

Utilizing Postcolonial Theory in Christian Education

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ABSTRACT

Postcolonial study is a method for examining a social problem or issue. It frequently uses the term *subaltern* to refer to groups marginalized in the social system by a hegemonic power for specific reasons, such as social class, religion, gender, race, language, and culture. The complexity of colonial effects obscures the extent to which colonialism has influenced our perspective, philosophy, and knowledge, such as regulations, policies, politics, and even our educational system that oppress others, *the subaltern*. This essay employs a postcolonial perspective (the subaltern theory) to demonstrate who and how people are marginalized within society's system. Subaltern theory evolves into a way of thinking that decolonizes all spheres of life, including religious education. Furthermore, using Liam Gearon's analysis, which examined the legal framework, educational system, and curriculum for religious education in Britain, and the marginalization within Britain's religious education system or curriculum. This article emphasizes the need for Christian education to encourage awareness and critical thinking to change the external environment of marginalization. The author argues that subaltern theory enables Christian religious education to examine its curriculum and content to ensure that it does not perpetuate oppression but fosters critical thinking that results in in-depth reflection and uninhibited creativity to address social and theological issues.

Keywords: Postcolonial theory, subaltern theory, religious education, Christian education, critical thinking

INTRODUCTION

'Postcolonial' is frequently applied to people living in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. However, it is worth noting that the term 'postcolonial' can refer to three distinct concepts: postcolonial as a period/era following Europeans' colonialization

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in the mid-20th century (often written with a hyphenated 'post-colonial'); postcolonial as a *process of resistance* to colonialism; and postcolonial as a *context* that encompasses not only a place or era, but also political, socioeconomic, artistic, cultural, and philosophical.² Postcolonial studies refer to the third definition, which is the critical examination of those elements that criticize and oppose Western thought's tendency to control, oppress, and dominate all facets of life.

Postcolonial studies will assist theology in reexamining its methodology and content, which have been shaped for centuries by Western perspectives, as evidenced by the history of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and South (Latin) America. Finally, this study assisted Christian Education as a branch of theology in challenging colonialism's traditional thinking, which resulted in stereotyped perspectives, images, colonial knowledge, and cultures that support and legitimize dominance.³ Thus, postcolonial studies propose Christian Education to foster and nurture people's faith in church and society in a postcolonial context.

METHODOLOGY

The Subaltern in Postcolonial Theory

Subaltern is a term that is frequently used in postcolonial studies. Several scholars, including Antonio Gramsci, Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Robert J.C. Young, use the term 'subaltern.' This article will discuss their perspectives in order to gain a better understanding of the term 'subaltern' in postcolonial studies. A subaltern is a group of people who face oppression within a feudal, hierarchical, and oppressive system. Thus, postcolonial theory (particularly the subaltern) can be used to dismantle the colonial legacy's oppressive system. It is hoped that the oppressive, unfair, or discriminatory educational system will be decolonized and that a new educational system will be developed that is fair, critical, and provides just and equal space and opportunity for diverse students.

2 Wai Ching Angela Wong, "Colonial and Postcolonial Context," in *Christianity in East and Southeast Asia*, eds. Kenneth R. Ross, Francis D. Alvarez SJ and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 464-5.

3 Vanessa Andreotti, *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 86-87.

Antonio Gramsci is credited with coining the term “subaltern.” He applied the term to those groups in a society subject to systematic hegemonic power by the ruling classes.⁴ Gyan Prakash affirmed Gramsci’s view that the term ‘subaltern’ referred to roles in class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture that were denied access to ‘hegemonic’ power.⁵ Gramsci views States as the ruling class or hegemonic power that exerts control over Subalterns in civil society, which he explains in his History of Subaltern Classes as a subset of Italian History.⁶ As a result, the subaltern group lacks social and political awareness as a fighting force. They have been constrained or imprisoned by social control or hegemonic power.

