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Abstract
Discussions amongst theologians about the relationship between faith and culture often operate from an impoverished and presumptive understanding of culture rooted in European modernity, and complicit in the history of colonization and exploitation that emanates from it. Postcolonial theorists interrogate the meaning of culture and its varied manifestations and reveal how power has been used to frame and define cultures with an aim towards coercive manipulation. These critiques create space for oppositional communities to coalesce and resist identity co-optation and oppression. However, the tendency amongst postcolonial theorists toward deconstruction without positing a reconstructed alternative rooted in subjectivity, creates a challenge for theologians who wish to articulate the positive value of a revelatory creator. Karl Rahner's account of grace and freedom provides a potential dialogue partner to respond to this challenge. Rahner's account of grace can be critically melded with postcolonial theory to create space for reconstructing his tendency towards essentialism, while developing oppositional communities that serve as incarnated challenges to oppression and violence in our contemporary church and world.

Key terms *Karl Rahner, grace, postcolonial theology, oppositional communities, resisting oppression*

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The intersections between faith and culture have long been a challenge to theological reflection and the communication of the Christian faith. Trying to navigate the boundaries between and amongst the tradition of the faith and its own cultural contexts, while at the same time negotiating with forms of the faith in the context of other cultural situations, is often difficult and dangerous. There is no shortage of stories concerning missionaries or evangelizers who met or propagated forceful coercive behaviors in the name of purification of culture, while stories and histories abound in which individuals operating from cultural locations being introduced to the faith resisted, often violently, imposition of foreign practices, values, and beliefs.

Part of the problem lies in how theology understands and approaches the meaning of culture, particularly in relationship to the meaning and focus in practicing *inculturation*, both by those who argue for inculturation at a theoretical level, and those who attempt to inculturate the faith in particular contexts. At one level, the idea of inculturation is a dynamic conversation between the faith of a people and their cultural ways of knowing and expressing that faith, which provides motivation and encouragement to one exploring the many intersections and areas of mutual support. On another level, however, is the challenge created when culture and faith seem to conflict, and the assumption is that the culture must adapt to the faith experience. The faith experience is thus privileged by the theological assumption that it transcends particular cultural expressions.

However, more than simply debating the question of the relationship between faith and culture, there is a need to recognize that the relationship between faith and culture is dynamic and fluid. These are not merely two poles that need to intersect, but rather two liquids that need to be carefully mixed together. And contextualizing the faith-culture discussion is the history of colonization which informs and influences the understanding and application of both culture and faith. This tension is seen, as Kathryn Tanner points out, in how the understanding of culture as a manageable whole allowed anthropologists to both advocate on behalf of "native" cultures, while also being used to extend the colonial regime.

> Anthropologists set out to describe the whole that the culture of native peoples formed prior to Western intervention, even as that same Western expansion made possible their own field-based enterprises. On the one hand, anthropologists could argue thereby on behalf of native peoples: the integrity of their cultures demanded they be left alone. On the other hand, colonial administrators, with or without the conscious collaboration of anthropologists, could conceive of native peoples as some manageable

> whole, and try to predict the repercussions of colonialist interventions on their ways of life. Once understood as an integral whole, native practices could either be enlisted as they stood for colonial administrative purposes, or taken apart to foster assimilation to a Western way of life.[1]

She argues that theology continues to employ an understanding of culture rooted within this modern understanding, which is closely allied with the colonial project.

Tanner attempts to grapple with a postmodern anthropological understanding of culture, and then identifies what it might have to say to theological reflection. Her primary concern is that theologians tend to work with a relatively static and independent concept of culture that is rooted in modernity and which, therefore, causes them to miss out on opportunities and insights a more postmodern approach to culture provides. As she points out, "Whether or not the word *culture* is employed, something like the modern anthropological understanding of culture crops up repeatedly in contemporary discussion of a surprisingly large range of theological questions."[2] Theologians thus need to begin the process of becoming more critically aware of the ways in which culture is used in theology and in reflections on the meaning of faith for particular cultural locations, and to move beyond the reductionist tendency within modern conceptions of culture that undercuts the dynamic role of culture in human living.

One of the primary benefits for theology in looking toward a postmodern anthropological perspective is that it allows theology to see itself as a form of cultural activity that is also bound and influenced by its particular context. As Tanner points out, "The most basic contribution that an anthropological understanding of culture—postmodern or not—makes to theology is to suggest that theology be viewed as a part of culture, as a form of cultural activity."[3] As cultural activity, theology is thus a human activity.

However, the challenge of theology being a human activity is important on two levels. The first is that while there is a tendency to move toward abstract or essentialist understandings of what it means to be human, "an anthropological idea of culture encourages theologians to develop a primary interest in the particular."[4] Emphasizing the particular allows for a more

[1] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 21-22.
[2] Ibid., 61.
[3] Ibid., 63.
[4] Ibid., 67.

nuanced understanding of how theology operates and functions within a particular way of life.

The second level concerns whether it is possible to simply separate culture and theology in order to have them dialogue with one another. In articulating what it means to construct a "local theology," Robert Schreiter argues that local theologies grow out of a dynamic interaction amongst "three roots—gospel, church, culture—with all they entail about identity and change."[5] Tanner's incorporation of a postmodern understanding of culture argues for moving beyond the artificial separation of culture and theology, toward a more nuanced articulation of theology within culture that accounts for the dynamic interaction amongst gospel, church, and culture.[6]

This second level of importance allows for a transformation of the intersection between culture and theology that invites further inquiry into the roles of the historical and present colonization of cultures. Because the particular histories of cultures involve unique experiences of colonization and oppression, attempting to understand particular experiences of culture necessitates inquiry into how those cultures have been defined and constructed from without. This inquiry invites dialogue not simply between culture and theology, but between those who are engaging in the task of liberating culture, postcolonial theorists, and theologians.

