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LITURGY AND POSTCOLONIALISM: 
AN INTRODUCTION

Cláudio Carvalhaes

INTRODUCTION

This book is a reading of the liturgical field with postcolonial and decolonial lenses. Both assume a critical view of and acknowledge the complexities involved in entanglements with and against colonialism in the search for autonomous ways of being and living. While both postcolonialism and decolonialism have important theoretical differences,1 and some authors will like to use one term over the other, in this book the two terms are used interchangeably, and so will be assumed to be synonymous throughout the book. They are modes of analysis in which social, cultural, religious, gendered, sexual, and economic ways of living are assessed critically by those who have been victimized by patterns of structural domination, and have been dismissed from the historical processes of life creation: namely, the poor, the disenfranchised, the subaltern, the wretched of the earth, and the colonized. Postcolonial thinking follows Audre Lorde, who said, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,”2 and goes to the master’s house with different tools in order to dismantle structures of oppression that lie under past and present discourses and practices of control.

The colonizer/colonized are always involved in decolonial thinking in many and yet unimaginable ways. The colonial presence in many places has defined maps, people, sovereignties, culture, notions of public and private, state, religion, imagery, ways of thinking, believing, and so on. At the heart of it, the bodies, the conscious and unconscious lives of people, have been forced, manipulated, and controlled to act, obey, and adjust to certain forms of power in specific places. Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes the presence of colonialism within the history of indigenous people: “The talk about the colonial past is embedded in our political discourse, our humor, poetry, music, storytelling and other common sense ways of passing on both a narrative of history and an attitude about history.”3 This presence has meant the negation of people’s own creations, autonomous ways of living, and sovereignties.
In this book, authors dissect how colonizers have exploited notions of worship and liturgical practices, and how those on the receiving end of these notions have responded to such forms of exploitation, in a variety of ways. The volume expands the field of postcolonialism by engaging liturgy/liturgical studies/liturgical theology and creating what I am calling here “postcolonial liturgical theologies” (PLTs). PLTs are ways in which praxis, theories, and theologies of religious groups are engaged in order to challenge those times when the imperial, colonizing power dynamics of domination use religious ideologies/reifications as instruments of an agenda of conquering and dismissal, undermining autonomies and destruction of people’s lives, wisdom, and sovereignties.

Additionally, and fundamentally, any work that wants to deal with PLTs must engage interreligious perspectives. The life, theologies, and rituals of non-Christian religions and peoples must trouble the theological exclusivity of the givenness of God in Christ. While this book wrestles mostly with Christianity, we have tried to avoid reducing everyone else’s past to a single history of Christian discussions. Our lives and futures are all tied together, and none of us is liberated until all, of all traditions, have been liberated. For that matter, when we use and create PLTs, we must engage deeply with the many ways in which each people fosters its own liberation. As Vine Deloria says, “If we are then to talk seriously about the necessity of liberation, we are talking about the destruction of the whole complex of Western theories of knowledge and the construction of a new and more comprehensive synthesis of human knowledge and experience.” And in order to do that, we must juxtapose our daily struggles, practices, theories, traditions, and imagination. As Andrea Smith says, “The theological imagination then becomes central to envisioning the world we would actually want to live in. At the 2005 World Liberation Theology Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, indigenous peoples from Bolivia stated they know another world is possible because they see that world whenever they do their ceremonies.” Our ceremonies, liturgies, and rituals must carry the seeds for this possible world.

I am forever grateful to all of the contributors scattered around the globe, who, in this volume, probe several aspects of the liturgical field. Each writer freely chose what she or he thought was the most important thing to wrestle with in this project from a postcolonial/decolonial perspective. The very plurality of the methodologies and approaches used here might be the best witness to postcolonial theory. Christian thinkers have written most of the essays in this book, but we also have one Jewish and two Muslim voices. That ratio is still certainly imbalanced, but is, perhaps, a good beginning. Also, it was a difficult task to organize the authors into chapters and the division used here is unsuccessful. In spite of dividing them into regions/contexts, some authors talk about different things and contexts, making the chapters somewhat incoherent. It is important
to point out that these essays discuss how liturgies/rituals function and have functioned in specific colonial contexts rather than giving present in-depth descriptions and analyses of specific rituals or liturgies.

**Liturgical Uniformity and Multiplicities**

For this introduction, I will depart from a specifically Christian perspective, hoping to offer some connections and disagreements with other traditions. Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns were the first to write about postcolonial perspectives of Christian worship. They reflected:

> From a postcolonial perspective, there is much to critique in the study of liturgy and the celebration of Christian worship…The crucial point for us relates to the challenge of handling and negotiating the weight that tradition carries in the construction of what passes as acceptable worship or worship that is affirmed in liturgical theology. ⁶

The word “liturgy” comes from the Greek *leitourgia*, or “the work of the people,” and was first related to how people used to organize their lives within the city, including by means of its festivals and civic duties. Nowadays, liturgies are used by various religions to organize their worship and their rituals to honor God, Gods, and/or the divine. Liturgies and liturgical theologies help organize religions with a plethora of actions, vocabularies, and a specific grammar that define forms of reasoning and bodily movements, shaping faith or religious life with flowing, movable, and plural senses of identity. Liturgies/rituals not only organize the religious life within sacred spaces or sanctuaries, but also interpret the life of the individual and the group in the world and consequently interpret the world itself. Liturgies are powerful actions that tell us what and how to think, what (not) to do, how and what (not) to relate to, what to avoid, and so on. Liturgical religious movements shape bodies, minds, spirits, politics, economies, and nation-states. From the beginning, Christian churches used liturgies to organize their world and its relationship with Earth and the cosmos, and to define who believers were while attempting to understand what and who God is in Jesus Christ in relation to all of these questions.