This terminology is then explicitly used in Subaltern Studies by Guha and later Spivak to discuss South India’s subaltern issues.⁷ Guha clarified the use of this terminology in a book devoted to subaltern studies. He stated that the term “subaltern” refers to South Asian society’s subordinate groups in class, caste, age, gender, and culture.⁸ Then, following Gramsci’s thinking, Guha asserts that the subaltern group is always subject to the ruling groups’/authority’s activity in all circumstances, even when they revolt or attempt to rise.⁹

Furthermore, Spivak is credited with popularizing the term “subaltern” in the field of postcolonial studies. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” she famously argued. Spivak is particularly interested in women as subalterns. However, she later broadened the definition of subalterns. According to Spivak, a subaltern is a heterogeneous group of victims of colonization.¹⁰ She concurred with Guha that subaltern included the rural upper class’s lowest strata, poor landlords, wealthy peasants,

4 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 215.

5 Ashcroft et al., *Key Concepts*, 215.

6 Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds. and trans.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 52.

7 Ashcroft et al., *Key Concepts*, 216.

8 Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), vii.

9 Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I*, vii.

10 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988), 284.

and middle-class peasants controlled by dominant groups.¹¹ Both are concerned with agriculture and colonial stratification in India, similar to Gramsci's concerns in Italy. According to Spivak, subalterns are victims of imperialist epistemic violence, which renders them incapable of self-definition and separates them from the elite in the imperialist order. Even the subalterns' consciousness is determined by the dominant, rendering them incapable of speaking for themselves.¹² This epistemic violence is inherent in the colonizer's desire to expand, dominate, and control the colonized (the subaltern), to the point where the colonizer is also an imperialist. In a different sentence, Spivak stated that subaltern awareness is a historicized political conscience centered on or based on elite groups or is not self-sufficient.¹³ Robert J.C. Young also confirmed this, stating, "The concept of the subaltern ascribed a new dynamic political agency to those who had formerly been described as the wretched of the earth, the oppressed and the dispossessed."¹⁴ The practical implication is that the existence of elite groups always trumps subaltern positions, voices, and perspectives. Thus, the term "subaltern" is widened to include the oppressed and those whose voices are silenced by the access that represents them and always eclipses them.

Young elaborated on the concept of subaltern through case studies. He described subalterns through the eyes of refugees in a variety of locations around the world. Young intends to disrupt the world's order, undermine privilege and power, and refuse to acknowledge Western culture's superiority as a means of demanding equality and well-being for all human beings on this planet.¹⁵ Young also agrees with Spivak that subalterns are individuals or groups who are excluded, marginalized, deemed to fall short of social standards, and lack the authority to

11 Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 284.

12 Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 285.

13 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, ed. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York; London: Methuen, n.d.), 203.

14 Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Anniversary Edition (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 355.

15 Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7.

speak.¹⁶ According to Young, the colonizer exercises control over the subaltern. Young uses the term “western” in his writings, while Spivak uses other terms to describe how the imperialist controls the subaltern’s knowledge – both terms refer to the same oppressor. Young focuses on the oppressor’s identity as a Westerner, while Spivak focuses on the oppressor’s power characteristics: dominant and control.

Young attempted to demonstrate that subalterns possess knowledge that is distinct from the colonizer’s. When Young discussed refugees’ knowledge, he asserted that they understand their anguish, the knowledge that attempted to make sense of their experiences, and the knowledge that they require medicine, food, and shelter.¹⁷ Young insisted that none of that knowledge is motivated by political considerations or a desire for gain.¹⁸ It is entirely about them and their lives. Due to their circumstances, the refugee can only think about how to survive that day. Their knowledge appears to be limited to dealing with day-to-day issues.

This fact demonstrates that Spivak’s counterpart is that subalterns must be cognizant of their knowledge. Colonization establishes the norm/standard of knowledge, and thus what has been deemed appropriate knowledge is western/colonizer knowledge. Subaltern studies seek to combat this erroneous belief that Subalterns lack knowledge or personal experience. Spivak’s subaltern studies attempt to instill a new sense of self-consciousness in subaltern groups that are not contingent on elite groups’ continued existence as the dominant ones who ultimately control them. Spivak refers to this as a subaltern strategy directed against imperialism’s control, exploitation, and dominance of subaltern life:

