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IDEOLOGY, IDEOLOGICAL CRITICISM, AND THE BIBLE

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Biblical studies has always been a contested field, and every reading is a contested reading. 'Dominant' readings of texts gain and lose supporters over time. The Bible can be read to support slavery, monarchy, the death penalty, racism, sexism, and a host of other violent relations, or it can be read to support an opposite set of structures. I tell the fundamentalist Christian students in my introductory Bible classes that if we gathered a room full of so-called biblical inerrantists, there probably would not be one singular interpretive agreement on any biblical passage. Contested readings are all ideological, although not all the 'contestants' would admit to their role and/or to the text's role in interpretation. In ideological criticism readers are required to own their own commitments and agendas, which can be difficult and uncomfortable. Focus has been on 'the hard sayings of Jesus' or 'the ethics of' the Tanakh or the New Testament, as if ideology were isolated in the more difficult passages. Ideological criticism (especially of the Marxist-influenced variety) takes the whole text to task, from the social formation of biblical books to the canonization process to the social location and ethical responsibility of the reader.

Ideology is usually what the Other has; there is an 'ideology of the Other'. The 'enemies' of the Israelites and early Christians have ideologies, and readings by feminists or minority groups are ideological readings. Since ideology is what the Other has, there is often no ownership of one's personal place in the interpretive history and ethical effects of one's own reading. In mainstream biblical

studies any reading that is not based on the post-Enlightenment tenets of the historical-critical method is also seen as ideological. Thus, the Christian Coalition and deconstructionist readings are ideological. Here 'ideology' often means 'political agenda'. Even though deconstructionists are commonly viewed as apolitical, they are still accused of bringing their 'agendas' to their readings.

A more overtly ideological critical approach that does claim its political commitments comes from liberation hermeneutics. Many times the 'readings from below' are by the powerless, but members of the dominant class/race/gender/sexuality also use these contextual narratives to address contemporary political issues (often omitting, or speaking for, the minority voices!). In terms of discourse and power issues, *who* speaks is an important ideological issue. Ideology is the political manifestation of the repressed/oppressed imagination of the biblical writer, narrator, character, ancient readers/hearers and/or contemporary readers. Or, ideology is false consciousness (see McLellan [ed.] 1977, on Marx) imposed on the masses by the dominant political or religious forces. Or, ideology is blindness (see Foucault 1980) on the part of the text and its readers. There is no neutral or objective place the reader can claim; degrees and types of privilege always linger—on the lips, the page, the political relationships.

More often, ideology stands for the value system and cultural mores of a biblical writer or text. In brief here is how this language of ideology in biblical studies sounds: there is 'the ideology of' the Chronicler and the Priestly writer(s), but also of the narrator and the characters. In sociological (and some literary) criticism, locating these ideologies can help reveal the historical context of the text. (These methods often slip into the referential fallacy which claims a direct insight into the ancient world—that modern techniques can provide a clear window into 'the way things were'). Ideology is a literary 'device': in formalist terms a literary principle that can be delineated in the text by use of structural or semiotical tools. One debate centers around the location of ideology. Ideology is something of/in the text; or ideology is something outside of the text, mostly in the interpreter (and interpretive community).

One of the most difficult aspects of ideological criticism is defining 'ideology'. The term originated with Destutt de Tracy in 1793, who considered ideology as the history and theory of ideas (see Barrett

1991: 169). Napoleon then coined the term 'ideologues', using it in a pejorative sense to discredit de Tracy and similar Enlightenment thinkers. Marx changed this general definition to the more specific one of the 'false consciousness' that infects the class struggle (McLellan [ed.] 1977). Thus, for Marx 'ideology' came to have an even more negative definition, since ideology is what the dominant class uses to support its interests. In a strict Marxist understanding, ideology in art and literature can be traced to the interests of the dominant social class.

In recent mainstream biblical studies ideology is more what the text has than what the interpreter has. With the rise of liberation exegesis and hermeneutics, ideology has come to include the belief systems of the interpreters and their social locations (interstructured oppressions, political contexts, etc.), the multiple focalizers of the biblical text (and its intertextual connections) and the ethical choices and repercussions of particular biblical readings. Ideology is once again about ideas—who has them, whose voice is privileged and why, what their agendas are, and the influence of these ideas in lived experience.

Ideological criticism points out the political nature of texts and interpreters. As in most critical theory, the majority of theorists are males from the First World. The emphasis is on class and not race and gender. Until very recent work by some of them, the most prominent theorists used in ideological criticism in biblical studies (Jameson, Eagleton, Foucault, Burke, Gramsci, Ricoeur and Bakhtin) have focused mainly on the politics of literature. The irony is that, as with other critical readings of the Bible in the twentieth century, the main theoretical underpinning of ideological criticism of the Bible has been white, European and European-American males (from Marx to Žižek). Female scholars such as Belsey, Spivak and Barrett have been marginal theoretical players in most ideological critical writing on biblical texts, as their works have been largely ignored. There is hope that the male theoretical focus is changing with the rise of cultural studies that question boundaries and existing power relations.

