

## **Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting with a Genuine Attunement to Otherness**

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### **Introduction**

The phenomenon of globalization saturates our daily awareness by means of several media in this age of information. On the one hand, this means that as a concept globalization enjoys a high profile so that most have at least a nodding acquaintance with its basic issues and challenges. On the other hand, such a general familiarity can also render the concept benign and undifferentiated with little regard paid to its complexity. Aside from a long historical precedent, globalization can also be appreciated as operating within at least three major interconnected realms—political, economic, and cultural—which in turn impact people's lives accordingly. The complexities of globalization's historical precedent and the cultural dimension of its current iterations inspired this article in a foundational way. From these promptings, I sought out possible intersections that these complexities had with biblical hermeneutics and found an interesting coalescence in alterity and postcolonial theory. Therefore, the aim of this article is to explore ways in which otherness can be owned and genuinely embraced throughout the interpretive dynamic in such a way that respects readers who are approaching and appropriating texts, specifically biblical texts, as culturally diverse others within a global context. This exploration is guided by an overarching concern to show the positive ramifications that result from allowing accepted modes of hermeneutical theory, as shored up by continental philosophy, to interact with more corrective interpretive modes, as guided by concerns of religious and theological discourse.

### **1. The Uncanny—Otherness in Self-Interpretation**

In order to better grasp the extent to which otherness plays an integral and distinctive role in postcolonial biblical hermeneutics, it is first necessary to come to terms with the extent to which our own sense of deep seated otherness conditions any interpretive dynamic. It was Martin Heidegger who offered the notion of “the uncanny” (*das Unheimliche*) to identify the pervasive and profound sense of

homelessness at the core of our human existence. As I will show, this is not merely a general sentiment of *ennui* but a mood that vitiates the very intimate internal mechanism of conscience. By first recognizing and owning this personal and visceral otherness, it then becomes possible to apply the hermeneutical significance of alterity in various contexts.

Heidegger debuts the concept of the uncanny in *Being and Time* as a way to advance his project to pursue the meaning of being through an existential analytic of human being-there or Dasein. While he never intended his thought to be reduced to a philosophical anthropology, the many categories that issue forth from his phenomenological description of Dasein's being-in-the-world offer enlightened insight about the vicissitudes of human existence. Here are his general remarks about how the uncanny accompanies and conditions the human project: "In anxiety one feels 'uncanny.' Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to expression: the 'nothing and nowhere.' But here 'uncanniness' also means 'not-being-at-home.'"<sup>1</sup>

While it is not possible or practical here to tease out the many nuances surrounding Heidegger's development of uncanniness, it is clear that an anxiety precipitates a basic sense of not quite being at home. At the root of this existential anxiety is an acknowledgement of our human finitude as it is ultimately circumscribed by death, a reality that is certain and cannot be effectuated by proxy, as Heidegger proffers: "Dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine, in so far as it 'is' at all."<sup>2</sup>

To give this insight its optimal potential for hermeneutics, it is best to appreciate the lack of ease and uncanny discomfort occasioned by this death awareness within life as more than just an opportunity for self-absorbed lugubrious reflection. Heidegger's care structure, which provides the basis of the being of human existence, is at once grounded in the delimiting parameters of the here-and-now as well as a movement forward toward possibility. Simon Critchley employs the handy term "thrown projection" to capture this dynamism which helps to see how the deep-seated sense of not being at home due to the specter of not being—death—transcends any mere internal confused unfamiliarity with the state of our own individual existences. Instead of being fixated in this way, the otherness that wells up from within because of the ever present reality of death moves us to confront the future replete with the interpretive potential latent in prospective encounters with innumerable others—whether texts or persons. Critchley explains:

The self is divided between two nothings: on the one hand, the nothing of the world and, on the other, the nothingness of pure possibility revealed in being-towards-death. . . . The self is nothing but the movement between two nothings, the nothing of thrownness and the

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 233.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

nothing of projection. Which is to say that the uncanniness of being human, being a stranger to oneself, consists of a double impotentialization.<sup>3</sup>

To ensure that Critchley's lapidary statement on the twofold nothingness associated with the dual encounter with nothingness fully realizes its positive potential for hermeneutic endeavors, the thoughts of another commentator on Heidegger are helpful. Fredrik Svenaeus invites us to see that while the unfamiliarity that we have with our very selves colors our engagements with other people and things in the world, viz., texts, in a challenging way, it also must be seen as a "positive homelessness of wonder." Svenaeus details this multivalent experience accordingly:

This attempt to make sense of life is driven by a feeling of wonder toward that which we do not understand. This wonder can turn into threat or even terror if something is too unfamiliar or uncontrollable. Our understanding can also be attuned in other feelings like joy... There is always something more to come in the future, something that I live toward and that I do not yet know. This is, according to Heidegger, the openness to life, a positive homelessness of wonder.<sup>4</sup>

The promise of coming to know the unfamiliar other as catalyzed by a personal sense of disconnect over our own death realizes an even greater depth in Heidegger's treatment of conscience. While Heidegger's notion of conscience at times departs from the typical ways that the concept has been used in Western moral thought<sup>5</sup>, there are nonetheless enough affinities that will enable us to come to yet another appreciation of the paradoxical way that a deep-seated otherness within ourselves informs our encounters with others that in turn deepens and expands hermeneutical possibilities. Here, too, Heidegger broaches the topic of conscience in *Being and Time* as a way to address the issue of Dasein's attainment of authenticity: "If we analyze conscience more penetratingly, it is revealed as a call (*Ruf*). Calling is a mode of discourse. The call of conscience has the character of an appeal to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self."<sup>6</sup>

At an initial level, the type of knowing cultivated by conscience is a critical self-knowledge that attempts to discern and interpret our genuine identity in the urgent and dynamic sense of who we are and who we may become. Critchley provides the following commentary: "I either choose to choose myself as authentic

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Critchley, "The Null Basis-Being of Nullity, or Between Two Nothings: Heidegger's Uncanniness," chap 8 in *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality*, eds. Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 148.

