

9 Glory

The first passion of theology?

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Life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it might display?

(Virginia Woolf)

To convey the qualities of an elusive, luminous halo: this may be the aim of theology, as much as it was the goal of Woolf's fiction.¹ It is, indeed, what has led me to the image of glory. Not the blinding lights of its triumphalist counterfeits, the reflection of gold, or the glamour of celebrity, but a quality inseparable from life in all its fragility and ambiguities. Displaying both light and darkness, this halo is perhaps like the almond-shaped auras of Byzantine iconography – also called “glories.”² It is the spectral luminosity of ordinary things, neither irresistible nor self-sufficient, but incessantly alluring. It is often barely perceptible, yet sometimes disconcerting – even terrifying. The apparent aberrations of its depictions do not diminish a theologian's zeal to convey its varying, hazy radiance. Drawn by passion to the glory that flickers in the midst of everyday life, theology speaks of its “unknown and uncircumscribed spirit.” This is a spirit that cannot be confined to neatly defined theological concepts or categories. And yet theologians persist in our weak attentiveness, “resolute” (Keller) in our attempts to describe it, however inaccurately and distortedly. We seek, with feeble words and images to express the inexpressible, in a multiplicity of voices, languages, and genres.

An uncircumscribed spirit perhaps lured the words of Irenaeus of Lyon: “The glory of God is the human being fully alive.” A celebration of these words lies behind the work of liberation theologians such as Elizabeth Johnson and Leonardo Boff, whose works express a passion for divine glory perceived in fully alive human beings.³ Rubem Alves rewrites Irenaeus in his unapologetic theopoetics of the body: “The glory of God is found in happy people.”⁴ Perhaps we recognize the efforts to convey it also in Emmanuel Levinas's allusions to the “gleam of transcendence in the face of the Other.”⁵ These witnesses to glory are not expressions of writers who are distant from adversity. Quite to the contrary, they are the poignant confessions of those who have been touched by dreadful realities of injustice and cruelty: sexism, abject

poverty, colonialism, genocide. Their statements are defiant; they implicitly challenge the assumed dichotomy between glory and vulnerability. Yet we may still ask, how can we celebrate wonder when even a cursory look at history reveals that systems of injustices expose the lives of some people to indescribable suffering, when claims to glory have so often been part of the very justification of unjust systems? Such allusions to human glory seem to have cast a long shadow of destruction and death.

The enormity of human injustice weighs on this exploration of glory – “*doxa*” – as I attempt to address the polydox character of theological witness. Injustice challenges me to attend to the vulnerability of life and leads me to seek concrete, material, fleshy images of the divine, for which I rely on biblical images of glory as earthy and elemental. Woolf’s words remind us that too often we miss glory where it is the closest to us, when it is most familiar. Therefore, theologizing glory requires theorizing the earthy and elemental; it also means theorizing what makes encounters with glory possible and difficult, prone to failure or counterfeit. For that exploration, I cross the border into the realm of philosophy to ponder the related concept of wonder. I am assuming, tentatively, that glory is the event that lures us into the experience of wonder, which Socrates famously declared to be the first passion of philosophy.⁶ But the distinction between these terms is hardly stable; philosophical descriptions of wonder, as we will see, often include the “objective” reality to which we are exposed as well as our “subjective” response to it. This argument thus necessarily moves between glory and wonder, for glory can only be conceived in relation to its effects on those who recognize it, who behold a transfiguration of the ordinary, those who open themselves in wonder.

This reflection is, thus, less about a theological position than about a theological attitude. Rudolf Otto’s words about the numinous aptly describe the experiences of glory: it “cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind” – or in the body? – “as everything that comes ‘of the spirit’ must be awakened.”⁷ Glory can only be evoked indirectly, through images that can never fully capture what, coming of an uncircumscribed spirit, materializes in multiplicity.

Semantic multiplicities

Even in the absence of the prefix “poly,” the term “*doxa*” reveals an intrinsic multiplicity produced through iterative processes of cultural and linguistic translation. In its classical usage, “*doxa*” denotes both “expectation, referring to one’s own opinion” and “reputation, referring to the opinion of others about oneself.”⁸ From these meanings emerge the well known usages of the term to refer to “opinion,” “view,” or “judgment.” It is often noted that, because *doxa* is a function of perception and affect, philosophers regarded it as an inferior type of knowledge in comparison with the assumed universality of the *episteme*. Viewed as mere opinion, *doxa* was considered inadequate for philosophy – although perhaps not altogether absent from it. However, Judeo-Christian history complexified the sense of the term when “*doxa*” became the Septuagint’s translation of the Hebrew “*kabôd*,” in turn influencing the New Testament concept of glory.⁹ Emil Brunner remained understandably surprised by the story of semantic intertwining.

“When for the first time a translator of the Old Testament hit upon the idea of rendering “kabod” by “doxa,” a linguistic change took place which was of unusual significance. The Greek word began to be modified to an extent which cannot be exaggerated.¹⁰

In contrast to the strong cognitive qualities that define doxa in philosophical parlance, with implications for thinking and wondering, the meaning of “kabôd” arises in relation to more material, concrete images. Derived from “*kabed*,” meaning “to be heavy,” “kabôd” is associated with a wide range of sensible metaphors, the best known of them being luminosity and thick darkness, often represented by fire and clouds.

In Hebrew scripture, the glory of God is represented as ubiquitous in creation. “The whole earth is full of [God’s] glory,” proclaims Isaiah. “The heavens declare the glory of God.”¹¹ It is perceived in wind, thunder, and floods: awesome and terrifying. Glory is also in the cloud that envelops the Sinai and the Temple, and the pillar of cloud or flame that accompanies the Israelites in the desert. It appears not only as extraordinary phenomena, but more often as the transfiguration of the ordinary. Even in cases where the allusions to glory are directly linked to theophanies, and thus considered as events of great consequence, depictions of glory maintain elemental, earthy qualities.

In touch with the elemental images of Hebrew Scriptures, doxa acquires different textures and shades. Contingent historical developments bring into semantic proximity a philosophical concept about thinking, and scriptural images for glory. The processes seem logical and yet the conceptual coincidences are startling. This “mysterious, almost incomprehensible word,” as Brunner describes it, is an eerily appropriate (almost literal) example of what José Saramago says of all words in *All the Names*: “The sense of every word is like a star hurling spring tides out into space, cosmic winds, magnetic perturbations, afflictions.”¹² The sense of *doxa* is indeed “radiating out in different directions that divide and subdivide into branches and branchlets” – reaching out indefinitely.

