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The contributors have brought to light one of the most forgotten or suppressed themes in the white churches and their theologies, namely, the centrality of land in forming a people’s nationality and religious identity. The clear message is that there is no authentic theology without affirming the integrity of God’s creation and that the Bible should not be weaponized to justify colonization of the land.

The volume contains four essays from four locations. Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian; Oscar García-Johnson from Honduras; H. Daniel Zacharias of the First Nations; and Hulisani Ramantswana from South Africa. Walter Brueggemann, one of the best-known North American Old Testament scholars, introduces the essays. K. K. Yeo, a Chinese from Malaysia, rounds off the essays with a summation.

Brueggemann expounds the meaning of land in the ancient world of empires and peasants in Psalm 73 and affirms its importance in the contemporary world. Today, land is not a mere theological topic but a highly sensitive political issue as well. Empires cannot survive by their military, political, and economic power alone. They justify their existence by appealing to some higher divine mandate, and so the Bible is weaponized by colonizers to advance their vested interests.

Mitri Raheb in his essay “The Bible and Land Colonization” elaborates on how the Zionists and some Western scholars use the Bible to justify the
occupation of Palestine. He challenges us to reread the colonization of the land from the Palestinian perspective, expounding different approaches of land theologies that emerged in the last three decades and highlighting newer postcolonial methods that advocate for the liberation of native people’s lands. He concludes by reading two biblical texts to illustrate a Palestinian Christian theology of the land and shows how the Bible was weaponized, abused, and misinterpreted to legitimize the colonization of Palestine. Selective biblical stories are used and certain biblical figures evoked by the Israeli government, the Zionist movement, and Christian Zionists to legitimize their settler-colonial project. This approach is used not only in the Palestinian context but also in North America, Africa, and Australia. The Bible became a tool for land confiscation and colonization. It is sadly true that Christian theology has played a significant role in supporting the ongoing colonization of Palestinian land and its people. There is a dire need for a decolonial theology of the land.

Oscar García-Johnson gives voice to Latin American and Latinx reflections. He argues that the faith seeking for land is an epistemic “homing device” that represents a decolonial search for transamericanism: the traditioning of Pachamama (land) and human dignity (humanitas). These two crucial values are lost in the conquest, colonization, and Western modernization in the American global south (Latin America and its diaspora). The author opines that one must first disconnect from colonial modernity’s cosmology of domination and construct a liberating ecology under the principle of bioregionalism. A theology of liberation must affirm that the land (Pachamama, Gaia) is alive as part of the cosmos and profoundly connected to the Spirit of God. The other elements of transamerican theology are the acknowledgment of the Spirit of God who is present in the lands and peoples of the Americas before and beyond the European acts of conquest, colonization, modernization, and economic development, all of which have been underwritten by a westernized Christian rhetoric of salvation. What is missing in this concept of salvation is the spiritual connection to the earth. The neglect of the spiritual connection with land for human liberation is one of the significant reasons for today’s world crises.

In line with García-Johnson’s argument, Daniel Zacharias challenges the Western anthropocentric reading of the Bible. Humanity is part of the community of creation, not above it. The Bible portrays an inseparable
relationship between the land and humanity. Without nonhuman creation, humans cannot last long on the earth. But if the planet is without human beings, the nonhuman creation survives and flourishes. The Bible affirms the cocreative power of the land. The author challenges us to reimagine a new theological methodology that gives priority to the land. Doing justice to the land is the foundation of theology.

Hulisani Ramantswana articulates the theology of “Promised Land.” In line with other contributors, he also argues how the European colonizers have used the Bible as an instrument to colonize indigenous people’s land in Africa and shaped their faith to conform to the colonial perspective. The Promised Land/Land of Promise motif is an essential component in the context of the Hexateuch. The Hexateuch reflects two main philosophies of acquiring the land of promise: first, an anticolonial view of land acquisition through negotiations for space in a space already occupied by others, and second, a colonial perspective of land acquisition from the position of power through military conquest. The author’s argument can be related to modern one-sided extractive development activities, which involve repressive state laws and marginalization of indigenous peoples.

K.K. Yeo gives a summation of the collection. Using his own family experience, he notes that space is political and ideological, which is why territories are frequently under dispute. From an Asian context, he points out that colonizers were from both the West and one’s region. The previously colonized immigrant communities (Chinese and Indian) contributed to the welfare of the sovereign territory but robbed the land and its natural resources. Under the guise of development and modernization, the new immigrants exploited the earth and destroyed the basic sustenance of the people. He concludes by affirming that any biblical interpretation that sees humankind as mandated to “subjugate the earth” misses the human vocation to care for nonhuman creation.

The contributors invite the readers to engage with their essays and encourage them to take their respective social locations and embodied space seriously. They challenge us, especially those from the Majority World and minoritized communities, to go beyond reflections on traditional theological loci to include the reciprocity of covenant in the creation story; the predatory ideology of colonizing theology in making indigenous peoples landless; the role of the Bible in reconstruction theology for
indigenous peoples to repossess the land; the ways to overcome the Zionist theological legitimacy in colonizing Palestine, and to overcome biblical interpretations that harm the land and its peoples.

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