<sup>4</sup> Fredrik Svenaeus, "Das Unheimliche: Towards a Phenomenology of Illness," *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 3 (2000): 8.

<sup>5</sup> John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 131-134.

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger, 314.

or I am lost in the choiceless publicness of *das Man*. Heidegger's claim is that this potentiality for being a whole—for being authentic—is attested to in the voice of conscience. Ontologically, conscience discloses something: it discloses Dasein to itself.<sup>7</sup> However, for all the disclosive potentiality that conscience should bring to bear on Dasein's project to know who she genuinely is and may become, it, too, is enfolded in an abiding sense of uncanniness. The basis for this is twofold. On the one hand, the form or manner of the call strikes Dasein as unfamiliar, and on the other hand, the very content of the call borders on a reticence that is devoid of any substance. In other words, so caught up in and busied by the external voices of "the they" (*das Man*), we do not recognize the call that wells up from within which can point us to our authentic reality and possibilities. Moreover, once we finally recognize or embrace the call of conscience, it does not provide a strict blue print for how to realize our own-most possibilities. Heidegger sums up this twofold sense of interior otherness in this way:

The call does not report events; it calls without uttering anything. The call discourses in the uncanny mode of keeping silent. And it does this only because, in calling the one to whom the appeal is made, it does not call him into the public idle talk of the "they," but calls him back from this into the reticence of his existent potentiality-for-Being. When the caller reaches him to whom the appeal is made, it does so with a cold assurance which is uncanny but by no means obvious.<sup>8</sup>

What gives balance and promise to this otherwise grim or inextricable sense of otherness, which conditions the internal summons of conscience, is to pay attention to the other type of knowledge that is implicit in its very functioning—knowing with another. Coming to appreciate this not only provides a better appreciation of Heidegger's notion of conscience, but more importantly for the purposes of this article, it shows how deep-seated otherness enables positive—receptive—interpretive encounters with the other. Françoise Dastur proves most helpful here, since she deftly presents a counterpoint to Heidegger's thought on conscience by offering some original commentary on Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself As Another*.<sup>9</sup> Preliminarily, but tellingly so, Dastur asks us to reconsider the etymological richness of conscience, which conveys a clear twofold sense of knowledge—knowing with oneself and knowing with another. She points out that Ricoeur identified this as a "remarkable dissymmetry" which opens the door to appreciating the value of how our own sense of otherness equips us to better acknowledge and embrace the other whom or that we encounter. She writes:

The word conscience, *cum scientia* . . . recalls the Greek *syneidēsis* [which] preserves the trace of the *cum*, of the *syn*, of the "with" that

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<sup>7</sup> Critchley, 146.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, 322.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

implies a relationship to alterity. In Greek, *synoida* has the sense of “knowing with another,” “being complicitous with,” and also “being a witness of,” just as much as knowing oneself, knowing oneself from within. This interior knowledge thus supposes in some way that one makes oneself witness to oneself. . . . But this witnessing of oneself demands that this Being-with-oneself be experienced in a rigorous dissymmetry, and this is brought forth by the call of the voice of conscience.<sup>10</sup>

It is Dastur’s conviction that, emboldened by an awareness of its etymological derivation, conscience is never merely a dialogue with oneself but instead goes beyond to make contact with another. This outreach is predicated and strengthened by the otherness, foreignness, and uncanniness engendered in the call of conscience itself, as emphasized by Heidegger: “the call comes from me and yet from beyond me and over me.”<sup>11</sup> Inspired by the ever-magnanimous interpretive perspective of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of generosity, Dastur points out that our outreach to the other is not merely fortified by a concessionary acceptance of the implicit ambiguity as we respond to the call of our own conscience. Instead, a conscious and welcome acceptance of the otherness that accompanies our deepest moments of self-interpretation become the basis for a positive passivity, which in turn paves the way for a heightened receptivity to the other.<sup>12</sup>

## **2. Interpreting with the Other**

With an acknowledged receptiveness to the other that comes from our grapplings with and investment in our own otherness, at its most intimate levels, we are now in a position to seek ways to apply this to hermeneutics in the fields of theology and religious studies. This application will maximize the receptivity to the other through platforms of philosophical thought that is not only dedicated to theorizing about the other, but does so with an aim to turn receptivity into a transformative experience. Moreover, the transformation that in some way impacts all parties engaged in a hermeneutic encounter will be given an added experiential dimension as it is expressed in some practical and felt way. With this in mind, I turn to the riches offered by the interrelated disciplines of postmodernism, postcolonialism, and Gadamerian hermeneutics.

### **A. Postmodern Hermeneutics**

John Caputo sets the stage in the broadest terms by his endorsement of postmodern philosophy as offering, not only the best tack for embracing otherness, but for doing

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<sup>10</sup> Françoise Dastur, “The Call of Conscience: The Most Intimate Alterity,” chap. 6 in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, eds. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 92.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, 320.

<sup>12</sup> Dastur, 93.

so in a way that is amenable to religious and theological discourse ultimately aimed at fostering intercultural dialogue. He posits:

“Postmodern” thinking, if it means anything at all, means a philosophy of “alterity,” a relentless attentiveness and sensitivity to the “other.” Postmodernism stands for a kind of hyper-sensitivity to many “others”: the other person, other species, “man’s” other, the other of the West, of Europe. . . . But the philosophy of alterity provides an equally fertile and suggestive opening for religious reflection.<sup>13</sup>

In keeping with the tack of much of his life’s work, Caputo proceeds to delineate the potential of postmodern thought by recourse to the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida. More specifically and of greatest relevance for hermeneutic application, he draws our attention to the other of language, since it is his contention that “everything that Derrida has written has had in mind the other of language, the alterity by which language is claimed.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Caputo, the reference function of language becomes the focal point for Derrida’s deconstruction. More precisely, he invites us to reexamine and assess the way that vaunted structures of language—in speech acts and texts—convey understandings about reality that “overestimate the *ego cogito* of the speaking subject while underestimating the power of the linguistic system within which the speaker operates.”<sup>15</sup> The upshot of this “deconstruction,” which pays attention to the forgotten other dimensions in the accepted structures of language’s functioning, is the articulation of new meaning about something. The opportunities that this invitation welcomes for interpretation are unmistakable as summed up by Caputo: “The point of deconstruction is to loosen and unlock structures, to let the shock of alterity set them in motion, to allow them to function more freely and inventively, to produce new forms. Deconstruction gives old texts new readings, old traditions new twists.”<sup>16</sup>