This wild polysemy – multiple in senses and sensibilities – is uniquely appropriate for a theology of the manifold. Thus my exploration does not aim to retrieve a univocal scriptural meaning of doxa at the intersection of Greek and Hebrew senses. Instead, it seeks to honor the term’s complexity by keeping visible in doxa all of the associations named above – and thus its indeterminacy – and by attending to the cosmic winds and magnetic perturbations that afflict and lure us today. By reading polydoxy through kabôd-doxa, I seek to unsettle theological reifications of doxa and to quicken the relationships latent in it. I am intensifying tenuous linguistic relationships, following branches and branchlets to foreground connections that I deem crucial for a polydox theology: connections between what we know, what illuminates the things around us and what illumination obscures; between the proximity of touch and the opacity of flesh; between vulnerability and reverence; between thought and the earth. I thus regard polydoxy as a theological attitude that relates to thought, opinion, and praise, but also, more deeply, to the world’s provocations and demands as well as to our affective responses to it. Such orientation necessarily gives rise to a multiplicity of voices, languages, and methodological

gestures, yet polydoxy is more than a plurality of opinions or a collection of teachings in and of themselves. A polydox theology entails enduring attention and responsiveness to the glory that manifests itself in the world. It implies a “disposition and an activity” of passionate engagement, indeed of true com-passion, with the beauty and the pain, with the joy and the suffering of the world.

Compassion – an active receptivity – inflects a polydox theology’s interpretation of “orthodoxy” (“right doxa”).¹³ Almost half a century ago, a first generation of liberation theologians understood that their ethical commitments demanded a courageous challenge to the privilege of orthodoxy. The “orthodoxy” they were concerned about had a reified meaning; it had become a synonym of merely “intellectualist” statements of belief. Liberation theologians argued that theology had often been obsessed with affirmations of “truth” at the expense of “doing the truth”; a new balance was needed, which they described as “orthopraxis.”¹⁴ As I envision it, a polydox theology presupposes liberation theology’s challenge to the privilege of normative statements and, more importantly, it affirms the theological orientation that such debates imply. Faith, Gustavo Gutiérrez insists, is “not a simple affirmation – almost memorization – of truths, but a commitment, an overall attitude, a particular posture toward life.”¹⁵ Such a turn toward concrete, embodied sites where theology seeks to discern what is true and right – in relation – is at the heart of what I understand by a polydox theology. Yet this theological approach departs from the language of those early liberation theologies in that, while denouncing the idolatry of the *one* dogma, polydox theology also seeks to reclaim a scintillating, complex, relational, earthy sense of doxa.

The constructive task is not a simple one, for the world has seen and suffered much under the counterfeits of glory. Indeed all too often what has been proclaimed as glory is its very negation – traits and practices that numb our sensitivity to the spectral, luminous halo of life. Polydoxy challenges both identifications of “doxa” with statements of absolute, disembodied validity and depictions of glory as a quality of overwhelming power or spectacular presence that place glory on the side of might.

God, gold, and glory

A counterfeit of glory has lodged itself in the infamous trinity of God, gold, and glory, which is commonly used as shorthand for the motives of the Spanish conquest of America. In that history, glory is identified with the gold-thirsty imperial power, and wonder is associated with the fleeting curiosity of those who confronted strange worlds. Those moved quickly to subsume them under what was already known or believed by appropriating or destroying what they encountered.

Colonial attempts to make sense of the amazing features of the “New World” were informed by fantastic literatures of the time as well as by Christian mythologies. Images of a lost (but still real) earthly paradise and a zeal for establishing a utopian world colored the colonizers’ encounters with the new land and its population.¹⁶ But the glare of riches that the colonizers thought they could possess overwhelmed the delicate glow of life there. The movement of conquest was one of voracious

appropriation and the results were catastrophic. The spectacular failures of conquistadores, settlers, and colonial powers to respond to the world they encountered, and the colossal destruction that conquest left in its wake revealed the very opposite of earthly paradise. The drive to conquer glory brought forth much deception and exhaustion, and Christian visions of glory are not untouched by such degradations.¹⁷

The sociopolitical dynamics of conquest cannot be neatly separated from the intellectual projects of the time of conquest, whether they are theological visions of glory or the philosophies of wonder. As Stephen Greenblatt argues, the theoretical conceptualization of the marvelous was not only the “intellectual background to Columbus and other early voyagers,” but also its effect. “The frequency and intensity of appeals to wonder in the wake of [Europe’s] great geographical discoveries of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century helped to provoke its conceptualization.”¹⁸ The passion for intellectual questioning that infused early modern discussions of wonder is thus enmeshed in the “rituals of appropriation”¹⁹ of exploration and conquest, which were in turn inseparable from greed and brutality. Such continuity between colonizing practices and intellectual production renders modern allusions to wonder and glory highly problematic for philosophers seeking now to deconstruct the colonial legacy. At stake is more than the recognition of historical complicity; it is more fundamentally a question of the inherent assumptions of modern epistemological and ontological frameworks in which theorizations of wonder are grounded. To trace these assumptions, I turn here to decolonial thinkers. I offer a very brief summary of a long and complex argument, which begins with the Cartesian *ego*.²⁰

In his reassessment of modern depictions of modernity, Enrique Dussel has stressed the connection between Descartes’ *ego cogito* and the ideal conquistador, the *ego conquiro*. Dussel argues that the *ego conquiro* precedes and sustains the *ego cogito*, and thus any decolonial project must deconstruct this modern construction of the subject. Nelson Maldonado-Torres extends this argument in the direction of philosophical method and ontology as they relate to the racialization of humanity. Descartes’ certainty about the *cogito* is based on doubt or skepticism. “Skepticism becomes the means to reach certainty and provide a solid foundation to the self,” Maldonado-Torres argues.²¹ This movement from doubt to certainty also describes the formation of the *ego conquiro*. If the *ego cogito* doubts the world around him, the *ego conquiro* doubts the very humanity of conquered others. What Maldonado-Torres calls “Manichean misanthropic skepticism” is exemplified in the theological debates between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Jínés de Sepúlveda – known as the Valladolid debate – regarding the ontological status of the native people of the New World.²² Whether we read the relationship between the Valladolid debate and Descartes genealogically or contrapuntally, and regardless of its official outcome, it was significant in reflecting and reinforcing the doubts about the scope of humanity. The process of doubting-on-the-way-to-certainty thus begins not in Descartes’ studio, but in America, from whence it travelled back to Europe for philosophical rendering. “[A] certain skepticism regarding the humanity of the enslaved and colonized sub-others stands at the background of the Cartesian certainties and his methodic doubt.”²³

The problematics of conquest are thus brought to bear on Cartesian doubt and placed at the very heart of modern intellectual inquiry. Furthermore, the

Cartesian idea about the division between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* ... which translates into a divide between the mind and the body or between the human and nature is preceded and even, one has the temptation to say, to some extent built upon an anthropological colonial difference between the *ego conquistador* (conqueror) and the *ego conquistado* (conquered).²⁴

This difference is not merely epistemological, but also a potent ontological division.