Susan Abraham articulates possible locations for intersection between postcolonial theory and theology. As she points out, the interaction between postcolonial theories and theology allows for theorists working at this intersection to "work out of a different space of a radical politics of culture that differentiates itself from both right- and left-wing articulations of [culture] as it exists in the Euro-American academy"[7] and provides a space for "creative revisioning":

> In particular, theological imagination in the postcolonial context is characterized by a marked distance from doctrinaire positions on identity, ethics, and liberation. In its stead emerge the heterogeneity of multiple (sometimes contrasting and contradictory) positions that remain an opportunity for creative revisioning. The practical context of postcolonial theology in view of globalization does not

[5] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, foreword by Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 21.

[6] In Schreiter's defense, he also comes to this realization in his subsequent text *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), as he sees theology as navigating between the "global and local."

[7] Susan Abraham, "What Does Mumbai Have to Do With Rome? Postcolonial Perspectives on Globalization and Theology," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 378. Interpolation mine.

> provide for the unifying and homogenizing visions of either liberal assimilation or conserving visions of "pure" or orthodox identity or ethics.[8]

Abraham points to the necessity of theology to consider its location in the process of engaging culture, and to allow for a more self-critical and nuanced approach to overcome its own tendency towards essentialist articulations of identity, ethics, and the meaning of liberation.

The creative revisioning resulting from this process of critical engagement between postcolonial theory and theology will be both deconstructive and reconstructive. The process of reconstruction will respond to one of the limitations identified by individuals working in postcolonial theology, namely, the absence of what Schreiter describes as "an ontology of peace [that] has to undergird a critique of violence."[9] As this reconstruction progresses, communities of resistance which function from positions of oppositionality (aiming to "disarticulate" dominant structures of thinking and acting which frame oppressive contexts) will be able to turn their exclusive focus on functioning from marginal locations towards a more constructive articulation of authentic human functioning.

This reconstructive engagement requires a creative account of human functioning and existence that will take seriously the particular experiences of marginalization and oppression and allow for resistance to identity co-optation as part of authentic subjectivity. Karl Rahner's articulation of grace and freedom provides a reconstructive dialogue partner for the deconstructive resistance found amongst postcolonial theorists. Thus, the critique and constructive imagination of postcolonial theorists concerning the experience of being subjects that provide for the creation of communities that resist oppression and marginalization, will be related to a fuller subjectivity found in Rahner's synthesis of the concrete and the transcendental to show how these communities are critical and oppositional, while also being reconstructive.

Rahner on Grace and Freedom and Community

Karl Rahner's wide-ranging engagement with a variety of theological topics and issues in light of the questions raised by modernity has had an inestimable impact on contemporary theological discourse, and he is widely considered as one of, if not the, most important theologians of the twentieth century. Central to Rahner's theological work on grace is the intersection

[8] Ibid.
[9] Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 58. Interpolation mine.

of the subject who hears the message of revelation and an understanding of what God reveals through communicating the message of revelation. Because the person is fundamentally oriented towards transcendence and God reveals Godself, the person naturally desires and is directed toward God as the infinite mystery that surrounds him/her.

Rahner argues against the tendency amongst neo-scholastics to identify grace as extrinsic to nature, and thereby separating them from one another. The neo-scholastic understanding of grace essentially separates it from nature such that "the relationship between nature and grace is conceived in such a way that they appear as two layers so carefully placed that they penetrate each other as little as possible."[10] Rahner finds this understanding of grace problematic because it results in a lack of curiosity on the part of the person in reflecting upon the transcendent within his/her reality. There is no need to search for grace within one's life when it is extrinsic to one's life, and "it is not surprising—though not of course justifiable—that man[11] should take very little interest in this mysterious superstructure of his being. After all, he does not find grace where he finds himself, in the immediate activation of his spiritual being."[12]

Rahner responds to this problem by reflecting upon the meaning by grace and how one can best express its character by writing, "God communicates himself to man in his own proper reality. That is the mystery and fullness of grace."[13] Grace is therefore not simply something that comes from God, but rather is God's self-offering.

> Grace is God himself, the communication in which he gives himself to man as the divinizing favor which he is himself. Here his work is really himself, since it is he who is imparted. Such grace, from the very start, cannot be thought of independently of the personal love of God and its answer in man.[14]

[10] Karl Rahner, "Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1968), 4:167.

[11] Many of the translations of Rahner's work, and given the era in which he wrote, employ the male pronoun in reference to God and for the general category of human. In order to be faithful to the translations used for this paper, the male pronoun, when used, is maintained for direct quotations but altered for discussion of the text or in paraphrases. The use of the male pronoun, however, should not be understood as agreement or acceptance of it as an adequate or accurate descriptor of God or to refer to all human persons.

[12] Rahner, "Nature and Grace," 168.

[13] Ibid., 175.

[14] Ibid., 177.

Grace is not external to God, nor should one separate God from God's grace as if God is a being who gives something outside of Godself. It is in understanding God as relational and desiring to communicate Godself that allows for a proper appreciation of the relationship between God and the human person.

Rahner moves from this understanding of grace as God's self-communication to discuss the human person. Rahner insists that the discussion concerning grace "must be a theological statement about man in the unity of his whole nature."[15] And since grace is the self-communication of God, there must be someone to receive that communication, which is love, whom God, therefore, loves. God creates this creature "in such a way that he *can* receive this love which is God himself, and that he can and must at the same time accept it for what it is: the ever astounding wonder, the unexpected, unexacted gift."[16] Describing this openness to receive God as present within creation, Rahner identifies intentionality in the creation of the person because God wants to communicate with the person.

> In the only order which is real, the emptiness of the transcendental creature exists *because* the fullness of God creates this emptiness *in order* to communicate himself to it. . . . It is to be understood rather as the freest possible love because he could have refrained from this and been happy in himself. . . . This is so because in the concrete order man is himself through that which he is not, and because that which he himself is, inescapably and inalienably, is given to him as the presupposition and as the condition of possibility for that which in all truth is given to him as his own absolute, free and unmerited love: God in his self-communication.[17]

The human person is thus open to receive God's self-communication in the center of the person's existence, and God's self-communication is directed towards the human person.

