

## **Bonhoeffer and Public Theology: The politics of recognition in postcolonial formation**

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### **Abstract**

This essay examines Bonhoeffer's insights into the legacy of European modernity, with its Janus-faced nature. Bonhoeffer's theology of the cross is, at a methodological level, grounded in both Christological collectivism and a biblical symbol of reconciliation. This combined position reinforces the politics of recognition and the critical appraisal of European modernity, and it promotes solidarity with innocent victims. As such, it breaks through Gustavo Gutierrez's critique of Bonhoeffer. Using the genealogical (power-discourse) approach to Bonhoeffer, this essay engages with Walter Benjamin to conceptualise the significant regime of "effective history" with its anamnestic reasoning and to deal with the absence of those silenced in the underside of history. This is crucial for a new interpretation of both reparative justice (*suum cuique*) and Bonhoeffer's discourse ethics of *parrhesia*, which can be applied in public theology within a postcolonial framework.

### **Keywords**

*Bonhoeffer; Walter Benjamin; Gustavo Gutierrez; effective history; politics of recognition*

## **Introduction**

In the following essay, I leverage a public theological method to explore the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer according to the public sphere of civil society and its postcolonial significance. Public theology can be defined as a constructive-ethical way to address problems of stratification

and reification in society and culture. These are often embedded with postcolonial conditions, such as the problem of immigration, refugees, and a new form of racism and biopolitical control under the phenomenon of global Empire.

Jürgen Moltmann articulates the relationship between Christian identity and public relevance for public theology with postcolonial implications. His earlier model of political theology after Auschwitz began with a critical analysis of Carl Schmitt's paganisation of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* into the totalitarian state. Later, Moltmann, together with Johann Baptist Metz, proposed a new version of political theology in a critical and publicly responsible manner by challenging religion as a private affair.

More than that, Moltmann enhances his model of political theology in terms of a *theologia publica* in the critical project of modernity by involving the public affairs of civil society and colonial history. For Moltmann, the year 1492 implies the beginning of the European hegemony and its artificial ideology of Eurocentrism over and against the other peoples of America, Africa, and Asia. Likewise, the philosophy of the Enlightenment (particularly at the time of Lessing and Kant) was bound to slavery and colonial exploitation.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the colonial side of European modernity gave rise to the misrecognition of the colonised Other. As Charles Taylor writes, "It is held that since 1492 Europeans have projected an image of such people as somehow inferior, "uncivilised", and through the force of conquest have often been able to impose this image on the conquered ... It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the politics of recognition is vital to the shaping of public theology for civil society in its postcolonial formation. This emerging postcolonial position facilitates re-examining Bonhoeffer's theology of reconciliation when dealing with modernity's Janus faces: the Jews, the secular ungodly,

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1 Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 12.

2 Charles Taylor, The Politics of Recognition, in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994 ), 26.

and the poor. Therefore, as I consider this regime filled with problematic features, my focus is on Bonhoeffer's public theology, his analysis of the double faces of modernity, and the postcolonial implications.

## Modernity with its Janus Face

Bonhoeffer's analysis of modernity continues to occupy his theological reflection during his imprisonment, in which he took seriously questions raised by the Enlightenment and the challenges of modernity in accordance with his teacher, Adolf von Harnack.<sup>3</sup> His theology of the maturity of humanity becomes a background for conceptualising public theology in conversation with liberation theology, particularly Gustavo Gutierrez.

Bonhoeffer strives to comprehend and interpret human life and ethical problems as the historical existence in dealing with our living relationships with people, the order of things, institutions, and powers.<sup>4</sup> His work facilitates the construction of a public theology able to engage with the givenness of life and diverse social fields in stratification and reification.

In doing so, public theology is differentiated from liberation theology and its common wholesale attack on modernity. For example, liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez perceives pathologies of "unsatisfied modernity" (Hegel)<sup>5</sup> in its consequences of individual freedom, private ownership, colonialism, and domination. In his critical analysis of the limitations of modern theology, Gutierrez draws attention to the religious socialist dimension in Karl Barth, who "is sensitive to the situation of exploitation in which these broad segments of humanity live."<sup>6</sup>

However, Gutierrez takes issue with the limitations of Bonhoeffer because he does not find the protest movement of the poor or the labour movement in Bonhoeffer's writings. Gutierrez claims Bonhoeffer's opposition to

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3 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (=LPP) DBWE 8 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 23.