Sociological criticism is often linked to ideological criticism in biblical studies for an alternative understanding of political and economic issues of the ancient world. Gottwald (1979) is the most influential example of this method of reading ancient Israel. Feminist, African-American and Third World biblical scholars focus on the other dimensions of the political realm, noting the overlap of class

with race, gender, sexuality and postcolonial issues. Bal (1988) combines anthropology and narratology in her feminist readings of Judges. Since all readings are ideological, it is important to expose the social locations and interests of the reader.

Ideological critical studies of biblical texts claim that biblical exegesis is no longer a neutral act; there are always class interests and power relations at stake. The following survey of the literature focuses on the last ten years (beginning with Sternberg 1985). The discussion includes biblical scholars who overtly claim to do ideological criticism, as well as those who do liberation and postcolonial readings.

Do Texts Have Ideologies?

In his 1985 book, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Sternberg raised the issue of the ideological nature of the Hebrew Bible. Ideology is connected to the rhetoric and poetics of the biblical text. Ideology is about persuasion and how the text motivates or manipulates the reader. The Bible is a didactic writing with an agenda to push. Thus, biblical texts have a particular slant on the story. Sternberg distinguishes between the didactic and the ideological nature of biblical texts: 'Didacticism is ideological writing, but not vice versa, and the dividing line is precisely where ethics and aesthetics meet to generate the *art* of persuasion' (1985: 483). Ideology has to do with morals presented in the text.

Sternberg takes a very modernist approach in his reading; the Bible presents its 'truth' (singular) to the reader. This 'truth' is part of a unified worldview held in the biblical texts. Sternberg summarizes: 'If the Bible is ideologically singular—and I believe so—then its singularity lies in the world view projected, together with the rhetoric devised to bring it home' (1985: 37). Sternberg finds a coherence to the biblical writings—texts linked by an ideological thread.

In a narratological vein similar to Sternberg's, Craig reads for ideology in the book of Jonah (1993). Craig sees a unified ideological system in Jonah and uses primarily the theory of Uspensky (1973), Polzin (1980: Polzin relies on Bakhtin in his reading of Deuteronomy) and Bakhtin (1981) in his definition of ideology: 'I employ the word to mean a deeply held and interlocking set of religious, social, and

political beliefs or attitudes about the world and how the world works' (p. 8). The author uses ideology as a unifying factor to keep the 'art' of the work (characters, narrator, plot, etc.) together. The characters and the narrator have different ideological viewpoints, but the multiple ideologies are unified by the author who 'finally subordinates this whole mass of ideology to a single accent and unified point of view: God is free to command, to codify plans, and to have compassion on all of creation' (p. 154). Although multivoiced (Bakhtin), the narrative of Jonah is controlled in the end by the author. Like Sternberg's, Craig's reading is a formalist one. The author (not the reader) has the authority to create an ultimate unity in this story. There is both internal and external ideology in Jonah, but everything in the text (such as silence, plot, rhetoric, questions, characters' discourse) is part of the author's strategy for a unified ideology. As Craig's subtitle states, art (and poetics) is 'in the service of ideology'. The author has a goal, and ideological criticism can uncover the author's interests and strategies (= ideology).

Most biblical scholars do not find such a simple ideological thread in the writings. Rowland and Corner relate:

> A text will not usually produce a particular ideology in a 'pure' form, whether it be supportive of the status quo or not. Accordingly, however loudly a note of protest sounds in a text, it is going to be shot through with the ambiguities of being part of a world that is itself full of contradiction and pain (1989: 150).

Thus, there is recent movement away from a formalist approach to scriptures toward poststructuralism. Rather than unity, there is disunity. New insights and voices of the Bible are to be found in the fragments and chaos and loose ends. For Eagleton the book of Jonah is not about unity but about chaos and 'the vertiginous collapse of meaning' (1990: 234). God is not merciful in the end: rather, 'God is a spineless liberal given to hollow authoritarian threats, who would never have the guts to perform what he promises' (p. 231). Eagleton calls into question the ideological unity of the text of Jonah; everything and everyone in the text is questionable and unstable.

The main theorist for biblical ideological criticism in the last ten years has been Jameson. His book *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* was influential in the mid-to-late 1980s in linking literary-critical and sociological-critical readings of the Bible. Jameson borrows his definition of ideology from the

Marxist writer Althusser, 'as a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of History' (Jameson 1981: 30). All texts have a 'political unconscious'; that is, texts are the narrative representation of a culture's mode of production and class struggle. Since the needs and desires of social classes are utopian, ideology and Utopia are in a dialectical relationship. Texts produce the tensions of lived relations, personal and communal. The interpreter enters into these narrative tensions seeking out the oppressive and liberative modes of production. Ideology is a system of representation within history. Jameson relates: 'History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its "ruses" turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention' (p. 102).