Rahner identifies moments when one is open to the divine self-communication in events where an individual "no longer has any reason which can be demonstrated or which is taken from the success of the

[15] Karl Rahner and Johann Auer, "Grace," in *Sacramentum Mundi,* ed. Karl Rahner with Cornelius Ernst and Kevin Smyth (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), 2:415.

[16] Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 1:310.

[17] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 124.

world."[18] These are experiences of the spirit and show that people of the spirit "should really live on the border between God and the world, time and eternity."[19] Thus, to have these experiences of the spirit is also to experience the supernatural.

The experience of the supernatural provides the means by which Rahner is able to link nature and grace in the experience of the human person. Given that the human person has the capacity to experience the supernatural—and in fact does experience the supernatural—then such a capacity must be a significant part of one's existence. Roger Haight describes the link between this experience and the recognition of the role of the supernatural in Rahner's work:

> One has an unthematic or preconceptual awareness that the orientation beyond oneself reaches even to infinity. This transcendence of the spirit, then can be seen as the vehicle of the operation of grace; in the concrete order this transcendence is a supernatural dynamism that reaches to a supernatural horizon, and implicit awareness of it is a consciousness of grace.[20]

The awareness of this orientation beyond oneself is not simply an experience, but is a fundamental part of human existence. Rahner names this the "supernatural existential," and he sees it as the openness of the human person to receive the self-communication of God. Karen Kilby points out that when Rahner speaks of the supernatural existential, he is not referring to something that is an object of our experience, but rather, the supernatural existential "refers to a fundamental element in human existence, something which is a constant feature of all our experience."[21]

The supernatural existential thus reflects the unity of nature and grace as it is experienced by the human person, and it is "a concept used to explain how it belongs to concrete human existence to be called to what transcends our existence, to life with God."[22] As such, it relates not simply to individual lives, but since "all people were created from the beginning for grace, it belongs to the very essence of concrete human nature to be called to grace,

[18] Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Experience of Grace," in *Theological Investigations,* trans. Karl-H and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967), 3:88.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Roger Haight, *Experience and Language of Grace* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 127.

[21] Karen Kilby, "Rahner," in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. Gareth Jones (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 345.

[22] William V. Dych, "Theology in a New Key," in *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 13.

to be able to find God in the particularities of all history."[23] The presence of the supernatural existential means that God's self-communication can also be discovered within history, which shows that the history of salvation and revelation are coextensive with all of human history, and God's presence may be seen in varying articulations and practices; because, ultimately, "everything that is really human can be a 'channel of grace," a finite mediation of our relationship with God."[24]

The intersection between salvation history and human history brings forth the paradox of the horizon that envelops one's existence: that it is experienced both as "infinitely distant" and "a hidden closeness, a forgiving intimacy."[25] This paradox is not simply present here, but reflects a deeper tension within Rahner's work as a whole.[26]

Building further on the significance of the supernatural existential, Rahner argues that not only does it provide an effective way of understanding the human person in relation to God, but it also is essential for being consistent with what is articulated through the doctrine of the Trinity.

> It is only through this doctrine that we can take with radical seriousness and maintain without qualifications the simple statement which is at once so very incomprehensible and so very self-evident, namely, that God himself as the abiding and holy mystery, as the incomprehensible ground of man's transcendent existence is not only the God of infinite distance, but also wants to be the God of absolute closeness in a true self-communication, and he is present in this way in the spiritual depths of our existence as well as in the concreteness of our corporeal history.[27]

There is a unity between God as both absolutely other than oneself and, at the same time, absolutely within one's very existence. Again, the paradox explained above presents itself. It would be difficult to logically explain this paradox away. It may be met, however, not by thinking one's way into the mystery of God, but by recognizing that prayer and meditation are the central way to enter into the mystery of God. Such prayer leads one to a mystical experience of God as the central tenet of any religious understanding.

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 14.
[25] Rahner, *Foundations*, 131.
[26] There is inadequate space for discussing this tension in depth here, but to further understand this tension, see Karen Kilby, *Karl Rahner: Theology and Philosophy* (London Routledge, 2004); George Vandervelde, "The Grammar of Grace: Karl Rahner as a Watershed in Contemporary Theology," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 445-59.
[27] Rahner, *Foundations*, 137.

Rahner says as much about the centrality of prayer in discussing the relationship between grace and freedom, when he points out that understanding the relationship between grace and freedom requires one to return to that which prayer provides.

> In order to really "understand" the problem of grace—freedom, to let it have its proper weight and to accept it, it is necessary to return to the frame of mind of a person at prayer. . . . [In prayer,] one is only accepting what one undeniably is, both real and yet derivative, a creature which produced in freedom and is produced as grace as it acts.[28]

Rahner's movement, then, is to show that understanding how grace and freedom intersect means not simply reflecting upon and thinking about how this grace is operative in one's life, but responding to the horizon of grace by opening oneself to communication with God who reveals Godself. And this process invites prayer as part of navigating the paradox between the infinite distance and infinite closeness at work within the person.

The relationality that prayer brings to the forefront receives further support in Rahner's discussion of the incarnation, which provides the interpretive means for understanding the relationality within the trinity. He begins his essay "On the Theology of the Incarnation"[29] with an articulation of the significance and centrality of God becoming human by reminding the reader that the incarnation of the Word of God is the "very centre of the reality from which we Christians live, of the reality which we believe."[30] It is only through an understanding of the Incarnation that one can also understand the mystery of the Trinity, the participation of the human person in the divine nature, and the mystery of the Church as an extension of the mystery of Christ.[31]

Rahner describes the human person as "mystery in his essence, his nature."[32] This mystery is not simply something that will be discovered or that of which we are not yet aware, but rather it "is the impenetrable which is already present and does not need to be fetched."[33] This mystery thus surrounds and permeates the person and is ultimately that through which the human person achieves ultimate fulfillment.

