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# Critical Theology

engaging
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Fall 2018 issue edited by Rosemary P. Carbine and David Seljak

## *The Ecumenist* becomes *Critical Theology*

**By the Editorial Team**

"Which side are you on?" In the wake of an illegal and violent invasion of her home in 1931 by deputies acting in the interests of a coal mining company, Florence Reece, the wife of a Kentucky coal mine strike organizer, penned the words to a song that asks the most important question for Christians today. With its tune taken from a Christian hymn, the song has been sung and rewritten dozens of times in dozens of conflicts. The chorus asks us to choose between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, those at the centre and those in the margins. Because the question has never been more urgent, we launch *Critical Theology* as a renewal of *The Ecumenist,* a journal that Gregory Baum founded in 1962.

Pope John Paul II was not afraid to take sides. When he visited Canada in the 1980s, he declared, "The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion; and production to meet social needs over production for military purposes." Similarly, in the face of dangers—long-standing and emerging—to the dignity and safety of human beings, Christians, along with members of the world's religions and all people of good will, need to make a decision. Neutrality, apathy, cynicism, and passivity are not options. Which side are we on?

*Critical Theology* is our reply to Florence Reece's heartfelt song. In this first issue, we have asked the members of the new editorial team to write a reflection on what critical theology means to them. You will find that, despite a shared commitment to the faith and justice agenda, each editor comes to this project from a different perspective. We welcome that diversity. Critical theology never imagines that it has the final answer. Consequently, we invite you to join us in that conversation as we search for new ways of creating a church for others, a church that declares that it is on the side of the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, and the excluded. It is a journey that involves us mind, body, and soul as we analyze our church, culture, and society, commit ourselves to care for those harmed by them, and adopt a new spirituality of compassion and solidarity.

## Contents

Gregory Baum's little theological journal *The Ecumenist* has found new life in *Critical Theology*. We are grateful to Novalis Publishing for its commitment to both *The Ecumenist* since 1999 and its renewed commitment to *Critical Theology*. We live in troubled times. We have been called. We now have a choice. Which side are you on?

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# Critical Theology in the 21st Century

**By Don Schweitzer**
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The Ecumenist *first appeared in 1962 as a product of the ecumenical enthusiasm inspired by Vatican II. It was intended to provide theological reflection on ecumenical initiatives. The rise of Black, Latin American, and feminist liberation theologies, along with the failure of Vatican II reforms to take root in the Roman Catholic Church, shifted this emphasis in the 1970s to an approach seeking social transformation, which Gregory Baum called "critical theology." Critical reflection on church and society in this vein remained the journal's main focus until his death in 2017.* The Ecumenist *has been renamed and reformatted. While it will still discuss ecumenical as well as interfaith initiatives and issues, its main emphasis will continue to be critical theology. Its new name has been chosen to reflect this. What follows examines some of what this will entail, from the perspective of a white male who is a member of The United Church of Canada.*

## Critical Theology

Critical theology has been defined as "any theology that uses critical social theory to uncover and unfold the emancipatory meaning of the Christian Gospel."[1] Critical social theory generally refers to forms of social scientific inquiry having a moral bent or other forms of thought concerned with the social good. Critical theology typically begins with listening to the voices of the marginalized and powerless,[2] who often go unheard. To this end it is guided by a preferential option for the poor. It attends to the suffering of the poor and their potential to transform and enrich society. Critical social theory is used by critical theology to unfold the liberating meaning of the gospel.

Critical theologies also attend to other social evils, like the various ways societies and social institutions, including churches, may jeopardize themselves. Institutions can become turned in upon themselves, allowing a "logic of maintenance" (the necessary effort to keep the institution alive and healthy) to overrule their "logic of mission" (the reason for which the institution was created).[3] Societies can let their notions of the good become hollowed-out, meaningless façades. They may destroy the natural environments that support them. Social movements can cut themselves off from their sources of inspiration and empowerment, neglecting the traditions and practices that sustain their mission and hope. They can restrict their concern to a single issue when many confront them. Churches can idolize the status quo, ignoring or stifling Spirit-inspired movements seeking social change or ecclesiastical renewal. Critical theology attends to the ways societies and social institutions can go into decline as well as to the sufferings of the present. The two are often closely linked.

Critical theology's critique arises from analyzing the sufferings of society's victims in light of the gospel's liberating and salvific message. Critical theology understands Jesus' proclamation of the coming reign of God as a concrete utopia that reveals the strengths and virtues of church and society as well as their weaknesses, shortcomings, and sins. Its critique is guided and sustained by faith in the crucified and risen Christ. It looks for signs of the times that signal where the Holy Spirit is at work to bring new life and renewal. Its norm is a complex demand for both justice and reconciliation. The salvation it seeks is multi-faceted and often full of tension. For example, it seeks justice and opportunity for development for the poor but also care for the environment. It typically advocates for socialist democracy but knows that populations often vote out of narrow self-interest. It draws upon church traditions and teaching to provide insight for the present, yet also subjects these to critical scrutiny. In seeking justice and peace, it must also be open to others and willing to critically reflect upon its own guiding ideals. As Gregory Baum wrote,

> Critical theology questions its own critiques not only in regard to remnants of past prejudice, but also regarding the possibility that under changed social conditions of the future these critiques could become ideological defenses of new marginalizing structures. The option for the poor is a transcendent principle since after a radical social transformation, this option does not defend the new order but demands instead that one listen to the newly marginalized.[4]

Critical theologies thus have no eternal city in this life, but look for one that is to come.[5] This "inner homelessness"[6] is a source of their vitality. It stems from an eschatological hope that has guided and sustained a long tradition of critical Christian social thought.

Critical theology also takes up the challenge of Karl Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: the task of the-

ory is not just to understand the world, but to change it. For critical theology, that task is to help move the world closer to its divine destiny. Critical theology thus understands truth to be transformative.[7] Truth has an impact and makes a difference. If it fails to move individuals, communities, and societies, it at least illuminates the distance between the present social order and what God wills, calling the former into question in light of the latter. Indeed, for critical theology this transformative power is an important criterion of truth. Any theological statement—no matter how beautiful or sophisticated—that does not lead to liberation in the concrete has not finished its intellectual journey. It is either wrong-headed or incomplete.

The hope and the desire for a better world puts critical theologies in conversation with secular social theories, movements, and critics who also seek a greater justice and a deeper peace. As Jürgen Moltmann wrote, "Critical theology and critical theory meet in the framework of open questions, the question of suffering which cannot be answered and the question of righteousness which cannot be surrendered."[8] From secular critical theories, critical theology has learned how Christian symbols and values may be misused or function ideologically, about the dynamics of social change, the possibilities immanent in the present, and the forms that justice must take. In turn, it points to the religious dimension of life and is able to articulate the basis of its hope, whereas secular critical theories often cannot. As the resurrection of the crucified Christ, the basis of this hope, is at the heart of the church's faith, critical theology is able to communicate its message to a wide audience of Christians, while critical theories often lack a historical subject.[9] The dialogue between critical theories and critical theologies can be mutually illuminating and enriching for both. The Holy Spirit can work through the discussions of critical theorists, generating new insights and awareness that benefit critical theology. Thus, while critical theology has a practical intent, it also involves theoretical discussions with secular critical theories, from which it has learned much.

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## New Social Theories

As part of these theoretical discussions, critical theology must enter into dialogue with new social theories. When *The Ecumenist* became a forum for critical theology, Gregory Baum was immersed in the work of Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, among others; their theories and spirit graced its pages. In the 1980s, as welfare capitalism ended and neo-liberal agendas took hold in Western societies, Baum became increasingly influenced by the Frankfurt School of critical theory.[10] Like critical theology, the Frankfurt School's theoretical approach emphasizes beginning with a critique of injustice and ideology[11] and is guided by a commitment to human liberation. That being said, this journal is not wedded to any one school of social critique; other social theories have since arisen with which critical theology can also profitably engage.

For example, prolific Yale sociologist Jeffrey Alexander has developed a social theory that has an emancipatory intent in its concern with social repair. However, it begins not with negation, but by looking at how change happens in society: that is, how the application of the symbolic moral code underlying civil discourse in a society can make that society more inclusive and equitable,[12] or how social evils come to public attention and become centres of concern in civil society.[13] Critical theology can be what Alexander calls a carrier group[14] that keeps the scandal of injustice in the public eye. Alexander's theory is complex, nuanced, and illuminating. It draws together Durkheim's insight that social order depends upon a shared moral code and Weber's insight that social unity is enforced through the legitimated exercise of power.[15]

However, critical theology might question it in some regards. According to Alexander, when "citizens make judgments about who should be included in civil society and who should not … they draw on a systematic, highly elaborated symbolic code."[16] What is contested between different groups within a national community is how this code should be applied, and to whom. The application of this symbolic code creates social realities, regimes of liberty and repression that grant freedom and privilege to some and cause oppression and denigration for others.[17] Critical theology might question Alexander's assertion that there is only one symbolic code underlying the civil discourse of a society. Critical theology looks for what Max Weber called "countervailing trends," subcultures and countercultures that challenge the dominant social values and suggest alternative practices. While these subcultures are part of society and concerned with how the dominant culture's symbolic code is applied, their own symbolic code typically differs from that of the dominant culture.

In the Bible alone there are a number of symbolic codes, each with a different moral orientation. The story of Cain and Abel teaches that we have a bond of solidarity that we owe to each other that extends across the divides of religious, cultural, and economic differences. We belong to one another. A person such as a migrant who is culturally, economically, racially, or religiously different from us is still our sister or brother, as Abel was to Cain. Their well-being is our concern. This moral code demands solidarity with those who are different. The moral code of the Exodus demands the liberation of the oppressed. It legitimates their struggle for freedom and calls for the well-to-do to exercise free, creative self-withdrawal so as to create living space for them. The moral code of the doctrine of the two ways, exemplified in Psalm 1, teaches that the righteous prosper and the wicked perish. This easily degenerates into a prosperity gospel or triumphalism even as it empowers poor individuals desperate for hope. Yet, the prophets turned it into a basis of social critique, and it harbours a hidden truth important for those who heed Jesus' call to take up their cross and follow him: though it may involve great sacrifice, the moral act is always essentially self-integrative, as through it a person actualizes their essential personhood.[18]

All these moral codes in the Hebrew scriptures with their different injunctions fed into the ethical teaching of Jesus, which radicalized the teachings of Torah in a twofold way, through a call for a) a higher righteousness and b) forgiveness of and reconciliation with others.[19] Furthermore, the radicalization of Torah ethics in Jesus' teaching laid the basis for "a recognition of the inadequacy of all human beings,"[20] which creates a recognition of one's constant need for grace. This in turn can become a moral code warranting the acceptance of the unacceptable. These moral codes are different in the evil or suffering they address, the action they call for, and the virtues they celebrate. If all these moral codes are present in scripture, which Alexander recognizes as feeding into the symbolic underlay of civil discourse in the United States, for instance, can this underlay be comprised of just one symbolic code? Is it not more likely that what holds societies together is not one but a number of symbolic moral codes, interwoven together, any one of which can become prominent at a particular time and place through the resonance that an event generates with it?

A second example is the social thought of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, which called attention to how the conflict between francophone Quebec and anglophone Canada is driven not so much by concern for economic power and justice, which is the focus of much Marxist social theory, but by the francophone demand for recognition of their culture as worthy of respect.[21] This demand is now recognized as a factor in many other social conflicts. As a philosopher, Taylor is unsure about what might ground recognition of other cultures as worthy of respect. However, scripture can be read as indicating that a pluralism of cultures is divinely willed. The World Council of Churches acknowledges that cultural pluralism can enrich the church's reading of scripture and understanding of God.[22] Finally, the doctrine of justification by grace was first articulated by Paul in his letter to the Galatians to legitimate cultural pluralism in the early church. It can provide a moral framework for Christians in which struggles for recognition are not necessarily zero-sum equations where gains for one group mean losses for another.