In his reading of the book of Job, Penchansky uses the theories of both Jameson and Macherey (theories of textual production) to examine Job's situation and the role of God in this situation. Penchansky traces the philosophical and literary movements of Formalism, Marxism and Neo-Marxism, and deconstruction to set up his method of reading for the 'ideological conflict in Job'. Dissonance is in the text (for instance, historical and structural dissonance) and in the readings of the text. Penchansky explains: 'The disharmonic elements of the book of Job create a kind of whole; not in hopeless disarray, as some would claim, but neither as a coherent story' (1990: 70). Most traditional readings of Job search for answers to the problem of evil and suffering in the world, but Penchansky states, '*There are in fact no answers in Job*' (p. 71). The book of Job is a text in relation to other texts (such as the *Testament of Job*; Greek and Hebrew renditions of Job) and its history of interpretation. It is a text full of multiple signifiers and interpretive impact—all through its conflicting ideologies (of the friends, Job's wife, God and Job).

Penchansky uses the term 'up for grabs' to describe the interpretive process: 'I see literary activity as having a lot to do with desire, choice, and conflict, the three things that we do when we grab for something' (1992: 35). In reading 'The Deuteronomic Template' (Judg. 2.10-23), Penchansky reveals and rejects the Deuteronomic ideology of insiders and outsiders: 'I do not like the Deuteronomic Template, and seek to undermine its influence by exposing its

ideological coercion and concealment' (p. 41). Penchansky exposes his own ideological reading strategy and the options interpreters have to speak out, be silent or be 'under erasure' (Derrida). As in his reading of Job, he is not looking for the unity of the text. Even when faced with the singularity of the Deuteronomic ideology in Judges 2, Penchansky chooses a conflictual relation to the text. He comments on the overall situation of ideological criticism: 'The ideological critic recognizes that the act of interpretation is a political act, and those who have controlled the reins of interpretation wield much power in the various institutions... There is no such thing as value-free or objective interpretation' (1995: 27).

Other uses of Jameson's method include Jobling's reading of Psalm 72. Jobling draws from Jameson's idea that the ideological conflicts in a text are connected with the social and semiotic systems that produce it. Texts are unstable; therefore, meaning is unstable but connected to a web of social, political and economic relations. Like Penchansky, Jobling offers multiple readings of the text to show the possibilities of readings using ideological criticism. Even though 'all roads lead to the undecidable', 'it is fair to claim a definite correspondence between the points where tension arises in the text and the points where it arises in the political analysis' (1992: 123). The ideas of monarchy and justice are deconstructed in Psalm 72, a psalm that exposes multiple levels of conflicting political relationships.

Boer uses Jamesonian theory to read the reign of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 11–14, 3 Reigns 11–14 (Greek text of 1 Kgs 11–14) and 2 Chronicles 10–13. With this Marxist reading Boer goes on to ask a key question: 'how might the ideological features of the text, which come in the form of religious issues, be understood as a class discourse?' (1996: 100). The allegorical method of Jameson includes three horizons (Gadamer's term [1985])—political or literal, social, and historical—which reveal the base and superstructure of the modes of production of the ancient Hebrew society and strategies of containment in the literary text. The roles of class and royal ideology are key in Boer's interpretation. The economic and social history of the ruling class in exile and in return is portrayed differently in each of the three versions of the Jeroboam story. The different discourses of social classes are in the ideology of the text. For Jameson, ideology and Utopia are dialectically related. The Utopia of the nation and the desires of the social classes in control of the mode of production are

in the text.

Other scholars who do socio-political readings of biblical texts rely more on the theories of Eagleton, an Althusserian Marxist like Jameson. Many of these readings focus on social class. For example, Gottwald shows the prophecy in Isaiah 40–55 to be against the dominant ideology of the ruling social class. Gottwald looks at the 'general mode of production' of the historical period of the prophet and also to the ideology of the text and the 'literary mode of production'. This text is about 'the ideological formation of a professional political and religious elite possessing the means and confidence to be the bearers of historic change in the redivision of the political and religious map of the ancient Near East' (1992: 55). Returning from exile in Babylon and restoring a Judahite nation are primary ideological concerns. Gottwald is again looking for patterns of elitism and gaps in the social order, as in *The Tribes of Yahweh*.