Postmodernism, and most specifically deconstruction, thus provides the general interpretive basis upon which the otherness that we experience in our most interior recesses can find a supportive resonance. As soon as we approach a text, deconstruction encourages vigilance for inherent structures of language that tend to guide interpretation in tried and true directions. However, once we are cognizant of these established patterns, deconstruction urges us to embrace the varied ways laying dormant in language that can also function to open up the text to fresh and different meanings. The challenge at this point then becomes to find a pattern of thought that could refine these efforts and give them more specific application to biblical texts in need of new readings in diverse cultural situations. Within reach is postcolonialism, a body of thought closely aligned with postmodernism that offers a

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<sup>13</sup> John D. Caputo, “The Good News about Alterity: Derrida and Theology,” *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (October 1993): 453.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 456.

vernacular or indigenous hermeneutic by which the texts of the bible can be more genuinely appropriated in the non-Western parts of the world (especially in those regions identified as “Third World”) as well as reappropriated in the West.

### **B. Postcolonial Hermeneutics**

While most readers of this journal have a proficient (if not expert) knowledge of postcolonialism, I want to sketch out a few general points that not only situate the discipline, but also indicate important ways that its hermeneutical agenda complements themes of this article concerning alterity and praxis. As someone native to and deeply imbedded in Western culture, I feel it is of the utmost importance that scholars from the non-Western world inform my thoughts. To that end, my research has been greatly facilitated by the work of R. S. Sugirtharajah, a native Sri Lankan who is currently professor of biblical hermeneutics at the University of Birmingham. He quickly situates postcolonial criticism in such a way that highlights its abiding concerns with alterity and practical application. What is more, he also underscores the way that postcolonialism is related to postmodernism yet retains its own distinctive agenda.

An unmistakable theme associated with postcolonialism, according to Sugirtharajah, is alterity. In fact, he sees this as one of the main issues identified with the debut of the discipline onto the intellectual scene: “Postcolonialism emerged as a critical activity within what is known as Commonwealth or Third World Literature . . . it was the first time that the colonized other was placed at the centre of academic discourse.”<sup>17</sup> And while postcolonial biblical criticism is now often linked with liberation theology by their common concern for the other who is “poor,” it is Sugirtharajah’s stance that postcolonialism’s focus on the other preserves the sense of otherness in a more intense and profound way. In commenting on how liberation theologians, and their well known preferential option for the poor, have been presented with a strong counterpoint from postcolonialism, Sugirtharajah states, “their interpretive focus had to move from making options for the poor, to options for the poor as the ‘Other.’”<sup>18</sup> More will be discussed later concerning Sugirtharajah’s belief that liberation theology and its liberation hermeneutic tend to domesticate the Third World other.

With this distinctive perception of and respect for otherness in the Third World ever at the forefront, postcolonial criticism nevertheless advances a hermeneutical approach that provides a productive point of contact between readers from the non-West and the West. In this way, any tendencies to remain exclusively in a mode of a hermeneutics of suspicion, because of the past ways that biblical texts were often used and misused to justify the interaction of the colonial enterprise with the colonized, are nudged out of place to foster a more affable and inclusive endeavor. Chiefly, with respect for the otherness of the non-Western perspective, the

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<sup>17</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>18</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible in the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial, Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 223.

different approaches of the “native” and “center” interpretations are brought together in a way that mutually conditions and enriches both sides. This enhancement is especially noteworthy since it will transcend the intellectual realm and deeply touch the interpreters in personal, even cathartic ways, as Sugiritharajah explains: “postcolonialism tries to integrate and forge a new perspective by critically and profitably syncretizing ingredients from both vernacular and metropolitan centres. . . . For both parties it must be a process of liberation.”<sup>19</sup>

Sugiritharajah goes on to invoke Edward Saïd, one of the pioneers of postcolonial theory, whose seminal text *Orientalism* (1978) was in large part devoted to a study of how the West formulated a knowledge base about the non-West other that was intentionally self-serving and paved the way for a lasting legacy of hostile bigotry. Nonetheless, Sugiritharajah showcases Saïd’s idea of a “contrapuntal reading” as a means to maintain the tension of otherness between standard and revisionist interpretations while at the same time cultivating a more conciliatory hermeneutics of generosity. He paraphrases Saïd’s contrapuntal phenomenological method in this way:

This is a reading strategy advocated by [Saïd] with a view to encouraging the experiences of the exploited and the exploiter to be studied together. In other words, texts from metropolitan centres and peripheries are studied simultaneously. Contrapuntal reading paves the way for a situation that goes beyond reified binary characterizations of Eastern and Western writings. To read contrapuntally means to be aware simultaneously of mainstream scholarship and of other scholarship which the dominant discourse tries to domesticate and speaks and acts against.<sup>20</sup>

Sugiritharajah gravitates to Saïd’s thinking since it emboldens his own convictions that postcolonial hermeneutics advances a much more complex and nuanced sense of otherness in its interpretive encounters. More specifically, an additional dimension of otherness is preserved by coupling Saïd’s recommendation, that any genuine hermeneutical rendezvous should include both those who have been exploited and those who have done the exploiting, with Sugiritharajah’s claim that such interactions should be liberating, transformative, and even cathartic for each side. Speaking in the broadest terms about the streams of postcoloniality that have ramifications for hermeneutics, Sugiritharajah writes:

It goes beyond the binary notions of colonized and colonizer and lays weighty emphasis on critical exchanges and mutual transformation between the two. Postcolonialism does not mean that the colonized are innocent, generous, and principled, whereas the former colonizers, and now neocolonizers, are all innately culpable, greedy and responsible for

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<sup>19</sup> Sugiritharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

all social evils. . . . The current postcolonialism tries to emphasize that this relationship between the ruler and the ruled is complex.<sup>21</sup>