More recently, Taylor has noted how notions of universal justice and compassion, though often violated, have become norms in the civil discourse of North Atlantic societies and how these societies have jeopardized themselves by eliminating from public discourse many of the strong moral sources needed to sustain commitment to them.[23] Taylor's concern is shared by others. Jeffrey Alexander also notes that the civil sphere is dependent upon contributions from the religious as well as other spheres.[24] In some of his later writings, Jürgen Habermas has also shown appreciation for how the symbols, teachings, and narratives of religions can prevent secular reason from becoming cynical and limited by keeping before it images of the moral whole and concern for the other.[25] Critical theology can contribute to public ethical debates by unfolding the public meaning of the gospel as a dynamic moral source that moves people to acts of compassion and solidarity.

A third example is the thought of Yale philosopher Seyla Benhabib. She notes that recent social movements "do not insist that one particularity can represent universality as such."[26] Whereas liberation theologies in the 1960s and 1970s tended to assume that there was a common women's experience or experience of the poor, more recent social movements and theories operate with an awareness of difference and otherness among society's victims. The recognition of a variety of oppressions in North America is not new.[27] However, awareness of the extent and significance of this diversity has increased dramatically in recent years as North Atlantic societies have become increasingly fragmented along lines of race, ethnicity, culture, income, sexual orientation, and political outlook. In such fragmented societies, there is no one social group that can be identified as 'the poor' whose experience "is a privileged standpoint in the social structure that bestows upon its occupiers a special vision of the totality."[28] Instead there are diverse communities of the poor, oppressed, and excluded. Social movements originating from these communities need to combine their passion for justice with friendship

with and solidarity for others who are different, so as to supplement one another's perspectives and build associations "of need and solidarity" on the basis of shared values and hopes that will have sufficient political and cultural strength to achieve social change.[29] Benhabib also notes that utopian visions of peace, justice, and community have not dried up.[30] Critical theology agrees. The gospel abides. It can still help create solidarity and hope that empowers struggles for justice. Critical theologies need to interpret the good news to create constructive links between the church and such social movements.

Benhabib further notes that nation-states are being dwarfed by globalized capitalism. Classical social theory, including that of the Frankfurt School, analyzed civil society in terms of nation-states.[31] While these remain important, their economic interdependence created by globalized capitalism, and transnational risks such as climate change, require that movements for peace and justice must often adopt a global perspective and address their claims for action to supra-national institutions.[32] Many look to organizations like the United Nations or the European Union, but there are other, more fluid, moral communities. The economic forces and cultural reactions unleashed by globalization and its critics are dividing the world into haves and have-nots, the latter being cruelly excluded from the security and prosperity that the former enjoy.[33] Meanwhile, religions, such as Christianity, are growing in global terms and globalization is helping them to spread and exert social and political influence.[34] They can now function separately or in cooperation as a global zone of resonance for moral claims. Globalization has created a new global consciousness as well as far-reaching economic interdependence among nation-states. This enabled Christians and other Canadians, for example, to participate in the liberation struggle against apartheid in South Africa through economic sanctions that hurt the South African economy and sped the demise of apartheid.[35] The challenge of globalization to critical theology is not simply to decry the injustices and suffering it brings, but also to discern and utilize the transformative potential it creates.

## New Social Issues

Many social issues that critical theologies engaged from the 1970s on remain. Awareness of others has arisen, such as international migration and the rights of Indigenous peoples. The former is changing societies around the world. The number of poor migrants risking their lives in hopes of better lives for themselves and their families or fleeing persecution is so great that European and North American nations are closing their borders to them. As a result, "the shores of the Mediterranean are becoming graveyards, strewn with the bodies of African, Chinese, and Middle Eastern peoples fleeing poverty in their own countries, then meeting death at the hands of deceitful guides and captains."[36] These migrants and refugee communities, like the Rohingya who have been driven out of Myanmar, pose a fundamental moral challenge to democracies. Democratic peoples have the right to decide what laws will govern their lands and who will inhabit them. However, this right is based on a recognition of human dignity and human rights. This dignity and these rights "have a context-transcending, cosmopolitan character" that extends "to all of humankind."[37] In denying refugees and poor migrants the aid and sanctuary due human beings, democracies fail to recognize the human rights that underlie their own way of life and fall into conflict with the moral basis of their own polity. Critical theology needs to bring the biblical message that we belong to one another, that we are each other's keeper, to bear on decisions about opening our doors to refugees and other migrants.

**"As the face of evil changes from age to age, so must critical theologies. The conversation will continue but with new questions, new theories, and new issues.**

A second new issue is the demand for recognition and reparations by Indigenous peoples that has been recognized in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). At the heart of this document is an insistence on Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, by virtue of which they may "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."[38] Implementing UNDRIP will require reshaping Canadian identity and the ethical space in which Canada and Indigenous nations meet. While churches contributed to the colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples in Canada, the gospel can empower people to seek reconciliation with those they have wronged. Critical theologies need to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's forty-third and forty-eighth calls to action, which call for the implementation of UNDRIP.

## Conclusion

This journal's new name, *Critical Theology,* indicates that it will continue to be a forum for critical theologies engaging church, culture, and society on various issues of peace, justice, climate change, and marginalization. Yet it will not be simply more of the same. As the face of evil changes from age to age,[39] so must critical theologies. The conversation will continue but with new questions, new theories, and new issues.

1 Gregory Baum, "Preface," *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), vii.
2 Ibid.
3 Gregory Baum, *Compassion and Solidarity: The Church for Others* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1987), 41–43.
4 Baum, "Preface," 9.
5 Hebrews 13:14.
6 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974), 10.
7 Baum, *Essays in Critical Theology,* 8.
8 Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 226.
9 Baum, *Essays in Critical Theology,* 11.
10 For a succinct overview of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, see Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Novalis, 1975/2006), 227–31.
11 Baum, *Essays in Critical Theology,* 7.
12 Jeffrey Alexander, *The Civil Sphere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
13 Jeffry Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012).
14 Ibid., 16–17.
15 Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 152.
16 Alexander, *The Civil Sphere,* 55.
17 Ibid., 66.
18 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. III* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 38.
19 Gerd Theissen, *The Religion of the Earliest Churches* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 30–31. The ethic of Jesus also relaxed some of the stricter interpretations of the teachings of Torah.
20 Ibid., 30.
21 Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition: An Essay by Charles Taylor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
22 World Council of Churches, *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 12, 36.
23 Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 514–20.
24 Alexander, *The Civil Sphere,* 53.
25 Jürgen Habermas, "An Awareness of What is Missing," in Jürgen Habermas et al., *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 19.
26 Seyla Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity: Human Rights in Troubled Times* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 188.
27 Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 188–91.
28 Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity,* 188.
29 Ibid., 189.
30 Ibid., 188.
31 Ibid., 189.
32 Ibid., 191.
33 Ibid.
34 Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 61, 83.
35 Renate Pratt, *In Good Faith: Canadian Churches against Apartheid* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).
36 Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity,* 191.
37 Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 175–78.
38 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,* Article 3.
39 Baum, *Religion and Alienation,* 166.

# Critical Constructive Theology as a Praxis of Worldmaking

**By Rosemary P. Carbine**
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> If Christian the*logy wants to proclaim the domination-free alternative world of G*d effectively and to continue such proclamation in the future, it has to engage intentionally in the process of religious and ethical world making.
>
> —Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Transforming Vision*

## Defining Critical Constructive Theology

In my view as a US feminist public theologian, doing critical constructive theology involves, in the spirit of Vatican II, reading the signs of the times or attending to the current contexts of the worlds in which we live, in order to develop an adequate, relevant, and meaningful Christian theology in response to various social, economic, political, and ecological crises.[1] Critical theology then constructs more capacious Christian theologies that encourage solidarity and justice. Constructive theology especially evokes the contextuality and vitality of Christianity: that is, how Christians in different places and times critically reinterpret Christian claims and practices to better address their own and the world's pressing needs. Since religion is often invoked both to oppress and to liberate, constructive theologians operate with a critical hermeneutics of suspicion and appreciation of prior Christian thought and life as they do this intellectual and practical work with living traditions for the promotion of justice and peace.

**"Critical constructive theology, then, involves not only Christians but also all interested people in worldmaking —the practice of envisioning and enacting worlds, that is, in critiquing and deconstructing oppressive worlds, on the one hand, and constructing or creating more liberative alternate worlds, on the other.**

Moreover, critical constructive theology not only interprets the contemporary situation in light of Christian traditions, but also furthers emancipatory practices that engage in critical and creative resistance to social suffering for the purpose of bringing about love, justice, and sustainability. Theologians mobilize Christianity for the betterment of the world, for imagining the world differently; that is, they receive, negotiate among, and remake multiple concurrent and contesting theological perspectives for more empowering and enlivening ways of being and living. From a critical and constructive perspective, Christian theology has been and can continue to be reviewed and remade in light of the worlds and worldviews that it calls into being and in which Christians live, move, and have their being always in relation with others.

Critical constructive theology, then, involves not only Christians but also all interested people in worldmaking—the practice of envisioning and enacting worlds, that is, in critiquing and deconstructing oppressive worlds, on the one hand, and constructing or creating more liberative alternate worlds, on the other. Racism, sexism, poverty, war, genocide, ecocide, and many other ways in which the world comes undone calls for the constructive creativity of critical theology as a way of worldmaking, or the ability to imagine and incarnate the world otherwise as characterized by the opening quote from feminist New Testament studies scholar and theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. This essay argues that worldmaking constitutes one way of doing critical constructive theology, of negotiating among inherited traditions and crafting out of them innovative ways of being and living in our concrete contexts for more liberative purposes: that is, for more just worlds of meaning and action. Oftentimes, rethinking Christian traditions for new ways of seeing and living into alternative possible worlds and worldviews is embedded and embodied in practices or, better, in praxis.

## Practices vs. Praxis

In a Christian theological light, practices are defined as "things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world."[2] Personal and communal identity-shaping practices are often associated with rituals that mark major life events, such as birth, marriage,

and death. However, such practices also include, from the history of Christianity, ascetic, mystical, and spiritual disciplines, forgiveness, healing, hospitality, ministry, and education. Practices not only establish, mark, and enforce boundaries of religious and other forms of identity, but also disrupt, extend, and chart new existential contours for individual and communal identity. In other words, practices can elicit new ways of conceptualizing our common life. Beyond forming, facilitating, and reinforcing identities (and sometimes even challenging and changing them), practices address basic human needs in our broken world, and thus encompass any collective and socially significant action, such as playing, eating and drinking, organizing (for living wages, racial justice, or eco-justice, for example), parenting, dreaming, caring for elders, and even listening to music.[3] Finally, practices undo false dualisms between ideas and activities and thus inseparably connect thinking with doing or, better, underscore our multiple kinds of doing. In sum, practices create community in the present across different cultural contexts of Christian life and across time with past and future Christians. They join religious commitments with real-life concerns that include and transcend Christian communities, and they democratize the doing of theology to include scholars, religious leaders, educators, and communities, as well as activists in the shared task to better the world, working sometimes from and ultimately for a multi-religious perspective.[4]

Making practices the starting point for doing critical constructive theology exceeds "invit[ing] theological reflection on the ordinary, concrete activities of actual people—and also on the knowledge of God that shapes, infuses, and arises from these activities."[5] It also surpasses deriving theological meaning from extraordinary or everyday activities or reflecting on theological claims that inform and emerge from these activities. Rather, placing a theological priority on practices emphasizes "taking part in God's work of creation and new creation."[6] Thus, a paradigm shift from practices to praxis can clarify this ongoing creative work of critical constructive theology, because praxis taps into and ties together the liberative dimensions of thinking and doing, of interpretation and action, whether religious or socio-political. In other words, this shift from practices to praxis signifies that religious visions and values not only carry explanatory power to make sense of us and of the world, but also, and more importantly, hold emancipatory power to remake us and the world.[7]

