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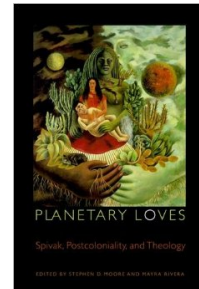
Book Review

Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology

by Stephen D. Moore and Mayra Rivera, eds.

New York: Fordham University, 2011

This book is the result of a conversation between Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and several postcolonial theologians such as Catherine Keller, Stephen Moore, and Kwok Pui-lan, held at Drew Theological School in 2007. The uniqueness of this book lies within the quality of the exchange of ideas between a non-theologian and theologians and the potential challenge those ideas give to the articulation of contemporary theologies that seek to take cosmopolis, gender, and empire critique seriously.



Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak of Columbia University, is arguably one of the most respected and prolific literary and cultural critics of our time. Her works are situated in the field of postcolonial and literary studies. But these terms do not fully capture Spivak's work, since critiquing post-colonialism is also her academic contribution as shown in one of her work, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Although Spivak declares herself not a religious person in the conventional sense of the word and hasn't used the works of any theologian, she has a respect for the sacred and the people who have religions. In Catherine Keller's opinion, Spivak's unique style of theorizing and reading "are potentially invaluable models for theologians struggling to hold together the deconstructive imperative to engage in the critique of theology and self-critique, on the one hand, and the ethical imperative to engage contemporary sociopolitical contexts, on the other hand." Spivak's works in postcolonial studies has inspired many theologians who share Spivak's zeal to critique empire, colonialism, and gender bias. Spivak's *In Other Worlds* and *Can the Subaltern Speak* have been widely read by postcolonial theologians.

The bulk of this volume centers around Spivak's usage of the term "planetary." Spivak challenges us to see ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents. Kwok Pui-lan says, "Planetary signifies an alterity that does not derive from us, a system that is beyond us and yet we inhabit in it." To think in planetary term is to situate oneself who offers prudent care of the alterity that is above and beyond our reach, an inexhaustible taxonomy; nevertheless offer us the chance to imagine the best possible scenarios for the flourishing for all.

As a professor who teaches global citizenship, I welcome Spivak's idea of planetary as a healthy alternative in terms of terminology and direction for thoughts. Spivak suggests "planetary" thinking as opposed to globalization or citizenship, terms that have been so frequently and loosely used these days that they keep suffering from the ongoing impression of imposing the same value system everywhere. The term "planetary loves" should not be mistaken as the equivalent of ecological justice, although Spivak welcomes it. Instead, as Kwok Pui-lan, one of the participants in this conversation says, "Spivak offers a love that is tough, non-sentimental, that embodies justice and speaks from a subject position that

remembers the blight of colonialism and is mindful of the intersectionality of gender, race, class, sexuality, and so forth.” Planetarity invites us to address a more complex topology and taxonomy without limiting our imagination in the realm of geographical-legal border, local or global. It is a mind-changing love.

This book has three parts: “Introductions” that seeks to situate Spivak in the myriad of postcolonial studies. The second part “Conversations” provide the verbatim Spivak had with several theologians in that gathering in 2007 as well as Spivak’s responses to papers inspired by Spivak’s works by Susan Abraham, a practical theologian of Harvard Divinity School, Tat-siong Benny Liew, a biblical scholar at Pacific School of Religion, and Mayra Rivera, a theologian from Harvard Divinity School. The final section, “Appropriations,” provides a series of papers by several theologians such as Namsoon Kang and Sharon Betcher to articulate theologies that based on Spivaks’ ideas.

This book will be a good introduction to the works of Gayatri Spivak and postcolonial theology especially for people who have never read their works but want to be informed and led to think alternatively.

Alan Lai