In many religions, liturgies/rites are filled with language, gestures, reasoning, expectations, forms of participation, and meanings that in some and many ways, shape contexts, the particular, and the universe. The multiplicity of liturgical/ritual forms, gestures, theologies, prayers, and practices enacted everywhere around the globe is endless, as endless as the human imagination, and provides a fantastic source for the ongoing construction of our identities and worldviews. The spread of religions beyond local contexts has expanded forms of faith and ways of living,
transforming religious, cultural, and social practices while being deeply affected by it all as well.

Due to the multiplicity and intrinsic plurality of Christianity since its very beginning, churches have tried to find ways to create norms, forms, prescriptions, and formulas of agreement to attest to the authority of its rites and, for that matter, its authenticity and distinct marks and its theological, liturgical, and social practices. Those complex formulas attempted to shape how the Christian faith should be spiritually/ethically lived, performed, believed, imposed, bounded, and shared. Liturgies, imagined and created by various Christian churches, are privileged places where religious/social processes of organization happen. Nothing less than life and death, under specific categories and understandings of the holy/divine, are at stake in religious liturgical actions. Consequently, at every liturgical/ritual gathering, a whole sense of what it means to be human is enacted.

At its heart, liturgical/ritual dynamics are deeply related to power, either maintaining or opposing powers already in place. Whoever holds religious power defines, allows, authorizes, and demands the proper practices/behaviors of the faith—a flight from the first liturgical sense of the work of the people to the work of specialists done on behalf of the people. Hierarchical structures of power have in many cases alienated the people’s participation in liturgy and worship, and have walled them off into a state of being no more than receivers of the holy things.

However, while religious institutions define themselves by the ways they define their sacred stri(u)ctures of power, access, and practices, people also engage official rituals and define the holy according to their needs. People follow liturgies as prescribed, but they also do whatever they want with them. From high to low masses and worship services, people add and delete language, mix the official with nonauthorized sources, blending religious symbols and actions, imagining and sometimes redoing people, rituals and language completely in multiple possibilities of conscious and unconscious engagements with God/the divine and one another. While empires and colonization processes tried to fix rituals as a way of controlling senses, understandings, and bodies, colonized people have always intervened in these processes, creating, rebelling, challenging, undoing, and redoing, from the margins and assumed places of powerlessness, forms of reaffirmation of life and resistance with old and new theological understandings of God. In this way, postcolonial readings in liturgical and ritual processes unveil how people who could not afford the power to hold holy things intervened in official systems, redoing their own forms of meaning, life, and survival. 7

From these places, usually at the margins of systems, local people are traditioning other forms of theological-liturgical life, engaging what they have received with their own knowledge, senses, rationality, and perceptions, recreating a world where the sacred and what matters in life are
perceived differently. These knowledges, which Michel Foucault called the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges," have always existed and have, in many ways, been perceived as a threat to the establishment of the proper forms of religion, including Christianity. According to Foucault, these knowledges are "historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functional coherence or formal systematization...naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required levels of cognition and scientificity." It is from these often hidden, forbidden, made negative and shameful treasures that this book arises, bringing forth a fantastic array of knowledge, visions, perceptions, paradoxes, engagements, challenges, and practices from people who love and wrestle with their liturgical practices and the work of the people in their own religious traditions.

PLTs work at the borders, within a critical border thinking/pensamiento fronterizo/Nepantla/third space, challenging the Eurocentric sense of the (liturgical) world. In this thinking, displacement, fractures, transitions, reverse thinking, interruptions, interventions, a different map of honor, power and colonial territoriality, crossing classes, identities, desires, bodies and sexualities, languages, and so on are some of the markers of this hermeneutics, and offer a new way of looking at liturgical traditions and resources. Faithfulness thus might mean something different than what we are used to. Faithfulness to whom, or to whose God?

**The Liturgical Turn**

What I call the liturgical turn within liturgical thinking has to do first with the "Liturgical Reform" that happened along with the twentieth-century ecumenical movement. Within Protestantism, the World Council of Churches, with its assemblies and documents such as BEM: Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry and Lima Liturgy, helped foster the renewal of the Church. Within the Roman Catholic Church, we see liturgical reform taking shape after Vatican II, and also before that, with the 1963 document Sacrosanctum Concilium calling the church to liturgical renewal. In these documents, languages and practices started to evidence new thinking and movements within Christian churches. The Liturgical Reform was a form of aggiornamento, that is, updating the church with new developments and changes around the world.