Global liberation theologies arose as a Christian response to oppressive socio-political situations in light of the gospel and God's ongoing presence in a fragile and fragmented world. Latin American liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez defined theology as *critical* reflection on liberating historical praxis (both social and ecclesial) in the light of the gospel.[8] Other liberation theologians applied praxis—faith-filled practices which critically engage with and transform the present in light of an alternative, liberative future—to the doing of theology itself as a *constructive* means to transfigure society and the church.[9] More than promoting a cyclical process which proceeds from practice to reflection to revised practice,[10] contemporary theologians join epistemology and ethics to claim that critical constructive theology arises from the mutual interaction between what we know and what we do, between "intellectual exercise and action."[11] For example, feminist liberation theologian Dorothee Sölle combined mysticism and political activism to do theology not as explanation or reflection, but as communication in itself (including and beyond the written and spoken word) of an alternative world characterized by peace and justice in contrast to genocide, militarism, and globalization.[12] Moreover, the late Ada María Isasi-Díaz elaborated *mujerista* theology as a praxis in itself, as a critical reflective liberatory act of giving voice to US Latina women's understandings, experiences, and struggles for personhood, subjectivity, and agency amid multi-layered destructive forces such as racism, sexism, classism, colonialism, and xenophobia.[13]

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>
> **Critical constructive theology contributes to cultivating an alternative vision of our socio-political order, and in so doing begins to prefigure that vision particularly through prophetic praxis.**

In keeping with this praxical turn, critical constructive theology emphasizes and evokes both personal and political dimensions. It enables persons situated in communities to claim religious subjectivity and agency, "speaking our own word, naming our own reality, reflecting upon and making explicit our own religious understandings and practices."[14] Rather than devolve into identity politics, or a theology of me and mine, it also critiques and denounces ideological ills and announces—that is, envisions as well as enacts (in multiple ways)—more just possible worlds.[15] To engage in this personal and political work, critical constructive theology comprises many genres, "not only linear, logical argumentation but also prophetic denunciation, songs and poems of protest and hope, lamentations, and language of consolation. And our theological language is not only a matter of written words but also of liturgical rituals, street demonstrations, and protest actions."[16]

## Worldmaking

Critical constructive theology contributes to cultivating an alternative vision of our socio-political order, and in so doing begins to prefigure that vision particularly through prophetic praxis. In the history of US social justice movements for worker, voting, women's, and civil rights, prophetic praxis often entails grassroots, nonviolent, collective action that confronts the prevailing unjust socio-political status quo and attempts to educate about as well as partly actualize an alternative possibility to it,[17] thereby edging us and our common life toward a more inclusive, just, and peace-filled quality of life.

Prophetic praxis consists of several features. It taps into theological roots of the dignity, sacrality, and interrelatedness of all life by appealing to an equal creation, to divine justice, and to an eschatological "vision of hope for a transformed future in which justice will be realized, right relations between nations restored, and peace ushered in."[18] It emphasizes communal rather than overly individualistic or isolationist spiritualities. It often takes a pluralistic or multi-faith approach to social change. It raises public awareness about and stands in solidarity with, or accompanies, marginalized peoples, which often requires relying on and then relinquishing privileges related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation and identity, citizenship, education, or other forms of privilege to participate with marginalized activists who are, ironically, challenging and ultimately undoing that same privilege.[19] Thus, prophetic praxis eschews a major risk of worldmaking: it prevents serving existing exclusionary, conflict-based, and oppressive ideologies. It avoids reinforcing status quo relations of power and privilege, on the one hand, and ignoring our very real human limits in doing this transformative work, on the other.

Prophetic praxis and its varied features have manifested in various US Christian social justice movements: abolition, worker rights, anti-war/pacifism, anti-racism/civil rights, anti-poverty, feminism, environmentalism, immigrant rights, LGBTQIA rights, and prison reform. These movements have contested and critically transformed status quo US public life, albeit partly, inspiring us to better embrace and enhance our common life together through "increased political rights, greater distributive justice, widespread democratization of power, … individual freedoms, and … a more compassionate and rewarding life for the community."[20] These movements demonstrate and engage in worldmaking, or ways of fusing religion and politics that "remake the world" on the one hand by criticizing the injustices of US and global public life, and on the other by actualizing (that is, imagining and partly incarnating) an alternative more just and liberative shared common life.[21] While religion may at times serve as a sacred canopy for the ideological status quo, its emphasis on critical self and social transcendence also "contains the seeds of radical, dramatic, critical evaluation of and action against an unjust social order."[22] Faith-based social justice movements in and beyond the US utilize prophetic praxis to critically disrupt and remake or reconstruct the status quo in light of a more just, more emancipatory, alternative yet intra-historical (or this-worldly) future, often envisioned and enacted in theological terms.

Different praxes of worldmaking resonate with scriptural studies of prophetic traditions, which "criticize" or challenge injustice and simultaneously "energize" or engage in practices that both imagine and live out or perform hope in more just future alternative possibilities.[23] Prophetic praxis also carries theo-political significance, because it mediates present and future realities or, according to Mark Taylor, "enable[s] … activists to taste the world for which they work." Taylor proposes a theo-political "Christian theatrics" rooted in the prophetic work of US social justice movements. Theatre, and the arts more generally, "unlock an actual world-making power in social and political settings. The world that is tasted aesthetically, acted out, especially when done repeatedly, issues in the enactment of new worlds, of new patterns of social and political interaction."[24] Going beyond the performing arts, Taylor's more recent work probes the worldmaking significance of other creative arts, such as painting, literature, music/song, poetry, sculpture, and textiles.[25] The artful practices of dominated and marginalized peoples carry a "symbolic force" that gives voice to oppressed peoples, who resist and flourish via that art and who "are enabled [by that art] to weigh in to create the world anew."[26] Politically marginalized and minoritized groups mobilize public support and are accompanied by elite empowered groups through this artful prophetic praxis that both dramatizes injustice and attempts to partly actualize an alternative possibility to that injustice via that art.

Likewise, feminist and womanist theologies engage in theo-political worldmaking. Hope in a more just future beyond religious and socio-political kyriarchies serves as its starting point. As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza claims, it "seeks to imagine the domination- and violence-free world intended by G*d and to envision it anew with the help of religious traditions and language."[27] Critically reclaiming and recreating religious language (found in myths and symbols), rituals, and art can catalyze or make a religio-political space for the inbreaking of this alternative world.[28] As womanist theologian Barbara Holmes similarly argues, womanist theology embodies "a politics of creativity" that "requires the artistry of humaneness"[29] and "reclaims the past and projects new realities" beyond the interface of racism, sexism, and global economic

interests that historically distorted and continued to distort not only Black women's lives but all our lives.[30] And yet, making new worlds in feminist and womanist theologies may also involve "spiritual incongruity," or the audacity to reject past religious traditions and socio-political strategies in favor of "creativity in the church and in the public square."[31]

## Contemporary Movements

Contemporary US social justice movements reflect or exemplify, in my view, critical constructive theology as a praxis of worldmaking that imagines and incarnates the world otherwise: that is, that edges an alternative world into existence. Critical constructive theology involves combining critical social theories and liberation theologies (including but not limited to feminist, womanist, and Latin@/x) to sustain emerging social justice movements and their attendant theological claims and praxes of socio-political engagement. US social justice movements can help trace some of the religious and socio-political contours of such praxes, movements which enable us to envision the world otherwise: that is, to imagine and live into the possibilities of another more just world, to make and remake the world more justly through such praxes. The Revolutionary Love Project (RLP) briefly described below identifies and decries current issues as its starting point, and then engages in practices to enact and to lay out possible paths to a more just alternative future. Given multiple intersecting issues of public significance in the present US context that are simultaneously globally imbricated and carry global implications, I will focus here on border issues (including but not limited to state border issues like immigration), such as racism, poverty, and sexism, through the lens of the RLP.

The RLP is a national initiative founded in February 2018 and based at the University of Southern California's Office of Religious Life. The project challenges the unjust US status quo and provokes new ways of envisioning US society by reclaiming love as a socio-political ethic of justice.[32] Founded by documentary filmmaker, civil rights activist, and Sikh faith leader Valarie Kaur, it sponsors a range of public actions and creates stories, tools, curricula, conferences (for Sikh American women justice leaders and multi-faith grassroots leaders), and TV series and films (to combat hate against Sikh and Muslim Americans)—all aimed at fostering social and political justice through a public ethic of love for "refugees, immigrants, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, LGBTQIA people, Black people, Latinx, the indigenous, the disabled, and the poor … women and girls (cis, transgender and gender non-conforming)." For example, the RLP allied with other US social justice movements, such as the Poor People's Campaign headed by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II[33] and the Women's March leaders,[34] to sponsor "The Day of Revolutionary Love, The Day of Rising" in February 2018 to coincide with Valentine's Day and its annual V-Day actions inspired by Eve Ensler's play *The Vagina Monologues* to end violence against all women and girls worldwide.[35] Reaching more than 14 million people, this coalitional mass action countered the startling rise of gender-based violence, xenophobic hate crimes, and white supremacist and nationalist movements in the wake of the election of US President Donald Trump.

Echoing a kind of worldmaking, the RLP claims that "We are birthing a future where love is a public ethic." In her TEDWomen '17 talk, Kaur describes this process of birthing a new world as a kind of midwifery:

> Revolutionary Love is the call of our times …. What if this darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb? What if our future is not dead but still waiting to be born? What if this is our great transition? Remember the wisdom of the midwife: Breathe, she says, and then push …. Revolutionary Love requires us to breathe and push.[36]

Similarly, the RLP's declaration and definition of Revolutionary Love on its website reiterate this future-birthing, worldmaking imagery, which resonates with Christian notions of death and resurrection.

> We will honor our mothers and ancestors whose bodies, breath, and blood call us to a life of courage. In their name, we choose to see this darkness not as the darkness of the tomb—but of the womb. We will breathe and push through the pain of this era to birth a new future.
>
> When we reclaim love through a feminist lens, then love is a form of sweet labor—fierce, bloody, imperfect, and life-giving. That means love can be taught, modeled, and practiced. Revolutionary Love is the choice to labor for others, our opponents, and ourselves.

In its new iteration, *Critical Theology* aims to stir readers to engage in or do critical constructive theology, too, so that religious traditions are reoriented and retooled to wield socio-political and theological leverage for love and justice. Each issue and its essays will draw on resources in Christian and other traditions not only to meaningfully respond to current unjust realities related to social, political, economic, and ecological crises, but also to reinvent Christianity itself, so that it inspires the praxis of worldmaking, so that it supports life-giving rather than death-dealing worlds and ways of being and living. Moreover, each issue will invite readers to engage in reflective practice on their own efforts at worldmaking, at birthing or generating an alternative, more just world. In so doing, *Critical*

*Theology* aspires to cultivate new habits for being and doing otherwise in response to various pressing issues of public significance, and for forging personal, familial, religious, social, political, and national identities for the common and cosmic good.

1 This essay offers a much revised and expanded version of my earlier contribution as a member of the Workgroup on Constructive Theology to Laurel C. Schneider and Stephen G. Ray, Jr., eds., *Awake to the Moment: An Introduction to Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), especially 108–11, 116–19, 172.

2 Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 18; see also 21 and 22–29.

3 David H. Jensen, series ed., *Compass: Christian Explorations of Daily Living* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010–2013).

4 Dykstra and Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," 6.

5 Ibid., 3.

6 Ibid., 21; see also 29.

7 William E. Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), quoted in Darlene M. Juschka, ed., *Feminism in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 18.

8 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 3–12.

9 Ibid., 12.

10 Dorothee Sölle, *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 5–6, 71–73.

11 Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha/In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 179.

12 Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Feminist Liberation Theology of Dorothee Sölle," and Beverly Wildung Harrison, "Dorothee Sölle as Pioneering Postmodernist," in Sarah K. Pinnock, ed., *The Theology of Dorothee Sölle* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003).

13 Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 19, 50–51, 177–79; see also Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha/In the Struggle*, 176–87.

14 Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha/In the Struggle*, 187.

15 Ibid., 52–54, 181, 183.

16 Ibid., 184.

17 Helene Slessarev-Jamir, *Prophetic Activism: Progressive Religious Justice Movements in Contemporary America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 1–20.

18 Ibid., 4.

19 Ibid., 58–64.

20 Roger S. Gottlieb, *Joining Hands: Politics and Religion Together for Social Change* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), 18–19.

21 Ibid., 3–23, especially 4–6, 9, 19–21.

22 Ibid., 9.

23 Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1–19.