Class-consciousness on the descriptive level is itself a strategic and artificial rallying awareness which, on the transformative level, seeks to destroy the mechanics which come to construct the outlines of the very class of which a collective consciousness has been situationally developed.¹⁹

Postcolonial scholars’ elucidation aids in the mapping of postcolonial studies by demonstrating that colonialism is at the root of this study’s emergence. For

16 Young, *Postcolonialism*, 1.

17 Young, *Postcolonialism*, 13.

18 Young, *Postcolonialism*, 13.

19 Spivak, “Subaltern Studies,” 205.

centuries, the West (imperialist/colonizer) has influenced the colonizer's thinking, perspectives, and life ideas. Additionally, Gramsci, Guha, Spivak, and Young define the position of subaltern groups within society's system. Recognizing the subaltern context enables us to develop awareness, criticize the oppressive or dominating system, and then move or devise a strategy for combating and changing it.

DISCUSSION

Subaltern Theory in Christian or Religious Education²⁰

Subaltern theory enables education to consider others' ethical responsibilities within society's educational system, particularly in formal school institutions. Thus, this section will demonstrate how Christian educators use it to examine the educational system, which intentionally or unintentionally promotes unbalanced or unequal relations by denying space, opportunity, or the expression of alternative ideas or opinions within the context of education; the majority considers the minority small, or the strong oppress the weak.

The first figure is Liam Gearon, who examines Britain's legal framework, educational system, and religious education curriculum. Liam Gearon is a Christian Education scholar who specializes in the intersection of postcolonial theory and religious education.²¹ Gearon examined a facet of postcolonial theory in his article, "The Imagined Other," and attempted to apply some insights to religious education about the 'other.' Gearon argued that contemporary religious education institutionalizes cultural marginalization through its definition of the religious 'other'; that a pluralistic system of religious education institutionalizes the very marginalization it purports to combat.²² Gearon aims to apply postcolonial theory to religious education, particularly Great Britain, to critique and transform it.

20 The term 'Christian Education' is commonly used in the United States, and the term 'Religious Education' is commonly used in European countries. In this essay, I used the term based on the sources for this essay.

21 Liam Gearon is Associate Professor in Religious Education in Harris Manchester College, United Kingdom, and he has also been recently appointed honorary senior research fellow at the School of Education, University of Birmingham. ("Liam Gearon," Department of Education The University of Oxford, accessed September 23, 2020, <http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/people/liam-gearon/>)

22 Liam Gearon, "The Imagined Other: Postcolonial Theory and Religious Education," *British*

Gayatri Spivak coined the terms 'Other' and 'Subaltern' concerning imperialism discourse. Imperialism, according to Spivak, creates the 'other' through a dialectical process.²³ This 'othering' is a process that occurs during the colonization process. Spivak demonstrated three stages of the othering process by examining how Europeans (Britain) colonized India. To begin, *worlding*, rulers present themselves and assert their identity as rulers by traveling to India's interior regions.²⁴ Second, *debasement* or deterioration, as evidenced by the use of terms such as 'depravity,' 'treachery,' 'brutality,' and 'perfidy to describe Indian tribes.'²⁵ Thirdly, *separation*, the colonizer (colonial government) and the colonized (native states) are distinct.²⁶ This discrimination occurs daily until it develops into a habit of "normality" in society. Indeed, discrimination serves to affirm the rulers' position and power in front of the oppressed.

Furthermore, in post-Reformation history, Gearon discussed the 'other' in Christian terms, specifically non-English and Protestant Christianity.²⁷ The 'other' here refers to anything that is not English Protestant Christianity. Gearon criticized the British education law, which he claimed defined cultural hegemony. Gearon's critique is noteworthy because it brings up the issue of cultural oppression in the western context, which is frequently referred to as the colonizer of its colonies. Even though this issue occurs in the context of Britain – which is identical to the country with the most colonies in the world – this case demonstrates that oppressive systems and practices can exist anywhere as long as they are used to dominate and control those deemed weak or inferior. For example, the 1944 Education Act in the United Kingdom recognized only English Protestant Christianity and categorized Catholicism as 'other.' Furthermore, in 1988 and 1990, the Education Reform Act re-contextualized and revised the concept of Christianity in the educational system. It

Journal of Religious Education 23, no. 2 (2006): 98.