Liturgical reform also affected/took place within the Pentecostal movement. Beyond the realm of historically Protestant Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostal and, later, New Pentecostal Churches have profoundly affected liturgical/theological ways of worshipping God. The Pentecostal movement provoked a different kind of rationality, a more bodily feeling of connectivity with God and the world, new ways of being liturgically fully stretched before God, arguing against a Protestant rationalistic approach and opening space for...
human emotions. Pentecostal Christians gained a somewhat immediate relation to God who manifested Godself in their own bodies with a different *imprimatur* of authenticity. Other churches operating under the shadow of larger ecclesial institutions, such as the Quakers, Waldensians, Mennonites, Unitarians, Baptists, Evangelicals, and Black churches in the United States, were also part of the liturgical renewal, as were religious movements such as the popular religiosity of Roman Catholic believers who invented popular uses of liturgy for their own sake and daily needs.¹⁶ With mainline churches losing their place in the consumerist culture of the United States, new formats of church are appearing, and prosperity gospel churches/liturgies are growing everywhere. Moreover, it is the churches of immigrants and the undocumented that are fundamentally renewing our liturgies yet again, but with very little attention from major churches. The liturgical turn is back: uncontrolled, messy, informed by unthinkable sources, and nowadays deeply marked by the effects of the economic neoliberal system in full force.

Consequently, a whole array of studies around contextualization and inculturation prompted new forms of thinking, wrestling with indigenous practices that were not accepted before. New forms of liturgical theologies, practices, and behaviors were negotiated under the umbrella of cultural differences.¹⁷ Not only Roman Catholics but also Protestants engaged in this new frame of thinking, especially because of the growing presence of Christianity from the South, its oddness, lack of proper subservience, and the growing difficulties of colonizing churches and holding (to) the strictures of former ways of liturgizing/ritualizing/understanding/living the faith. Liberation theologies were/are challenging our established liturgical theologies in many ways as well.

In addition to these changes, recent approaches to New Testament scholarship have provoked those within the liturgical field to update their theological conclusions, and have evidenced a plurality of novel perspectives that have expanded the field in different directions.¹⁸ Diversities and multiplicities of early Christian liturgies, prayers, understandings of leadership, theologies, and practices implicated in the mixture of the *lex orandi* (law of prayer) and *lex credendi* (law of belief), have expanded the possibilities of thinking and practicing faith, sometimes debunking myths of former New Testament and liturgical theological scholarship that wanted to hold on to strict forms of liturgy that had shaped the entirety of Christianity. One example of this type of scholarship is represented by Gregory Dix and his poetic and theologically spellbinding *The Shape of Liturgy*.¹⁹ While still a classic and a main resource for much of the liturgical renewal movement, this book can no longer *hold* its basic premise that there is/was a uniform shape of liturgy that can be traced back to this once imagined monolithic thing called the early Christian church or Christian liturgy, in the singular. New sources of scholarship have broken
ground for new liturgical theologies that are now coming from many places around the globe other than Europe or the United States.

Liturgical theologians from the Southern hemisphere, along with some from Europe and the United States, are bringing new vocabularies and bibliographical sources into discussion. They are radically changing a field that often relied on European/US thinking, and that used cases from the world South only as illustrations to enhance what really mattered in their (northern) liturgical theological argument and to maintain the structures of patriarchal power/thinking.

Another aspect of the liturgical turn is the challenging of the very understanding of the liturgical episteme, or the construction of thinking, that we could define as Apollo over Dionysus. It was the Latin American, Anglican, liturgical theologian Jaci C. Maraschin who called our attention to this division. For him, our liturgical thinking was marked by a strong Apollonian structure, organized around order, harmony, and reason. Influenced by Nietzsche, Maraschin challenged us to trust the Spirit of God and let our thinking lean more toward Dionysus, the god of wine who represented joy, ecstasy, and pleasure, enabling us to perceive the lightness and the beauty of God that heavy, ordered thinking would never allow us to think, much less to experience. Maraschin was proposing a shift to the body without losing reason, opening liturgies to engage and love God through the desires, limits, joys, pains, and pleasures of the body in a more deeply incarnated way. Queer theologies are a result of this movement toward Dyonisus, confusing Plato’s black-and-white-horses.

To use another western philosophical structure, the whole of liturgical thinking is grounded in Descartes’s maxim, “I think therefore I exist,” and does not allow, for instance, Spinoza’s work on the emotions to be trusted. Life is matter and the result of proper thinking that organizes life within certain strictures that were very suspicious of emotions and body movements. This way of thinking entailed the vanishing of other peoples (any people) whose religious practices and emotions did not match the emotionless process of proper (Christian) thinking. In this way, the incorporation of peoples, such as the Jewish Marranos in Europe or the Africans brought to the Americas, and the ethnic cleansing of the Natives by white-colonized America, were examples of a normal flow of “engagement” with those who did not correspond to the proper human ways of feeling/thinking and, consequently, of living the Christian faith.

Nonetheless, the Portuguese researcher Antonio Damazio follows Spinoza in order to debunk Descartes’s maxim, resulting in the declaration, “I feel therefore I am.” As Walter Mignolo says, “A re-orientation has come about, a change from Being to Doing, a transformation of the classic philosophical questions.” Don Saliers, Ernesto Cardoso, Jaci C. Maraschin, and many others have helped us perceive life in an expansive
way in the field of liturgy.  

Even before Damazio, Saliers, Cardoso, and Maraschin, Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade gave us a new, key means of thinking about life: “Happiness is the proof of life.”