4 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. R. Krauss, et al DBWE 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 219–220.

5 Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), 176.

6 Ibid., 203.

National Socialism did not lead him to examine society's broader crisis, making him less aware of its underlying injustices.

Gutierrez's critique of Bonhoeffer seems to be enigmatic, and even unfortunate, as liberation theology often serves as a major interlocutor with public theology. In his critical assessment of modernity and its blackmail, Bonhoeffer holds that a human being is emancipated in his/her tremendous power and restraints from all repressive authority and coercion through emancipated reason, class, and people. This ushers in the unparalleled rise of technology, which turns master over nature.

In fact, the reason espoused by the bourgeoisie became a working hypothesis and therefore an end in itself. "However, behind the Bourgeoisie rose, dark and threatening, the masses, the fourth estate, with no other name than just the mass and its misery."<sup>7</sup>

The blackmail of modernity brings unparalleled misery to the revolt of the masses, while its promise to human rights brings nobility of achievement to the bourgeoisie. Such a revolt reached its peak in National Socialism and Fascism. The working class embraced the political propaganda of National Socialism and became its army.

Along with the discovery of human rights, however, all these are overthrown by the emancipation of reason, which is the project of the Enlightenment: "Centralized and absolute despotism, spiritual and social tyranny, prejudices and privileges based on social status, and ecclesiastical claims to power all collapsed before this attack."<sup>8</sup>

The bourgeoisie and reason eventually came to terms with each other for power and domination. However, the underprivileged classes began to stir. The dark menace of the masses, the fourth estate, has loomed behind the bourgeoisie, as the masses and their misery. The millions of undeserved wretchedness now raised their accusations and claims against the bourgeoisie.

Their own law is that of misery rather than the law of emancipated reason. Technology, mass movement, and nationalism are the historical inheritance

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7 DBWE 6: 118–9.

8 Ibid., 118.

bequeathed to Western Modernity from the French Revolution: “People were mature enough to take their affairs into their own hands, in both domestic and foreign matters.”<sup>9</sup>

In Bonhoeffer’s view, the complex unity of reason, the masses, and the nation entails the seeds of decay within itself. The demands for absolute liberty have brought people to the depths of slavery. Nationalism inevitably went to war.<sup>10</sup> The dark side of the maturity of humanity transpires in the liberation of the human being as an absolute ideal, while it paradoxically results in human self-destruction and nihilism. At the end of modernity initiated by the French Revolution, there is secular nihilism. Ultimately, this is the reality of Western godlessness – a religion of hostility to God.

This is the deification of the human being in the proclamation of such secular nihilism, as seen in the religion of Bolshevism as well as penetrating its secularist spirit into the midst of the Christian church. Following Bonhoeffer, I suggest that we stand in the crisis of this upheaval.<sup>11</sup>

## Bonhoeffer and Benjamin

National Socialism, religious nationalism, and Bolshevism characterised Bonhoeffer’s own context. In the genealogical analysis of the history of the subjugated, Bonhoeffer can be seen in his concern with reparative justice for the dignity of innocent victims amid biopolitical Fascism. If history, in an anamnestic frame of reference, includes its genealogical analysis of revealing universal history as power and domination, then it breaks through ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke) which otherwise hides the brutal reality of the violence and injustice against the masses.

Thus, Walter Benjamin can be consonant with Bonhoeffer, as Benjamin argues: “But a storm is blowing from Paradise” and “irresistibly propels

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9 Ibid., 120.

10 Ibid., 120–2.

11 Ibid., 119.

him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of ruins before him grows skyward. What we call progress is this storm.”<sup>12</sup>

Benjamin would share a ruined experience of German Fascism as the destruction of reason, in which biopolitical genocide was undertaken in the name of a racist ideology of progress and utilitarian collectivism or eudemonism. However, history is no longer known by virtue of progress and enlightened reason. The concept of its linear continuity is denounced as plots and fictions of the ruling class. The ruin of the past and sacrifice of the victim grow skyward behind the marching history of rationalisation and homogenization of all differences into sameness.