The colonial difference creates a sphere of “damnation, life in hell,” where horror becomes naturalized through the idea of race. In the eyes of colonial powers, human beings marked as *damné* lack “ontological weight.”²⁵ For those so marked, death is not an individualizing factor – as it was in Martin Heidegger’s reflections about *Dasein* – but part of their daily reality. For this reason, Maldonado-Torres argues that decoloniality cannot emerge “through an encounter with one’s own mortality, but from a desire to evade death.”²⁶ Here lies the crucial difference for decolonial engagements with wonder: “If the most basic ontological question is ‘why are things rather than nothing’, the question that emerges in this context and that opens up reflection on the coloniality of being is ‘Why go on?’”²⁷ The *cry* is its existential expression.

To approach the concept of wonder – and consequently of glory – from the perspective of the cry of injustice demands careful consideration of wonder’s inherent ambiguities. The questioning of wonder that I have been tracing here is based primarily on a reading of its modern versions, where doubt is a step, even a strategy to achieve certainty. But the decolonial critique raises other significant questions. Indeed Maldonado-Torres argues that the decolonial turn entails an affective element – a sense or feeling of horror.²⁸ “The decolonial attitude is born when the cry of terror in the face of the horrors of coloniality is translated into a critical stance toward the world of colonial death and in a search for the affirmation of the lives of those most affected by such world.”²⁹ In Maldonado-Torres’s view, the philosophical dimension of the decolonial attitude is related to, but different from, the attitude of wonder that Husserl describes. While the theoretical attitude of philosophy, as commonly conceived, emerges from wonder at the natural world, the decolonial attitude is born from scandal and horror in the face of unjust death; while the former is guided by detachment, the latter is motivated by non-indifference toward the Other.³⁰ In these statements, horror and compassion are assumed to be incompatible with the affects of wonder. Understandably. For how can wonder be related to the cry of terror, the scandal of horror at death unequally distributed, death that becomes the ordinary reality of some lives?

The cry of injustice weighs heavily on any thought of wonder and glory. And yet, we shall probe deeper into the assumed opposition between the horror and glory, compassion and wonder. For I suspect that the affective elements that spark the decolonial attitude – its sense of indignation and compassion – are sustained by an intuition, an apprehension of what I would call the “glory” encountered in the Other, where wonder leads to the “search for the affirmation of the lives of those most affected by such world.”³¹

Enduring wonder

The conceptual and practical slippages between wonder and mastery, between glory and might, that affected modern explorers and conquerors (as well as scientists and philosophers) shape current attitudes toward wonder and glory, including the apparent split between those terms and the experiences of those who suffer oppression. Modern versions of wonder follow Aristotle and Descartes, valuing it only as a transitional step that prompts learning, but which a subject shall eventually overcome.³² This role makes wonder subservient to the aims of certainty and mastery. But such aims are not intrinsic to wonder, but rather, an effect of its disregard.

A rearticulation of wonder should begin, in Mary-Jane Rubenstein's account, not with its modern exponents, but with Socrates, for whom wonder "arises when the understanding cannot master that which lies closest to it." Wonder arises when "an everyday assumption has suddenly become untenable: the familiar has become strange, throwing even the unquestionable into question."³³ This astonishment is not a stage that one seeks to overcome. It is always unsettling.

Unlike curiosity or puzzlement ... wonder does not vanish when the cause of the surprising phenomenon is discovered, nor does it relentlessly seek out new marvels to calculate, comprehend, or process. Rather, wonder wonders at that which conditions – and for that reason ultimately eludes – the mechanisms of calculation, comprehension, and possession themselves.³⁴

Descartes is thus not a champion of wonder, but a paradigmatic figure of its demise. In contrast to Maldonado-Torres's association of philosophies of wonder with ideologies of domination, Rubenstein argues that what is related to "the will toward mastery, even toward divinity" is the "progressive eclipse of wonder." Yet this demise is not a simple suppression of wonder – which would be impossible to accomplish. Instead, what we observe is the appropriation of wonder by claiming possession of its sources – gold, curious objects, knowledge, or a piece of land. By "comprehending the source of the wondrous, the thinking self in effect becomes the source of the wondrous."³⁵

The impulse to possess, in order to become the source of the wondrous, is not unrelated to the movement of consolidation of the *ego cogito* discussed above. It redirects desire. Rather than being affected by wonder, the subject reasserts mastery and distance. Indeed Rubenstein contends, the "Western philosophical tradition does not so much do away with wonder as it does *internalize* it, presenting itself as the agent, rather than the patient of wonder."³⁶ Thus I suggest that the attitude of detachment and indifference that decolonial thinkers decry is not one of too much wonder, but too little. Failing to endure wonder, Cartesian subjects pursue curiosity, accumulating knowledge through mastery and ultimately construing themselves as its source.³⁷ In contrast, wondering "passion traverses the not-knowing (not ignorant) subject," as Trinh T. Minh-ha describes it.³⁸ To be the *patient* of wonder, to endure it, entails a persistent exposure to the weight of the world.