A whole reorientation for the lex credendi, lex orandi.

The liturgical turn is thus the extension of liturgical reform, still within what Gordon Lathrop calls “critical classicism,” which has to do with “the willing reception of traditional patterns and archaic symbols…” and “is marked by the willing elaboration of a contemporary critique of received traditions.”

We must not underestimate the power of liturgical renewal and must continue to accept the challenge of its work and possibilities. The liturgical turn does so by carrying forth traditioning, challenging its work and possibilities. The liturgical turn continues with the traditioning, challenging interpretations, questioning not only liturgical thinking and church practices, but also its many orders, symbols, forms of liturgical creation, understandings of bodies and sexualities, vocabularies, uses of the Bible, liturgical resources, forms of access to holy things, relations to economics and other fields, and so on.

Once given and taken for granted, the universal tent of proper liturgical thinking—that tried to fix liturgical practices and thinking and keep everything intact under the name of proper tradition—must now locate itself in very particular and contextual ways and ask if the proper is still important, possible, or even necessary. The creation of liturgical thinking now not only demands that the liturgical theologian locate her/himself in a specific context within a specific culture and local wisdom, but also names the whole array of sources of his/her own formation, biography, and production of knowledge, and responds to the realities of a local people. Breaking with the illusion of a linear, patriarchal way of liturgical thinking held by the centers of power and regurgitated everywhere else, PLTs aim to search and use subjugated knowledges, practices, vocabularies, and sources of the people at a certain place, which might lead us all to unforeseen liturgical/theological possibilities.

Within these subjugated knowledges, Mignolo calls our attention to the construction of knowledge and knowing. He calls for an “epistemological disobedience” that invites other forms of imagination, knowledge and knowing. In this process, we must be careful about how knowledge is constructed: Geo-politics of knowledge goes hand in hand with geo-politics of knowing. Who and when, why and where is knowledge generated (rather than produced, like cars or cell phones)? Asking these questions means to shift the attention from the enunciated to the enunciation. And by so doing, turning Descartes’ dictum inside out: rather than assuming that thinking comes before being, one assumes instead that it is a racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space that feels the urge or get the call to speak, to articulate, in whatever semiotic system, the urge that makes of living organisms “human” beings.
The formation and development of knowledge and knowing in our liturgies reveal how we want to hold life. Thus, at the liturgical turn’s core, there is more than just reform; there is the very living of life! Because life is not just what we think, but fundamentally how we think. As Mignolo says: “The maintenance of life is an expression of knowledge, a manifestation of adequate behavior in the domain of existence.”

Thus, to maintain the life of those who are not part of the current exclusory economic system and this self-enclosed European form of knowledge, we must reinvent knowledge itself so that we can exist. That means reclaiming knowledges, creating and exploring other forms of knowing—which means thinking and being church in many forms, including unexpected connections, checking power dynamics, bodily movements, unimagined juxtapositions of old and new symbols, emotions, unforeseen relations, and ecclesiastical power shifts as “necessary steps for imagining and building democratic, just, and non-imperial/colonial societies.”

New appropriations, expansive juxtapositions, challenging hegemones, reassessing sources and historical interpretations, checking and redrawing old maps, and naming patriarchal, racist, heterosexual thinking and social class structures, are now at the cusp of the liturgical turn. It is a new turn indeed, honoring what is liberative anywhere and dismantling systems of oppression, arrogance, domination, and exclusivism. Any postcolonial act is a work of love for the past, a work of sustenance for the present, lurking hopes for survival in the future; an ongoing critical, careful, and reckless action that works within and beyond the binary framework of liturgical thinking, trying to escape the exclusive western forms of understanding life and living the faith.

**Disseminating Identity and Difference**

Identity and appropriation, authenticity, mimicry, and mimesis are always at play in liturgical thinking/practices. The colonial discourse creates an identity that swallows difference and turns the multiplicity of the sacred into cultural uniformity and monotony. The question of identity, so present in Christian ecclesial traditions, may be an attempt to reify the imperial demand for sameness and a return to the colonial positivist discourse as proper order and progress. The very question of authenticity placed to colonized people is a form of continuous appropriation into the identity/identical forms of liturgical thinking and action and its ambivalent forms of power. The quest for identity also reifies symbols and structures of power in a form of essentialism, a kind of metaphysical place that comes “before” the thinking of identity.

The attempt to find norms and patterns of liturgical practices and thinking named before was part of the identity project that hoped to identify ecumenical ground around which Christian churches could gather. While
the search for unity is fundamental for our struggles, this project has forgotten that first, the search for unity is always a search for someone’s identities; and second, the very birth and consequent spread of Christianity have always been marked by differences, syncretism, endless changes, and ongoing, uneven reorganization of its many selves throughout history.

The structures of the liturgical field have always been at play in religious traditions, trying to foster one embracing discourse that establishes boundaries for practices, languages, and thinking through particular patterns of worship. This identity-shaped theology/liturgy has been a powerful tool within the missionary movement as well. Each denomination wanted to plant its particular flag in the newly “discovered” colonies, and ended up mirroring what already existed in the country/ies from which it came. For example, the many missionary movements in colonized countries created several denominational church buildings competing with one another on the same street, a situation no different from the one found in many streets throughout the United States. The same/different theology/liturgy identity discourse of denominational self-righteousness in this evangelizing-formative Christian project fostered a necessary self-distinction, and consequently, a distrust of other theologies and liturgies. Distinction as self-enclosed identity was as central a project as the message itself. Christ alone never went alone!