To rewrite the history of the present, a politics of the Messiah is required to unveil dangerous moments of the anonymous victims, since the past is not finished yet. This position of anamnesis is subversive in inspiring the present action to bring their life story to light for reparative justice and solidarity.

Similarly, Bonhoeffer champions his politics of the Messiah by emphasising the Gospel against the bourgeois faith in progress and its utilitarian individualism. He reacts against bourgeois self-satisfaction in its convenient reversal of the radical meaning of the Gospel. To the degree that the new teaching of the Reformation in Germany weakened the Roman historical heritage, Bonhoeffer draws attention to Nietzsche, who undertook an anti-Christian appropriation of the Greek heritage.<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche might be taken as one of the greatest examples, breaking through with the bourgeois encapsulation of the Gospel of the Reformation through his unparalleled critique of the metaphysics of the Enlightenment and its related nihilism.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, modernity has a Janus face in bringing out profound change in human life and emancipation from religious superstition and dominion, especially in Weber’s sense of the disenchantment of the world. It causes an iron cage or social pathology of reification in the colonisation of the lifeworld. The reality of modernity is unsatisfied, yet incomplete, while

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12 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, translated Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 257.

13 DBWE 6: 107.

14 Ibid., 64.

requiring a meticulous exploration between reason, the subaltern, and emancipation, considering God's reconciliation in Christ with the world.

In doing so, Bonhoeffer does not entirely reject the world coming of age but brings the Gospel of reconciliation and *theologia crucis* to the incomplete legacy of modernity in favour of the politics of recognition, theology of the subaltern, and human rights in the postcolonial spheres of civil society.

## Modernist phenomena and their challenge

Modernist phenomena in the aftermath of the French Revolution and European humanism would be classified, according to Bonhoeffer, into the problem of anti-Semitism, secular atheism, and the fourth estate – the working class in poverty.

In fact, the major issue occupying Bonhoeffer's concern was the Jewish pogrom associated with *Kristallnacht* (1938). At the height of Hitler's power and popularity in 1941, Bonhoeffer wrote that "Western history is by God's will inextricably bound up with the people of Israel, not only genetically but in an honest, unceasing encounter. The Jew keeps open the question of Christ ... Driving out the Jew(s) from the West must result in driving out Christ with them. For Jesus Christ was a Jew."<sup>15</sup>

To the degree that Jesus came to the world as the promised Messiah of Israel and the Lord of the Church, the people of the world and Western history are inseparably bound to the Jewish people in a genuine, uninterrupted encounter. This encounter includes dialogue with contemporary Judaism, which keeps open the question of Christ. In fact, the church "has become guilty of the lives of the weakest and most defenceless brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ,"<sup>16</sup> with special reference to the suffering Jews at his time.

However, Bonhoeffer should not be portrayed as a Philo-Semite with a blind attitude to Jewish teaching of the Torah or the Jewish State in its brutal violence of the Palestinian people.

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15 Ibid., 105.

16 Ibid., 139.

## The secular and the poor

Bonhoeffer characterises godlessness as full of promise, which is against pious godlessness corrupting the church. The problem of secular culture, or the secularisation process, in Western modernity does not necessarily mean contradicting the Gospel of reconciliation. In the affirmation of secular godlessness, Bonhoeffer argues that “before God and with God we live without God.”<sup>17</sup>

More than secular atheism, the poor belong to an essential part of the church’s confession of guilt, since this confessional stance denounces the spoliation and exploitation of the innocent victim and the poor by the enrichment and corruption of the strong.<sup>18</sup> The church is under obligation to be responsible and advocate for the victims of every social order, even to the extent that they do not belong to the Christian community.

In his ecclesiology, Bonhoeffer articulates the significance of the sociological category, in which his position of the Gospel is not value-neutral, but considers the deliberations of the church and the Proletariat. His sociological type of the church cuts through the limitation of the distinction between church and sect (proposed by Weber and Troeltsch) and engages with social problems in a vast and complicated spectrum.