23 Ashcroft et al., *Key Concepts*, 171.

24 Ashcroft et al., *Key Concepts*, 172.

25 Ashcroft et al., *Key Concepts*, 172.

26 Ashcroft et al., *Key Concepts*, 172.

27 Gearon, "The Imagined Other," 101.

did, however, continue to emphasize Christianity as the primary religious tradition in Great Britain.

In this context, as the majority in Great Britain, Christian culture predominates in formulating concepts and definitions of religions other than Christianity. Other religions were portrayed solely as ‘other’ and were denied the right to self-definition. This practice exemplified what Spivak meant when she spoke of a subaltern group incapable of speaking for itself. The dominant political and social system exerts control over the definition and voice of others. Furthermore, Spivak implies that the imperialist creates the ‘other’; it is colonized, imperialism’s object.²⁸ Those in positions of power (in Gearon’s case, Christian culture in Britain) assumed they could speak for the ‘other.’

Gearon wrote that, as a result of education law, religious education teaching practices frequently resulted in excessive oversimplification or even stereotyping of the “other.”²⁹ Additionally, he continued, practice teaching reflected the paradoxical nature of religious education:

Religious education retains the hegemony of Christianity as a cultural benchmark of ‘Britishness’ (‘in Great Britain are in the main Christian’) while emphasizing heterogeneity of pluralism (‘taking account of teachings and practices of the *other* principal religious traditions in Britain’).³⁰

In Britain, the concept of imagined ‘other’ in-laws of education and curriculum takes two forms: *first*, religious education engages with diversity through cultural enrichment (i.e., religious art, artifacts, and architecture).³¹ *Second*, religious education stifles diverse ideas by downplaying distinctions, thereby endangering cultural hegemony (i.e., Christianity) through political power.³² Gearon defined the second form as the “demonization” of particular cultures, which resulted from the poor perpetuating “colonial discourses of power, control, and domination.”³³ Gearon proposed critical solutions based on these facts, utilizing postcolonial theory to

28 Ashcroft et al., *Key Concepts*, 172.

29 Gearon, “The Imagined Other,” 102.

30 Gearon, “The Imagined Other,” 102.

31 Gearon, “The Imagined Other,” 102.

32 Gearon, “The Imagined Other,” 102.

33 Gearon, “The Imagined Other,” 102.

foster a more considered relationship between religion, culture, and its dynamics in education. He proposed that the definition of culture be expanded to include human creativity (creative arts and creativity in science and technology) and social dimensions. That culture refers to the shared values and behavioral patterns that distinguish various social groups.³⁴ By doing so, Gearon presupposed that no single culture would dominate, define, or manipulate other cultures.

Additionally, Gearon argued that religious education in England and Wales should move away from the exclusion of 'the other' and away from equating Christianity with British culture instead of incorporating a hierarchy of interests into a system that must be culturally equivalent.³⁵ Individuals, cultures, or political parties that control the quantity and quality of public space frequently wield power to define others. According to Gearon, this may have occurred in education, including religious education. The identification process not governed by a particular culture prevents the marginalization of numerically small groups or cultures; thus, nothing is marginalized. Perhaps Gearon's argument, concluding that subalterns cannot speak, can address Spivak's concern. According to Spivak, the high level of oppression endured by subaltern groups in society has rendered them incapable of attaining a privileged position that would enable them to speak and be heard.³⁶ Gearon argues that postcolonial theory illuminates cultural representations and may deconstruct subjective assumptions about religion's place in the world. Education must be cognizant of a collective response to the colonial legacy's remnants of 'other people' in religious education.³⁷ This note is a critique of religious education as well as a call to action.

The role of Religious Education becomes critical in this context. Religious education should not tolerate unequal social relationships. Religious education must contribute to efforts to elicit subaltern consciousness in order for it to speak out

34 Gearon, "The Imagined Other," 103.

35 Gearon, "The Imagined Other," 103.

36 Alireza Asgharzadeh, "The Return of the Subaltern: International Education and Politics of Voice," *Journal of Studies in International Education* 12, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 341.