From a Latin American perspective, the colonization project used all of its instruments to engage the newly discovered worlds within the gospel of Jesus to erase differences, turning the other into the same/different of the missionary/church/culture/colonizer. Everything that looked different and couldn’t be recognized had to be destroyed. This project was liturgical, too. Liturgies were powerful weapons in this conquering/civilizing project. So much so that thinking and living, reasoning and behaving, were to be organized around certain religious practices. Teaching savages to properly worship has been an ongoing form of civilization. Only those who worshipped in civilized thinking/acting manners were considered human, a practice which required embracing a new identity, both of the gospel and of the missionary/colonizer. No wonder that during the era of slavery in the United States, black people, second-rate humans, were placed at the mezzanines whenever they were allowed to enter white people’s churches. Thus, religious colonialism, religious faith vis-à-vis Empire, was seen as a means of human development, the process by which a culture would gain technical tools and develop a proper sense of humanity. As R. S. Sugirtharajah says, even Reinhold Niebuhr saw colonialism as “an inevitable stage in the development of civilizations.”

Grace alone never went alone!

Within colonizing processes, the liturgical space was central to the life of a community. At the center of every city in Latin America, there is a
chapel, a church, or a cathedral, which is, or was, the center of life. The boundaries of the new world were drawn in liturgical practicing/thinking, establishing a spatial center from which life was organized. Moreover, the establishment of a center defined a periphery, where those noncompliant with the proper religious life and practices were segregated. Notions of essentials and adiaphoras also mark this center-periphery organization in theological and liturgical studies, throwing into the corners those who neither displayed the proper marks of the church, exhibited proper theological thinking, nor followed the proper liturgical rubrics. There is a list of things and people considered essential, fundamental to faith/power/holy things to occur. Our liturgical clothes are adamant reminders of that fact. Even the logic of ordaining converted indigenous priests/pastors, the ones who were friendly to the empire, was a tool to hold onto the center while claiming the periphery.32

Nonetheless, colonized people never received any colonial process without resistance. There has always been a dialectical movement between conquering and reactions (to that conquering) through large and small movements of fissures. Alfredo Bosi says:

The conquering Cross of the Crescent will be planted in the land of Brazil—wood and will subjugate the Tupis, but on behalf of the same cross, there will be calls for the freedom of natives and mercy for blacks. The cult celebrated in the Jesuit missions of Seven Peoples will also be prayed by the colonizers, anointed by their chaplains, who will slay them without mercy.33

The migration/dissemination of liturgies across the globe has found ways to intercept, refuse, diffuse, amplify, and dilute the interstices of the liturgical empire, forming new ways of being Christians within identities not always easily discerned.34 Even today, when liturgical systems of thinking/practicing try to hold to tight formulas, or ascribe a single cultural liturgical order, since every liturgical order is indeed cultural, these systems come up against the variety of human creation, turning any attempt to hold on to one liturgical order increasingly more difficult.

The “leakiness of imperial boundaries,”35 as Gandhi Leela reminds us, has been there from the outset. That means that liturgical systems have always been porous, ambivalent, and paradoxical, even when totalizing powers have wanted to avoid or mask that fact. However, with time, these leaking boundaries have become more evident as indigenous people have started to create, confirm, expand, and un/define their known limits beyond the proper and the acceptable.

Again, identity has been a fundamental aspect of this process. The very structures of the Empire had to deal with the many identities of the conquered people, and that movement was never a one-way street. The
and them developed by the imperial system tried to establish the limitations of contact and the maintenance of power. Edward Said says:

Throughout the exchange between Europeans and their “others” that began systematically half a millennium ago, the one idea that has scarcely varied is that there is an “us” and “them,” each quite settled, clear, unassailably self-evident. As I discuss in Orientalism, the division goes back to Greek thought about barbarians, but whoever originated this kind of “identity” thought, by the nineteenth century, it had become the hallmark of imperialist cultures as well as those cultures trying to resist the encroachments of Europe.  

Liturgical theologies often work from this same logic of identity thought, favoring the practices of some groups over others, differentiating liturgical and non-liturgical churches, high and low churches, ranking proper and improper ways of worshipping God. The dissemination of sameness through differentiation was done with the use of heavy notions of values and hierarchical definitions, ascribing honor and dignity to those who become the same, while never really letting the colonized become the same. While Christian denominations continue to claim clear identity as a way of maintaining their own place in the world, the identity project entailed a double movement of structuring reality in social classes and annihilating difference.