[28] Karl Rahner, "Grace and Freedom," in *Sacramentum Mundi,* 2:427. Interpolation mine.
[29] Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," in *Theological Investigations*, 4.
[30] Ibid., 105.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 108.
[33] Ibid.

The ultimate fulfillment arrived at through the mystery explains why God become human is such a significant statement. Since God enters into this human reality by becoming human, we see that the essence of what it means to be human is found in this self-emptying through which "man is in so far as he gives up himself."[34] This self-emptying of God which leads the human person to give up oneself as the way to enter into the ultimate mystery provides the first implication of the incarnation. In following God become man, who is the meaning our being human, the follower is invited to enter into the fullness of the mystery that surrounds not only the individual, but communities and the unique ways in which people form community in the world.

This uniqueness allows for and invites the individual to give up oneself not only by entering into the mystery of God via separation from the world, but rather by more fully entering into the mystery of other people. The creation of human relationships and loving others through acts of service ground the larger mystery of our humanity. The choice to love others allows the individual to enter into the mystery that is "already present" and thereby see the meaning of being human within this mystery.

Rahner's discussion also provides for the possibility that even if explicit revelation in Christ has not yet been learned or heard by a particular individual or community, it remains possible for the individual or community to have responded to the meaning of the incarnation.

Anyone therefore, no matter how remote from any revelation formulated in words who accepts his existence, that is, his humanity—no easy thing!—in quiet patience, or better, in faith, hope and love—no matter what he calls them, and accepts it *as* the mystery which hides itself in the mystery of eternal love and bears life in the womb of death: such a one says yes to something which really is such as his boundless confidence hopes it to be, because God has in fact filled it with the infinite, that is, with himself, since the Word was made flesh.[35]

The explicit acceptance of revelation as it is preached and heard has always been a central component of the mission of evangelization for the community of believers, and thus has often resulted in Christianity being seen as either complicit in or the rationalization of the colonial project. However, Rahner's discussion of the incarnation challenges what has often been assumed—that those who have the revelation must then share this privileged revelation with those who have not yet heard it.

[34] Ibid., 110.
[35] Ibid., 119.

Against this assumption that one brings and gives God to others, Rahner here opens the door for the incarnation to already be accepted and incorporated into a community of those who believe what it means, without yet hearing its particular form of articulation as it manifests itself in the Christian scriptures. Thus, as the message is brought to others, the first question is not "What must we share?" but rather, "How is God already present within this community, and how is the incarnation already understood in the particular forms and ways of being within this community?"

The idea that God is already present in the life of an individual or community is closely aligned with Rahner's theory of "anonymous Christianity"; it is necessary to "keep in mind both principles together, namely the necessity of Christian faith and the universal salvific will of God's love and omnipotence."[36] And it is precisely the idea of the anonymous Christian that "puts before it [the Church] the person to whom it addresses itself in his true hopeful condition so that it can approach him with confidence."[37]

The anonymous Christian is necessary given that the Christian understanding of the universal will of God is to save; the faith must account for the faith this grace produces in places which have yet to receive the overt preaching of the gospel. Rahner uses this argument to both counter questions about the necessity for naming and developing a theory of "anonymous Christians," while also arguing that grace freely given exists to be accepted or rejected prior to revelation history. When grace is explicitly recognized within history, then it dawns upon the person that all history is salvation history. He distinguishes between an explicit recognition, which we might understand as a conscious awareness of God's existence and presence through humans' acceptance of God's grace, culminating in the incarnation, and an indirect awareness, which seems to be based upon people who follow their conscience and live their lives in ways which are consistent with the explicit recognition of grace, save for the explicit recognition itself.

By distinguishing between grace and revelation history, Rahner provides a framework within which a person who is not overtly conscious of God's presence in the form of the Gospel message is still able to achieve a state of grace. Through universal grace, "the innermost dynamism of the world in general,"[38] any human who moves toward the divine is entering toward God. However, this movement toward the divine contains neither an explicit consciousness nor a definitive articulation of the divine.

[36] Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl-H and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 6:391.

[37] Ibid., 398. Interpolation mine.

[38] Karl Rahner, "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian,'" in *Theological Investigations,* trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 14:289.

In this sense, then, Rahner allows for a faith which is capable of developing into an explicitly conscious awareness of Christ and the Church, since the essence of Christianity (the grace of God) is present in this faith. And Rahner ascribes the name "anonymous Christian" to the person possessing this faith.

The presence of anonymous Christians means that the salvation preached by the Church also needs to be nuanced. Rahner explains that "salvation here is to be understood as the strictly supernatural and direct presence of God in himself afforded by grace."[39] Of central importance is the indication of salvation as the direct presence of God. This definition provides a challenge and should invite altering the assumptions of salvation as universally linked to a place called heaven within space and time. If God is understood as the horizon of mystery that surrounds and envelopes our existence, and thus the inexhaustible mystery, then entering into the fullness of that mystery is to receive salvation.

Salvation is also, however, supernatural and therefore transcendent. In other words, it is only ultimately achieved as we are transformed into our transcendent being. This would occur after death; however, its occurrence after death does not relegate it simply to some future state, which of course only makes sense within our historical-material existence. Once we are transformed into our transcendent being, future and past would cease to exist, as we would be in the presence of the infinite.

Given the interconnection between the transcendental and categorical in Rahner, one participates in the transcendent transformation when one undergoes transformation now, in the form of opening ourselves to the transcendent mystery that envelopes us and allowing ourselves to be "born anew" within this mystery. This is one example of what we typically refer to as the movement of the Spirit within us.

Instead of focusing on winning others over, one should focus on (and the Church should emphasize) entering more fully into the mystery of God's presence that envelopes our reality. This emphasis would transform the focus towards witnessing to others a life lived within that mystery, and thereby bringing others along on the path toward salvation. The missionary focus of this approach is thus to win people over towards explicit articulation of the faith, if that fulfills their ends, while also encouraging others to live their faiths more fully, which would also expand their participation in the ultimate mystery. The result is a salvation-centric expression which allows and encourages Christians to live their salvation more fully and to make explicit the invisible presence of God.