Myers performs a Marxist reading of Mark which he calls a 'political reading' (1988). He is aware of the problem of defining the term 'ideology' and suggests as a definition of ideology the basic Marxist idea of either subversion or support of the status quo. Myers employs sociological criticism and narrative criticism in his political hermeneutics and thus considers phrases such as 'worldview' or 'social strategy' as interchangeable with 'ideology'. Marxist criticism is helpful in unmasking power relations, and 'the study of ideology is for purposes of determining not only how symbolic discourse functions socially, but also *on whose behalf*' (p. 18). In brief, the task of ideological criticism is '. . . to examine the ideological signification of Mark's literary form' (p. 99). Myers uses a wide variety of Marxist scholars from Gramsci to Eagleton to promote 'ideological literacy' in his political reading of Mark (p. 99). Ideology is signified in a literary text, in the symbolic narrative world. Myers supposes that an ideologically literate reader can know the ideologies of the Markan context in the Jewish war against Roman control. Jesus and Jesus' message of liberation and justice for the poor stand in stark contrast to the imperialist powers of Rome.

Similarly, Herzog reads the parables of Jesus as subversive narrative. Jesus is the teacher of the poor and oppressed, and the parables provide a window into the world of peasant and landowner, justice and injustice. Herzog draws on the thought of the Brazilian Marxist educator Freire on literacy and education for social justice. In

teaching the poor with parables Jesus is using an encoded message. Herzog relates that

> the interpreter must pay attention to the scenes [the parables], encode and attempt to understand how they could generate conversations that enhanced the hearer's ability to decode their oppressive reality, or how they encode limit situations depicting limit acts that are intended to challenge the boundaries of their closed world (1994: 29).

What did it take to survive in the New Testament world? What were the power plays between rich and poor, slave and master, men and women? What is important is not to get back to some 'original' meaning of each parable, but to cast each parable in its social setting and relate it to the transformation of present lives and social settings.

Fowl raises the question of whether ideology is inside or outside a literary text. He claims that most ideological critics search for ideologies in a biblical text. This search for ideologies 'usually stems from the scholarly observation that those who produced the biblical texts shaped them in the light of their own economic, ethnic, social or gender based interests' (1995: 15). Examples of biblical scholars who do this type of ideological criticism include Mosala (1989) and Schneiders (1991). Fowl's goal in dismissing the idea that texts have ideologies is to focus more on 'the relationships between texts and social practices and about how one might alter the social practices underwritten by particular texts (especially biblical texts)' (1995: 16). Fowl follows the Abraham story through the Bible and extrabiblical texts to ask the question: 'Which of these or other ideologically loaded interpretations of Abraham is the ideology of the text?' (p. 28). If one says a text has an ideology, then one may be only 'ideologizing' the text. Fowl rejects Third World readings (unless done by white male scholars, such as G. West): 'Further, we need to stop talking about texts as hopelessly or irredeemably racist or patriarchal or elitist, etc.' (p. 32). Fowl does ideological criticism from a position of privilege, putting ideological criticism back into the control of white male scholars.

If biblical texts have no ideologies, then they are all redeemable, regardless of the violence in the text and its interpretive history. The colonizer can retain control and power over the colonized because the biblical text is 'innocent'. Therefore, the cries of the colonized, like Mosala, Sugirtharajah and certain feminists, that the text is not innocent can be ignored or deemed as so much ideologizing of the

biblical text. At this stage in ideological criticism the postcolonialist is standing face-to-face with the colonizer. The colonizer is still embedded in a system of privilege even if the colonizer has experienced a liberal conscientization toward postcolonial thought.

In a similar mode, Cartwright moves the readings from below to the privileged sphere in biblical studies. Cartwright's focus is not on narratology but on hermeneutics; in other words, his interest is on the reader and not the author of biblical texts. In this way, he uses Bakhtin differently from Craig. Cartwright finds his definition of ideology by examining African-American biblical hermeneutics. From Bakhtin, Cartwright has learned that 'not all interpretive practices mediate ideology in the same way or to the same end' (Cartwright 1993: 141). For African-Americans the Bible is 'double-voiced' because it has been a book of both oppression and liberation. The 'Bible' is actually a chain of texts (or Bakhtin's 'utterances') and there can never be one 'correct' or 'true' and unified reading of the text. Texts have histories of interpretations and are dynamic rather than static entities.

Liberating Ideology

Ideological criticism of biblical texts has been best known as an intellectual exercise of First World scholars reading in Marxism or Russian Formalism. However, a key locus of ideological readings of the Bible is increasingly among the marginalized: Third World readings (e.g. Minjung [see Commission on Theological Concerns 1981]), African-American, feminist, womanist and mujerista readings. Sugirtharajah recognizes the subversive importance of the 'voices from the margin' in the Third World. The margin is 'a site of creative re-visioning' (1995: 1) in which 'the continuing task of the interpreter is to investigate and articulate the truth and to confront the powers that be' (p. 7). Cultural insights, strategies of reading, specifics of contemporary issues of class and economy are all brought to the act of biblical interpretation. Experiences of colonialism and orientalism and their presence in the history of the missionary movement and in traditional biblical studies are emphasized. The Bible has been used as a weapon of imperialism, sexism and racism, and liberation hermeneutics is claiming the Bible back on its terms, terms that are plural, national and post-national and often revolutionary.