24 Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 117; for more on the theological basis of this theatrics in Christology, see esp. 70–78, 90–118, 127–133.

25 Taylor, *The Theological and the Political: On the Weight of the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 114, 136.

26 Ibid., 12–14, 114; see also chap. 3.

27 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Transforming Vision: Explorations in Feminist The*logy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 19.

28 Ibid., 20. For example, see Laurie Cassidy and Maureen H. O'Connell, eds., *She Who Imagines: Feminist Theological Aesthetics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012).

29 Barbara A. Holmes, "'We'll Make Us a World': A Post-Obama Politics of Embodied Creativity," in Monica A. Coleman, ed., *Ain't I a Womanist, Too? Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 187–200, at 188, 191.

30 Ibid., 189.

31 Ibid., 195, 196.

32 http://www.revolutionarylove.net

33 Part of the US civil rights movement, the 1968 Poor People's Campaign challenged the intersectional injustices of militarism, racism, and poverty. Nearly 50 years later, the revived Poor People's Campaign has gathered the testimonies of poor Americans in more than 30 US states to the devastating intersections of systemic racism, poverty, militarist war economics, and environmental crises in their lives. For more information about its Declaration of Fundamental Rights and its 40 days of actions between May and June 2018 to lobby for and realize those rights, see https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org and https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/weekly-themes.

34 The Women's March, or the most recent national and international collective protest for women's rights as human rights, and for civil and human rights more broadly, initially consisted of over 670 sister marches, and totalled nearly 5 million marchers worldwide in solidarity with the over 1 million marchers on Washington on January 21, 2017. The guiding principles of the Women's March for collective and coalitional activism encompass gender, racial, economic, and sexual justice, but also immigrant rights, gun violence awareness, and racial hate crimes, especially against Black women. Their 10 actions/100 days campaign and other mass mobilized actions subsequent to the Women's March on Washington have protested the Muslim Ban, organized a strike for International Women's Day, challenged the NRA through School Walkouts and the March For Our Lives, protected DACA, marched to abolish ICE and immigrant family detentions/separations, fostered a March for Racial Justice and for Black Women, and much more. All have played a major role in shifting US public discourse to reshape US public policy. See https://www.womensmarch.com.

35 See http://www.vday.org and https://www.vday.org/homepage.html.

36 http://www.revolutionarylove.net/ted

# Critical Theology and Evil

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While evil has always been with us, and theology has always wrestled to respond to it, critical theology is a praxis-oriented reaction to the unique forms of evil in the modern world. Because modernity is a unique social constellation that generates unique forms of evil, it demands a new theology—a new reading of the good news of salvation and redemption. Hence, critical theology represents an exciting religious innovation, a modern response of faith rooted in tradition to an unprecedented world. This response requires a new theoretical and methodological framework, and so critical theology relies on a modern academic imagination formed in part by the social sciences—themselves products of modernity—as well as the humanities in their modern iteration. The presence of this new imagination, with its roots in the Enlightenment, distinguishes critical theology from the classical tradition. However, critical theology does not accept this new way of thinking uncritically. Reading the social sciences and humanities in light of the gospel, critical theology judges them in light of their emancipatory agenda. As a sociologist of religion with a lively interest in theology, I find it impossible to think about critical theology without understanding modernity, because the evil against which it defines itself, the victims to whom it commits itself, the categories through which it understands evil, and the responses it hopes to inspire are all uniquely modern. Moreover, critical theology is engaged scholarship. It seeks not only to understand the modern world but to change it.

At the same time, as a white, male Christian, I appreciate that critical theology has recognized that the Christian tradition itself has been distorted by irrational authority as well as practices of domination, exploitation, and exclusion. Informed by this new emancipatory imagination, critical theology judges traditional Christian beliefs, practices, institutions, and forms of community. Along with other theologies of liberation, it has enormous creative potential to reimagine central Christian concepts, such as sin and redemption, as well as to reform and renew the church. Critical theology engages the church along with culture and society. Indeed, critical theology is willing to extend this critical spirit even unto itself, entering into dialogue with people of other faiths and people of good will in order to uncover its own shortcomings. This willingness to be ever open to the new and unexpected through an authentic encounter with the Other is one manner in which this new journal, *Critical Theology,* continues the mandate of *The Ecumenist,* which was founded some 56 years ago.

## Evil and the Modern World

It has become unfashionable in academia—even in Christian circles—to use the word "evil" for fear of appearing naïve or uncritical in the eyes of one's peers. There are good reasons for this reluctance to use a word that has been abused so badly and so often.[1] Regardless, critical theology, which announces solidarity with the victims of any social order, cannot avoid the concept or the word. While acknowledging the legitimacy of many of the criticisms of the concept, Israeli philosopher and activist Adi Ophir defines evil as the socially structured order of superfluous harm: that is, harms—such as pain, hunger, suffering, loss, and humiliation—that could have been but were not prevented.[2] Echoing Emanuel Levinas, Adi Ophir argues that, in the face of such evil, the moral person cares for others and is committed to eliminating superfluous harm. As a form of engaged scholarship, critical theology begins with a response to evil, whether the term is used or not. Leaving aside the debates around theodicy, critical theology highlights the spiritual dimension and religious meaning of compassion and solidarity, the commitment to care for others, and to eliminate superfluous harm. It seeks to inspire people of all faiths or no faith to overcome violence, injustice, and exclusion.

Of course, classical theology wrestled with the problem of evil, but critical theology assumes that the modern age requires a redefinition of the understanding of evil and the Christian response to it. Like "evil," the term "modernity" is also unfashionable in many academic circles. Even so, we live in a modern social order. What is called postmodern is really "advanced" or "late" modernity,[3] the later development of that revolutionary social order that emerged in Europe over the last 500 years and has spread through successive waves of globalization around the world. Fundamentally, modernity is about winning. The modern world is—on a different order of magnitude—more populous, powerful, and affluent than any empire of the past or any traditional community today. The success of modern societies, however diverse, rests on the unique structures that were ushered in by the

industrial and democratic revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries.[4] The principles of industrialization (the application of reason to production both in terms of technology and rational management, that is, bureaucracy) were applied through either free markets or state-directed economies of various sorts to all forms of production, including agriculture and the service economy of so-called post-industrial societies. The result was an explosion of productivity leading to unprecedented wealth.

Modern societies are also products of democratic revolutions. First, since modern people believe that societies are made by people, they believe that sovereignty, too, comes from "the people." Consequently, modern societies—even those marked by the most brutal dictatorships—claim to govern in the name of the people. Second, modern societies are defined by "political modernization," specifically, the penetration of government into lives of ordinary people; the participation of people in the process of government; the identification of people with the nation-state; compliance with law because of the unprecedented coercive power of the state; and a consensus of people around basic values, a common history, and a shared destiny.[5] Just as much as the industrial revolution, the democratic revolution enormously increased the power and wealth of modern societies. It allowed unparalleled cooperation in major projects, such as legislating the conditions necessary for industrial expansion (whether under a free market or a centralized economy), providing systems for education and health care, or raising national armies numbering in the millions.

**Although modernity is often described via a singular term, there is great diversity within and among modern societies. Eschewing earlier models of "convergence," social theorists now talk about "multiple modernities.**

However, this wealth was concentrated in certain industrial centres, leading to "uneven development." The wealthy centres came to dominate the emerging nation-states, a sort of "internal colonialism."[6] It also gave industrializing societies the power and the motivation to conquer and colonize the world in search of raw materials and new markets. Modernity, as said above, is about winning, which often meant that others must lose. The Mexican-Argentinian philosopher Enrique Dussel states that modern people flatter themselves by recalling Descartes' dictum, "I think therefore I am," as if the modern persona was defined through reason. Modernity, he writes, was first defined by conquest: the conquest of the Other that has led to a Eurocentric hegemony. To Descartes' definition of the modern, Dussel adds, "I conquer therefore I am."[7] Imperialism, conquest, and colonization are as central to modernity as reason, liberty, equality, and solidarity.

In either its community-nurturing or empire-building forms, modernity is, for most people, synonymous with "progress," a vaguely defined term over which many disagree but everyone claims as their own. Modern people see society as a project. Zygmunt Bauman calls modernity a "garden culture,"[8] a term he uses to highlight the fact that modern people

> view society as an object of administration, as a collection of so many 'problems' to be solved, as 'nature' to be 'controlled', 'mastered' and 'improved' or 'remade', as a legitimate target for 'social engineering', and in general a garden to be designed and kept in the planned shape by force (the gardening posture divides vegetation into 'cultured plants' to be taken care of, and weeds to be exterminated) ….[9]

Hence, modernity is a social order in which individuals and institutions attempt to improve not only specific individuals and institutions, but also society as a whole, aiming at a total transformation of society in the name of progress. Modern societies are revolutionary societies. This characterization obscures the complexity, contradictions, and contestations of modernity. Capitalism (and its competitors), globalization, the Enlightenment, industrialization, democratization, the scientific and technological revolutions, and so on all helped to define our modern societies, but they sometimes reinforced one another and at other times frustrated one another. This diversity only demonstrates that modernity is a project—and, as such, it is incomplete, always contested, never entirely disentangled from pre-modern realities, and constantly subject to reversals and unexpected configurations. Although modernity is often described via a singular term, there is great diversity within and among modern societies. Eschewing earlier models of "convergence," social theorists now talk about "multiple modernities."[10]

This diversity depends much on historical conditions (for example, how early a society modernized, whether it was a colony or a colonizer, and its culture before modernization), but also on the fact that the project of society building is always guided by a culture and a "social imaginary."[11] Modern societies are the sites of conflict over various dreams of progress. These dreams, when they become concerned with exercising power—that is, control over the garden and the power to determine which plants will be encouraged and which will be eliminated—evolve into formal ideologies.[12] An ideology, thus understood, is a blueprint for

the garden, a blueprint for progress that determines (or seeks to determine) the structure, direction, and purpose of a society. It addresses society as a whole and every aspect of society; it seeks to create (or maintain) a social order, that is, the whole constellation of social structures and cultures that organizes, sustains, and animates a society. People who live in the West (and especially the United States and Canada) often ignore the power of ideology, and scholars have from time to time announced the "end of ideology" or the "end of history."[13] This is ironic since we are living in the era of the world's most successful ideology, capitalism, which has become so pervasive that it is invisible to most people.[14] Just as Marx and Engels predicted over a century and a half ago, capitalism has—unevenly, and not without resistance and reversals—infiltrated every nook and cranny of our own societies and, through globalization, spread across the globe.

The enormous leap forward in power and wealth that marks modern societies has been a boon to human well-being. Wherever modernization has spread, one sees an increase in life expectancy, usually fuelled by a dramatic drop in infant mortality, as well as a general increase in affluence. Even colonized peoples, who first experienced modernization as conquest and oppression, have adopted some form of modernity, even if they reject European models of development.[15] Increasingly, modernization—as it spreads around the globe and redefines every aspect of the lives of individuals, families, groups, and societies—is inescapable, hence the modern evils generated by the colonization of empires by European powers, the invasion and displacement of Indigenous peoples everywhere, the domination of regions by the wealthy centres, and the penetration of technocratic systems into the "life-world." Even resistance to Eurocentric modernization has led societies colonized by the European powers to modernize: that is, they needed to adopt political, economic, and social modernization in order to resist and finally throw off the colonizer.

Increasingly, there is no "outside" of the system. In a network of absolutist nation-states, every person and group (including formerly autonomous Indigenous populations) and every square inch of land comes under the power of the state, just as every state is subject to an equally inescapable transnational order. Even if they reject modernity, every person is subject to the consequences of modernization, including climate change, pollution, and nuclear fallout, either from accidents or weapons. Modernization is also a totalizing system; it touches on every aspect of human life as it relentlessly colonizes the life-world. At this point in history, the project of modernity forms the ground and matrix of our social being. Consequently, there is no avoiding modernity in theology. Even a theology that rejects the modern age—such as that of Pius IX or so-called Islamist theology—cannot escape it; even as it preaches a return to a premodern social order, it articulates a way forward to an alternate modernity. Consequently, modernity is the horizon of all theology that calls itself "critical."