### C. *Gadamerian Hermeneutics*

What is fascinating and in keeping with the spirit of postcolonialism's corrective and indigenous approach to hermeneutics is its unmistakable and strong link with established, dare I say metropolitan or centered, tactics. Specifically, as readers of this journal will appreciate, a reexamination of the key tenets of Hans Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics echoes with Sugirtharajah's postcolonial criticism, especially with regard to allowing for a healthy interplay of otherness in the interpretive exchange. One place where Gadamer's program allows for further development along these lines is in his notion of the fusion of horizons. But before turning to an analysis of how the otherness of the other is maintained in the fusion of horizons, it will be advantageous to review some preliminary Gadamerian insights on the tensive and productive dynamic associated with interpretive encounters. According to Lawrence Schmidt, "respecting the otherness of the other is a central requirement for understanding philosophical hermeneutics and has featured prominently in Gadamer's thinking from the beginning."<sup>22</sup> This early phase focuses on Plato's "friendly questioning" which takes place in hermeneutic conversations. While it is beyond the scope of this article to mine the full depth of the Gadamer's earliest thought, Schmidt offers the following helpful gleanings from *Plato's Dialectical Ethics* where the dynamism of friendly questioning is explicated. His synthesis indicates that a twofold outcome eventuates from such an interchange, which positively impacts both the interactions of the conversing parties as well as their appropriations of the content of their musings. Schmidt writes: "each conversant must be willing to listen to and acknowledge the other's right to freely disagree. . . ."

The role of the other is not just limited to this willingness to listen to grounds only and agree or not. The other may advance the conversation further by helping to uncover the subject matter of the conversation."<sup>23</sup>

The proper way to relate to the other's speaking in friendly conversation is given depth and breadth by Gadamer's fusion of horizons on at least two fronts. First, the conversational horizon is no longer focused on the two discussants—self and other—but instead includes the important recognition of how their interactions are centered on a text. Second, there is the realization that the entire encounter between the participants and the text takes place within a specific temporal backdrop that acknowledges how the past conditions any present interpretive outcomes.<sup>24</sup> Equipped with this appreciation of the multiple layers of horizons that may be "fused," it is more in keeping with the aims of this article to devote greater attention

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<sup>21</sup> Sugirtharajah, *The Bible in the Third World*, 250.

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence K. Schmidt, "Respecting Others: The Hermeneutic Virtue," *Continental Philosophy Review* 33 (2000): 359.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>24</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 306.

to the nature of the fusion that takes place between the participants as they interpret a text. Schmidt's commentary on Gadamer proves instructive here by highlighting the delicate balance that must be achieved. On the one hand, an atmosphere of mutual respect and parity must be cultivated between the two parties reading the text. This, among the many possible relations that the participants may have as they approach the text, is the proper hermeneutic relation, as Schmidt states: "the other is recognized as an equal other. . . . One grants the other the freedom to speak as an equal and presupposes the preconception of completion, which means to take seriously the coherence and truth of what is said. The I is self-critical and listens to the other. This alone creates the openness of the hermeneutic conversation."<sup>25</sup>

The critical navigation that must take place here is one of steering between an acceptance of those with whom we read a text as being equal to us, in the sense that they too have an interpretive truth claim to offer, and an avoidance of blurring this equality into a homogenization of the other and her interpretive message. In other words, the fusion of horizons that takes place between self and other engaged in reading texts does not result in a neutralizing of perspectival differences which in turn leads to a common interpretation. Fred Dallmayr's insights are especially illuminating on this front when he writes:

Occasionally, Gadamerian hermeneutics is accused of, or identified with, a facile consensualism, with a happy blending of views devoid of conflict. To some extent, his *Truth and Method* has encouraged this construal, especially through its notion of a "fusion of horizons". . . .  
Yet at a closer (and more sympathetic) look, what is involved here is not so much a fusion in the sense of convergence but rather an unlimited openness to horizons—in such a manner that interpretive understanding can never be fully stabilized or completed.<sup>26</sup>

The call to better appreciate the fusion of horizons in this more expanded, even radical, sense of ushering in an "unlimited openness to horizons" is not meant to be realized as merely an academic reminder when engaged in carefully circumscribed hermeneutical endeavors. Instead, Dallmayr reminds us of Gadamer's treatment in *Truth and Method* of the ever present challenge to apply hermeneutics: "an integral part of traditional hermeneutics was the so-called '*subtilitas applicandi*,' the ability to bring the meaning of a text to bear on a given situation."<sup>27</sup> Here is where important links are forged between well-established hermeneutical theory and Sugirtharajah's postcolonial vernacular hermeneutics on several scores. First, and most directly, Sugirtharajah, too, champions the constitutive "praxiological" dimension of all aspects of postcolonial theory, especially in its hermeneutical applications. He explains:

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<sup>25</sup> Schmidt, 368-369.

<sup>26</sup> Fred Dallmayr, "Hermeneutics and Inter-Cultural Dialogue: Linking Theory and Practice," *Ethics & Global Politics* 2 (2009): 27.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

Postcolonial hermeneutics has to be a pragmatic engagement, an engagement in which praxis is not an extra option or a subsidiary enterprise taken on in the aftermath of judicious deconstruction and reconstruction of the texts. Rather, this praxiological involvement is there from the outset of the hermeneutical process, informing and contesting the whole procedure.<sup>28</sup>

Aside from both Dallmayr and Sugiritharajah agreeing on the necessity to make interpretive efforts practical, they also concur on the focus of any such applications. And it is this point of agreement that offers yet another opportunity to advance the thesis of this article on the importance of genuinely appropriating otherness in all hermeneutical ventures, especially in the intercultural contexts of globalization. On the one hand, it is Dallmayr's position that Gadamer's concern to relate the meaning unearthed from texts has poignancy for globalization: "In our time of globalization, when different societies and cultures are pushed closer and closer together, hermeneutical understanding is bound to transcend local contexts and to acquire a cross-cultural or transnational significance."<sup>29</sup> Most significant in Dallmayr's astute retrieval of Gadamer's wisdom are the exigencies brought to bear on alterity as a result of globalization's intense and unprecedented compression of others. On the other hand, from Sugiritharajah's perspective, the problematics of bringing together others as it is understood today under the moniker of globalization were initiated and given a lasting quality of disparity by the phenomenon of colonialism. Thus, hermeneutics not only has the mandate and wherewithal to confront the challenges of globalization in a generic and trendy sense, but it must also address with its postcolonial sensibilities the peculiar difficulties associated with globalization's impact on the inhabitants of the Third World. Sugiritharajah contends:

Textual reclamations and resistant reading practices will make sense only if they address the questions people face today. Ultimately, the question is not whether our reading practice is seen as colonial or postcolonial, modern or postmodern. Its usefulness will not be judged by its ability to offer a critique of the complex heritage that colonial occupation produced. Its critical relevance will be apparent when it has a bearing on the issues that cause concern to our people, such as housing, education, homeland, healthcare, social security and the justice system. . . . The task of postcolonialism is ensuring that the needs and aspirations of the exploited are catered to, rather than being merely an interesting and engaging avenue of inquiry.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Sugiritharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 33.

<sup>29</sup> Dallmayr, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Sugiritharajah, *The Bible in the Third World*, 274-275.

The key to applicability and relevance of hermeneutics for globalization and the distinctive challenges it brings to bear on the developing world is a heightened attunement to otherness. From a Western perspective this requires a slight adjustment to the already established mechanisms of the hermeneutic dialogue. As traced out above, recourse to Gadamer's friendly questioning and fusion of horizons quickly demonstrates the legacy of the conversational dynamic implicit in the art and theory of interpretation. Thus, it becomes a matter of elevating or recasting the dialogue onto a different plane. This is exactly the invitation extended by Dallmayr when he sees the applicability of Gadamer's thinking to globalization. The question becomes, how does otherness factor in so as to ensure integrity and vibrancy during any interpretive exchange? For answers, Dallmayr showcases "The Diversity of Europe: Inheritance and Future," an essay by the later Gadamer that treats the implications of European unification. From these insights come glimpses of how to recast standard procedures associated with hermeneutic dialogue onto a broader platform. Chiefly, all of the sensitivities which are adhered to as a way to ensure that otherness is respected between two participants in a typical interpretive experience, thus staving off any facile convergence, are now intensified to reckon with the complexities of an inter-cultural encounter. Dallmayr delineates the specifics: "participants in cross-cultural encounters are expected neither to erase themselves (in a vain attempt to 'go native') nor to appropriate and subjugate the other's difference; rather, the point is to achieve a shared appreciation and recognition of differences."<sup>31</sup> Gadamer sees this as an opportunity "to stop and respect the other as an other"<sup>32</sup> with the practical results of fostering mutual learning and transformation. This, then, becomes the component of application or praxis that is ingredient to Gadamer's hermeneutics as it pertains to the otherness in confronting a timely issue. When reading texts with others in a global context, a genuine openness to mutual otherness fosters a learning process that involves possible transformation.

Some may assess this hoped for practical outcome to be unattainable and high-minded due to the very perspective from which it is formulated. This becomes especially pronounced when juxtaposing it with postcolonial theory. What realistic evaluation, yet alone advocacy, can a hermeneutic philosophy so ensconced in the Western intellectual tradition offer to the interpretive dynamic that includes layers of non-Western otherness? By way of initial response, it is good to keep in mind a point made above about postcolonial hermeneutics. There it was the assertion of at least one practitioner of this corrective approach, Sugirtharajah, that both Western and non-Western modes of interpretation can be used in meaningful tandem. But for an even more specific response that homes in on the aspect of otherness so as not to render the Western other as ineligible to interpret in situations of glaring cultural difference, let us allow Sugirtharajah to speak in a more personal and frank way on the matter. While his cultural heritage could easily lead him to a stance that invalidates the insights of a "metropolitan" or "from the center" perspective like

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<sup>31</sup> Dallmayr, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Diversity of Europe: Inheritance and Future," chap. 18 in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 236.

Gadamer's and his academic executers, he instead recommends an inclusive fellowship for those who converse around the hermeneutical table:

“You don't know what it was like, because it never happened to you, and therefore you have no right to speak”—does not allow room for a sober assessment. . . . It would be lamentable to resort to personal experience as a hermeneutical trump card. . . . Personal experience, cultural affinities and ideological closeness, important though they are, are poor surrogates for understanding and accountability in hermeneutics. Sensing and feeling what is right is sufficient. One does not need to have lived it.<sup>33</sup>

If there is a willingness to accept compassion and empathy as the requisite qualities that admit diverse participants to hermeneutic conversations, it is Sugiritharajah's contention that these same traits will be further polished during such encounters and eventually realize an outcome that is similar to the one hoped for by Gadamer. In other words, the practical fallout will be a learning experience with transformative possibilities. Sugiritharajah's realistic expectations come through in the following remarks with marked candor, even a slight edginess, as one who works from a non-Western vantage point: “The task of the hermeneut is not to change the world but to understand it. Hermeneutics does not create revolution; it changes people's perceptions and makes them aware of the need for revolution. Its function is to make people see more, feel more, rekindle the fire of resistance.”<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics

It is noteworthy for the purpose of advancing the argument in this article to appreciate the implications that surface when Sugiritharajah uses expressions such as “revolution” and “resistance” to identify the pragmatic dimensions of the postcolonial hermeneutical process. While these terms are readily associated with leftist theories, such as Marxism, which in many ways have provided a philosophical base to the counterpoint hermeneutics of liberation theology, it is Sugiritharajah's claim that the validity of any alternative mode of interpretation must be adjudged on the way it perceives and approaches the other. When broadly introducing postcolonial hermeneutics earlier, a passing point of contrast was made between its approach to the other and liberation theology's option for the poor. Easily detected there, but not fully pursued, was Sugiritharajah's lukewarm assessment of the effectiveness of a hermeneutics of liberation, as employed by liberation theologies, to extract practical meaning from biblical texts for the Third World. It is critical at this point to further pursue Sugiritharajah's uneasy relationship with liberation hermeneutics in order to better understand his stance that postcolonial criticism

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<sup>33</sup> Sugiritharajah, *The Bible in the Third World*, 269-270.