It is thus crucial to differentiate between allusions to wonder that welcome an ultimate incommensurability and inappropriability of what it encounters, and those in which wonder is understood as equivalent to curiosity, that is, as a passing emotion

pursued as a means of instant gratification, acquisition, or self-aggrandizement. And yet, such a distinction does not yield an unambiguous wonder. For instance, even in the context of colonization, experiences of curiosity provided energy for creative projects that, if never unambiguous, were not simple appropriations but also produced new hybrid spaces of life in the midst of destruction.³⁹ And the ambivalence of wonder runs deeper. It is not simply that wonder and curiosity often emerge from similar desires and merge into one another, or that they produce both positive and negative effects. A recalcitrant ambiguity issues from the fact that wonder produces both awe and terror: awe at the realization that there is something rather than nothing, a world that we cannot account for; terror at the strangeness of that world, where even our best explanations are inadequate, where what we assumed to be the solid foundations are shown to be groundless.⁴⁰

The unsettling experience of seeing what used to be commonsense become untenable, and the familiar appear strange, tempts prompt closure by building fortresses of hypercertainties. “The experience of wonder also opens out the possibility of its closure. The groundless awe upon which thinking ‘rests’ can either be inquisitively endured or it can be covered over with unquestionable premises.”⁴¹ Thus experiences of wonder can impel the production of absolute or mystifying explanations to stand-in for terrifying uncertainties. Statements of universal knowledge or absolute dogma may be invoked to set limits to the terrifying depth that wonder reveals, covering precariousness over with “clear and distinct ideas,” or strictly marked attributions of origin. In the case of theologies of glory, the phrase “the glory of God” may be treated as an explanation of the experience of wonder rather than an opening to its irreducible depth – as an attribution that can then be assimilated into common knowledge about power or prestige. That is, glory is construed as a (predictable) trait of a certain kind of being or reality, wonder as the (predictable) reaction at the grandeur of that kind of being or reality. Once this explanation is in place, wonder seems properly contained in what is reasonable, the world remains recognizable, and fear can be assuaged – or at least circumscribed and managed.

Delimiting the terrifying from the alluring aspects of wonder – if not suppressing the terrifying aspects altogether – is a constant temptation for philosophers and theologians. (Rubenstein offers numerous examples of this philosophical habit.) Otto’s influential construction of the relationship between terror and wonder illustrates this tendency. He associates terror with glory but explains it as a realization of the inherent nothingness of humanity in relation to the divine, which he contrasts to the “wonderfulness” associated with grace. Otto invokes an image of divine magnanimity to make intelligible the perceived ambiguity. “Creature consciousness,” the subjective reaction to awe, is “a feeling of one’s own submergence, of being but ‘dust and ashes’ and nothingness.” A sense of “impotence ... against overpowering might,” Otto claims, is the “numinous raw material for a feeling of religious humility.”⁴² Terrifying, indeed.

Otto’s characteristic assumption of a link between glory (or the awe that arises in response to it) and “self-depreciation” seems to confirm the decolonial suspicions that glory casts a long shadow of disgrace. Does such a claim not mirror the colonial dynamics that promote a sense of impotence against overpowering

might? The legitimization of relationships of domination by claiming mastery as the basis of reverence or humility is a sadly familiar stance in Christian history. Moving away from such positions, however, shall not lead to the suppression of discussions of horror, to limiting glory to the beautiful and pleasurable. A theology of glory that seeks to be meaningful in the midst of concrete realities of injustice and pain cannot ignore the terror with which it is associated.

The structure that Otto describes maps the divide between glory and nothingness onto an ontological split between divinity and humanity (or vice versa). In contrast, liberation theologies invoke glory to illuminate and disturb worldly ontological structures. They insist that the glory does not manifest itself where normally expected, on the side of might, but among the weak – it shines in the midst of those who are excluded and thus denied access to what they need for flourishing. Dussel argues that the image of Moses facing a burning bush – one of the most celebrated images of divine glory – epitomizes the human encounter with the excluded person, who “is the ‘locus’ of God’s epiphany.”⁴³ The Other interpellates the self, like God in the burning bush. The Other calls the self to see (and thus move) beyond the boundaries of systems of domination. As in an experience of wonder, this encounter alters perception as the subject becomes responsive to a surplus of meaning in common reality.⁴⁴ While the luminosity of the burning bush evokes the alluring qualities of glory, the encounter is not merely a pleasurable or comforting experience. In a different context, Dussel argues:

The cry of pain such as ‘I am hungry’ requires the urgent answer, an answer that issues from a sense of responsibility ... It is this responsibility that exemplifies the authentic religion and worship, and the trauma that one suffers for the Other who cries out is the *Glory of the Infinite* in the system.⁴⁵

The encounter with the Other shatters the pretensions of “the system” – the social, political, or epistemological system – revealing its dreadful effects. The phrase “the Glory of the Infinite in the system” may suggest a disembodied force channeling through a person as if from outside, consonant with Dussel’s appeal to divine “exteriority” – a concept drawn from Levinas’s work. However, Dussel grounds the cry firmly in the flesh. Gastric juices, pain, appetite: These “carnal, corporeal, and material desires” are the bases for the desire of the divine, he argues.⁴⁶ The source of the cry is anything but immaterial. Furthermore, whereas damnation implies a denial of the ontological weight of the colonized/racialized person, in this view, breaking through that denial entails a perception of glory, of a weight that cannot be circumscribed, to a divine alterity that cannot be appropriated, even by the one from whom it radiates. The “trauma” of the cry implicates the self in an irreducible responsibility and in the process the self is undone.⁴⁷

For the person who perceives it, the cry unsettles what she assumed was most evident: the structures that defined her place as a person in established social arrangements, the weight of her life and that of others. The encounter can thus be terrifying, for it shows the groundlessness of the foundations on which we construct our world – and our selves. While the experience does not dissolve the self, it dis-encloses it – to use Jean-Luc Nancy’s term.⁴⁸ And thus it may reveal not

only our own complicity and complacency in such systems, but also the uncertainties of our own lives and common vulnerabilities, perhaps even shattering our sense of security and stability. It is a realization of our implication in complex webs of life that exceed comprehension. And the “complexification of relations” runs the risk of “a certain monstrosity,” as Catherine Keller observes.⁴⁹ If glory evokes humility, it is from a realization not of impotence or submergence in nothingness, but rather of the immensity of the reality in which we are implicated.