## Evil, Modernity, and the Good News

Welcoming the moral, intellectual, and material advances of modernization, critical theology recognizes a dark side to modernity that is inseparable from these positive elements. The enormous power that modernity delivers can be used for both good and ill; industrialization gives us the power to both feed and kill millions. Beyond its magnification of power for evil, modernity's unique cultural elements and structures can lead to new forms of evil. For example, after the revelation of the horrors of the Shoah, many believed that Nazi Germany had regressed to premodern tribalism and barbarity. However, later analyses showed that this genocide was the product of uniquely modern rationality (including the project of social Darwinism and the "science" of eugenics) and structures (such as the modern bureaucracies in transportation, communication, and the industry necessary for the mass production of death).[16] Moreover, the structures and culture of modernity contain various contradictions and elisions that can harm people and the environment without anyone intending to inflict suffering or damage. Critical theology, like critical theory, says yes and no to modernity. It is not anti-modern, nor is it postmodern.

While there is increasingly no "outside," no standpoint from which to experience and judge the modern world from a distance, critical theology insists that the gospel that brings good news to the poor, liberation to the captive, sight to those who cannot see, and liberation to the oppressed (Luke 4:18) represents a transcendent truth and experience of community. Rooted in the emancipatory dimension of the gospel and tradition, critical theology can judge the modern world, just as it judges the Christian heritage in light of the humanistic side of modernity.

The starting point of critical theology is a "no" rooted in a "yes." Dussel argues that liberation represents the negation of a negation. It expresses a protest; it announces a "no," in the face of systemic oppression, exploitation, and exclusion of the Other. However, this negation of a negation assumes a positive, an *a priori* affirmation of the fact that humans, created in the image and likeness of God, are called to live in face-to-face loving relationships of community.[17] Building on Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, Dussel argues that the relationship of love that the gospel announces calls us to a freely chosen I–Thou relationship between equals. The "no" of liberation theology then protests

evil that violates the ethic of community rooted in love, because oppression, despoliation, and exclusion reduce this I–Thou relationship to an I-It relationship.[18] Like the theology of liberation, critical theology roots its protest against modern forms of evil in this fundamental affirmation of human dignity.

Evil, Dussel argues, is "an order." It is the systemic negation of the Other, the inherited, unjust social order into which we are born and in which we all participate with various levels of awareness and culpability. Evil expresses itself as the rejection of the Other in systemic oppression, exploitation, and exclusion justified by sexism, racism, religious chauvinism, class discrimination, homophobia, and a variety of cultural and ideological systems.[19] Theologies of liberation confront this systemic evil with a call to redemption, a process that begins with the recognition of the human dignity of the Other—the poor, the oppressed, the enslaved, the excluded—with whom God identifies completely as the "absolute Other."[20]

Critical theology shares this redemptive imagination. It affirms all in the modern world that promotes life and seeks to emancipate people from anything that violates human freedom and equality, that is, the ability to live in a community of love. It seeks to analyze all systems of domination, exploitation, and exclusion in light of this gospel ethic. It uncovers and opposes all forms of irrational authority and all cultures that justify violence, injustice, and indifference. It is inspired by the Enlightenment values of equality, reason, liberty, justice, and solidarity. Since there is no single form of domination, exploitation, and exclusion in the world today, critical theology is concerned with all forms of oppression (for example, those based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, religion, Indigeneity) and the myriad ways in which they intersect. And since it appreciates the moral limitations and ambiguity of all human projects, it also examines those dehumanizing trends of the Enlightenment itself.

## Theology in Dialogue with the Enlightenment

For critical theology to understand evil as an order, it must understand modernity. If classical theology was faith in dialogue with philosophy, then critical theology is in dialogue with the social sciences and modern humanities.[21] This dialogue has resulted in an explosion of theological renewal and creativity. Contemporary theologies of liberation often adopt insights from Marx's sociology of inequality and class oppression, and feminist theology begins with a social-scientific analysis of patriarchy in the church and society. In this way, critical theology allows the Catholic tradition itself to be changed by its encounter with Enlightenment thinking. For example, throughout the 20th century, this encounter has in part inspired the church to change its fundamental thinking on ecumenism, interfaith dialogue, human rights, religious liberty, social justice, and the environment.[22]

Even fundamental categories of Christian theology are being redefined by the dialogue of theology and the social sciences. For example, eschewing Augustine's explanation of original sin, Dussel rethinks the concept in sociological terms: that is, as "hereditary" or "originary" sin. He writes:

> From the moment an individual is born, he or she will never exist apart from the institutional texture that antedates and determines this particular individual (a relative determination, of course, but one that is fundamental for this particular existence). For example, someone may be born wealthy, a member of the dominant class and of a moneyed, bourgeois family. He or she is surely not responsible for having been born there. But just as surely, this individual inherits this institutional, "originary" sin.[23]

This conversation with the social sciences and humanities leads critical theology to focus on "social" or "structural" sin—without abandoning the concept of individual sin and responsibility.[24] However, individual sinfulness is, ultimately, inseparable from this social context, given that individuals are always socialized beings. Dussel continues:

> When the individual subjectivity of the human person achieves effective freedom (psychologically in adolescence ), it already finds itself that of a bourgeois or a proletarian, a peasant or a petit bourgeois, a woman or a man, and so on. We are this way already. Upon this foundation we can construct our life. But we must inevitably construct it precisely from the original constitution we have received and inherited. Thus historical, social sin is transmitted by institutions—by cultural, political, economic, religious, erotic, and so on, structures.[25]

Without a social scientific imagination—the manner of thinking that ties biography to society and history[26]—the church has tended to fixate on individual sin without taking into account the harm we do simply by participating in unjust, violent, and exclusionary social structures.[27]

Critical theology's reliance on contemporary social science and humanities scholarship also reveals its connection to modernity. The social sciences and the humanities in their contemporary form are the product of modernity. Critical theology is literally unthinkable in any context but modernity. Nonetheless, critical theology insists that, like theology, the social sciences and

humanities adopt an emancipatory and self-critical agenda.

Critical theology is willing to apply this critical perspective to irrational authority that has distorted Christian beliefs, practices, institutions, and forms of community. For example, patriarchy has distorted our understanding of God and created structures of exclusion in the church. Moreover, the distortions of Christianity can harm those outside of the church as well. The Christian teaching of contempt for non-Christians, for instance, legitimated European conquest and colonization. Sometimes, the harm done by Christian teaching or practice is hidden and unintended, and only a social scientific analysis can uncover it. Critics of authoritarianism in the church, for example, had shown how the teaching of obedience in the church often led Christians to submit to authoritarian leaders. In his chapter "Critical Theology" in *Religion and Alienation,* Baum writes,

> It is the task of critical theology to discern the structural consequences of religious practice, to evaluate them in light of the Church's normative teaching, and to enable the Church to restructure its concrete social presence so that its social consequences approach more closely its profession of faith. What must be in keeping with the Gospel is not only the Church's teaching and practice, but also and especially the actual, concrete effects of this teaching and practice on human history.[28]

Critical theology recognizes that harmful cultures and structures exist not only in society but in the church community as well—something that the current crisis around clerical sexual abuse demonstrates vividly.

In fact, critical theologians must not shrink from self-criticism. In his analysis of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Baum especially appreciated the school's concept of the "end of innocent critique."[29] Adherents of each ideology tended to assume that error and evil were confined to the system they were criticizing and that the solution was to implement their own blueprint for progress. Hence, capitalists saw the medieval order as a barrier to human freedom and dignity that only free markets could address. Socialists saw capitalism as the source of all human suffering and proposed various forms of state control. In each case, the critique was "innocent," that is, it failed to see the good in the system it rejected and the shortcomings, contradictions, and possible negative consequences of its own ideology. Each critique evolved into a monologue of judgment and condemnation—always aimed outward. The Frankfurt School called for the end of all such "innocent" critique and proposed a model that remained open to learning from others. Critical theology mirrors this idea. No theology is ever complete. No practice is without harm. No institution is without victims. Critical theology reinterprets the "preferential option for the poor" in this manner. Each system creates its own victims, and so the commitment of theology and of the church is to the poor and not the system, for the poor (the dominated, the exploited, the marginalized, and the excluded) reveal the lack in any social order. Only God is perfect. Only God's kingdom will have no victims.

**"**

**Critical theology recognizes that harmful cultures and structures exist not only in society but in the church community as well—something that the current crisis around clerical sexual abuse demonstrates vividly.**

Hence, critical theology must eschew any finality. It must ever renew itself—both because it moves through history in an ever-changing society, and because it knows that only God can speak the final word. Since, like all systems of thought and practice, critical theology is limited by the perspectives theologians bring to the conversation, it must be open to a wide variety of voices. For example, the first generations of liberation theologians addressed a number of oppressive systems, especially the convergence of economic exploitation and political domination afflicting Latin America. It took a second generation to point out that these progressive theologies—almost always written by men—failed to address patriarchy in society and the church (including in theology).[30]

Critical theology, then, continues the original inspiration for *The Ecumenist*, the journal founded by Gregory Baum in 1962 to support the Catholic Church's new openness to ecumenical dialogue. It extends this spirit of openness and dialogue to those who seek human emancipation—those in the Catholic Church and in other Christian churches and communities, people of the world's religions, practitioners of spirituality not directly tied to religious communities, and secular people of good will. It continues in the spirit of compassion and solidarity that Baum introduced in the late 1960s and early 1970s when he reoriented the journal to the faith and justice movement within the church. It continues its open-ended search for the truth that will set us free.

## Conclusion

In the modern age, the ground beneath our feet is constantly moving. Indeed, Bauman uses the term "liquid modernity" to describe our current society in which everything permanent that the early modern project (which he calls "solid modernity") attempted to build (nation-states, peoples, churches, industries, etc.) turns out to be fluid. If we feel solid ground beneath our feet, it is because we are standing on the deck of a mighty ship that is moving across uncharted waters. We feel that we are moving towards darker times.

*The Ecumenist* was launched during a period of cultural and religious optimism about modernity—an optimism that was caught in important Catholic documents such as *Pacem in Terris* (1962) and *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). Many people felt that society and the churches could be reformed and humanized. What followed were decades of political, economic, cultural, and religious retrenchment, leading to the consolidation and concentration of power, wealth, and prestige. When Paulist Press ceased support for *The Ecumenist* in 1990, Baum wrote an editorial saying goodbye to his beloved journal. He reflected on the change in context from the optimistic mood of the 1960s to the sobering reality two decades later. He wrote, "In my judgment the present is a time of mourning …. We now live in the wilderness."[31] In the second edition of *Religion and Alienation,* published some 14 years later, he concluded that this trend had deteriorated even further. Neoliberal economic policy had promoted an increasingly unregulated capitalism to widen the gap between rich and poor. Neo-colonialism extended the subjugation of the global South. Runaway consumerism was depleting natural resources and running up against the limits of ecological sustainability.[32] The thirteen years that followed have only confirmed Baum's dark analysis.

We launch *Critical Theology* as if only seeing through a glass darkly. Old certainties have faded. Even supporters of globalized capitalism are unsure of how to reconcile infinite growth with a finite planet. Increasingly, even they understand that the dream of elevating the population of the world to the level of affluence enjoyed by the wealthy would exhaust the earth's resources and destroy our common home. Serious scholars discuss the confusion that the end of capitalist modernity will bring. Increasingly, the contradictions and shortcomings of modernity are catching up to us.

While there may not be much ground for optimism, there is much room for hope. In the name of this hope, Christians, along with all people of good will, will want to resist the demonic trends and potentialities in the world today. They will want to announce both in word and deed commitment to the victims of an increasingly dangerous world. They will seek partners from their own communities, in other faiths, and among secular groups to respond with compassion and solidarity to suffering. They will search for ways to help others, resist evil, and proclaim the good news. These times call us, in Baum's words, "to enter upon a new spirituality, a new, possibly painful experience of God, where the peace that passes all understanding becomes a new restlessness."[33] *Critical Theology* invites you to embrace this new restlessness, knowing that we are not alone—that we are carried by God's grace.