<sup>34</sup> Sugiritharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 95.

offers the better approach to the other, especially when engaged in biblical hermeneutics.

On the one hand, he credits liberation hermeneutics for having paved the way for postcolonial theory to widen its purview and engage in religious discourse. In discussing the pioneers of the tradition, such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Saïd, Sugirtharajah observes the paucity of any substantive treatment of religion in their theoretical agendas: “Postcolonial criticism, which was influenced by Marxism, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis . . . has sadly paid little attention to the potency of religion and theology among Third World peoples.”<sup>35</sup> However, he also goes on to acknowledge how liberation theology, working in its own vein, raised the profile of the significance of religious texts for efforts of revisionist thinking in the developing world: “Currently the most popular and accessible to Western audiences is the liberation-focused Latin American theology.”<sup>36</sup>

Sugirtharajah continues his contained yet rightful praise for liberation theology, beyond its having acted as a basis and entrée for postcolonial theory’s foray into biblical hermeneutics, by acknowledging a litany of its interpretive features. Among these are ones that specifically address the importance of alterity, yet as I will show later, they are only partially effective in fully embracing the significance of the other in comparison to the approach of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics. Since liberation theology has been part of the intellectual scene since the 1960s, it has naturally undergone a process of development in its own right. Sugirtharajah identifies three phases in this evolutionary process, and maintains that the focus of the final two stages were best attuned to the other and so provided the springboard for the expansion of postcolonial hermeneutics into the area of biblical interpretation. Foremost among its foundational interpretive features is liberation theology’s insistence that there is no neutral reading of the text, as Sugirtharajah limns: “An interpreter has to take an option; liberation theologians unapologetically, openly and consciously side with the poor, and it is from that perspective that a reading is undertaken.”<sup>37</sup>

Base or Basic Christian Communities (*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base*), a staple from the liberation theology tradition, became the primary venue where meaningful readings of the bible on the side of the poor—*de los Pobres*—have taken place. While it is beyond the scope of this article to delve into the methodological fine points of biblical interpretation associated with Base Christian Communities, it is important to have a basic appreciation that it essentially entails an appropriation of the bible by “ordinary readers.” To that end, Sugirtharajah prefers to call this mode of interpretation the “people’s reading” which enables a synthesis of “ordinary people’s critical consciousness of their own society and the text.”<sup>38</sup> Aside from the voice of the poor other being given the perspectival point of privilege in these encounters, alterity surfaces and must be integrated in yet another important way. This is best understood by paying attention to the way that some African theologians

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>37</sup> Sugirtharajah, *The Bible in the Third World*, 207.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 216.

and biblical scholars have designated this hermeneutical exercise as one of “reading with.” In other words, it is not just a matter of acknowledging the invaluable perspective that the other, especially the non-Western marginalized other, brings to the interpretation of the bible, but it is also important to examine how this point of view interfaces with academic exegesis and commentary.

A special issue of the journal *Semeia* was devoted to the exploration of the intersection between these two perspectives, and the insights of Teresia M. Hinga in her concluding article are most helpful: “Categorizing themselves as ‘critical readers,’ writers in this volume express their wish to participate in a ‘reading with’ ‘ordinary readers’ whom they identify as the poor and oppressed, the victims of various injustices and conditions of domination prevailing in Africa.”<sup>39</sup> As Hinga proceeds to offer a synopsis of the various contributions to the special issue of the journal, she also highlights some cautionary points associated with the attempt by professional exegetes to “read with” lay interpreters. These are important since they resonate with Sugirtharajah’s position that while postcolonial biblical hermeneutics has built upon the liberation hermeneutic of liberation theology, it nonetheless surpasses it by espousing a more authentic appropriation of otherness in the interpretive dynamic. By means of a sobering question, Hinga highlights a specific caution that must be heeded by the critical reader trying to read with the ordinary reader: “To what extent does she/he [the academic reader] avoid romanticizing their views by claiming only to listen to the poor, while failing to engage in serious conversation with the poor for mutual enrichment?”<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, it is not enough to just ornamentally showcase the other because her voice provides a hitherto neglected perspective. Of equal importance for a sound hermeneutical enterprise is the necessity to find ways that ensure her message is being taken seriously, especially as it is juxtaposed with more standardized interpretations offered by the academy. It is Sugirtharajah’s conviction that postcolonial biblical hermeneutics will be more alert and sensitive to this sort of appropriation than liberation theology. Evidence of this came through in Hinga’s just mentioned admonition where “romanticization” was specifically identified as an impediment to genuine attempts to “read with.” Writing from an African rather than a Latin American context, she offers a credible voice of contrast. Whether it is the tendency to romanticize the poor other or merely homogenize her perspective in some generalized way, Sugirtharajah believes that this is endemic to liberation hermeneutics and will only be corrected by a cultural sensitivity that genuinely reads with the other as a postcolonial hermeneutics. He makes the following point of contrast, “Unlike liberation hermeneutics, postcolonialism does not perceive the Other as a homogenous category, but acknowledges multiple identities based upon class, sex, ethnicity and gender.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Teresia M. Hinga, “‘Reading With’: An Exploration of the Interface between ‘Critical’ and ‘Ordinary’ Readings of the Bible: A Response,” *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism* 73 (1996): 277.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>41</sup> Sugirtharajah, *The Bible in the Third World*, 262.