To perceive glory is to awaken to the weight of reality, to be exposed to its insistence and resistance.⁵⁰ This is not just an intellectual process. While precluding neither doubt nor opinion, sensibility to glory entails an affective turn, indeed, a conversion. “A moment of awe is a moment of self consecration. They who sense the wonder share the wonder.”⁵¹ For decolonial thinkers, such conversion leads to a sense of self that is inherently marked by the responsibility to the human-Other. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak extends this disposition to include the non-human world. She argues that the impossibility of mastering that which presents itself to us, a reality that does not derive from us and yet one we inhabit, leads us to see ourselves as planetary creatures, marked by a primordial responsibility to that which we cannot account for: the planet that sustains our life.⁵²

The cry is not the negation of glory, but the negation of its negation. The cry of a hungry person and the groaning of creation manifest the persistence of glory, the astonishing fact that all the world’s callousness and violence have not overcome it. Thus, I do not assume glory and wonder to be absent from the lives of those who suffer under severe conditions of colonial and neocolonial life or violence; such an assumption would lead us to lose sight of the inexplicable nature of resilience, of the uncommon insight, persistence, and vision that give impulse to the very possibilities of decolonial thinking and practice. Staying in wonder entails resisting the temptation to seek shelter behind our own certainties, even when those certainties pertain to the detrimental effects of oppression and the suffering of others. Wonder unsettles expectations by disrupting not only illusions regarding dominant systems, but also expectations about victimization that may close our senses to the astonishing realities that reveal themselves even in the midst of dire situations.

Luminosity, darkness, weight

Outraged by the horrors of human injustice, touched by the amazing insistence and resistance of life, we persist in our attempts to describe life’s elusive glory. And so we approach, again, the site of one of the most celebrated biblical images of divine glory: an ordinary, insignificant bush. The scene is strange – the bush is burning, but it is not consumed. Moses is drawn to the mysteriously incandescent shrub and approaches it. God’s glory appears in the bush. But is it simply God’s? The one who speaks from the bush has been touched by the cries of the Israelites suffering under slavery. The cries reach God, and God is moved – inflamed. At that particular moment, the divine flame caught Moses’s attention – and his heart. Its light and heat draws Moses into divine passion. The fire is then in Moses as it was in the bush.

I have imagined myself like Moses, wondering at the sight and warmth of the burning bush, barefoot, feeling the pebbles on the ground pressing against my feet. The hissing sound of fire is soothing. The encounter then becomes more than a visual experience, allowing the whole body to be exposed to it. A broader sensual experience diminishes the distance allowed by sight, but not the reverence with which glory is approached. I take off my sandals – and perhaps other protective garments as well; I am exposed, affected. The astonishing sight of fog and light over hills and sea, or the roaring power of a hurricane passing over a small island may evoke similar awe. Beauty and sensible pleasure are intrinsic to glory's lure. Yet glory is not simply another name for the beautiful; terror also arises from its encounter, as we have seen. The Israelites are often said to be shocked to realize they had survived an encounter with divine glory – and so are we. I have been arguing that only a concept of glory that acknowledges its inherent ambivalence can truly welcome the world as it presents itself, with indescribable pain as well as beauty. Glory, like the numinous, can be characterized as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Certainly, the terror that it inspires may prompt some to build fortresses of hypercertainties, to represent glory as might; its allure may tempt others to consume its sources – or to imagine that could do so. Glory will always be susceptible to appropriation and counterfeit, as much as to simple disregard. Still neither terror nor fascination can be excluded from it without risking detaching glory from realities of injustice, from the vulnerability of flesh.

Glory gleams in the midst of ambiguous situations and common experiences, in flesh and matter – in finitude. Glory does not lead us away from actual, material things, nor does its perception unveil absolute, hidden knowledge. What then does glory bring to light? Glory is a quality of things in their irreducible singularity, as they impinge upon our lives without being reducible to them. Glory manifests value and gravity as well as non-knowledge and inexhaustibility. Thus, encounters with glory imply revelation and incomprehension – incomprehension that is not ignorance but the inability to fully grasp, to encompass, own, or contain. Incomprehension remains in revelation, not because some knowledge is kept hidden but because knowledge is never fully adequate for the glory's significance.⁵³ Glory is not an unknowable secret, but it defies closed explanations. Perceiving glory can be called revelation, not as the lifting of a veil but as “dis-enclosing” of structures of knowledge, of relations, of being.

Conveying the coincidence of revelation *and* incomprehension, glory is portrayed as both the radiance of the flame and the darkness of clouds, or as a splendor so intense that it cannot be contemplated, a darkness of intense luminosity. Moses's request to see the glory of God – possibly the earliest scriptural reference to glory – marks the coincidence in glory of revelation and inexhaustibility with delightful wit. In one of his various conversations with God, a seemingly impatient Moses asks him, “Now show me your glory.” Why would someone who “speaks” with God make such a strange request? We may wonder. And this is where God seems to leave us when he responds:

There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand

until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.⁵⁴

So Moses did not see, could not have seen the fullness of God. But he saw God's backside. Did he see God's glory? In a narrative that includes multiple conversations and even arguments between Moses and God, this detail is especially revealing for what it does not reveal. Thus the theologian is left, like Moses (I presume), moved by experiencing a glory that *passes* by. An irreplaceable event, to be sure, but one that cannot be controlled, contained, or possessed.

"Glory purely and simply gives itself, and precisely as that which is not appropriate – not even by the one from whom it emanates," writes Nancy.⁵⁵ Indeed divine glory is not something God manages as a tool to impress Moses. Surely, there are other stories where God seems to do just that, especially to intimidate enemies – stories that represent glory as a weapon of power.⁵⁶ Yet the story we are considering suggests otherwise. If God is forced to devise a strategy to protect Moses, we can assume that God cannot manipulate or constrain divine glory. Glory gives itself as it passes by. Glory, Nancy continues, "is only admirable, and perhaps admirable to the point of not being able to be contemplated."⁵⁷

Unable to contemplate directly or comprehensively divine glory, mystical writers speak of the infinite divine light as darkness – darkness that is not opposed to light. Byzantine artists represent it as the inner darkness of the halo. Others see this radiant darkness in the biblical image of the cloud. Catherine Keller follows the "trail of clouds," which takes us first, with Gregory of Nyssa's guidance, to meet Moses yet again.⁵⁸

When, therefore, Moses grew in knowledge, he declared that he had seen God in the darkness, that is, that he had then come to know that what is divine is beyond all knowledge and comprehension, for the text says, Moses approached the dark cloud where God was.⁵⁹

This revelation of divine darkness is apparently as alluring as the inextinguishable flames of the burning bush, and yet more approachable. But its approachability only deepens the sense of mystery and inappropriability disclosed in the burning bush or a passing God. The metaphors of light and darkness eventually overflow the singularity of Moses's encounters with God to open theological nonknowing "into the eerie non-separability of a boundless universe." This crucial step unfolds from Keller's reading of Nicholas of Cusa's work: "rather than the unknowable God desiriously pursued beyond the knowable universe, the universe itself 'cannot be grasped.'"⁶⁰ This affirmation of a universe inherently marked by divine mystery (or by a "contracted infinity") can potentially disenclose modern habits of objectification – possibilities that Keller proceeds to explore. Here it leads us to open glory beyond the boundaries of God-centered attributions into the cloudy realm of creaturely nonseparability, which entails further nuances to the meaning of the "admirable" qualities of glory.