In the midst of fears and complex systems, churches try to draw borders of protection that end up isolating themselves in entrenched mighty liturgical and theological fortresses, ending possibilities of mutual exchange, learning, and connectivity. Moreover, the identity-based colonial-imperial process of the missionary work also spilled over into notions of nationalisms and hatred. Consequently, borders and walls, such as the wall of shame that the United States built to separate itself from Mexico and the whole of Latin America, and the wall of injustice raised by Israel against Palestine, does not seem that wrong or problematic. They mirror the distinctions kept in worship spaces. Instead of searching for the illusion of clear-cut identities, liturgies should engage sameness/difference as a movable, flowing process of ongoing formation of identities that does not fear that which does not look like its own image. Liturgies, as privileged spaces for social entanglement, are marked by the condition of hosting the foreigner, the stranger, the parasite. By openly and creatively engaging sameness and differences in different contexts for different liberating purposes, ritual religious spaces must engage the parasite, that of the other as a fundamental part of itself, as a way to foster diversity and keep complexity in our human social fabric. By learning to engage, navigate, think, and practice faith in various and multiple ways, we assume that we live in this web of connectivity, as we continue to work with binary structures in order to dismantle them.
Thus postcolonialism will work within binary systems, finding within their porous spaces unknown forms of life, other forms of thinking, other possibilities of the holy and its sacred gestures, different praxes, indigenous resources, resistance processes, and people’s self-affirmation. The movements between colonialism and postcolonialism are ample and asymmetrical. The specific processes occurring in India, for instance, while very contextual and particular, are noticeable elsewhere. Chad M. Bauman researches the Dalit converts in North Central India and says, “Those who became Christian drew upon the symbols of both colonizer and colonized, and refashioned them into a coherent, meaningful, and effective collective identity that enabled them to change the world, or at least their experience of it.”

Life and death are always at stake! The dialectic movements within colonization and postcolonial acts are so complex that they must be carefully analyzed and engaged. The dissemination of liturgies has created worlds, established societal structures, invented and deleted forms of lives, uncovered and shattered a myriad of identities, and has destroyed, reshaped, and developed ways of understanding and behaving within traditions.

**Only One Is Holy**

Gordon Lathrop reminds us of the Eastern liturgy singing “One Is Holy” as the response to “holy things to holy people.” That phrase, as Lathrop points out, contrasts with our condition—none of us is holy. Also, it emphasizes the fact that the Christian liturgy is meant to bring us to God, knowing that no liturgy is good enough for the task it is charged with in any historical time. Thenceforth we move now from a postcolonial perspective, engaging the possibility of the Oneness of God in our midst.

Often, Christian theology has emphasized this idea of oneness as an ecumenical trademark, a fundamental aspect of Christian unity. However, this perceived notion of oneness is problematic, since a notion of divine Oneness is always (only) someone’s theological notion of what/who the One is about. A theology of oneness often relies on an ecclesiastical construction based on a lived tradition that carries theological, liturgical, and historical specificities. Within such a theology, the specificities of the oneness of God, which are (also) the specificities of the holy, cannot but be expressed within the specificities of this particular construction, itself the creation of a specific group. This sense of oneness turns away the polidoxity of God’s oneness and excludes theological diversity and the multiplicities of the body of Christ. The result is that the Holy is owned by traditions, identities, since it is trapped into a theological understanding of the oneness that keeps reflecting a game of mirrors.

The handling of the holy one is also at stake. What sense of the holy? Who has access to this form of the holy? Who can hold the holy things?
In Christian liturgies, the *ex operere operato* structure looms large around ritual practices, and its theological stricture is dependent on the inner efficacy of a sacramental order that, if done properly, will make the presence of God present and authenticate its power: \(a\) goes to \(b\) that goes to \(c\) that will necessarily and inescapably go to \(d\). Thus, while the theological hope is that the community is actually processing this movement together, only some special people can pronounce the formula for its efficacy. The hierarchical structures of churches have often become more a structure of power than structures of service, or structures of power vested in structures of service. Signs of authority and propriety in accessing and handling holy things are deeply marked in exclusionary notions of the holy and of the oneness.\(^{40}\) In this sense, the oneness of God privileges those who define the liturgical orders and books—a group all too often consisting of a white, male, heterosexual presider, and the whole patriarchal system grounded in social high class. We need to dismantle liturgical constructs that keep exclusive notions of the oneness of God and God’s holiness that mirror the domination of lower class societies. Feminist, Queer, liberation theologians, and many others have criticized the historical making of these liturgical theologies and its notions of access and validity of theologies and liturgies that do not entail the plurality of God and God’s holiness.\(^{41}\)

Another issue regarding the singing of “Only One Is Holy” is interreligious dialogue. As mentioned before, PLTs must engage interreligious perspectives. From the multiplicities of religions and religious understandings and practices, how are Christians to deal with the sense of the holy? How do Christians who say “only one is holy” engage in dialogue with other religions that consider everything and/or everybody holy? Also, how are Christians to deal with Jesus as the only holy one? Interreligious dialogue does not intend to preclude anyone from boldly affirming what one believes, and Christians must be able to say, “Jesus is the only holy one!” However, Jesus’s oneness and holiness must be engaged in the correlations, differentiations, and possibilities of the many encounters of the holy one Jesus with others’ religions and other people’s oneness and holiness. Does this engagement take away the holiness of Jesus? Surely not! But it challenges Christians to review their own senses of oneness and holiness. That is because often, others define the oneness/holiness of Jesus as something other than divine and Godly, and consequently, as something mistaken, not enlightened yet or enough, if not utterly and radically wrong, something deeply suspicious, if even human. In this proposition, only God (my God, the God I own) can make others (those who are not as holy as I am) holy. In this sense, God’s oneness is marked by the same sameness-difference identity structures we mentioned above.