To illustrate the different approaches, he turns to a Gospel text that recounts the story of the Widow's Mite as it appears in Mark 12:41-44. Citing the commentary of José Cárdenas Pallares on the passage, who writes from a liberation vantage point, the poor widow's piety is contrasted with the religiosity of the power elites. Her modest monetary offering to the Temple is seen as a genuine sacrifice, whereas the larger sums donated by the wealthy are pro forma. The larger message then becomes an object lesson on whose relationship with God is more commendable, with the widow, who represents all the poor, enjoying an idealized spiritual life. Pallares makes this clear:

In contrast with the sterility of official religion, which gets along on miracles and money alone (Mk 11:12-22), the poor widow demonstrates true faith in God (Mk 11:22-24). Her strength and her security are God (12:44). The interpretation Jesus and the first Christians make of this poor person's behavior is an absolute and utter reversal of values, a contradiction of everything that motivates a classless society. For this poor person, and as for the poor Jesus and the poor primitive communities, what counts is God.<sup>42</sup>

Observable here is an extensive flattening out of otherness on many fronts. At the preliminary level when attempting to draw an interpretive contrast between the widow and the wealthy, the condition of the former is automatically valorized with no regard for the nuance of these different states of life. With this purview in mind, the broader interpretive application becomes a projection of a classless society where otherness will be undetectable.

For Sugirtharajah, applying a postcolonial hermeneutic to this story will lead to a richer and more layered interpretation by ensuring that otherness in its many instantiations is not only respected but also allowed to remain at play in all its fullness. The result becomes an interpretive stance that, first off, assumes the position of the widow in a more genuine (and less idyllic) way. It then goes on to expose a differentiated, and regrettably imbalanced, interaction among the many others in Greco-Roman society instead of projecting a sanguine utopia of equality. He writes:

Postcolonialism reads the Gospel incident from the point of view of the widow and sees it not as an approval of her action but as an exposure of abuse by the temple treasure authorities. If one sees it from the widow's angle, Jesus was not applauding her action but making an assault upon an institution which generated poverty in Israel. . . .

Postcolonial reading will not see the widow as being singled out by Jesus as a model for piety but as a poor widow who was

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<sup>42</sup> José Cárdenas Pallares, *A Poor Man Called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 57-58.

manipulated and swindled by the system into parting with the little she had.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, what Sugirtharajah is contributing in this instance to biblical hermeneutics is a plea to invest more in cultural rather than political or quasi-political sensitivities. While the latter have the potential to advance the liberation of the other in developing regions of the world, as evidenced by the liberative hermeneutic practiced by liberation theology, it is only by identifying with and immersion into cultural difference when reading a text that both parties' otherness remains intact and genuinely informs the interpretive outcome. Here is the basic distinction that should be heeded, according to Sugirtharajah, for such a hermeneutic to realize its potential:

The question then is, what sort of Third World theological curries are available to Western audiences? At the risk of over-generalizing, third world theological texts fall under two categories, namely, *liberation-focused* and *culture-sensitive*. While the former privileges a liberation hermeneutic as key, the latter mobilizes indigenous cultural nuances for the theological enterprise.<sup>44</sup>

Other practitioners of postcolonial hermeneutics make similar recommendations, and even have gone a step further by believing that texts can be approached in a way that respects and maximizes otherness through an interpretive lens that synthesizes cultural and liberation concerns. For instance, Charles Nyamiti, a Tanzanian Catholic theologian, has unearthed African models of Jesus by employing a twofold interpretive method of inculturation and liberations theologies.<sup>45</sup>

Regardless of which stance is embraced, the more radical position of Sugirtharajah or the more conciliatory of other non-Western academics, the point is to engage in a postcolonial hermeneutics that is culturally sensitive in receptive and less patronizing ways. Few would deny the humanizing effects that can eventuate from the removal of oppressive structures as challenged by a liberative perspective, but the motivations behind this viewpoint are more vulnerable to either a neutralized, overly pious, or stratified appreciation of otherness. It is necessary, therefore, to first pursue the culturally sensitive approach as it has the greater promise to deflect such vulnerabilities and to allow for interpretations that are initiated by an openness to otherness and sustained by a continued perceptiveness of the specific otherness that must play out in such interactions between non-Western and Western readings. To summarize, Sugirtharajah offers this insight as it applies to biblical hermeneutics:

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<sup>43</sup> Sugirtharajah, *The Bible in the Third World*, 263.

<sup>44</sup> Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, 163.

<sup>45</sup> Volker Küster, *The Many Faces of Jesus: Intercultural Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 59.

The Christian bible is not subjected to a postcolonial gaze in order to make the texts come alive and provide solace and comfort to those devout (or in some cases not so devout) readers who also have social and political perceptiveness. . . . [The postcolonial gaze] seeks to puncture the Christian Bible's Western protection and pretensions, and to help reposition it in relation to its oriental roots and Eastern heritage.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4. The Other's Other Jesus

Some African theologians have complemented their devotion to postcolonial modes of biblical interpretation with the riches of their indigenous symbol system to formulate more diverse and inclusive models of Jesus. As non-Westerners they bring a built-in perspective of otherness to the standard Western theological glosses on biblical texts. But beyond this is an added dimension of otherness kept in play as their work invites participants in religious discourse from all regions of the world to reconsider the very unfolding of alterity implicit in the pivotal theological tenet of the incarnation. In other words, the Christian conviction that God became a human being conveys an implicit alterity whereby God chose to be not-God. Jesus thus becomes a paradigm of otherness, and should therefore be the source of innumerable expressions of otherness. This will ensure that Jesus is embraced and understood by those within the diverse cultural contexts who believe his work and message have the capacity to meaningfully address the current challenges that confront humankind. Thus, when Bénétzet Bujo, a Catholic theologian from Zaire, advances his understanding of Jesus as proto-ancestor in light of the ancestor tradition in African culture, he is clear that such an alternative image is firmly rooted in the alterity of Jesus' incarnation and not merely the cosmetic promotion of cultural diversity:

From what has been said so far, it will be clear that giving the title of "Proto-Ancestor" to Jesus Christ is no superficial or whimsical concession to the fashion of the day. . . . My proposal has to do rather with the very essence of the Word's becoming human. To borrow the words of Karl Rahner, in the Incarnation God really assumed humanity in a decisive way. In uttering God's Word, which became our flesh, God immersed himself in the "void" of "godlessness" and "sin," so that henceforth it is impossible for us, if we wish to meet God, to ignore the man Jesus.<sup>47</sup>

Beyond finding a mooring for alterity in postcolonial biblical hermeneutical approaches in well-founded theological doctrines such as the incarnation, an added

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<sup>46</sup> Sugiritharajah, BTW, 257-258.