[39] Karl Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," in *Theological Investigations,* trans. David Morland, O.S.B. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979), 16:200.

More importantly, however, this approach would move from Christianity being a closed system towards being more open and engaged with the concrete realities with which it comes into contact. Rahner reminds us that "'anonymous Christianity' signifies first and foremost that interior grace which forgives man and gives him a share in the Godhead even before baptism."[40] This allows for a refocusing on mission as the task by which the Church makes "God's grace manifest here below in all its possible forms and in all historical spheres and contexts."[41] As a result of this effort, the focus can shift towards a more open and critical engagement in the particular spheres of existence, directing one's attention towards communities in which God's presence is already operative rather than simply focusing on individuals who are aware of the presence of the grace of God in an implicit and anonymous way.

Rahner's theological movement thus begins with taking the human person and experience seriously. This leads him to draw a connection between nature and grace that shows their interrelation and avoids extrinsicism. He then shows how the human person is open to and drawn towards God, even if the person is not explicitly aware of it. Opening oneself to this relationship with God involves entering into the mystery of the "already present," and the "not yet fully present" is best responded to with prayer. The fulfillment of this mystery is the incarnation, through which God becomes present in history.

Given that the incarnation is historical but with universal significance, it is possible that some individuals who are not yet aware of Christ explicitly have lived their lives as if they were aware of the truth revealed by Christ. It is possible thus to speak of anonymous Christians and therefore, the salvific focus of Christianity may be on discovering how the salvific will of God is already present in individuals, rather than bringing that salvation to them. The result is an invitation to explore and engage with individuals about the ways in which God is already present in their lives, rather than to assume one brings all the answers. This focus on exploration and engagement will move from focusing on individuals to focusing on communities, since the historical context and articulation of God's presence will be communal or cultural, rather than individual.

In wrapping up this section on Rahner, it is important to discuss a few critiques of his work, because these point to possible additional ways of engaging postcolonial theory. One of the common areas of critique of

[40] Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church," in *Theological Investigations*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 12:165.

[41] Ibid., 176.

Rahner concerns his seemingly, in Stephen Duffy's words, "romantic idealization of originating, prethematic experience, thus overlooking the complex, problematic character of human experience in history and society."[42] The result is that his "metaphysical fascination does not afford sufficiently strong grounds for critiquing the modern fascination with instrumental and technical rationality and its offspring, consumerism."[43] Critics argue that Rahner's focus on the transcendent foundation of existence inhibits his ability to take people's particular lived realities seriously and to understand the complexity of lived experiences. Rather than interpreting these critiques as problems that render inadequate Rahner's entire theological corpus, postcolonial theory provides a framework and perspective that augment Rahner's transcendental focus by creating locations for creative revisioning. This potential for creative revisioning becomes particularly more apparent since consumerism is closely allied with the larger movement of transnational capitalism, which many postcolonial theorists see as the prime mover of new forms of oppression and marginalization.

Duffy points out that many of Rahner's critics are ultimately directing their critique towards Rahner's readers, rather than Rahner himself, because the hermeneutics of suspicion, which also informs postcolonial theory, is more properly seen as an extension of Rahner's project, rather than a critique of it.

> The historical identity of Christianity cannot be explained by speculative thought without regard to the constitutive role of Christian praxis. This hermeneutics of suspicion aims not at negating Rahner's transcendental anthropology but at *realizing* its intention of turning to the subject in its concrete social context and praxis. Thus the hermeneutics of suspicion conduces to a hermeneutics of recovery.[44]

The hermeneutics of recovery to which this critique refers provides the possibility for constructive engagement with the challenges of postcolonial theory, where the critique offered by political and liberation theologies (which employ the hermeneutics of suspicion to ground Christian praxis) points to a limitation in the work of Rahner.

[42] Stephen J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 338.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

Moreover, Duffy argues further elsewhere that, in spite of the criticisms of Rahner raised by political and liberation theologians, they are dependent to a large degree on Rahner's articulation of a Christian anthropology.[45] Rahner's anthropology thus provides a basis and foundation, if not an explicit articulation, for interaction with others and engagement with the concrete particular location in which individuals and communities find themselves. Thus, while Rahner's anthropology is criticized for not explicitly and sufficiently engaging the question of praxis and particular locations, one might yet find the resources to see how Rahner has helped theological anthropology shift "from the question of 'what it is to be human' to 'What does it mean for humans to be in relationship to the self, others, the world, and with God?'"[46]

Key Themes in Postcolonial Theory and Theologies

While Rahner's monumental contributions to theology, and in particular to understanding how the interaction between nature and grace within the individual leads to communal participation, has been widely recognized and applauded, it has also been questioned for its tendency to focus on an abstract person divorced from a particular context. This tendency to abstraction can be seen as a result of the tensions inherent in Rahner's work as he attempts to take seriously both the concrete existence of the person and the transcendental ground of that existence. These tensions allow for constructive creativity in responding to particular realities.

On the other hand, this tendency to abstraction can also be seen as one way in which Rahner's theology is centrally European and therefore complicit in and with the larger colonial movement of Europe and the West. Homi Bhabha interrogates this tendency within Western thought, even in progressive thinkers like Michel Foucault. He critiques Foucault, and implicitly the movement of Western intellectual traditions, for the ways in which it constructs an image of "man" which has been "dehistoricized." The problem is that this movement fails to account for the ways in which power is operative in the West and in the construction of "Man," as he states, "The invisible power that is invested in this dehistoricized figure of Man is gained at the cost of those 'others'—women, natives, the colonized, the indentured

[45] For more on this point, see Stephen J. Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 85-114.

[46] Susan Abraham, *Identity, Ethics and Nonviolence in Postcolonial Theory: A Rahnerian Theological Assessment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), xii.

and enslaved—who, at the same time but in other spaces, were becoming peoples without a history."[47]

However, while these limitations are evident within the Western tradition, they have not prevented postcolonial theorists from engaging with Western concepts and structures. In fact, postcolonial theory has attempted to critique and dismantle the ways in which Western ideological and theoretical systems have been complicit in the colonizing history of the West, consistent with Tanner's argument that culture needs to be critiqued for the ways in which the understanding of culture has been complicit with the colonizing history of the West.