It [the social problem] includes the problem of the capitalist economic period and of the industrial proletariat created by it; and of the growth of militaristic and bureaucratic giant states; of the enormous increase in population, which affects colonial and world policy; of the mechanical technique ... that mobilizes the whole world for purposes of trade, but also that treats people and labour like machines.<sup>19</sup>

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17 DBWE 8: 360.

18 DBWE 6: 140.

19 DBWE 1: 271.

## Reconciliation, politics of recognition, *Parrhesia*

Bonhoeffer conceptualises his ethical position within the framework of the biblical discourse of reconciliation, which would be consonant with a phenomenology of the lifeworld. His methodology implies Christological collectivism, or universalism, because God is reconciled in Christ with the world. In Christ, all things exist (Col 1: 17). The whole of humanity is accepted by and united with God in Christ's reconciliation in which God took up the sin of the whole world.

This reconciliation embraces the forlorn and the godless into itself, while the ultimate holds open to the penultimate, which relates to and is empowered by the freedom of the ultimate. The evil world “has its ultimate and true reality not in the devil, but, again, in Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

An ethics of reconciliation is in the dialectical dynamic between the penultimate and the ultimate, pointing to Christ who “brings down the powerful from their thrones and lifts the lowly” (Luke 1: 52). An ethics of reconciliation empowers Christian discipleship by involving creative activity in all social-cultural realms and challenging the ruined aspect of the penultimate, where “human beings become things, commodities or machines.”<sup>21</sup>

In dealing with the reality of the penultimate, Bonhoeffer considers the regime of justice in terms of Roman antiquity and its law of *suum cuique* (to each their own). He takes issue with social utilitarianism or eudemonism, which curtails and even destroys all the rights of the individual, leading to chaos or despotism. A dialectical balance between the individual and society is sought in terms of God's creation of the individual and preservation of the life of the human being as a communal species.<sup>22</sup>

Bonhoeffer's reflection of *suum cuique* can be obviously seen in his approach to the reification of the human being in the capitalist order with its Fascist face. Thus, it sharpens the meaning of reconciliation through the connection between reparative and distributive justice for the victim.

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20 DBWE 6: 65.

21 DBWE 6: 165.

22 DBWE 6: 182.

Reconciliation requires an immanent critique for its emancipation, because it has been misused as an ideological tool for facilitating the negotiations of power.

Bonhoeffer articulates the basic ethical situation of reconciliation in reference to its contextual character of the good, in which the human being is conceptualised in the givenness of life. We, historical, social beings, pose the question of the good and the right amid our living relationships with people, the social order of things, institutions, and power relations. Ethical issues are developed and interpreted amid life-history underlying our historical existence.<sup>23</sup>

For Bonhoeffer, Christian ethics cannot be a book of moral prepositions or a work of reference, built on moral principles or its ideal type. Rather, it validates the knowledge of the good, the right, and the evil.<sup>24</sup>

In the question of the good and the right, it is obviously important to conceptualise the ethics of reconciliation in the sense of the lifeworld for a politics of recognition, which acknowledges the validity of multiple life worlds in the democratic, pluralist sphere. It is the religious symbol of reconciliation, as it were, which recognises each lifeworld by correlation with it. In fact, God's reconciliation does not negate or totalize specific, unique cultural values or the creativity of each lifeworld.

At this point, Bonhoeffer elaborates an ethical contour of the lifeworld, insofar as the question of the good is posed and is decided amid our living relationships – with people, the social order of things, institutions, different histories, and power relations. He is positioned in discourse ethics (*parrhesia*), which characterises and reinforces his ethics of discipleship through immanent critique, truthful validity, and emancipation.

In Bonhoeffer's account, telling the truth is based on and indebted to the living God who entered the world through Jesus Christ. God's truth has become flesh and is alive in the real. God sets us in a living reality because

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23 DBWE 6: 220–1.