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1 Richard J. Bernstein, *The Abuse of Evil: The Corruption of Politics and Religion since 9/11* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005).

2 Adi Ophir, *The Order of Evils: Towards an Ontology of Morals,* trans. Rela Mazali and Havi Carel (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 24.

3 Zigmunt Bauman uses the term *liquid modernity* to describe the advanced or late stage of modernity. See his *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000).

4 Robert Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Publishers, 2004 [1966]), 21–44.

5 Boyd C. Shafer cites these as the elements of modern nationalism, but indeed they apply to all forms of political modernization. See his *Faces of Nationalism: New Realities and Old Myths* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 12.

6 Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

7 Enrique Dussel, "Anti-Cartesian Meditations: On the Origin of the Philosophical Anti-discourse of Modernity," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 13:1 (2014): 21–24. See also Dussel's *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity,* trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995).

8 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1989), 92–93.

9 Ibid., 18.

10 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

11 Ibid., 1–2.

12 Robert Nisbet, *Conservatism: Dream and Reality,* 4th ed. (Milton Kenyes: Open University Press, 2008), 15–17.

13 Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York: Free Press, 1962), and Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992, 2006).

14 Linda McQuaig, *All You Can Eat: Greed, Lust, and the New Capitalism* (Toronto: Penguin, 2001), 1–39.

15 While there is much diversity within and among modern societies, the fundamental, inescapable "structural trends" of modernization were originally defined in Europe. For this reason, Enrique Dussel rightly identifies modernity as the age of Eurocentrism. Although he objects to the Eurocentric reading of world history in which the influence of Asia, Islam, and the Spanish world disappear, he argues that the modern period is the only one that could be called "Eurocentric." See "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1:3 (2000): 471.

16 Of the Shoah, Steven T. Katz writes: "Everything, from the making of trains to carry the victims, to the making of gas chambers to gas the victims, to ovens to burn the victims, to the communications that controlled the entire process, was the end product of a technologically advanced civilization that decided to turn its economy, as well as its inmost soul, over to manufacturing death." Steven T. Katz, *Historicism, the Holocaust, and Zionism: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought and History* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 195. See also Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust.*

17 Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and Community,* trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 17–18.

18 Ibid., 18–21.

19 Ibid., 28–30. In *Ethics and Community,* Dussel listed only domination and exploitation (despoliation). However, in his book *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion,* trans. Nelson Maldonado-Torres et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013 [1998]), he added exclusion as another means of systematically rejecting the Other.

20 Ibid., 19, 46.

21 At the height of his career as a theologian, Gregory Baum, puzzled by the theological and pastoral retrenchment of the institutional church after the Second Vatican Council, took a two-year leave from St. Michael's College to study sociology at the New School for Social Research (now the New School) in New York. This reorientation to the modern social sciences shaped *The Ecumenist* from 1970 on, as well as his seminal book, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975; 2nd ed, Ottawa: Novalis, 2006).

22 See Gregory Baum, *Amazing Church: A Catholic Theologian Remembers a Half-century of Change* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2005).

23 Dussel, *Ethics and Community,* 21.

24 Gregory Baum, "John Paul II on Structural Sin," in *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), 189–204.

25 Dussell, *Ethics and Community,* 22.

26 C. Wright Mills identifies this as the core goal of what he calls the "sociological imagination," but in fact it now describes the aim of all the social sciences and the humanities that have been informed by them. See his *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 3–13.

27 Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation,* 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Novalis, 2006), 172–73.

28 Ibid., 169.

29 Gregory Baum, *The Oil Has Not Run Dry: The Story of My Theological Pathway* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 137.

30 See, for example, Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and the Ethics of Poverty and Reproduction* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002).

31 Baum, *The Oil Has Not Run Dry,* 143.

32 Baum, *Religion and Alienation,* 223–26.

33 Baum, *The Oil Has Not Run Dry*, 144.

# Critical Theology in Progress: Responding to 21st-Century Challenges

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In *Method in Theology*, Bernard Lonergan describes the role of theology as mediating "between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix."[1] Nowhere in theology is this better expressed and lived out than in critical theology. Critical theology takes many forms, including feminist, political, and liberation theologies. What underlies all these expressions of critical theology is the effort to bring together the worlds of theory and practice, with the starting point as the concrete experience of individuals and communities suffering injustice. When I say "individuals and communities," I do not mean one or the other, but both simultaneously. The intrinsic social justice orientation of critical theology must take up concrete concerns and troubles as they impact *both* individuals *and* communities.

Critical theology is an interpretive tool and a call to action. As an interpretive tool, it encompasses both a "hermeneutic of suspicion" and a "hermeneutic of recovery."[2] A hermeneutic of suspicion identifies gaps and underlying ideologies operative in texts and in cultures that undermine human agency and violate human dignity. A hermeneutic of recovery focuses on what still might be recovered from these contexts despite abuse, prejudice, and ignorance. In *Essays in Critical Theology*, Gregory Baum identifies what he understands as "the method of critical theology":

> I always start reflection in response to concrete troubling issues in church or society so that I am unable to jump directly into theoretical considerations. Theoretical debates always reflect the historical context in which they take place. That is why critical theology moves from 'story' to 'theory.'[3]

The emphasis on situating oneself in history demands listening to stories and situating ourselves in our own concrete historical settings. What are the troubling stories of 21st-century church and society? My history places me directly in relationship to concrete troubling issues. For example, in the early years of my theological formation, I became aware of troubling issues concerning women in society, the Christian church, and theological studies. I came to realize that easy solutions would never address the deep-rooted misogyny against and marginalization of women that seemed to pervade the history not only of Christianity but also of religion in general. Also, the secularization of society in the Western world had not overcome these endemic problems. The December 6, 1989, murder of 14 École Polytechnique[4] students, all women, occurred in Montreal when I was working on my doctorate. This event was profoundly troubling and pushed me further to want to understand the core meaning of such violence against women. I drew on Bulgarian-born French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva to probe the deep psychic roots of gender violence. While Kristeva helped me to understand more deeply violence against women, her solution, a 'postmodern' eradication of identity and a refusal to acknowledge a subject in history, left me adrift. Of her work as psychoanalyst she writes: "the therapist … gives meaning to the 'emptiness' of the 'borderline' while teaching the patient to cope with the emptiness within self-understanding that is the original source of our anguish and moral pain."[5]

Kristeva's refusal to acknowledge the transcendent dimension of human existence pushed me to ponder her inattentiveness to the dynamic of her own ethical questions and made me realize that while she contributed a great deal to understanding violence against women, more was needed.

## Truth and Justice

Exploring the work of Bernard Lonergan and his invitation toward self-appropriation provided a light in the darkness of Kristeva's bleak postmodern solution. Through my reading of Lonergan, I came to a certitude about human existence. Despite real challenges, the search for truth and justice is not an illusion. Lonergan's explanation of how human beings come to know what is true and what is good helped me discover the importance of what he calls "critical realism." Knowing is not just "taking a look" at what is "out there" to be found. Knowing is a process of paying attention to our experience and critically asking questions about the truth of our understanding of that experience. Further, decisions about how to act are linked to what we come to know as true. There is a vital connection between what I come to know as

true (through being attentive to my experience, asking questions about that experience, and critically evaluating the accuracy of my understanding) and making decisions based on that knowledge.

Lonergan claimed that "all my work has been introducing history into Catholic theology."[6] He paid attention to history, and in our search for truth and justice, we cannot ignore the experience of human beings. In my view, both Gregory Baum and Bernard Lonergan shared this conviction. They were willing to cross the bridge from theory to practice, recognizing the gaps in theory that came to shake their trust in disembodied thought and abstract theory. They both recognized the imperative of paying attention to history and to the concrete stories of struggling and oppressed individuals and communities.

Kristeva deepened my concern about implicit and explicit violence against women and helped me to recognize the pervasive plight of all "others" who were victims of violence and oppression. For Kristeva, otherness speaks of each person's irreducible singularity, which consequently escapes any totalizing efforts of theory. Yet, remarkably, this otherness, which we all experience, does not eradicate or eclipse our common humanity and our capacity to enter into dialogue. This was a belief on which Gregory Baum staked his life. He wrote:

> Against the postmodern objection to dialogue across boundaries, I offer my own experience shared by many others. In this defense of dialogue, I actually vindicate my entire life, my work as a theologian and everything I stand for. The recognition of 'the other' has guided my theological efforts to correct the exclusivist trend in the Catholic tradition, whether 'the other' be Protestants, Jews, members of other religions or secular humanists.[7]

In taking history seriously, critical theology recognizes and promotes dialogue, cooperation, and conflict that allow for movement beyond systemic structures of evil toward the re-creation of institutions that remain open to the dynamism of authentic human existence.

Without a common humanity and shared horizon of meaning, truth and justice are not possible. The foundation of critical theology is the human capacity to recognize that is so and to engage in action that addresses problems of injustice, oppression, and exclusion. Thus, the imperative behind critical theology is not only to critique unjust social structures, but also and more importantly to present alternative possibilities. Critical theology is a project (it must always be dynamic and *in process*) where gospel values are brought to bear on contemporary social issues. To engage in critical theology is to assert the possibility of acting in the world as intentional agents, identifying unjust social structures, and working toward a corrective that liberates its victims. It is a theology that seeks to uncover bias and violence and move toward ethical encounters: that is, listening to and respecting all others, but particularly the other who is suffering, who is poor, who is a victim of violence, and whose voice is often excluded from public discourse.[8]

In my view, critical theology articulates questions of crisis. Yet, questions presuppose a belief in the existence of answers. Indeed, they often point us in a direction where we might find answers. The dynamic of asking questions about our experience in order to understand correctly and act accordingly is the nature of human living. Thus, while there are social processes that can lead to pathological social trends, there is also the possibility of social processes that can set in motion the healing of these pathologies. Critical theology demands a ceaseless vigilance on behalf of "victims of human malice and social injustice."[9] Critical theology asserts that it is possible to overcome the malice and injustice.

**"Critical theology demands a ceaseless vigilance on behalf of "victims of human malice and social injustice." Critical theology asserts that it is possible to overcome the malice and injustice.**

The years that followed my doctoral work led me to focus on healthcare and bioethics. A background in social ethics provided a broader analysis of the bioethical issues that preoccupied my research. In 2009, during a sabbatical year, I did a joint post-doctoral fellowship with the Centre for Clinical Ethics and the Joint Centre for Bioethics at the University of Toronto. Along with research, I had the privilege of working in hospitals in the role of Clinical Ethicist. This experience taught me how much people in "limit situations," that is, who are experiencing life-threatening health crises, yearn for the message the gospel offers and for the values that the Catholic Church advocates. These limit situations, at various times in life, affect all human beings. As Gregory Baum asserts, "[s]ince God is partial to the poor, men and women who are marginal, despised or deserted—*and by extension all human beings*—have a high destiny."[10] In reflecting on the hospital context, on the meaning around life and death, illness, and suffering, all human beings are affected by the limit situations of human existence. Regardless of a person's or family's background, the search for meaning in these situations is noteworthy. Through the experience of finite limits,

patients and families become aware of transcendence. Critical theology recognizes that hope can be born of loss. There is a commitment to hope despite suffering. In face of the challenge that human dignity is a "useless concept,"[11]—an argument made by some medical ethicists—critical theology upholds and asserts the dignity of the human person in times of utter impoverishment. This assertion is possible because human dignity is, as Baum asserts, "grounded in divine transcendence," and therefore "recognized as sacred and hence untouchable."[12]

## Teaching Theology

Teaching theology in a secular university presents the challenging task of communicating divine transcendence in 21st-century secular culture. Critical theology confronts the loss of transcendence in a highly technological and science-based society. In a secular university, theology is, at best, misunderstood and, at worst, considered a "remnant from the past," irrelevant in the context of contemporary education and research. Yet, my encounter with students and my immersion in Indigenous teaching and ceremony have provided me an opportunity to apply a hermeneutic of recovery from the eclipse of the transcendent. While they do not always acknowledge the spiritual, students often take theology courses because they yearn to understand something of that dimension of who they are.