Postcolonial theory grew out of the challenges identified within Edward Said's seminal text *Orientalism*, in which he critiques both the idea of the "West" and the idea of the "Orient." As he states in his preface to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of his text, this critique links with the dynamics of understanding contemporary history.

> I emphasize in it [*Orientalism*] that neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has an ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other. That these supreme fictions lend themselves easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion has never been more evident than in our time.[48]

Said's argument problematizes the clear distinctions amongst various locations and their qualifications as being rooted more in the power and exploitation of the "orient" by European nations, rather than in some inherent characteristics found in the cultures described as the "orient." Therefore, "his most critical challenge to colonialism was that the 'Orient' was basically a political, ideological, and imaginative creation of European culture during the post-Enlightenment period."[49]

The construction of the orient as "a political, ideological and imaginative creation" provides a framework for theorists attempting to interrogate the ways by which theology assumes and incorporates understandings of culture as it develops concepts and reflections, as well as ways in which theology coming from imperial and colonial centers fail to recognize their own complicity in the colonial project. Movements within political and liberation

[47] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 197.
[48] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), xvii. Interpolation mine.
[49] Wong Wai Ching, "Postcolonialism," in *Dictionary of Third World Theologies,* ed. Virginia Fabella, MM and R.S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 169.

theologies need to remember that "postcolonial theory offers an invaluable vantage point on theology, because it interrogates how religious and cultural productions are enmeshed in the economic and political domination of colonialism and empire building."[50] The movement towards history and histories of suffering and marginalization taken up by political and liberation theologies thus need to become more interdisciplinary through more effective engagement with social theory if they are to truly bring about liberation and transformation, including liberating theology from its complicity in the colonial history of the "West."

Interrogating the ways in which theology became entangled with colonialism and empire-building is not simply an historical project of determining how theology has been complicit in the colonizing of peoples; it also provides a discourse for challenging the ways in which theology is done and the methods it employs. In particular, since theological and religious discourse is embedded within universities and is often performed by local cultural elites, it becomes complicit in the reproduction of power and oppression evident within these locations. In addition, the assumption that theology comprises a unique discipline whose borders are "policed" and maintained by ecclesiastical authorities and professional structures of promotion and publication within academia, becomes a focus for questioning by postcolonial theorists.

One challenge confronted by those dialoguing with postcolonial theory concerns its fluid method that is not easily applied to particular situations. Amongst postcolonial theorists, even the term "postcolonialism" itself is open to debate. However, while the methodology itself is fluid, some theorists point to markers in their own work that help them navigate the intellectual terrain as they interrogate the intersections between colonization and the intellectual apparatus of the West, which includes the practice of religion and the academic work of theologians.

A primary feature of postcolonial theory is that it "'disarticulates' power from the centers that name spaces (e.g., contexts, national identity, religious identity, or communitarian forms of identity) or time (e.g., history, modernity, epochs, eras, ages) by pointing out the way language and discourse operate to impose a preferred order on the lives of subjugated people."[51] Disarticulation invites one to resist oppression by critiquing discourses and becoming aware of how they rationalize and legitimize oppression, while also

[50] Kwok Pui-Lan, "Theology and Social Theory," in *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians*, ed. Kwok Pui-Lan, Don H. Compier, and Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 19.

[51] Abraham, "What Does Mumbai," 378.

recognizing that claims to clear binary delineations, for example, oppressor-oppressed or colonizer-colonized, are ultimately human constructions and more problematic than helpful in their articulations.

Sandoval, in her work on oppositional consciousness, has attempted to weave together multiple perspectives in order to develop a consciousness that resists all forms of oppression. She expresses concern with what she perceives as the ideological limitations and weaknesses of feminist theory[52] that have tended to reproduce the marginalization of voices within the feminist movement. Specifically, the charges that "hegemonic feminist theoreticians and activists are trapped within the rationality of this structure, which sublimates or disperses the theoretical specificity of US third-world feminism,"[53] necessitate an alternative consciousness that creates discursive and a theoretical space that incorporates the experience of US third-world feminists.

Sandoval counters this hegemonic tendency within the feminist movement by employing a "differential consciousness." Differential consciousness allows one who is confronting injustice and working for justice to navigate the theoretical and ideological frames available, in order to "effectively transform them out of their hegemonic versions," as each frame becomes "ideological and *tactical* weaponry for confronting the shifting currents of power."[54] Sandoval identifies these oppositional theoretical and ideological frames as "equal rights," "revolutionary," "supremacist," and "separatist,"[55] and in a later work, argues that "the differential form of oppositional consciousness is both another mode of these oppositional ideologies and at the same time a transcendence of them."[56]

Differential consciousness becomes important in the contemporary world because of the shifts in poles of injustice against which "citizen-subjects" must struggle. The need for this struggle comes about as a result of a shifting world order and the manifestation of new forms of oppression.

[52] Many theorists working in postcolonial theory also employ feminist, liberationist, womanist, and other perspectives which confront power and oppression that is replicated in spite of their avowed positions against power and oppresison. Thus, while the aim here is to discuss postcolonial theory, it is impossible to avoid engaging other frameworks that inform and deepen postcolonial theory, without being able to give adequate articulation to how they relate to one another on a broader scale.

[53] Chela Sandoval, "US Third-World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (New York: Routledge, 2003), 84.

[54] Ibid., 89.

[55] Sandoval discusses these in detail in"US Third-World Feminism," 80-85, 87-88. The particularities of each frame are unnecessary for this essay.

[56] Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, foreword by Angela Y. Davis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 183.