37 Gearon, "The Imagined Other," 104.

and be heard, to rise above the conditions of *subalternity*. Religious education must advocate for the rights of subalterns, creating a possibility of subaltern speaking. According to Asgharzadeh, Michael W. Apple, and Kristen L. Buras argue in *The Subaltern Speak: Curriculum, Power, and Educational Struggle* that “not only can the subaltern speak, more significantly, but also they are speaking right now... it is equally important to realize that subaltern emancipation requires a response from those privileged to acquire a global vision.”³⁸ Religious education’s role in the curriculum is critical in reclaiming this privilege and establishing a space for the subaltern to speak.

Gloria Delany-Barmann, a Bolivian educator, echoes the same message. She discussed her ideas concerning Bolivia’s indigenous people as subalterns whose knowledge and languages were denied access to education in Bolivia. Bolivian society is ethnically and linguistically diverse. Bolivia’s context is diverse in indigenous cultures and languages; 46.8 percent of the population can only communicate in Spanish, while 40.8 percent are bilingual (Spanish and Indigenous language).³⁹ While Spanish is a widely used language for communication, indigenous people (original people) continue to require recognition and distinct cultural and linguistic policies.⁴⁰ Bolivia’s education system is considered assimilationist, which means it teaches Indians (indigenous people) to read and write in the country’s official language. On the other hand, Indigenous organizations recognize that this does not ensure cultural and linguistic diversity and thus recognize that defending their language and culture is a necessary component of political struggle.⁴¹ Delany-Barman argued against educational reforms, particularly in teacher preparation practices, by emphasizing bilingual intercultural skills education.⁴² Teachers would

38 Asgharzadeh, “The Return of the Subaltern,” 342.

39 Gloria Delany-Barmann, “Teacher Education Reform and Subaltern Voices: From Política to Práctica in Bolivia,” *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 9, no. 3 (2010): 181.

40 Gloria Delany-Barmann, “Teacher Education Reform and Subaltern Voices,” 182.

41 Gloria Delany-Barmann, “Teacher Education Reform and Subaltern Voices,” 183.

42 Gloria Delany-Barmann, “Teacher Education Reform and Subaltern Voices,” 180.

have the opportunity to listen to indigenous voices and speak their own, as subaltern voices are critical for developing new educational paradigms.⁴³

Delany-Barman's experience can be applied to religious education when teachers and students engage with contextual realities such as religious plurality and develop a theology that reflects the learner's situation.⁴⁴ Additionally, Gearon believes that by deconstructing colonial assumptions and conceptualizing other faiths in religious education, religious education will develop a postcolonial spirit and a provocative openness to the 'other' without dominating.⁴⁵ This section reminds us that religious education, through its components: pedagogical principles, methodology, curriculum, and educational actors (theorists and teachers), can perpetuate the hegemonic system's dominance over subalterns through legal and policy rules. The postcolonial theory incorporates religious education in order to examine the impact of policies on educational curricula. This theory (subaltern theory) invites religious education to create spaces and opportunities for dealing with the issues surrounding the subaltern's voice, experience, unspoken words, multiple identities, power relations, and even the intersections between those issues, thereby enabling critical thinking, reflection, and ultimately system change.

Challenging Critical Pedagogy Through the Lens of Subaltern Theory

After understanding subaltern theory within postcolonial studies, I became aware of the importance of critical pedagogy in Christian education. Even within the education system, particularly when favored by hegemonic interests, teachers can become perpetrators of educational oppression. Spivak reminded us of this in 2010 during a panel presentation at Stanford University in which she responded to Gramsci's thoughts. Spivak emphasized the importance of teachers (the intellectuals) promoting 'the subaltern' culture and political movements into the hegemonic

43 Gloria Delany-Barmann, "Teacher Education Reform and Subaltern Voices," 198.

44 Mark A. Maddix, "Embracing Postcolonialism: The Future of Christian Education," *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 15, no. 3 (2018): 486.