Briggs raises the key question: 'Is the liberative content of hermeneutics contained within this movement behind the text? Or, put in a different way, is a socially transformative praxis based on a hermeneutics, not of the text itself, but of the social practices behind it?' (1990: 276). Identity politics is behind many recent liberation readings: there is a push for all interpreters to make public their social locations (Segovia and Tolbert [eds.] 1995a, 1995b). This push is to uproot the traditional objectivist claim in biblical studies that one interpreter can produce a universal reading of a biblical text. The hegemony of traditional scholarship from Europe and the United States is becoming decentered in a postmodern, postcolonial world where meaning is fragmented. One of the dangers in ideological critical readings is that First World biblical scholars may reinscribe colonization by co-opting the readings of the marginalized. Instead of standing on the margin, they attempt to pull select parts of the margin in to their own advantage. Readings that are too resistant are left on the margins. Texts cannot have ideologies because if the ideology of a certain text were unethical (for instance, advocated violence against women or homosexuals), then resistance to the text would be an ethical option. If ideology is outside the text (brought in by the interpreter or the social worlds), then the sacred canon stays intact. Often this act of imperialist sabotage is so subtle that its violence goes unnoticed. Mainstream biblical studies then knows the margin only as filtered by the center. A new, acceptable reading of race, class, gender or sexuality is then given a place in the interpretive discourse, and the more radical readings stay on the margins. The ideological power of the recent 'voices from the margins' is apparent only when they speak unfiltered. Again, Briggs is instructive:

> It is not my belief that interpretation must always result in a hegemonic act. Liberation theologies have portrayed how peoples of color, women, peasants and workers have appropriated the biblical tradition as a commitment to their own liberation (1990: 299).

Both filtered and unfiltered voices make up the ideological critical readings of the last ten years, and will be the trends of the next ten years.

For many in liberation hermeneutics in the Third World, the biblical writings are themselves ideological exchanges—of the ancient ideologies with the modern ones. The systems of oppression are not only past but present and there is a direct relationship of modern

communities to these biblical stories of oppression and liberation. For example, in a Japanese feminist reading of the Gospel of Mark, Kinukawa (1994) identifies with the roles of women in shame-based cultures. Jesus' positive response to the women who boldly break social barriers to approach him overturns the oppressive norms against women's behavior. Kinukawa links the oppression of women in the first century CE with the present situation of Japan's slave trade of prostitutes. Jesus and the women who followed him crossed the social boundaries of his world; so should contemporary believers (men and women).

G. West follows a similar path in his explanation of liberation hermeneutics in South Africa. West summarizes and analyzes the current liberatory hermeneutics in South Africa by Mosala, Boesak and many others. He borrows definitions of ideology primarily from Eagleton and Jameson. West then makes his own ideological claims: 'But what of those who are not and cannot be organic intellectuals and yet who are committed to solidarity with and accountability to the poor and marginalised? How do I as a white, middle-class, South African male [speak for the oppressed]?' West's answer is that he must move from 'speaking for' and 'listening to' toward speaking to and with the oppressed (1991: 213). West further clarifies that from his own social location he 'can choose to be accountable to and to be in solidarity with the poor and oppressed. We can learn from them and we can serve them. We can choose to be particularly constituted by work with them' (p. 215). West works with 'communities of ordinary readers' (p. 234) in the Institute for the Study of the Bible in South Africa to produce contextual readings of biblical texts. The emphasis is on transformation and repentance of individuals, not systemic change.

Often the term 'materialist reading' is used to denote ideological critical readings of the Bible. From Marxist philosophy 'materialist' refers to the 'lived experience' and the social conditions of human life. 'Ideology' deals with the hegemony of the ruling classes and the class struggle from the oppressed classes. Belo of Portugal combines structuralism (de Saussure; Barthes) and deconstruction (Derrida reading Freud) with a Marxist materialist reading in his reading of the Gospel of Mark. Belo's agenda for reading Mark is to incorporate exegesis and history, 'the theoretical articulation of *narrative*, *practice*, and *ideology*' and '*materialist ecclesiology*' (1981: 6). The

relationship between signifier and signified, the social issues of purity and danger, and the political context of Roman colonialism form parts of Belo's materialist reading. The relationship between narrative and ideology is important in identifying Mark as a subversive Gospel. Belo summarizes this relationship: 'The ideological relation, on the basis of the transformations effected in its codes, will rework the narrative in order to make it serve the reproduction of the ideology; the narrative is now reideologised' (p. 33). Belo is saying that Mark's Gospel subverts the Roman colonial order of the first century CE. The ideology of the text traces the change from the apostolic leadership to the formation of ekklesia (pp. 282-83) in the face of Roman imperialism and the failed insurrection in 70 CE. Belo is engaged in a Marxist-Christian dialogue that makes contemporary connections with the early Christian world, with Jesus' death as the center point of action:

> '*The resurrection can only be the fruit of insurrection*.' . . . Is this not true in our day of the murder of a Che Guevara or a Camilo Torres? And even more of the many anonymous heroic combatants in the Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Algerian, Cuban, Chilean, etc., revolutions? (p. 295).

There has always been violence against the `bodies of the poor' by the capitalist state, and a materialist reading and ecclesiology serve as a subversive corrective to the past and present state injustices. Therefore, Mark is a revolutionary text that exposes the ideological commitments of the church.

Ideological critical readings from the Third World have as a main goal the exposure of multiple oppressions. Tamez of Costa Rica offers an understanding of the term 'oppression' from the Hebrew Bible; the various Hebrew words for oppression have the following meanings: the unjust relationship between rich and poor; violence against women; violence against the poor; slavery (1982: 8-9). As Tamez describes

the relationship: 'The oppressed are therefore *those who have been impoverished*, for while the oppressor oppresses the poor because they are poor and powerless, the poor have become poor in the first place because they have been oppressed' (p. 3). Oppression is idolatry; the oppressor is an idolater. Tamez is engaged in a reconstructive reading that is Bible-centered; that is, the Bible is a liberatory text for the poor and oppressed, granting hope, good news, and revolutionary strategies.

In the United States a major reconstructive hermeneutical movement has been in African-American biblical studies. The groundbreaking book, *Stony the Road We Trod*, has as its main agenda reclaiming the black presence in the Bible and relating the black experience of oppression and social action to biblical exegesis. In the overwhelmingly white world of biblical studies, the scholars in this volume are claiming their own spaces in the field. The editor, Felder, lays out one of the central issues for the volume: 'The white, male, Eurocentric model is flawed because it is imperialistic. Also, as a point of view, it is basically irrelevant to our black churches' (1991: 6). Part of claiming these spaces is recovering Africa and Africans in the Bible and on biblical maps. Wimbush describes the way the history and ongoing process of African-American reading strategies arose out of an oral culture and explains: 'The interpretation was not controlled by the literal words of the texts, but by social experience. The texts were heard more than read; they were engaged as stories that seized and freed the imagination' (1991: 88). This imaginative approach to biblical hermeneutics uncovers the traditions of racist readings (in the 'curse of Ham' in Gen. 9.24-27, in the omission of Africans in translation and in passages extolling slavery as an appropriate metaphor) and also of sexist readings (of the *Haustafeln*, 'household codes'). Martin asks a critical question:

> Why is the African American interpretive tradition marked by a forceful critique and rejection of a literalist interpretation of the slave regulations in the *Haustafeln*, but not marked by an equally passionate critique and rejection of a literalist interpretation regarding the subordination of women to men in the *Haustafeln*? (1991: 225).

Thus, the interstructure of oppressions (here, race and gender) is revealed. The Bible is still central and is viewed as a necessary liberating agent in the face of past and present oppressions.

Another way ideological criticism is employed in the reading of biblical texts is in 'resisting readings'; that is, readings that question the text and resist its ideologies and/or the ideologies of its interpretive history. One example of such a reading is Weems's interpretation of the story of the two midwives in Exodus 1. Since Pharaoh assumes that the Hebrews are different and thus inferior, the midwives Shiphrah and Puah exploit this 'ideology of difference' by claiming that the Hebrew women are different from the Egyptian women because of their reproductive power and speed, and thereby

avoid being part of Pharaoh's plan to kill the Hebrew male babies. Weems comments:

> In the end Exodus 1 does not challenge the notion of differences between people, be they male and female, or Egyptian and Hebrew. . . The notion of differences between people is not challenged, but is simply inverted and co-opted for his or her own purposes and for his or her own ideological interests (1992: 32).

The social standing of women is not challenged by the narrator in Exodus. Men are still in charge, so Weems advises that this text is ambiguous in its liberatory power.

For Mosala, ideological criticism is all about exposing 'hegemonic assumptions' to get to the liberatory message (1992: 129). He argues that the centrality of the Bible in liberation struggles is up for question:

> The insistence on the Bible as the Word of God must be seen for what it is: an ideological maneuver whereby ruling-class interests evident in the Bible are converted into a faith that transcends social, political, racial, sexual, and economic divisions. In this way the Bible becomes an ahistorical, interclassist document (1989: 18).