Is the glory that lures Moses to the burning bush, as I asked earlier, simply God's? I asked before. Can we clearly distinguish between the flames in that incandescent

bush, in the Israelites' cries, in God's voice, in Moses's heart? The theological habit of treating "the glory of God" as a circumscribed attribution with clear demarcations and calculations – as an unquestionable origin and cause – constrains this flame. Reflecting an imagined rift between divine glory and human nothingness, the habit of separation may seek to affirm an absolutely egalitarian ontological structure, for it equates all humanity in its subjection to God, all beings sharing the same lowly status compared to God's glory. However, such a structure mirrors an all too human dichotomy that opposes honor (the "admirable") to vulnerability, separating those whose lives are recognized as such from those who are denied ontological weight.⁶¹

The glory of a mysteriously excessive divinity overflows such ontology; its luminous darkness permeates creation and is perceived twinkling in vulnerable life, in the lives of those who are considered the least. The cries of pain and hunger – those cries that negate the negation of a creature's ontological weight – manifest the insistence and resistance of glory *in* the flesh. Those who respond to the cry, may perceive in the encounter divine glory and experience a dis-enclosure of relationships at the heart of the self. Such relationships are revealed as a matter of divine concern and our responses as ethical and religious obligations. Vulnerability and reverence coexist. Carnal, corporeal, and material needs, which expose our dependence on others and our exposure to injury, are fleshy sites of glory.⁶²

The inherence of divine glory in corporeality manifested by pain or appetite is no less significant in corporeal pleasure, beauty, and resilience – when these are not construed as the absence of pain or suffering. Like the non-consuming fire that Moses reverently contemplated, flesh's hazy luminosity attracts those who perceive it, as it deters the impulse to consume or assimilate it. Envisioning a carnal wonder at the edges of Descartes' *Meditations*, Luce Irigaray brings Eros into the first passion. Wonder is for her the lure of the desired other as well as what protects a necessary "interval" between self and other. Wonder is both active and passive; in wonder touch respects the ungraspability of flesh. Irigaray uses the term to refer to what attracts/resists the self as well as to the subjects' response to it, thus including elements of glory and wonder. Her frequent references to illumination suggest that glory shines through her depictions of wonder.⁶³ Irigaray describes wonder as "[a]n excess that resists," aptly characterizing a glory that appears not only in the shock of injustice, but also in the irreducible difference of that which is closest to her, which lures her beyond herself, to wonder in the flesh.⁶⁴

Matter and flesh are indispensable for glory. Still, even when we hear that the earth is full of divine glory, theologies tend to inattentively substitute a human face or body for a small incandescent bush.⁶⁵ But glory cannot be contained in the human sphere, either in the cry for socio-economic justice or in calls for an ethics of erotic encounters. The groaning of creation calls for com-passion toward the non-human other – indeed, for a conversion, to become reverently attuned to the non-human, to protect an interval for wonder against our appropriative and consumptive impulses.

Moved beyond the self, yet not breaking off finitude; turning toward the scintillating opacity of carnality and materiality and to their indefinite complexity; astonished, perhaps terrified, by sensing our implication in an immense, evolving, ever unfinished network of creaturely relations; delighting and suffering in

the physical world of the senses. In that ungraspable matrix, each encounter with glory is unique, irreplaceable, unrepeatable – as is each and every one of its organisms and relationships. A “relative-absolute,” Xavier Zubiri calls this irreducible singularity that emerges only in relations – that only *is* in relations.⁶⁶ Because it is never outside of materializations, glory is neither one nor many. Glory gives itself in finitude, experienced in unrepeatable events – not as a totality, not to be grasped or comprehended, not to be controlled or accumulated. Moses sees God’s backside, a sight of glory passing by; and that passing is all we ever perceive – always the irreducible singularity of an encounter experienced as the touch of a fleeting moment. Glory is perceived as it passes; yet its passing, like the meaning of our vanishing present, weighs on us.

The vanishing present weighs on us; it draws us toward the earth and it troubles, it concerns us, as Nancy observes.⁶⁷ Building on the etymological proximity between “to weigh” (*pesar*) and “to think” (*pensar*), Nancy brings materiality to bear on thinking; it is a gravity to be felt in the seriousness of thought as in the pressures that bodies exert. “The existence of the world is grave,” he says, adding the planetary force to the cluster of terms with which he addresses wonder and thought, existence and meaning. Thought is “to welcome the wonder before that which presents itself”; it is “letting what weighs weigh.”⁶⁸ Feeling the weight, the heaviness of things is the very possibility of thought. Yet things weigh “outside thought,” “away from the completed, personified, signified meaning”; weight is their very inappropriability.⁶⁹

The etymological connection between *kabôd* and weight likewise suggests its grave import and its irreducibility to our processes of signification. We are exposed to the weight of the world, to the unexplainable reality of our very existence in relationships that we cannot fully represent and to the enormity of human injustice, to a life-sustaining planet (a gift we cannot account for) and to its unbearable devastation. If glory is that halo that envelops all existence, or the luminous darkness that surrounds all knowledge, it is also the weight of materiality, its resistance to appropriation, to the accumulation of constructions and deconstructions; the significance of its density and gravity. Yet thickness, density, mass are not what we most often associate with glory. Indeed, weight is likely to evoke the opposite feelings. We are “disgusted with our weight ... The humus – the earthiness – of humanity can be so mortally humiliating,” observes Sharon Betcher as she invites us to “think Spirit with the weight of the earth.”⁷⁰ To think with the weight of the earth, to welcome the glory that persists here and yet beyond ourselves, entails a humility that – far from reducing human or humus to nothingness – feels its connections to gravity, to the planet, to the ground.