In this way, the use of “Only one is holy” has been part of a larger colonial process that has supported dominance to rule over people’s sovereignties, has excluded voices (feminist, queer, and minorities), and dismissed
the challenges of interreligious conversations and a larger sense of mutuality. The holiness of Jesus must be placed in relation with Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Yoruba, and other religious perspectives that engage the holy and the one in different/same ways. The pluriform embodiment of the holy manifested in a variety of ways offers us a much needed and enriching vision of the world and a deep respect for the plural One!

At the heart of the oneness of God is the cotidiano, the daily life of the people. It is, perhaps, one of the key questions for the liturgical world, one held in deep respect by Alfredo Bosi:

The nodal question is how each group situation read and interpreted Scripture, the angle of its practice, the universalizing discourses of religion. Symbols, rituals, narratives of creation, fall and salvation, and what makes these discourses not be able to recover, when moving towards an ideal totality, the day-to-day life that is cut by the economic division and oppressed by the hierarchies of power? From cultum, the supine cervical mode of being, also derives another participle: future, culturus, what will be worked, what one wants to cultivate.

The postcolonial/decolonial project is indeed the ongoing critique of any form of power and the cultivation of a respectful and enriching mutuality within the complex daily life of the people where the holy one manifests itself in plural ways. Hence, this book attempts to impede imperial tendencies of exclusivism and impulses of self-enclosed oneness in the modes of operation of liturgical and theological thinking that also defines people’s thinking. Going to the periphery of the world where the poor live, we learn how people understand the one and the many, the holy and the unholy, as well as how they organize their lives and their sacred spaces. Constructing forms of collective work and shared power and the cultivation of a respectful and enriching mutuality always threatened by death. Our cultus will be a non-hierarchical, equal class shared land given to all, where everybody has access to the basic sources of life and where the lives of the poor will be honored and understood as holy.

**Postcolonial Liturgical Theologies**

The maintenance of poder dynamics persists while dominant discourses set themselves up by muting what they deny, dismissing what is in between or not clearly recognized. These structures’ undersides are constituted by the adversaries of the proper, which often go by the names of the exception, the barbarous, or the unreasonable. While binary modes of thinking need to announce and cherish what is in opposition to themselves in order to tame that which can destroy their own structures, these modes (of thinking) use notions of the exception, the improper, the trickster, the coyote, alterity, and so on, to preserve the hierarchical scheme of identity.
value. For example, when the trickster appears, the laughter provoked by him/her serves to sustain the functioning of its opposite, that is, the necessary seriousness of thought. When the coyote roams around, it reminds us to keep the doors locked.

In postcolonial thinking, these terms and others, such as mestizaje, hybridity, mimicry, opacity, and interstitiality, already carried inside of the colonial project, are now developed and expanded in order to find other ways of envisaging, practicing, and expanding our thought about life’s meaning. Imagination is desperately needed! Within epistemological processes that carry half-theological truths of the empire, we are entangled in liturgical gestures that teach us how to live anywhere in order to maintain systems of oppression, even when not intentionally preserved. Under these schemes, the denial of the other, the deep silence over the battle of social classes, the practical dismissal of the poor, and the destruction of the variety and multiplicities of life, are often detached from the concerns of our liturgical practices.

This book makes use of many different voices, emphases, and methodologies. In any colonized voice, the dominator is present. My colonizer looms large and is present in every word I write, any song I sing, every corner I turn. For instance, I must emphasize to myself repeatedly that indigenous communities are alive, creating and resisting, and I must be careful to learn and respect their ways of living within their own commitments and struggles. Due to a thick history of racism, I must repeat to myself and to my communities time and again that black lives matter! Because five hundred years of colonizing voices in me continue to try to turn these communities into the other of myself, placing them in the shameful shadows of society, delegating them to the past, deleting their beauty, struggles and capacities. My very fear of speaking up is also a product of colonizing voices that keep threatening me. My feet on the ground, with the poor and the disenfranchised, are what keep decolonizing myself.

In the Americas, identities are intrinsically related to that which was received over the course of five hundred years. Thus, confusion, uncertainties, unsettlement, displacement, and feeling lost or trapped, are always part of theological/liturgical thinking/practicing. To discern what voice we are using, whose commitments we are taking on, who we are serving, is our endless task. I am an impostor, a trickster, a coyote, one who pretends to know and to feel. A Brazilian boy from the poor areas of Sao Paulo living in the United States, not always conscious, not always knowing the difference between truth and illusion, on what side of the border I am, with whom I should side, what liturgical practice to teach, to differentiate properly what is right or wrong, what is proper and what is really improper: this is my life and the life of the theologian/liturgist/artist in me. I am a product of the empire and its rigorous critique, an instrument of the empire’s forces of exclusion, and, at the same time, its
strongest opponent. To undo the colonizer in me is an impossible task, but one that I will never give up.

Only one is holy, no one is holy, everyone is holy! What are the liturgical/theological ways in which we say: only one is holy? What are the mirrors, dissensions, necessities, and impossibilities of this affirmation? Who can get to say “only one is holy?” With whom am I saying only one is holy? To what extent does this singing bring liberation to the outcast and defy this economic system of deep exclusion? These are things for us to consider.

