and familial ties. Thus, the book makes an important contribution to Reformation studies.

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After Heresy: Colonial Practices and Post-Colonial Theologies. By Vítor Westhelle. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010. 181 pp.

When I teach Roanoke College's freshman seminar, I have students read the Platonic dialogues about the trial and death of Socrates, then the debate between Epicurean, Stoic and Skeptic in Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods,* and finally Augustine's *Confessions*. Contemporary students (eggheads excepted) are scared to death of this course at the beginning, but emerge from it awakened and eager to enter upon the life of the mind in their ensuing college careers. They have learned that their civilization is *not* the hegemonic monolith of the modern, imperial West, philosophically initiated by Descartes and codified in the Kantian Enlightenment's putative universalism—a universalism blind not least of all to its own post-Christian historical particularity. Instead they have become critically aware of what MacIntyre calls "tradition": an "embodied argument," a dynamic and unresolved contest of contending views on the human and its place in the world.

Westhelle's erudite, lucid and subtle argument in this essay can give modern Westerners a similar kind of baptism into the complex process, first identified as the dialectic of the master and slave by Hegel, at work in the emerging multi-polar global civilization. Modern globalization, a product of Western colonialism and neo-imperialism, creates the conditions for its own pluralist subversion in the phenomenon of post-colonial "hybridization." By this term, Westhelle points to a thoroughly historicist, non-essentialist, non-utopian, non-romantic view of the post-colonial self as the dissimulating intruder in the dominant language game. This post-colonial makes use of the "minority report" of Western self-criticism that runs from Luther to Derrida in order to escape hegemony, to attain to self-consciousness for those who have been denied an identity, and to begin the necessarily messy and pluralistic construction of a multi-polar future. This ironic, post-colonial

dependence on the Westerners, Hegel and Marx, is figured as the "return of the caravels"—a difficult, but indispensable point made against vestiges of Rousseau's myth of the noble savage. As philosophy, this little book is as lucid and convincing a survey of post-colonial theory and its issues as I have read.

Theology appears, tentatively, elusively, and suggestively, in these pages. The reason for the reticence is a series of sensitive questions which loom large among post-colonialists: whether Christ equates with Western colonialism; whether authentic "God-talk" is possible under the conditions of hegemony; whether theology is a language of domination and discipline. On one level, Westhelle agrees that theology has been ideological, functioning "as the instituting knowledge of the churches." "Idolatry is the main temptation of theology" (112). Idolatry, in Westhelle's Derridian analysis, is the fallacy of thinking that theology can represent the infinite in its finite language with the "optical consistency" of modern science (113), thus establishing a corresponding religious homogeneity "after heresy." But biblical criticism has destroyed this possibility, bringing us today to our "painful" situation in which theology is the most conflicted of all disciplines (116). Berger's "heretical imperative" reigns.

Yet this contemporary collapse of monotheistic idolatry (or is it rather our new polytheism?) opens up a way for the *via negativa*. Post-colonial theology cannot and will not unite in a common set of theological representations of God, which in any case tend inevitably to become idolatrous and hegemonic. To his credit, Westhelle honestly acknowledges the cost in considering a "Derridian project for theology." A consistent iconoclasm implies the deconstruction of the "fundamental dogma of Christianity, the Chalcedonian doctrine of the unity of the two natures in the person of Christ" (93).

Nevertheless it is also the case that biblical narrative functions subversively to give liberating expression to the experience of "subalterns" ("others who are under or beneath," 130). Westhelle in conclusion therefore struggles not to give in prematurely to a mere plurality of genitive and adjectival theologies or to resign himself to apophatic silence. Indeed, he tries valiantly to unite these post-colonial theological subversions, not in one common representation of the Infinite who remains essentially *deus absconditus*, but rather in

the usage of the principles of *sola Scriptura* and Chalecodonian *communicatio idiomatum* as rules for "expressing the gospel in the dialectic of a particular context" (163). It is not Christ as iconic persona drawn from the Scriptures but Christ as liberating event that unites post-colonials in their fierce commitment to the particularity, incorrigibility, and incommunicability of their contexts.

Needless to say, this reviewer has a few reservations. The Luther who is invoked in this book is the young Augustinian monk of the Heidelberg Disputation, not the theologian of *Verbum externum* against Karlstadt, the bodily presence against Zwingli, the *fides catholica* against Schwenckfeldt. The Hegelian dialectics of alienation in externality—in my view a Gnostic theology—displaces a Pauline-Augustinian-Lutheran doctrine of sin as the captivation of desire by envy as well as greed, in despair as well as pride. As hinted in my opening paragraph, I do not find the caesura in Western history represented by the imperial project of secular modernity adequately narrated in this ambivalent account, in which Westhelle seems never to able to make up his mind between Kant and Hegel. Surely the dependence on Derrida makes him side with Kant. That is above all evident in the conclusion of the book reported above: Christ ceases to be the really present agent, as depicted in Luther's "joyful exchange," and becomes a cipher for rules of engagement, "unabashedly," Westhelle writes, "an apparition and specter and not the embodied logos . . ." (93). But perhaps this is to push Westhelle's ambiguous language too far and too rigorously.

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