> With the transnationalization of capitalism, when elected officials are no longer leaders of singular nation-states but nexuses for multinational interests, it also becomes possible for citizen-subjects to become activists for a new decolonizing global terrain, a psychic terrain that can unite them with similarly positioned citizens-subjects within and across national borders into new, post-Western-empire alliances.[57]

Sandoval thus sees oppositional consciousness as fluid and adaptable given the unique manifestations of oppression, because traditional structures responsible for justice—such as political structures in relation to economic systems and policies—have themselves become fluid and co-opted as agents rationalizing and legitimizing this oppression.

Oppositional consciousness is lived not simply through individuals who resist oppression, but also by communities of resistance that resist co-optation through "coalitional consciousness." Coalitional consciousness develops across lines of resistance to develop a theoretical topography that informs and guides communal resistance because "theory, however staid and final, even when it situates identity in a desperate move toward final knowledge, is also capable of enabling the development of a common community of understanding that can, in its collective will, further politically oppositional goals."[58] Communities that coalesce around these theoretical frames that inform resistance can be called oppositional communities.

While Sandoval's work primarily concerns questions between feminist and postcolonial theory, Kwok probes the intersections of postcolonial theory, feminist theory, and religion within the context of being an Asian. She identifies three key imaginations within postcolonial studies—historical, dialogical, and diasporic—that function as movements which help the theorist to probe the fissures, cracks, and openings that tend to be marginalized because they do not fit within particular frameworks.

Historical imagination serves to bring forth the voices and experiences that have been neglected or ignored in history, or that have been fragmented and thus effectively silenced. Creating space for these voices or recovering lost experiences shows that "the historical imagination aims not only to reconstitute the past but also to release the past so that the present is livable."[59]

[57] Ibid., 184.
[58] Ibid., 79.
[59] Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 37.

This effort, however, does not strive to imagine a unitary, essentialized experience, but rather, strives to maintain the Asian connection between community and identity.

> It is necessary to distinguish between a Western habit of "essentializing" and "homogenizing" human experience and the self (as most clearly seen in the colonial enterprise) and the womanist and Asian cultural constructions of the self, which are rooted in and understood through the communal experience.[60]

Kwok insists that the focus should be on the concrete and complex ways that identity is navigated within locations that emphasize community over individuality, and on not assuming that identities can simply be homogenized. This allows for more practical articulations of hope because ultimately the future "is a historical imagination of the concrete and not the abstract, a hope that is more practical and therefore not so easily disillusioned, and a trust that is born out of necessity and well-worn wisdom."[61]

Given the emphasis on community in navigating and resisting essentialized, unified identities, Kwok's second imagination emphasizes the need to bring together the multiplicity of voices within Asia which are neither fixed nor stagnant.

> Dialogical imagination will need to consider the theoretical challenge coming from the studies of the contact zone, which foreground the modes and zones of contact between dominant and subordinate groups, between people with different and multiple identities. . . . Dialogical imagination also has to capture the fluidity and contingent character of Asian cultures, which are undergoing rapid and multidimensional changes.[62]

Asia is not simply a place, but rather the location of the intersection of changing and developing identities which come from a multitude of sources and influences. As a result, Kwok suggest transition and pilgrimage as the dominant motifs for theology done in the context of Asia, since the journey itself is fruitful, whether or not one arrives at a particular conclusion or destination.

[60] Ibid., 36. Kwok maintains the Chinese practice of placing her "family name" first, and thus Kwok will be used as the "last name" in subsequent references and in the works cited page.

[61] Ibid., 38.

[62] Ibid., 43.

> The notion of *transition*, which destabilizes a fixed time and space, and resists pinning down by preconceived identities or satisfaction with ready-made answers. Provisional and going in different directions of transition is radically open to new spaces and questions. In a more religious vein, there is the time-honored notion of *pilgrimage*, conceived as either a outward or upward journey, wherein one leaves the local and the familiar to search for the sacred, the global, or the divine.[63]

The emphasis on transition and pilgrimage brings Kwok to her third imagination, which is significant because "diasporic imagination recognizes the diversity of diasporas and honors the different histories and memories."[64] Given that Asia and Asian identity is not static, it is also important to include those that have travelled and dispersed, whether throughout Asia or throughout the world. Though the stories and experiences may not originate in Asia, Kwok argues that one can still cull other cultures and stories which may inform one's identity since a "diasporic consciousness finds similarities and differences in both familiar territories and unexpected corners; one catches glimpses of oneself in a fleeting moment or in a fragment in someone else's story."[65]

Kwok's three imaginations—historical, dialogical, and diasporic—provide movements by which once can revision the past to recreate new perspectives on what to struggle against and to work for in the future. The power of imagining is that it allows one "to discern that something is not fitting, to search for new images, and to arrive at new patterns of meaning and interpretation."[66] The emphasis is thus on exploring and engaging possible locations of meaning and insights that may be drawn from them. Because she is articulating a movement to struggle against co-optation of Asian identity and to articulate a discursive space for Asian theology, her work provides an example of the oppositional consciousness to which Sandoval refers.

Sandoval and Kwok thus provide several aspects of postcolonial theory useful for dialogue with the work of Karl Rahner. Sandoval provides a framework within which one can resist as he or she becomes aware of and responds to the forms of oppression that permeate contemporary realities, while Kwok's movements create particular locations for critically

[63] Ibid., 44.
[64] Ibid., 49.
[65] Ibid., 50.
[66] Ibid., 30.

interrogating and developing new discursive spaces for creating new ways of theorizing that exemplify Sandoval's coalitional oppositional consciousness.

Rahner and Postcolonial Theory: Oppositional Communities as Locations of Grace

Postcolonial thinkers raise a significant challenge to the tension in Rahner's work between the concrete, historical situation within which the individual finds himself or herself, and the transcendental reality that helps to give meaning to how God communicates and is made present in the world. Rahner takes seriously the human person and the person's experience. His articulation of the interaction between nature and grace places an emphasis on the absolute mystery that surrounds and envelops the human person while giving voice to the particular experience of each individual. This interaction between nature and grace further shows how the human person is open to and drawn towards God, even if the person is not explicitly aware of it, and that this interaction takes place in communities as well as within the individual.