> **"The relational nature of the Indigenous episteme acknowledges the interconnectedness of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of individuals as well as the person's connection with all living things, the earth, and the universe.**

In the early 1990s, Baum identified "powerful intellectual trends" that play a direct role in the eclipse of the transcendent; such trends are even more powerful 25 years later. Two of these trends—the positivism of the natural and social sciences, and the postmodern "rejection of any form of universal reason,"[13]—reject the spiritual. They do not accept the theological claim that God made human beings in God's image, and human beings can seek what is true and what is good. Critical theology recognizes the negative effects of these trends and looks for ways to recover the meaning of the transcendent. In my own teaching experiences, two forms of recovery involve the acknowledgement of students' deep existential questions and the growing respect for and recognition of Indigenous ways of knowing.

With input from my colleagues, I wrote about the experience of teaching theology in a secular university. The subtitle of the paper, published in *The Ecumenist* in 2017, was "Still Room for the Transcendent." The paper was an effort to articulate the amazing experience of teaching students who ask deep and probing questions. The consensus among faculty in our department is that theology gives students the opportunity to explore their questions; that is, we give students permission to ask questions about their experience. Teaching theology must begin with students paying attention to and articulating their experience. By making room for students' experience and questions, space is made for their encounter with the transcendent. Theology provides students with a countercultural experience that, for many, is enticing and exhilarating. We have the privilege of providing the university (which includes four faculties: Arts and Science, Engineering and Computer Science, Fine Arts, and John Molson School of Business) with service courses that the majority of students in our classes take as electives. Students are, therefore, exposed to theology in a secular context. My colleague Matthew R. Anderson expressed this paradox:

> Perhaps the small growth in interest in Theological Studies is a natural correlation to the vastly greater increase in STEM (Science, Technology Engineering, Mathematics) fields, its 'balance', as it were. It may also be that we, like philosophy, fine arts and liberal arts or literature programs, represent an alternative, for the creatively minded, to the reigning paradigm of customer and consumer, and so an alternative to the uncritical positivism of some fields of study. It may also be (one hopes) that more and more people are seeing, or at least sensing, that techno-scientific language is sometimes, when coming from governments or corporations, not really all that scientific. It can hide an ideological bias as strong as any other form of 'church.' Theological Studies, at Concordia [University in Montreal], is also the place where one can study ethics, a field badly needed in today's public and corporate spheres, which may not be interested in cultivating a strong civic sense of responsibility and public critical debate.[14]

A second acknowledgement of the transcendent that has emerged strongly in the past approximately 10 years is a newfound respect for Indigenous methodology and ways of knowing. Universities are beginning to pay attention to Indigenous voices, in part because of revelations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 2015 Report, which included 94 Calls to Action, and in part because of the growing strength of Indigenous voices both in the academy and in the public realm. Universities are beginning to rec-

ognize and welcome the alternative ways of knowing that Indigenous epistemologies and practices bring to research and education. Indigenous methodology is striking. It resonates with critical theology's method. The starting point is the experience of the person and their rootedness with their people, their culture, and their land.

One of the most common phrases among Indigenous peoples is "all my relations." The relational nature of the Indigenous episteme acknowledges the interconnectedness of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of individuals as well as the person's connection with all living things, the earth, and the universe. While a modern Western perspective tends to emphasize individuality and autonomy, relationality is the core of Indigenous peoples' ways of knowing. Everything in the universe is interconnected. To acknowledge "all my relations" is to acknowledge the purpose of each being on the earth and how each being is worthy of respect and caring. Indigenous ways of knowing are fluid, nonlinear, and relational.[15]

The fundamental symbol for North American Indigenous peoples is the circle. It signifies the family, the clan, the tribe, and ultimately all of creation. It has no beginning and no end. All in the circle share equal value. Cultures that are based on a view of existence as circular tend to be egalitarian, rather than hierarchical. The circle points to the importance of maintaining balance with all that exists. For example, the medicine wheel, an important symbol for many Indigenous peoples, represents different dimensions of Indigenous existence. It symbolizes the four directions of the earth, with each direction signifying a stage of the whole of a person's life. The four directions can also signify the seasons of the year, aspects of life (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual), or elements of nature (fire, air, water, and earth). The key message in these different interpretations of the medicine wheel and the circle is the importance of balance. Balance is what allows Indigenous peoples to walk the "good path." It models and emphasizes the fluidity and relationality that are core to the ways of knowing of Indigenous peoples.

All of existence is spiritual for Indigenous people.[16] This is a universal starting point for Indigenous people, even though they represent a multitude of related cultures, with a great variety of tribal ceremonial structures expressing that spirituality. The primary metaphor of existence for Indigenous people is spatial; therefore, Indigenous spirituality and existence are concretely and deeply rooted in the land. Being rooted in the land and in a particular place appears in nearly all aspects of Indigenous existence, in ceremonial structures, symbols, architecture, as well as the symbolic parameters of Indigenous peoples' cosmos. Indigenous spirituality is holistic. It is not separate but intimately related to all aspects of reality and all dimensions of Indigenous life. For Indigenous peoples, there is no separation between the visible and the invisible or between the human and non-human. Rather, there is a profound solidarity that resonates with the solidarity inherent in critical theology.

Critical theology continues to listen to the victims of 21st-century manifestations of injustice, oppression, and marginalization. It hears the voices of those who lament our fragmented society, loss of meaning, and erosion of moral and epistemic foundations. Its response is to continue to hope that God is with us, working with us in our efforts to hear and respond to those most wounded by poverty, meaninglessness, addiction, and other symptoms of systemic structures of evil that often take on a life of their own. Facing these powerful and ubiquitous systems makes it difficult to "see clearly where and how to involve oneself."[17] Baum speaks of it as living in "the wilderness."[18] This wilderness condition pushes critical theology to pay attention to local grassroots movements where change is still possible and is, in fact, happening. From my perspective, what is happening among Indigenous people strongly exhibits this type of change. It also happens when critical theology encounters and pays attention to authentic questions, the type of deep existential questions to which few other disciplines are attentive.

1 Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), xi.

2 Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 28 ff.

3 Gregory Baum, "Critical Theology: Replies to Ray Morrow," in *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), 4.

4 Currently named Polytechnique Montréal.

5 Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, trans. Author Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 34–35.

6 Quoted in Frederick E. Crowe, *Developing the Lonergan Legacy: Historical, Theoretical and Existential Themes*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 79.

7 Baum, "Critical Theology: Replies to Ray Morrow," 21.

8 Baum, "Preface," *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), vii.

9 Gregory Baum, *The Oil Has Not Run Dry* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 45.

10 Baum, "Critical Theology: Replies to Ray Morrow," 14. (My italics.)

11 Ruth Macklin, "Dignity Is a Useless Concept," *British Medical Journal* 327: 1419–20.

12 Baum, "Critical Theology: Replies to Ray Morrow," 15.

13 Ibid., 3.

14 Quoted in Christine Jamieson, "Theology in a Secular University: Still Room for the Transcendent," *The Ecumenist* 54:3 (2017), 5–8.

15 Margaret Kovach, "Emerging from the Margins: Indigenous Methodologies," in L. Brown and S. Strega, eds., *Research as Resistance* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2005), 19–36.

16 George Tinker, "The Full Circle of Liberation: An American Indian Theology of Place," in David G. Hallman, ed., *Ecotheology: Voices from the South and the North* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1994), 218–25.

17 Baum, "Critical Theology: Replies to Ray Morrow," 32.

18 Ibid.

# Critical Theology and Critical Nationalism

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I met Gregory Baum on a cool Montreal morning in September 1994. I had just arrived at McGill University to undertake doctoral studies on the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the German church under National Socialism only to discover that my presumed doctoral supervisor had decided over the summer to retire and to take no more students. Gregory had agreed, with the help of a persuasive faculty administrative assistant, to meet with me to discuss my options, which seemed to be few at the time. As I sat down in his little office, Gregory asked me where I was from, what I wanted to study, and why I did not stay at the University of Heidelberg to study theology. He was intrigued that I was from rural Missouri, and that I was interested in modern German political thought as well as the Hitler resistance movement. I explained that my decision to leave Heidelberg was a result of the departure of Prof. Wolfgang Huber to become the Lutheran (*Evangelische*) bishop of the recently reunited Berlin-Brandenburg church body. There was no longer anyone in the Heidelberg theological faculty interested in political theology, Bonheoffer, and Christian ethics—and besides, I did not consider myself a theologian but more of a historian.

Gregory's next two questions changed the course of my life: "By political theology, do you mean Carl Schmitt?" I responded, "Yes, in part." He shrugged and moved to the next question. "Tell me, Scott, do you know anything about the church in the GDR [German Democratic Republic, or East Germany]?" As I told him about a conversation I had in 1992 at Union Theological Seminary in New York City with Albrecht Schönherr, one of Bonhoeffer's closest friends and the first bishop of the post–Berlin Wall eastern sector of Berlin-Brandenburg, Gregory began to smile. He then reached down into his heavy metal desk, pulled out a 350-page manuscript, and dropped it down in front of me with a dramatic clang that reverberated around his office and through my ears. It was, he explained, a manuscript he had just submitted to a publisher, entitled *The Church for Others: Protestant Theology in Communist East Germany* (1996).[1] He instructed me to read it so we could discuss it … early the following morning over breakfast at a greasy spoon restaurant a short walk from his office. Little did I know it then, but my journey into critical theology had just begun.

> **"We cannot, for example, simply disregard or dismiss the oppressive world in which we live, which would lead to a type of naïve utopianism. Instead, we must recognize and respond to the structures and practices that enable oppression and seek to instill liberative practices.**

As Don Schweitzer notes in his article in this issue, Baum defined critical theology as "any theology that uses critical social theory to uncover and unfold the emancipatory meaning of the Christian gospel."[2] For Baum, who spent much of his post–Vatican II life wrestling against theologies that prioritized doctrinal purity over human experience, critical theology has a starting point in the social, political, and economics contexts of people who, for whatever reason, find themselves marginalized and powerless against the death-dealing and dehumanizing forces in modern society. As Rosemary Carbine rightly argues in this issue, critical theology involves the practice of "envisioning and enacting worlds, that is, in critiquing and deconstructing oppressive worlds, on the one hand, and constructing or creating more liberative alternate worlds, on the other hand."[3] Due in large part to the influence of the Frankfurt School of social thought, which Baum encountered during his time at the New School for Social Research in New York City in the late 1960s, he understood the work of critical theology to be dialectical. We cannot, for example, simply disregard or dismiss the oppressive world in which we live, which would lead to a type of naïve utopianism. Instead, we must recognize and respond to the structures and practices that enable oppression and seek to instill liberative practices.

There is, Baum maintained, always a movement towards liberation that is open to both a "yes" and a "no" to the current situation. In this regard, critical theology does not operate within a Manichaen world of good and evil or light and darkness. Rather, critical theology understands that evils such as racism, sexism, poverty, war, genocide, and ecocide remain, to some degree, linked to human efforts to be free, to be agents

capable of making decisions on matters that directly affect them. Similarly, projects that seek to overcome racism, sexism, poverty, war, genocide, ecocide, and other oppressive forces carry with them the capacity to do evil themselves. David Seljak, in his article in this issue on how critical theology handles the matter of evil, points to the metaphor used by Zygmunt Bauman regarding the creation of modern society.[4] Following a "blueprint," modern society provides the means for progress, avenues for pursuing individual dreams and possibilities for climbing social and economic ladders. But, for people on the margins, modern society *also means* the Holocaust, colonization, genocide, and ecocide. For Baum, then, critical theology must question its own critiques regarding "remnants of past prejudice, but also regarding the possibility that under changed social conditions of the future these critiques could become ideological defenses of new marginalizing structures."[5]

When I met Gregory in 1994, he was deeply interested in the relationship between nationalism and theology. This was due in large part to his involvement as a public intellectual in debates about Quebec nationalism leading up to the 1995 referendum on sovereignty, the possibility of developing a social economy, and the role of the Catholic Church in Quebec. Through much of the 1990s, Baum began to clarify his thinking about how critical theology could inform theories of nationalism. I would like to highlight two books that were informative to me as I continued my doctoral work on German political theology and, later, on the connections between US foreign policy and the culture wars of the 21st century.