Glory is the trace of a divine relationship woven through creaturely life and its relationships. It is the cloudy radiance of the ungraspable excess that inheres in ordinary things – something that manifests itself, that gives itself: excessive in virtue of the extent and complexity of its relationships and of the divine investment in them; ungraspable in its irreducible uniqueness; heavy and grave. It can appropriately be called *divine* glory, as long as its divinity keeps materializing in earthly grounds, becoming vulnerable flesh.

Postscript

A dark and luminous halo envelops all life, but we seldom perceive it. “The perception of glory is a rare occurrence in our lives. We fail to wonder.”⁷¹ Indeed theology has too often placed belief ahead of wonder, and contained glory in an external realm, inaccessible to humanity except in spectacular events that display the might of God. I have been suggesting that the passion at the heart of theology, what keeps us moving toward this strange mode of speech and writing, is neither the illusion of security and stability offered by well-structured metaphysical systems, nor even our crucial social projects. It is rather the lure of an elusive, misty halo of life. Metaphysical statements and prophetic pronouncements are some of our responses in this passion for glory. As Christian theologians, we see in glory the manifestation of divinity in creation, of the investment and care of God for even the smallest of things. Other metaphors may likewise seek to convey that elusive quality that presents itself to us as alluring, excessive and worthy of profound reverence. “God” may not be integral to such metaphors. Yet we do not need to surrender our claims to perceive the back of God passing by in the ordinary events, in strange places or unlikely situations. We keep trying to convey this uncircumscribed spirit – however inaccurately and distortedly.

The experience of glory is rather frustratingly neither my own nor absolutely external to me, in as much as I can only experience it when attuned to its perception. The subtle appearance of glory would be lost for us in the absence of a capacity to remain in wonder – despite its unsettling effects. Like everything else in the world, neither glory nor wonder are protected from co-optation or counterfeit. Yet we may practice a kind of attentiveness that is not discouraged by such failures, but rather exposes them, as it remains open to the glory that might still surprise us.

The polydox theology that I am envisioning here may be composed like what Eduardo Galeano calls “Magical Marxism: one half reason, one half passion, and a third half mystery.”⁷² It is clearly not amenable to calculation and cannot be called a method; it might include a little bit of imagination and no less poetic folly. Such a polydox theology attends to the devastating realities of pain and oppression without losing sight of the marvelous qualities of ordinary life, without ever believing that it has at last discovered the absolutely real. It does not so much abandon traditional symbols or critical analysis as move in them, to open spaces for indeterminacy and wonder, dis-enclosing theology, to experience glory in our perennially unfinished and redeemable world. It seeks to cultivate the capacity to endure wonder – creative in its receptivity, persistent in its disposition. The flourishing of creatures may well depend on this capacity to welcome the wonder before the weight of reality, of a human face, a bush, a passing cloud, or a burning fire.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Michael Nausner for his insightful feedback on this chapter. The editors' incisive comments and suggestions were also vital for this version of my chapter.
- 2 In religious art, the combination of a halo and an aureola is called "glory," although often the distinction between halo and aureola is not maintained. It is often painted as concentric circles growing darker as they approach the center – a visual depiction of an apophatic theology idea. A. Andreopolus, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005, pp. 83–91.
- 3 Liberation theology recovers the image of God as creator of life, a God whose glory is the "human being alive." Among the people for who death is not a single figure of speech but a daily reality thrust upon their attention in infant mortality, violent conflict, and torture, a theology of God as creator and sustainer of life acquires piercing relevance.
L. Boff and C. Boff, *Liberation Theology: From Dialogue to Confrontation*, San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1986, p. 25.
- 4 R. Alves, *I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986, p. 20.
- 5 E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969, p. 24.
- 6 Socrates: "I see, my dear Theaetetus, that Theodorus had a true insight into your nature when he said that you were a philosopher, for wonder is the feeling of a philosopher, and philosophy begins in wonder," in Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. B. Jowett, 155d.
- 7 R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. J. W. Harvey, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950.
- 8 W. R. Cook, "The 'Glory' Motif in the Johannine Corpus," *JETS*, 27:3, 1984, p. 291.
- 9 "The word *doxa* was used to translate twenty-five different words, but *kabod* is by far the most common translation." It was also used in the Greek iconographic tradition for the mandorla. Andreopolus, *Metamorphosis*, p. 86.
- 10 E. Brunner, *Dogmatics I: The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. O. Wyon, Cambridge: James Clarke and Co, 1949, pp. 285–6.
- 11 Isaiah 6:3, Psalm 19:1; New International Version.
- 12 Brunner, *Dogmatics I*, p. 286. J. Saramago, *All the Names*, trans. M. J. Costa, San Diego, CA: Hartcourt, 1997, p. 112.
- 13 I understand this active receptivity to be consonant with what Nancy calls "passibility," which defies the opposition between passivity and activity; a "disposition" and an "activity," a capacity of "receiving or welcoming" meaning. J.-L. Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, trans. F. Raffoul and G. Recco, Mahers, NY: Humanity Books, 1997, p. 69.
- 14 The intention ... is not to deny the meaning of *orthodoxy*, understood as a proclamation of and reflection on statements considered to be true. Rather the goal is to balance and even to reject the primacy and almost exclusiveness which doctrine has enjoyed in Christian life and above all to modify the emphasis, often obsessive, on the attainment of an orthodoxy which is often nothing more than fidelity to an obsolete tradition or a debatable interpretation.
G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Sr. D. Inda and J. Eagleson, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973, p. 10.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 16 R. N. Brock and R. A. Parker, *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2008.
- 17 The fate of images of paradise – those rich, creative representations of earthly glory – follows this path of degradation. As Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker observe, "after the discovery of the Americas, the location of paradise in maps shifted from Iraq and India to the New World and then disappear entirely." *Ibid.*, p. 324.

- 18 S. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonders of the New World*, Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1991, p. 19.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 20 The term “decolonial” has been used to name the work of a particular group of scholars who coined the term to emphasize, among other things, that the decolonizing project is an unfinished task. R. Grosfoguel, N. Maldonado-Torres, and J. D. Saldívar (eds), *Latin@s in the World System: Decolonization Struggles in the 21st Century U.S. Empire*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, 2005.
- 21 N. Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies*, 21, 2–3, 2007, p. 245.
- 22 The Valladolid debates, which took place between 1550–1, presented two opposing arguments about the nature of the natives, represented by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. The latter argued that the natives belonged to Aristotle’s category of “natural slaves.”
- 23 Maldonado-Torres, “Coloniality of Being,” p. 245.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 247. Maldonado-Torres relies on Frantz Fanon’s use of the term. F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 251.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- 28 N. Maldonado-Torres, “La Descolonización Y El Giro De-Colonial,” *Tabula Rasa*, 9, July–December, 2008, p. 66.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 66–7, my translation.
- 30 *Ibid.* This attitude also includes a “willingness to take many perspectives and points of view.”
- 31 This is the significance of the critique as one that entails not only epistemology, but also ontology.