24 DBWE 6: 17, 80.

God is neither a general principle nor a metaphysical idol. Our speech activity must be truthful in actual, concrete life situations before God.<sup>25</sup>

Bonhoeffer holds that a discourse ethics of *parrhesia* appreciates the actual situation and undertakes serious reflection upon it. A trustworthy word is alive as related to life itself. It entails a position of suspicion, or a critique of ideology, when it comes to the adaptation of the truth to each situation. Ultimately, it destroys the idea of truth or narrows down the discrepancy between truth and falsehood.<sup>26</sup>

Bonhoeffer's mode of *parrhesia* shapes his ethical formation by challenging the church's failure to speak the right word in the right way at the right time. Historically, violence and wrongs have been done in the name of Jesus Christ. Worse still, countless victims have been slandered and defamed to justify this corruption in the church.

In fact, there is a parallel between Bonhoeffer and Foucault in their respective resistance to a Fascist way of life in the history of the present. Fascism is described as a type of religion of nature as it is cultivated with a religious sensitivity and venerated within the biological-national life. For Foucault, a *parrhesiatic* mode of speech is rooted in the mystical, critical tradition of Christianity, which risks one's life with personal frankness and unspoken confidence in God.

Foucault's position can be described as a form of negative theology in its challenge of the divinization of Western "man" in the project of modernity. With confidence in God's love, effective resistance to power could take place. Foucault's promotion of the non-fascist life strives for reconciliation and the politics of recognition by unveiling the system of power-knowledge as a mechanism of exclusion and subjugation.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, historical effect, language hierarchy, and social condition are all incorporated into the regime of lifeworld and analysed in their relation to

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25 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville H. Smith (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 361.

26 Ibid.

27 James Bernauer, "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life," in *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience*, eds. J. Bernauer and J. Carrette (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 77–94.

social discourse, material interests, different histories, and power dynamics. This ethical stance considers a postcolonial epistemology, in which public theology scrutinises the extent to which biopolitical control of the human body reifies human life as givenness.

Yet, against biopolitical subjugation, God accepts humanity because God assumed the form of the poorest of our brothers and sisters. In other words, God is the representative of naked human beings. Thus, God, in his assumption of human flesh, aims at transforming the status quo materially and spiritually.<sup>28</sup>

### Effective history and *Theologia Crucis*

It is essential to locate the biblical symbol of reconciliation in its double reference to the recognition of the Other and within the anamnestic reasoning of *theologia crucis*. The latter strengthens the critical importance of reconciliation in challenging the unreconciled reality of society and culture that is stratified and reified in the public sphere by the reproducing mechanism of injustice and violence. It implies Christian transvaluation of all values, which strengthens the politics of recognition. This remains crucial in Bonhoeffer's synthesis of *theologia crucis* with his genealogical approach to history from below in accordance with the outcast, the suspect, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, and the reviled.

Bonhoeffer's idea of reconciliation knows no abyss of evil hidden from God, because the world is reconciled with God. It embraces even the most abysmal secularism of the world. Following in the footsteps of Martin Luther, he holds that "The curses of the godless sometimes sound better in God's ear than the hallelujahs of the pious."<sup>29</sup>

This perspective incorporates significant ruptures and discontinuities in the course of history (in the sense of effective history that is concerned with the margins) into the Christian social imagination of public theology. It problematizes the extent to which exclusion would take place along with

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28 Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), 33.

29 DBWE 2: 160. Endnote. 59.

domination, foreclosure, and omission, particularly with race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality.

Through the work of German philosopher Walter Benjamin and African American theologian James Cone, I elaborate on Bonhoeffer's position to illuminate an effective history of diverse instances (politics, economics, religion, ideology, culture, sexuality, and race). This is a complex reality of society and culture in formation, stratification, and reification. An ethics of reconciliation examines both the absence and presence of problems through a genealogical reading or clarification of what is repressed and marginalised in the political and cultural text and context. It searches for an underlying contradiction or absence by which to unveil what cannot be said and is foreclosed in the text.

This perspective features effective history (centred on break, decentricity, and difference), which reacts against the marching history of progress and technological rationality tainted with Western imperial power. Effective history helps buttress a postcolonial stance in seeking to measure and appraise the dislocation of colonial histories and cultures against the line of a single continuous reference time.