**Conclusion**

*Tudo junto e misturado*, Brazilians say: “Everything together and mixed up.” Perhaps, if we are all together and mixed, we can shout only one is holy and learn that the Christian faith consists of solidarity, of living together in communities of affection and interreligious empowerment, trying to figure out, together, through ours and somebody else’s liturgies, what being human is all about.

This book is an invitation to the table/altar: come and let us weep together over the death and disasters of the world and the exclusion, pain, and hardships of our poor people; come and feast together on this table of promises, alterities, wisdom, and possibilities for a new world order; come and let us share our worship books, our religious traditions, and see what comes out of that. Bring your bodies and voices and minds, challenge us, teach us to feel, think, and dance with you. Come and wrestle with these authors and their proposals.

Clearly, the fields of postcolonialism/decolonialism and liturgies are much more complex than the way I describe them here. But this new field of postcolonial liturgical theologies is a beginning in this new liturgical turn that I hope will continue and take different shapes and forms. The chapters of this book indeed show a little of the complexities of all that is at stake in this postcolonial liturgical theological endeavor, the ins and outs and within of imperial/colonial religious senses, reasons, and practices. The hope is that this book will serve as another source for others to venture into new and old thinking, from which they may gain the courage and passion clearly demonstrated in the essays of these wonderful writers.

**Notes**

1. In very broad and short strokes, one can say that postcolonialism emerges from experiences in the Middle East and Asia, is a critique to Orientalism and has been deeply influenced by Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. Decolonialism, on the other hand, arises from experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean, is a critique against Occidentalism and its leading figures have been Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, and Walter Mignolo.
2. Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” 
3. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous 
4. Vine Deloria Jr., *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York: 
   Routledge, 1999), 100.
5. Andrea Smith, “Dismantling the Master’s House with the Master’s Tools,” 
   in *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women’s Theology*, ed. Kwok 
   Pui–lan (New York: Orbis, 2010), 82.
   Perspectives* (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2011), 5.
7. If we think there is only silence in oppressive movements, we must start to 
   hear the noise that exists in any form of community. If we look at the ways 
   in which Africans responded to the white Christianity imposed throughout 
   the Americas we have a vast array of movements of resistance that went from 
   protecting their own religious beliefs and practices to entirely reshaping 
   Christianity for their own needs.
8. For the notion of traditioning, see Orlando Espin, *Idol and Grace: On 
9. Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews 
   and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 
   1980), 81.
10. Ibid, 81–82.
11. For a border hermeneutics perspective, there are many authors from the 
    South of the globe but I will mention here only sources from Mexico and 
    Latin America: Glorai Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 
    (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987); Alfredo Bosi, *Dialética da 
    Colonização* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1992); Enrique Dussel, 
    *Filosofía de Liberación* (México: Edicol, 1977); Walter Mignolo, *Local 
    Histories/Global Designs: Essays on the Coloniality of Power, Subaltern 
    Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 
    2000); Aníbal Quijano, “Colonialidad y Modernidad/Racionalidad,” *Perú 
    Indígena* 29 (1991): 11–21; José David Saldivar, *Border Matters* (Berkeley: 
    University of California Press, 1997). For border theory in relation to 
    the sacrament of the eucharist, see my book: *Eucharist and Globalization: 
12. The *Societas Liturgica* in its 2013 meeting in Wurzburg, Germany, celebrated 
    and studied the many ways the *Liturgical Reform* happened in the twentieth 
13. World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 
    1982).
14. Ibid.
    promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963, bit.ly/ 
    postcol_i-13.
16. See Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, 
    *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines* (Vatican 
    City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002) and Mark R. Francis, *Local Worship,*
Global Church, Popular Religion and Liturgy (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).


19. Dom Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (New York: Continuum, 1945.)


24. The late Ernesto Barros Cardoso was a musician, songwriter, liturgist, and liturgical theologian who created artistic and innovative liturgies filled with freedom, liturgies that impacted a whole generation of Christians in Brazil. While Cardoso never published any books or articles, he created the Liturgical Network (Rede de Liturgia) of the Latin American Council of Churches that still exists, and is very active up to this day. Jaci C. Maraschin has several articles in English and several books and chapters in Portuguese; for example, Jaci C. Maraschin and Frederico Pieper Pires, “The Lord’s Song in the Brazilian Land,” Studies in World Christianity 12.2 (2006): 83–100.


28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 1.

30. Sameness and difference are central to postcolonial thinking, from very different perspectives (there are, for instance, British/Middle Eastern/Asian or Hispanic/French/Algerian/South American perspectives).

37. Sameness and difference worked in different ways in different places. For instance, colonial discourse wanted to establish sameness and eradicate difference in the Americas, while in Asian contexts, colonial thought tried to establish difference and deny sameness between colonizer and colonized.
40. This private sense of the holy has social results as well. The acceptance of the use of holy things by some people also allows them to own private pieces of land, even if it entails the exclusion of many from the land. PTL must deal with the economic aspects related to liturgies as well. See Cláudio Carvalhaes, “Worship—Loving Madly,” *Liturgy, Special Issue: Liturgy, Culture and Race* 29.3 (May 2014).
42. Bosi, *Dialética da Colonização*, 16.
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