Mosala seeks ways to undo the reinscribing of elitist interests in biblical interpretation. For example, Mosala reads the book of Esther with the South African women's struggle for liberation in mind. The story of Esther is a colonial story, but here the colonized seek survival within the dominant system. Mosala summarizes: 'More than being a feudal and survival discourse, the book of Esther is a patriarchal text' (1992: 136) which cannot address and support African women in their struggle. Thus, Mosala rejects the book of Esther as liberatory for his situation.

Another example from Mosala is his materialist reading of the Gospel of Luke. Mosala examines the complex social relations and modes of production and economy in first-century Palestine, which is divided broadly into 'the ruling classes', 'the dominated classes', and 'the underclasses' (1989: 159-60, from Freyne's sociological reading). Mosala uses Eagleton's Althusserian definition of ideology as real social relations to examine the 'ideological conditions' of Luke's Gospel (pp. 160-61). Mosala objects to the standard interpretation of Luke as the gospel for the poor. He states that Luke produced a Gospel 'in which the struggles and contradictions of the lives of the poor and exploited are conspicuous by their absence. By turning the

experiences of the poor into the moral virtues of the rich, Luke has effectively eliminated the poor from his Gospel' (p. 163). The Gospel is acceptable to the rich because it does not change the systems of oppression that might affect their privilege. Mosala further elaborates: 'Thus Luke is not a mere distorter of facts or traditions; he is a shrewd ideologist who writes for his class in the sense of Gramsci's "organic intellectuals"' (p. 168). Jesus becomes a hero of the rich and poor alike and no social systems are overturned in the end: 'Luke's ideological co-optation of Jesus in the interests of the ruling class is an act of political war against the liberation struggle' (p. 171). Luke's liberation vision is limited, and what he does not include in his Gospel is as important as what he does include. Mosala finds the voices of the poor in acts of revolutionary social change absent. Luke is a filter of the message of Jesus to the dominant class, and is thus a very deceptive Gospel.

In my reading of the Apocalypse of John (Revelation), I reject the text as a male, misogynist fantasy of the end of time. I use Jameson to read against the grain of the text and to push further his idea of the link of ideology and utopian vision in a narrative. 'There is an ethical push and pull in ideological criticism that is dialectical on the theory level and practical on the social level. The incredible tension of the not yet and the not said pushes and pulls the reader who is not doing' (Pippin 1992: 37). Jameson incorporates some fantasy theory (of Bloch) in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), and I develop this aspect further, using the Marxist fantasy theorist Jackson. Her definition of fantasy relates well to biblical literature: 'Fantasy re-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real' (1981: 20). The fantastic representation and reproduction of patriarchal power in the book of Revelation raises important issues for the ethics of reading and the reconstructing of this text as liberatory for women (or men).

Resisting a biblical text and saying 'no' to it as a liberatory narrative is not a new method of reading the text. Ideological criticism of biblical texts has been represented by readings that reconstruct texts as liberatory and by readings that resist those same texts as oppressive. For example, the exodus–conquest metanarrative is liberatory in Jewish history and in the Civil Rights movement in the Southern United States in the twentieth century; this same narrative is seen as oppressive by some Native American and Palestinian

interpreters who identify with the Canaanites in the story. The multiplicity of readings using ideological criticism is increasing, for 'ideology' is found in the hinges of class stratification, gender and race relations, and sexual politics—the interstructured oppressions that comprise contemporary power and discourse theory and practice.

The Ideological Future in Biblical Studies

In a recent overview of ideological criticism in its collaboratively authored book, *The Postmodern Bible*, The Bible and Culture Collective uses Barrett's definition of ideology, which echoes Foucault: 'Ideology is a generic term for the processes by which meaning is produced, challenged, reproduced, transformed' (Barrett 1991: 97; The Bible and Culture Collective 1995: 272). The Collective sorts through the profusion of definitions of ideology and *Ideologiekritik* in Marxist and other critical theory to relate the influences of literary and political theories on biblical interpretation. Our assessment of ideology is as a positive term that reminds the interpreter of the ethical implications of exegesis and hermeneutics. Ideological criticism is a postmodern move that questions the power relations in reading, discourse and the production of commentaries on the Bible (including our own anti-commentary book). As Barrett's definition relates, ideological criticism removes the stable ground or center of the dominant interpreter, creating new possibilities of meaning and action. We state, 'Ideological reading, as we define it, is a deliberate effort to read against the grain—of texts, of disciplinary norms, of traditions, of cultures' (1995: 275). Ideological criticism shakes up the assumption of the dominant place of mainstream biblical scholarship by asking: Who is in control? Who supports this network of power relations? Who is not represented or is overrepresented? In what ways are the Bible and its translations and interpretations linked with colonial and neocolonial power? Is the Bible always a liberating text for all? What is the ethical responsibility of the biblical critic? What is the place of dissenting or resisting voices?