The coloniality of Being indicates those aspects that produce exception from the order of Being; it is as it were, the product of the excess of Being that in order to maintain its integrity and inhibit the interruption by what lies beyond Being produces its contrary, not nothing, but a non-human or rather an inhuman world.

Maldonado-Torres, “Coloniality of Being,” p. 257. I use the term “apprehend” as Judith Butler defines it.

“Apprehension” is less precise [than recognition], since it can imply marking, registering, acknowledging without full cognition. If it is a form of knowing, it is bound up with sensing and perceiving, but in ways that are not always – or not yet – conceptual forms of knowledge.

J. Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, New York: Verso, 2009, p. 5.

- 32 M.-J. Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 12.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 The identification of celebrity with glory similarly bypassed the challenges of wonder, affirming instead the search for qualities that can be appropriated and commodified. Referring to this debasement of glory, Heidegger wrote, “For us today, glory has long been nothing but celebrity, and as such it is a highly dubious matter, an acquisition thrown around and distributed by the newspaper and the radio – nearly the opposite of Being.” M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. G. Fried and R. Polt, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 108.

- 38 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 23.
- 39 S. Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization*, trans. D. Dusinberre, New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 127.
- 40 Rubenstein, *Strange Wonder*, p. 9.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 42 Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, pp. 20–1.
- 43 E. Dussel, “An Ethics of Liberation: Fundamental Hypotheses,” in E. Mendieta (ed.), *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, p. 139.
- 44 Ironically, the need to challenge human failure to recognize divine glory in weakness and suffering – which leads Dussel to invoke glory – was Martin Luther’s critique of what he deemed “theologies of glory.” He argued
- That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the “invisible” things of God as though they were clearly “perceptible in those things which have actually happened” ... Because men misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn “wisdom concerning invisible things” by means of ‘wisdom concerning visible things,’ so that those who did not honor God as manifested in his works should honor him as he is hidden in his suffering.
- Heidelberg Disputations*. I am grateful to Terra Rowe for drawing my attention to this interesting reversal, as well as for her comments on an earlier version of this chapter.
- 45 E. Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981, p. 307. The influence of Levinas is hard to miss. “The movement toward the Other, instead of completing me or contenting me, implicates me in a conjuncture ... Whence came this shock when I passed, indifferent, under the Other’s gaze? The relationship with the Other puts me into question ...” These are Levinas’s words.
- 46 E. Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003, p. 307.
- 47 Levinas’s and Dussel’s metaphysics of the exteriority cast the subject–Other relationship in ways that tend to reproduce some elements of the assumptions of mastery and impotence that I am questioning here. I develop this critique in *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007. However, I am here interested in their displacement of glory as a way to conceptualize a moment of wonder that is not antithetical to terror.
- 48 J.-L. Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. B. Bergo, G. Malefant, and M. B. Smith, New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.
- 49 C. Keller, *The Cloud of the Impossible*, unpublished manuscript.
- 50 Insistence and resistance are the key characteristics that Nancy uses to describe meaning, in distinction from signification. Nancy, *Gravity of Thought*.
- 51 A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983, p. 78.
- 52 G. Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- 53 By “incomprehension” I am signaling something similar to what Nancy calls “inadequation” when he argues, “glory is the exhibition of inadequation or incommensurability,” *Dis-Enclosure*, p. 58. Nonetheless, the spatiality of “comprehension,” in the sense of encompassing or containing, evokes for me the appropriative impulses – in geopolitics as in epistemology – that I do not want to lose.
- 54 Exodus 33:18; 21–3.
- 55 Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p. 57.

- 56 Giorgio Agamben's exploration of glory focuses on the relationship between glory and majesty, arguing (against Hans Ur von Balthasar) that there are no aesthetic aspects of glory in Scripture. By choosing what he calls the "liturgical" interpretation, Agamben uncovers important associations between power and glory, but may be foreclosing other aspects and, as a consequence, other interpretations. G. Agamben, *El Reino Y La Gloria: Por Una Genealogía Teológica De La Economía Y El Gobierno*, trans. A. G. Cuspinera, Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2008.
- 57 Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p. 57.
- 58 Keller.
- 59 *Life of Moses*, quoted in Keller.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 In Judith Butler's terms, one could say that this common dichotomy renders precarity imperceptible; those lives would not even be grievable, because they cannot be recognized as such. J. Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London and New York: Verso, 2004.
- 62 "To mourn and to wonder ... that is what the spirit yearns for when it stands in the midst of trauma and breathes in the truth of grace," argues Serene Jones as she concludes her reflections on theology "in a ruptured world." S. Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- 63 L. Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. H. Bostic and S. Pluháček, New York: Continuum, 2002.
- 64 Thus Luce Irigaray describes wonder, often blurring the boundary between glory and wonder. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 75.
- 65 I elsewhere pursue a reading that attends to the bush and the fire in their elemental significance. M. Rivera, "Elemental Bonds: Scene for an Earthy Postcolonial Theology," in T. B. Liew (ed.), *Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010.
- 66 I. Ellacuría, "The Historicity of Christian Salvation," in I. Ellacuría and J. Sobrino (eds), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993, p. 276.
- 67 Nancy, *Gravity of Thought*, p. 2.
- 68 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 69 The weight of thought is ... the weight of the thing insofar as that thing weighs outside of thought, insofar as it punctures and overflows the thought that it is, but that is can be only by being open to the thing, and its heaviness.
- Ibid.*, pp. 77–80.
- 70 S. Betcher, "Grounding the Spirit: An Ecofeminist Pneumatology," in L. Kearns and C. Keller (eds), *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies of the Earth*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2007, p. 316. Similarly, Catherine Keller reflects on the problem of the absence of any Christian stories of earth-epiphanies. "Talking Dirty: Ground Is not Foundation", *ibid.*
- 71 Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 85.
- 72 E. Galeano, *El Libro De Los Abrazos*, Mexico: Siglo Ventiuno Editores, 2001, p. 209.