<sup>47</sup> Bénétzet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 82.

anchorage may be discovered by recourse to a recognized tenet of continental philosophy. While it is beyond the scope of this article to convey, even in the most preliminary way, the seminal work of Emmanuel Levinas on alterity, it is nonetheless fascinating to point out its connections with the efforts of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics to promote images of Jesus that are as diverse as they are inclusive. Such a link is specifically made by the work of Anselme Sanon, a Catholic theologian from Niger, who has applied to Jesus the ancient African cultural image of master initiator. Rooted in and sensitive to such cultural symbolism, Sanon is then motivated to apply it as an articulation of Jesus because of an attraction to Jesus' face. This in turn results in a novel and profound way to better understand Jesus. On the one hand, it readily resonates with the African mindset, culturally attuned as it is to the affinities between Jesus and the prominent role of the eldest brother to mentor and ritually initiate the younger family members into full communion with the community. Moreover, it urges those in other cultures, who are less familiar with initiatory processes, to arrive at a renewed sense of the positive role that initiation and its rituals play in communal life. With this, it is then possible to achieve a conceptualization of Jesus as master of initiation that at once moves religious discourse about him in new directions, but does so in complementarity with accepted theological assertions that Jesus acts as senior sibling and mentor in the formation of a radically new and all inclusive community. All this is possible, according to Sanon, by initially responding to the allure of Jesus' human face, as he writes:

What position am I to assume before Christ? Is it curiosity, or call, or attraction—the attraction to the kind of face that fascinates? Attraction it surely is, to this face which two thousand years of attempts—not to say temptations!—intellectual and spiritual, theological, artistic and aesthetic, have never ceased to deliver! In the new community of Christ, which must be founded on all of the shores of the world, a junction must be struck, under penalty of treason, at a confluence—to drain the rich alluvions of all peoples of all lands to the great river, to the shore of shores, the face of Christ.<sup>48</sup>

To be drawn to and enchanted by the human face of Jesus, to allow it to make a claim on us, regardless of faith disposition, will result in discovering new ways to articulate who he is for diverse cultural contexts and what his message can bring to early 21<sup>st</sup> century existential challenges. Not only does such a focus on the face of Jesus reinforce and mutually condition the genuine attunement to otherness of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics in its appropriation of pertinent christological scripture texts, but for Sanon it also positively impacts encounters with others to forge a heightened communal awareness in the widest sense, “To see the face of Christ, to recognize his African face, is to find an African name for him. . . . A name and a face tend to designate personal and relational identity, personal being and

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<sup>48</sup> Anselme T. Sanon, “Jesus as Master of Initiation,” chap. 6 in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 85.

social being. That is, they seek to express personal being in its social bonds—in its social, communitarian dimension.”<sup>49</sup> And it is at this juncture where Sanon’s invitation to look upon and be looked at by the face of Jesus in tandem with a postcolonial biblical hermeneutics has a connection with Levinas. The insights of Jeffrey Bloechl have been most helpful in formulating the possibility of such a link, and they have also made me aware of the necessity of further study for the link to be more widely accepted by practitioners of both philosophical and theological hermeneutics. Nonetheless, Bloechl underscores the double fall out of interpretative opportunities instigated and sustained by a face. On the one hand, the gaze offers a teachable moment as the one looking upon the face of the other is introduced to a fresh reality that is never fully grasped, as Bloechl explains: “It now stands to reason that Levinas invests so much in the face of the other person. In the face of the Other person, he famously contends, the subject meets a dimension that defies comprehension. The face thus shocks, but also awakens and teaches.”<sup>50</sup> In a similar vein, Sanon’s postcolonial hermeneutics maintains that the receptiveness to the gaze of Jesus, as foundational to the appropriation of pertinent biblical texts, will lead to unprecedented yet legitimate understandings—“namings”—of Jesus that will in turn have meaning in a variety of contexts and for a diverse readership. While the lessons from such encounters defy easy and once-and-for-all comprehension, the opportunity for repeated hermeneutical exchanges has been given a foundation and spirit of welcome by the very demands engendered in facial contacts. Bloechl traces out this important dimension of the dynamic:

Whereas previously I had been absorbed in my own concerns, without cause to truly question their supremacy, now I am called to see that the Other person, too, inhabits this world I had taken as my own. Before solitude is community, and before self-indulgence is the need and desire of my neighbor, in fact already urging itself upon me in the disturbance that his or her nearness brings to the world I inhabit. . . .

The first moment of hospitality is a gathering-together of oneself and one’s very world, under the arresting presence of the human face.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, a contemporary philosophical depth is given to the postcolonial biblical hermeneutics that drive christological projects like Sanon’s where the face of Jesus becomes the common focal point upon which Christians and non-Christians alike may gaze and be claimed by the gaze to arrive at interpretations of Jesus that are meaningful and relevant.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>50</sup> Jeffrey Bloechl, “Words of Welcome: Hospitality in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas,” chap 13. in *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality*, eds. Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 235.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 235-236.

## **Conclusion**

It is hoped that this article has made some gains in its aim to explore the merit of allowing otherness to initiate and sustain the interpretive endeavors especially when reading biblical texts. Throughout and in various ways there has been an abiding concern to show the place of “praxis” as interpreters from diverse cultural backgrounds are brought together with an unprecedented level of intensity because of the globalized context in which we now live. While the practical fallout may not be measured with accuracy in a quantitative way, the intangible outcome can be appreciated for its multifaceted existential enrichment. As otherness remains at the core of our own self-interpretation of who we are and called to be by the intimate mechanism of our conscience, it must in turn be the awareness that precipitates and continually nourishes those tasks committed to meaningfully interpret texts in conversations marked by intercultural difference. In those endeavors more specifically devoted to the bible which are characterized by non-Western and Western difference, there is the possible outcome of not only mutual intellectual enrichment as both parties come to value the merit of perspectival diversity, but also the opening up of unprecedented ways to reach diverse articulations about that which remains most ineffable.