Thus, ideological criticism serves as a reminder that reading is a subjective act done by/to/for/with/against subjects. Belsey is helpful here, for she refers to ideology as 'signifying practice':

> ideology, the sum of the ways in which people both live and represent to themselves their relationship to the conditions of their existence. Ideology

> is inscribed in *signifying practices*—in discourses, myths, presentations and re-presentations of the way 'things' are—and to this extent it is inscribed in the language (1980: 42).

She is echoing Althusser in ways similar to Eagleton and Jameson in that ideology is 'material practice' and 'the necessary condition of action within the social formation' (p. 57). Still, Belsey interprets this Althusserian Marxist reading of ideology as slightly negative: ideology is evasive and deceptive, revealing meaning as some slippery object that shoots from group to group in a series of power struggles or class conflicts. Mitchell also represents an ambiguous position on defining ideology which is useful in postmodern interpretation: 'the notion of ideology is rooted in the concept of imagery, and reenacts the ancient struggles of iconoclasm, idolatry, and fetishism' (1986: 4). Ideological criticism is itself a contested field, but the movement is not away from contestation but rather toward the montage of images and technologies and bodies of the postmodern world. Ideology is thus no longer Napoleon's term for everything fuzzy and negative, because in the postmodern world these negative spaces are often where critics (the 'ideologues'!) linger. The definitions of ideology and ideological criticism are slowly moving into a more positive focus in their more postmodern manifestations.

The most recent positive definition of ideology, and one that biblical scholars will be influenced by in the near future, comes from the Lacanian, Slovakian, Neo-Marxist, psychoanalytic critic Žižek. Žižek reads through Marx and Freud to get to Lacan. Ideology is inscribed (Althusser) in the text, in the body, in the mind and in the dreams (Freud 1967). Žižek writes that '*ideology has nothing to do with "illusion"*, with a wrong, distorted representation of its social content' (1993: 230). And again as a way of summary:

> Herein lies one of the tasks of the 'postmodern' critique of ideology: to designate the elements within an existing social order which—in the guise of 'fiction', i.e., of the 'utopian' narratives of possible but failed alternative histories—point toward the system's antagonistic character and thus 'estrange' us from the self-evidence of its established identity (p. 231).

Like many ideological critics, Žižek begins with the semiotic practice of texts, that is, with the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. Žižek uses the term 'ideological fantasy', meaning by fantasy what Jackson does: that fantasy, like myth, supports the real and reality (1994: 325-27). Marx's definition of fantasy as (cynical)

illusion is then turned by Žižek into a positive reading of illusion: 'The fundamental level of ideology, however, is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself' (p. 316). In this unconscious illusion we encounter the Real (Lacan's term) in our dreaming (p. 325). Dreams, myths, the surplus of images and meaning—here is where ideology dwells.

This continuation of an interdisciplinary approach to ideological criticism by Žižek is a helpful model for biblical scholars faced with the fragmentation of biblical studies into global base communities, cyberspace, popular cultures and other spaces where 'religion' and 'Bible' and 'biblical studies' are part of a larger conversation about the forces shaping our worlds. Ideological criticism sounds a necessary warning that the previous enclosure of biblical studies is crumbling. Although the dominant structures have crumbled, many biblical critics are under the illusion that the center still holds. Traditional historical-critical commentaries are still being written, many disciplines within biblical studies are still overwhelmingly European or European-American, and the patriarchy is still in control. But other voices are being heard. The 'margins' are resisting (and often revolting) against the assumed 'norms' in biblical studies. New questions about the ethics of reading make it difficult to rest safely and satisfied in an intellectual vacuum.

According to the Bible and Culture Collective, ideological criticism is not an end, but a way into the discussion about ethics and meaning in biblical studies: 'Thus, in the final analysis, ideological criticism is a limited, reductionist term for a much larger context of cultural relations and processes. Ideological criticism is resisting, ruptured, incomplete, chaotic, yet imaginative' (1995: 306). This critical opening is meant to create a sense and sensibility for authentic communities of resistance and solidarity with the oppressed. The model of the lone scholar writing an isolated work, or of an enlightened colonizer summarizing the works of the oppressed, may begin to shift into models of 'participatory action research', in which interpreters work in collaboration to produce texts. Ideological criticism proposes that the traditional terms of interpretive and structural power shift in ways that continually question the new positioning of power relations and in ways that are continually in process. Many in the dominant group of biblical scholars may/will be

intimidated by the ruptures and incompleteness and the examination and probable loss of privilege that is called for in ideological criticism. Ideological criticism relates that this 'loss' will actually be a gain—toward more inclusive and transformative biblical scholarship.

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