While this movement within Rahner's work is significant because it respects both the individual's experience and the transcendent ground of existence, the complexity of individual existence tends to be overlooked or minimized. Postcolonial theorists react against this reductionism by arguing that it is representative of the empire-building of the West which utilizes reductionist definitions of humanity to co-opt and marginalize colonized peoples. The result is a suspicion of all claims to transcendental and universal understandings of the human person. This seems to create a border around postcolonial theory and Rahner's modern theology that cannot be overcome.

However, in spite of this seemingly insurmountable barrier to interaction between Rahner and postcolonial theory, Abraham argues that this border may prove to be porous. She argues that if theology can pay attention to the significance of culture and oppression, the "boundaries between the disciplines of postcolonial theory and modern theology [can be made] porous [through] an imaginative capacity defined by some postcolonial theorists as 'subaltern reason': a mode of critical and imaginative thinking that is characterized by its site of articulation at the margins of hegemonic knowledge."[67] The challenge becomes balancing metaphysical thinking with a thorough account of the particularity of individuals and communities, and their histories.[68] This will necessitate moving the focus from the center

[67] Ibid., 203. Interpolation mine.
[68] For more on this point, see Abraham, *Identity, Ethics, and Nonviolence*, 196-97.

to the margins in theological discourse, while opening up oppositional consciousness to "an ontology of peace [that] has to undergird a critique of violence"[69] to allow for interaction through the border.

Oppositional communities provide a space for articulating the nuances and realities of particular cultures, communities, and their histories of oppression. Kwok provides a method for Asian feminist theology that employs historical, dialogical, and diasporic imaginations that are responsible to and open paths for addressing Asian realities. Her use of the various imaginations as a source of opposition within the Asian faith community exemplifies Sandoval's oppositional consciousness within the Asian context. Kwok points out the need for resisting co-optation within Asian religious traditions by focusing on new and alternative readings of culture and of the faith. Kwok's description of how one becomes aware of and resists these realities of exploitation and marginalization is part of the development of Sandoval's differential consciousness.

The development of oppositional consciousness can be further seen as Asian theologians engage in discussions of how the Christian faith is lived in community in Asia, while at the same time questioning and critiquing the term Asia itself and the historical relationship between Christianity and empire-building. Thus, it is not simply a question of what it means to believe within the Asian context, it is also a question of whether one can speak of an Asia, multiple "Asias," or simply must resist using the term altogether. It is also a question of how faith has served to motivate resistance to colonization, strengthened the colonial project, and provided other positive benefits to nations and cultures in Asia. Oppositional consciousness is thus shown to navigate multiple identities and locations, because resistance includes confronting oppression and injustice within the concrete historical experience of marginalization.

Since these questions arise out of a concrete experience of marginalization within Christianity, and lead Kwok as a theologian to clarify what it means to be Asian, female, and Christian, Rahner would argue these are examples of transformation toward the infinite horizon that surrounds and inform our questioning. The motivation and yearning within the person and the honest recognition that prevailing structures of identity and meaning—including the identities constructed by the faith community itself—need to be resisted because of the injustice and the disempowerment they cause is an essential part of developing oppositional consciousness. The mere act of questioning and struggling to resist simplistic answers is evidence itself of grace at work

[69] Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 58. Interpolation mine.

in the person and the community. Rahner would identify the community being drawn towards the foundation of all justice as their resistance develops into a coalitional response that rejects the representations of oppressions and recognize the need to confront oppression as an experience of being drawn more fully into the mystery of life.

A further reflection from Rahner is seen when the oppositional community moves to articulate its opposition in relation to a lived tradition of faith. Thus, while on the one hand postcolonial theorists would be quick to critique the ways in which the notion of tradition can be oppressive, it is also important to articulate how the tradition can be liberative, and what is meant in articulating the Asian subject who engages these three imaginations.

Rahner's account of grace grounds the full subjectivity of oppositional communities. In other words, oppositional communities that coalesce around particular experiences of resistance that lead to identification of new discursive spaces, are linked with the fullness of the humanity of the community. These communities are developing a shared responsibility that manifests "Christian love of neighbor and communion acquir[ing] a field they have never known: the field of the political, the field of responsibility for the social structures required for a life worth human living."[70] The result is a truly catholic understanding of what it means to be human that takes seriously both the particularity of the individual experience and the transcendent ground of existence.

The interaction between postcolonial theory and Karl Rahner's theology thus bears the fruits of engagement. Postcolonial theory provides a challenge to the tendency to generic reductionism in Rahner. It provides a nuanced appraisal of specific experiences of marginalization and oppression and the struggle against those experiences of subjugation through oppositional communities which resist co-optation. At the same time, Rahner's theology shows how the movement within oppositional consciousness and communities can be shown to be linked to the mystery that envelops our existence and informs oppositional movements. The effect is the potential to dialogue with and challenge the tradition while helping to create truly catholic understanding of the meaning of humanity.

Recognizing, as Rahner does, that we are constantly in process and constantly moving in relationship to ourselves, to others and to God, and thus never really fully aware of ourselves, opens the door for different and divergent ways of being, but always in community with others. These

[70] Karl Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, trans. Robert Barr (Middlegreen, England: St. Paul Publications, 1983), 90. Interpolation mine.

communities are always particular locations with specific histories and experiences which inform their status as subjects. Postcolonial theory creates discursive space to articulate and develop oppositional communities which can build upon the critique and constructive imagination of postcolonial theorists concerning the experience of being subjects. These communities and their resistance against oppression and marginalization are brought into discussion with a fuller grounding of subjectivity through interaction with Rahner's synthesis of the concrete and the transcendental. These communities are both critical and oppositional, while also being reconstructive. And they provide concrete examples that Rahner's transcendental anthropology, when critically melded with postcolonial theory and critique, provides a way for developing oppositional communities that serve as incarnated challenges to oppression and violence in our contemporary church and world.

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