## The Church for Others: The East German Church and Critical Solidarity

That manuscript that Baum gave me to read on the first day I met him was the result of a trip he took in 1992 to Berlin, the city of his youth, to meet with theologians and church leaders associated with the East German Church. He went there thinking that he would encounter the remnants of a revolutionary theology that resembled at a structural level Latin American liberation theology, which focused on a people-oriented economy and thought of itself, in some regard, as socialist. What he found instead was a church that had developed a nuanced theology to address the situation in East Germany. It bore virtually no resemblance to Latin American liberation theology.

In the 1960s, a number of prominent East German theologians concluded that the GDR was their home, and God had placed them there with the expectation that they would exercise and prove their faith. Many of these theologians had belonged to the Confessing Church, which stood against the Hitler regime. They were well aware of the oppressive structures within socialism and looked in amazement at Western theologians who failed to see oppressive structures within Western democracies, especially when former Nazi leaders were elevated to leadership positions in the West. In spite of socialism's flaws, they believed that it was nevertheless reformable or "improveable," which meant that a dialogue between Marxists and Christians was warranted and ought to be pursued. One important element in this dialogue was the role that the church had carved out in society; that is, the church was able to position itself as a *Volkskirche*, a "people's church," which represented the voice and moral direction of GDR citizens on the whole. So, when the church engaged the state (the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the SED), it did so not as a marginalized voice of a parochial few, but as an institution that spoke for all East German people.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, East German theologians developed a theology of "critical solidarity" to help Christian members find their way in society. First defined by the Protestant theologian Heino Falcke, "critical solidarity" enabled the church to affirm the right "to utter a frank Yes, and given the case, an equally frank No."[6] At the 1971 synod of the church in the GDR, Schönherr defined the church's role in socialism in these terms: "We want the Church not beside, not against, rather in socialism" ("*nicht neben, nicht gegen, sondern im Sozialismus*"). In other words, East German theologians such as Schönherr and Falcke sought to find a critical path between the gospel and socialism.[7] In their view, there was no contradiction between the gospel and the humanistic ideals of socialism. The church should support projects that foster human life and, without hesitation, warn people of projects that threaten it.

To some Western ears, this position of critical solidarity sounded like collaboration with Communist leaders; however, to the Marxist-Leninist government of East Germany, the fact that the church presented itself *in* and not unreservedly *for* East German socialism meant that the church posed a serious threat to state power. To the SED, the church was heretical, radical, and in need of ongoing condemnation. In practical terms, this position of "critical solidarity" enabled the church to provide "free space," essentially "cover," to social and political movements within the GDR that were critical of state policy. These movements would have been illegal if not for the protection of the church, which, under Schonherr's leadership, had cleverly negotiated with the SED since the 1960s. In Baum's view, the critical theology developed by East German theologians to address the unique situation in which they were living led to the development of a critical nationalism, which was able, on the one hand, to embrace the reformable, humanistic elements of socialism and East German so-

ciety and, on the other, to raise fundamental objections to the dehumanizing elements of the Marxist-Leninist policies of the SED government.

## Paul Tillich and *The Socialist Decision*

In 1998, Baum published a book, written in French, entitled *Le nationalisme: perspectives éthiques et religieuses* (published in English by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2001 as *Nationalism, Religion, and Ethics*), to consider nationalism from the perspective of Christian ethics. Again, one motivating factor in writing this book was an attempt to provide a broader context for his thinking on Quebec sovereignty. Another was to fill a gap that he saw in Christian ethics, particularly Catholic social teaching, which, according to Baum, had not developed a significant body of literature on the "confusing" and "polymorphous" phenomenon of nationalism.[8] In this book, Baum highlighted both religious and non-religious thinkers who had addressed nationalism in ethical terms: Martin Buber on Zionism, Gandhi on peaceful resistance in a colonized situation, Paul Tillich on the rise of German nationalistic movements during the 1920s and 1930s, and the Quebec intellectual Jacques Grand'Maison on Quebec nationalism. To demonstrate the dialectical nature of critical theology and Baum's attempt to provide an ethical perspective on nationalism, I will focus on Tillich's argument, which Tillich presented in his book *The Socialist Decision* (1933).[9]

In late 1932, Paul Tillich, then dean of the Frankfurt School for Social Research, embarked on a project that identified some of the ideological roots of the deep divisions wracking German politics. Tillich saw that the liberal democracy and capitalist economy of the Weimar Republic had resulted in political, economic, and social chaos. While critical of the Republic, he also set out to correct the utopian ideologies promoted by conservative nationalists (the National Socialists) and the Marxists. The dichotomous nature of both ideologies, he observed, had resulted in divisive cultural debates rooted in monolithic, "either/or" thinking about nationalism and ethnic solidarity, on the one hand, and a universalism rooted in modern principles of progress, on the other.

Tillich argued that the Marxism of the 1920s and 1930s, like the conservative-nationalistic thought of National Socialists, had fallen prey to what he called "non-prophetic myths." Marxism, in its attempt to distance itself from bourgeois values, had unwittingly adopted the "bourgeois myth of demand." This techno-rationalistic myth of the bourgeoisie obligated individuals, and especially workers, to pursue material interests instead of community interests. In other words, socialists, like capitalists, valued the maximization of production. Lost in this pursuit was the non-rational (not *ir*rational) love of family, community, land, and culture. With regret, Tillich concluded that while Marxist socialism had promised the working class a revolution, it had only further perpetuated the atomization and alienation of the individual—the very situation Marxism denounced in liberal-bourgeois society.

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Tillich could therefore understand why so many Germans turned to a "myth of origin," a political theory that recognized the importance of ancestral ties, the relationship of the human being to the soil, and the meaning of a community cultural heritage. Tillich identified two strains of this myth: a "revolutionary" and a "conservative" myth of origin. He admitted that he was particularly sympathetic to a "revolutionary" myth of origin, such as the one that supported a less extreme variation of German-nationalistic ideology. Unlike the "conservative" myth of origin, which sought to re-establish old social hierarchies, the "revolutionary" myth rejected medieval feudalism and other traditionally oppressive social constructs. The "revolutionary" myth of origin also denounced modern competition as an inevitable and beneficial outgrowth of human community. Taking the focus away from the radical individualism of industrial capitalism, the "revolutionary" myth redirected the German people (the *Volk*) towards common goals and values. It promised an organic unity between the German people and their land, which provided socio-political rootedness, stability, and harmony.

For Tillich, though, an unchecked myth of origin cannot escape political romanticism, which understands politics as a natural phenomenon that unfolds historically with leaders destined by "Providence" or "the crisis of the times" to rule. Political romanticism inspired Germans to see history as a transcendent force, appointing leaders to combat other forces that sought to destroy national identity or disrupt a perceived natural order. Although sympathetic to the revolutionary potential in political romanticism, Tillich realized that the German myth of origin was caught up in a tragic contradiction. On the one hand, it focused on the benefits of maintaining relational community bonds, a tie to the land, and a common understanding of the good. On the other hand, this same myth created a radical dualism between Germans and non-Germans, insiders and outsiders, and good and evil. For these reasons, Tillich

argued, social injustices would inevitably emerge in times of social crises, for in the call for unity, there was also a latent invitation to discriminate and persecute outsiders. Despite his sympathies for the revolutionary potential of a myth of origin, Tillich concluded that any myth of origin was too exclusionary, if embraced in isolation, to be an acceptable political ethic.

To overcome the problems associated with accepting *either* a myth of demand *or* a myth of origin, Tillich proposed a socialist principle. This critical principle, he argued, is one that subjects the myth of origin to the controlling myth of demand—but the prophetic rather than bourgeois version of that myth. Following the Jewish prophets' demand for social justice, which had, to some degree, spilled over into liberal-bourgeois rationalism, Tillich held that the "ought" of the demand must exist as a constant limit on the myth of origin. That is, in political decision-making the demand for social justice must always take priority over a myth of origin because the demand for justice and solidarity is unconditional. The function of this prophetic demand, then, is to negate any potential injustice or exclusion based on a myth of origin. In effect, Tillich thought that the prophetic demand continually exposes the blind and unjust nationalism that inevitably results from an unchecked myth of origin.

Baum deeply appreciated Tillich's vision of a type of German nationalism that was empowered by the history and culture of the German people and yet limited by the prophetic myth of demand. Through the interrelationship between the myth of demand and the myth of origin, Tillich hoped that his prophetic socialist principle could check the conservatism of German-nationalistic political thought with the demand of social justice and limit the techno-rationalism of the 1920s and 1930s Marxist-socialism with a sense of communal rootedness. In short, Baum concluded that Tillich's socialist principle was an attempt to develop a self-critical nationalism.

## Critical Theology and a Contemporary Ethic of Nationalism

What prompted Tillich to write *The Socialist Decision* in 1933, East German theologians to develop a theology of critical solidarity in the 1960s and 1970s, and Gregory Baum to cite the need to construct a critical ethic of nationalism remains with us today. Germany, for example, is besieged with a divisive debate about immigration and who is authentically a German. In the wake of her policy of opening Germany up to one million refugees in 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel has had to denounce the rise of far-right political parties, particularly the AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*, or Alternative for Germany) and a reinvigorated neo-Nazi movement. In September 2018, she stood before the German Parliament condemning xenophobic violence in terms that echo calls for restraint under the Weimar Republic: "There is no excuse or reason for hunting people down, using violence and Nazi slogans, showing hostility to people who look different, who have a Jewish restaurant, for attacks on police officers. We will not allow whole groups in our society to be excluded on the quiet." She added that Jews, Muslims, Christians, and atheists all belong in German society, and that human dignity is inviolable under the German constitution.

In the United States, Donald Trump's brand of populism has appealed to rural, white, evangelical Americans. In short order, Trump's pragmatic nationalism has marginalized Muslims, women, Hispanics, Blacks, environmentalists, the media, civil servants (the "deep state"), and others critical of his individual and political actions. In effect, conservatives, particularly Republican leaders, have parlayed a myth of origin, "Make America Great Again," into political power. Liberals have, in turn, sought to resist using universal claims to justice. These appeals to social justice fail to attract rural conservatives, for example, largely because the appeals to justice are not linked to their lived experiences and are not presented in a language that is familiar to them. As Baum pointed out in his reading of Tillich, missing in this debate is the critical tension that an ethically acceptable Christian ethic of nationalism requires both rootedness and universal claims that are prophetic in nature. By highlighting the work of grassroots movements that seek to overcome poverty, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other oppressive forces in today's society, *Critical Theology* can serve as a forum to discuss what an ethically acceptable form of nationalism might look like in a world rightly suspicious of nationalistic projects.

1 Gregory Baum, *The Church for Others: Protestant Theology in Communist East Germany* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).

2 Don Schweitzer, "Critical Theology in the 21st Century," *Critical Theology,* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2018): 3; citing Gregory Baum, "Preface," *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1994), vii.

3 Rosemary Carbine, "Critical Constructive Theology as a Praxis of Worldmaking" *Critical Theology* 1:1 (2018), 8.

4 David Seljak, "Critical Theology and Evil," *Critical Theology* 1:1 (2018), 12.

5 Baum, "Preface," *Essays in Critical Theology*, vii.

6 Baum, *The Church for Others*, 68; qtd Albrecht Schönherr, *Abenteur der Nachfolge: Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag), 324.

7 "Socialism" in East Germany meant the Marxist-Leninist socialism of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the SED. East German theologians did not consider themselves Christian socialists or socialists, as did some liberation theologians in Latin America, North America, and other parts of Europe.

8 Gregory Baum, *Nationalism, Religion, and Ethics* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 3, 5.

9 Paul Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*, trans. Franklin Sherman (New York: Harper & Row, 1977; German original 1933); Baum discusses Tillich's argument in *Nationalism, Religion, and Ethics*, 61–83. Much of this section on Tillich is from a slightly revised excerpt from Scott Kline, *"The Socialist Decision* and the Politics of Fear," *The Ecumenist* 43 (2006), 11–14.

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