming on the edge of, or irrupting within and pressing beyond, the available aesthetic and semantic codes (the symbolic order). This does not limit creative practice to either this aesthetic realm or to theological reflection on this realm; instead, it opens up another field through which one can connect creative practice to political and theological commitment. As Williams says:

> Creative practice is thus of many kinds. It is already, and actively, our practical consciousness. When it becomes struggle—the active struggle for new consciousness through new relationships that is the ineradicable emphasis of the Marxist sense of self-creation—it can take many forms. It can be the long and difficult remaking of an inherited (determined) practical consciousness: a process often described as development but in practice a struggle at the roots of the mind—not casting off an ideology, or

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[58] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 212.

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> learning phrases about it, but confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships.[59]

It is to this long, at times (and often simultaneously) gut-wrenching and soul-lifting, "struggle at the roots of the mind" that Christian theology is dedicated. For this, too, is a work of life.

[59] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 212. For another account of this psychological internalization of the hegemonic order, see Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization Of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory Of Oppression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

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