45 Gearon, "The Imagined Other," 104.

sphere rather than acting as pioneers of the subaltern group revolution.⁴⁶ This note serves to warn intellectuals, including teachers who advocate for subalterns, to avoid becoming entangled in a system that promotes hegemony. Thus, critical pedagogy becomes a necessary principle in Christian Education in order to heighten teachers' and students' sensitivity to and awareness of subalternity; awareness of the importance of critical thinking in order for them to avoid dominating one another. It is worthwhile to recall Frantz Fanon's notes:

The colonized subject is constantly on his guard: Confused by the myriad signs of the colonial world, he never knows whether he is out of line. Confronted with a world configured by the colonizer, the colonized subject is always presumed guilty. The colonized does not accept his guilt but rather considers it a kind of curse, a sword of Damocles. But deep down, the colonized subject acknowledges no authority. He is dominated but not domesticated. He is made to feel inferior, but by no means convinced of his inferiority. He patiently waits for the colonist to let his guard down and then jumps on him. The muscles of the colonized are always tensed. It is not that he is anxious or terrorized, but he is always ready to change his role as a game for that of hunter. The colonized subject is a persecuted man who is forever dreaming of becoming the persecutor.⁴⁷

The subaltern theory sheds light on the challenges confronting Christian Education as one of the theological disciplines. Christian education is frequently viewed as a field of study and knowledge devoted to applying Christian theological content in people's lives. Christian theological perspectives and values develop into modes of thought, habits, and lifestyles and eventually into characters expected to contribute to the transformation of the environment and the world.

The 'subaltern' or 'colonized' experience oppression in Fanon's terms. They are capable of resisting the colonizer's tyranny (the imperialist; the oppressor). On the other hand, the colonized requires stimulation, encouragement, and strength

46 Stephen Morton, "Subalternity and Aesthetic Education in the Thought of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak," *Parallax* 13, no. 3 (2011): 80.

47 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 16.

to recognize and change their situation without becoming the new oppressor. As a result, this subaltern theory encourages Christian education to foster awareness and critical thinking and effect change in the world. As bell hook previously stated, the subaltern must liberate itself from colonizer dependence, "Without a decolonizing mentality, smart students from disenfranchised backgrounds often find it difficult to succeed in the educational institutions of dominator culture."⁴⁸

The Subaltern theory encourages consciousness toward a critical attitude by identifying the construction of knowledge that has shaped people's knowledge and character in addressing various aspects or dimensions of life. It cannot be denied that the Western perspective has a sizable influence on how Christians construct knowledge. I was born and raised in Asia (Indonesia) and received an education in the Western model. In the Indonesian context, public and religious education refers to both curriculum and educational content in Western education. Western education standards have obliterated knowledge; Western knowledge's standard dictates how knowledge is acquired, its content, and even its standard.

Furthermore, Spivak criticized when she raised the subaltern theory from her experience as a woman in India. Unless they are subjected to Western perspectives and knowledge, the oppressing colonizer, subaltern knowledge is considered non-existent and unheard of.⁴⁹ In Western education, which is shaped and controlled by the West, teacher-student relationships are frequently subject-object. The teacher assumes the role of the ruler (colonizer), while the student assumes the subaltern (colonized) role. Teachers and students are autonomous subjects who influence one another during the process of knowledge construction. By grasping this subaltern theory, Christian educators empower teachers and students to think critically, construct and develop their knowledge, and draw on their experiences as sources of knowledge because subalterns can speak for themselves. Critical thinking is a fundamental teaching principle. It is Christian Education's pedagogy. Other subjects

48 Bell Hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York; London: Routledge, 2010), 26.

49 William E. Deal and Timothy K. Beal, *Theory for Religious Studies* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), 114.

must not dominate her/him. Teacher-student relationships are subject-to-subject, which is the goal of critics' subaltern theory.

Students can engage in critical pedagogy without regard for the content of the knowledge provided as if the teacher were filling an empty glass. Critical pedagogy seeks to develop human awareness to comprehend the situation, recognize the unjust system, and devise a strategy for combating it. Paulo Freire, who fought against the duping and oppression of farmers in Brazil a few decades ago, was an opponent of this educational system.⁵⁰ Freire was critical of the one-way education model (monologue), which he believed suffocates creativity and imagination.