The position of effective history finds its significance in Walter Benjamin's anamnestic reasoning of history and progress tainted with European Fascism. "There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the way it was transmitted from one owner to another" (thesis VII).<sup>30</sup>

In James Cone's account, the Christian political realism of Reinhold Niebuhr takes the point of departure based on self-interest and power. What characterises Niebuhr is his approach to the cross as a 'transvaluation of values' (Nietzsche), in which God's love and mercy are sought in the cross of Jesus Christ as 'the very key to history itself'.<sup>31</sup>

However, Cone argues that while Niebuhr retains a complex position on racial issues, the problem of race never becomes one of his central concerns.

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30 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 256.

31 James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2011), 35.

In Cone's view, Bonhoeffer took an existential interest in engaging with African American history and literature while preaching at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem during his education at Union Seminary (1930–1931).<sup>32</sup>

This earlier stance can be seen in Bonhoeffer's attitude against violence and abuse of power in his sermon in London in 1934: "Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its apologia for the weak... It should give much more offence, more shock to the world, than it is doing. Christianity should ... take a much more definite stand for the weak than to consider the potential moral right of the strong."<sup>33</sup>

His position finds its culmination in his genealogy of effective history, anamnestic form of *theologia crucis*, and the politics of recognition. In fact, racism in the Fascist context is embedded with biopolitical power, which becomes the precondition for exercising the right to kill. It justifies the murderous function of the State in its technology of normalisation, together with the state apparatuses.

Against the racist state, Bonhoeffer's political stance calls the church "not just to bind up the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel but to seize the wheel itself."<sup>34</sup> Jesus Christ is present in our discipleship by encouraging the church to dethrone an idol of power and its politics of racism, which erases innocent victims from the historical record.

Seizing the wheel itself comes to terms with a messianic approach to effective history and its spirit of resistance against the positivistic history of progress and its colonial violence. Thus, postcolonial *theologia crucis* rewrites the history of the present by embracing those subjugated and foreclosed in the field of politics, economy, race, gender, and sexuality – the subaltern in stratification and reification in society and culture.

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32 Ibid., 42.

33 Bonhoeffer, *London: 1933–1935*, DBWE 13 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 402–3.

34 Bonhoeffer, "The Church and the Jewish Question," in: *Berlin: 1932–1933*, DBWE 12 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 365.

## Conclusion

Of special significance in this essay is a genealogical reinterpretation of Bonhoeffer to reclaim his prophetic legacy for public theology in postcolonial formation. His critique of bourgeois modernity entails a symbolic–materialist signifier to protest systems of domination and the marching progress of the victor and violence in perpetrating the innocent victim and burying them on the underside of history. *Theologia crucis* in the politics of recognition reinforces a Christian ethics of discipleship that advocates for the life of the subaltern, which is often caused and stratified in the public realms through the waves of immigrants and refugees who are caught in neo-racism in the neoliberal phase of global capitalism.

A social-scientific approach to diverse public spaces facilitates public theology in dealing with the reality of hierarchy and stratification in social formation under control, discipline, and oppression inflicted upon the lives of the subaltern. To rewrite the history of the present requires a genealogical-anamnestic reading strategy of reconciliation and *theologia crucis* by supplementing history with a subversive memory of Jesus, an innocent victim. This configuration of Jesus as representative of collective suffering emphasises the significance of a messianic eruption in our midst, in a way that facilitates rupture, transformation, and revolution. It reinforces a recognition of the church as “Christ existing as church-community”.

Christian discipleship summons the church to exercise *metanoia* in its wrongdoings. This requires the rewriting of effective history in the life narratives of those on the margins. Like a constellation of stars, history is pluralistic and democratic in character. It is invested in each unique lifeworld through the light of reconciliation, which undergirds a postcolonial politics of recognition over against Eurocentric modernity, neo-racism, and the brutal reality of biopolitical violence. Can the subaltern speak? Indeed! God speaks to the church through their face and bare life: The most defenceless and weakest brothers and sisters stand in the life of Jesus Christ.

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