Christian education should motivate students to interpret, comprehend, and reflect on various religious phenomena in various contexts and situations.⁵¹ The teacher teaches the cognitive aspects of sharing historical accounts, traditions, symbolic, and ritual content from Christianity. However, the teacher serves as a mentor who helps students develop critical thinking skills, broadens their understanding, heightens their awareness, and fosters a sense of solidarity⁵² with the subaltern. Hopefully, in this way, Christian education can foster a critical pedagogical spirit that seeks established meaning, established knowledge, an established means of authority; encourages students to take risks, act on their sense of social responsibility, and engages the world as objects of critical analysis and hopeful transformation.⁵³

Postcolonial theory serves as a lens through which to view the context objectively and critically. Nonetheless, the more in-depth postcolonial study is a critical thinking framework for analyzing our society's colonial context. The study awakens us to colonization's pervasive influence in all spheres of life, dividing positions and perspectives into two binary oppositions: imperialist and dominated/subordinated, colonizer and colonized, or Western and Orientalist. Subaltern theory

50 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York & London Continuum, 2005), 36.

51 Paul Vermeer, "Meta-concepts, thinking skills and religious education," *British Journal of Religious Education* Vol 34, no. 3 (March 2012), 338-339.

52 Solidarity is seen as a "signifier of consciousness." In Spivak, "Subaltern Studies," 202.

53 Hendry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 14.

elucidates who and how marginalized groups of people are in our social system. Due to the complexity of colonialization's effects, we become unaware when our perspective, philosophy, and knowledge are heavily influenced by colonialism, and as a result, our regulations, policies, politics, and even our educational system oppress others. Subaltern theory evolves into a way of thinking to decolonize all spheres of life, including religious education. Subaltern theory assists religious education in examining its curriculum and content, ensuring that it does not perpetuate oppression but rather fosters critical thinking. This critical thinking will result in in-depth reflection and uninhibited creativity necessary for resolving social and theological issues.

Perhaps, through Andreotti's offer to speak within the scope of Postcolonial Studies in Education, a further step toward encountering this subaltern theory and religious education can be developed. One proposal is to engage with other knowledge systems via the initiative Through Other Eyes.⁵⁴ Because subaltern theory frequently references neglected subaltern knowledge and voice, Andreotti's proposal is pertinent; educators should place a premium on engagements with subalterns' perceptions of global issues. This step expands the possibilities for incorporating postcolonial studies into religious education by inviting and facilitating the subaltern's voice.

CONCLUSION

Gearon's argument demonstrates that postcolonial theory illuminates cultural representations and has the potential to deconstruct subjective assumptions about religion's role in education. Thus, education must take into account a collective response to the colonial legacy's 'other people' remnants in religious education. Religious education must contribute to efforts to elicit subaltern consciousness in order for it to speak up and be heard, in order to rise above subaltern conditions. Then, the indigenous people of Bolivia's experience and challenges are considered,

⁵⁴ Andreotti, *Actionable Postcolonial Theory*, 217.

where subalterns' knowledge and languages were denied access to education. These two experiences can help Christian Education recognize the critical role religious education plays in reclaiming this privilege and establishing a space for the subaltern to speak.

As a result, Christian education must advocate for the rights of subalterns by establishing a space for subaltern discourse. The role of Christian education in the curriculum is critical for reclaiming this privilege and creating a space for the subaltern to speak. Thus, critical pedagogy becomes a necessary principle in Christian Education in order to increase teachers' and students' sensitivity to and awareness of subalternity; awareness of the critical thinking skills necessary to avoid dominating one another. The teacher acts as a mentor, assisting students in developing critical thinking skills, broadening their understanding, heightening their awareness, and cultivating a sense of solidarity with the marginalized. Christian education, in this way, may foster a critical pedagogical spirit that seeks established meaning, established knowledge, and established means of authority, encourages students to take risks, act on their sense of social responsibility, and engages the world as objects of critical analysis and hopeful transformation.

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