

Combating the Global Empire

:Exploring a Theology of Resistance and Subversion

I. John Mohan Razu*

Introduction

In this paper I will in the **First section** explain how the United States (U.S.) emerged as an empire¹ and advancing with its vision which is gradually

This article was presented in the 7th Minjung-Dalit Theological Dialogue Conference, October 17th-22nd, 2007, Seoul, Korea.

Dr. Indukuri John Mohan razu, Professor of Christian Social Ethics and Chairperson of the Department of Theology and Ethics at The United Theological College, Bangalore. Co-ordinator of Field Education and teaching in the Department of Church and Society. A member of the National Council of Churches in India Dalit Task Force and the National Programme of the Student Christian Movement of India. e-mail: ijohnmohanrazu@yahoo.com

1 The initial controversy over the use of the word empire in relation to American power is over. Increasingly in the mainstream media and in political discourse, the concept of empire and Pax Americana, is frequently and prominently mentioned. The shift in terminology of dominance to hegemony empire is significant because it highlights the classic concept of direct political control by an imperial centre. Of course, the mechanics of implementing the empire is not the same as the past where vulgar territorial conquests has been replaced by security guarantees, treaty obligations, small wars, and open-ended peace-keeping and nation-building operations. Yet, the underlying logic of empire remains the same. Empires operate, not in terms of conducting relations with states, but prevailing over the relations amongst states; i.e., empires try to abolish the structural anarchy of the international system by assimilating states into an overarching order.

Further the empire is built on increasing and expanding military relationships of various kinds with a number of countries as well as stationing of hundreds of thousands of US troops around the world. These military bases, numbering hundreds, are today's version of the imperial colonies of the world. For further reference, see Ninan Koshy, The global empire: an overview, in *EMPIRE, Reformed World*, Vol. 56, (4), December 2006, pp.335-347.

Similarly, Muto Ichiyo, states that empire is the appropriate concept to help comprehend the global situation since the end of the World War II. In other words, the American hegemony, in the post-World War II world was largely shaped and can be characterized as imperial hegemony, instead of imperialist hegemony. For more details, refer to his article, The American empire in historical perspective, Ibid., pp. 348-354.

In this paper I use the term Empire both as a noun indicating the present US hegemonic order and also as an adjective as being distinct from the word imperial for the reason that these two Have distinct characteristics and mechanics of operation. For instance, of course, the mechanics of implementing empire today are different from what they have been in the

being realized. This empire doctrine is aided by the neo-liberal market economy that has taken place in the world in the last two decades. Therefore, the world empire envisioned by the U.S. and global capital connive and thus translate this vision through different means and mechanisms. In the **Second section**, I will deal with conceptual and theoretical clarifications of the terms 'subversion' and 'resistance' that are to be considered as bases for a theology of resistance and subversion. In the **Last section**, I will explore the resistive and subversive movements' dynamic rooted on praxis as a countervailing theology to the growing phenomenon of empire-expansion.

Mapping the Global Empire: An Overview & Analysis

Empire is one of the most prominent terms, a common vocabulary and an accent of our times. Over the last 120 years preceding the end of the Cold War, there was never the kind of domination exercised over the sovereignty of nation-states that the U.S. exercises today. In conjunction with this, Joseph Nye, Dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government wrote in *The Washington Post*, Not since Rome has one nation loomed so large above the others. Indeed the word 'empire' has come out of the closet.² When we re-visit world history, Britain was the dominant imperial power from 1870 to the First World War. Between the First and Second World Wars, Britain and France lost their dominance and were challenged by the U.S., Germany, Japan

past: vulgar territorial conquest has been generally – but not always – replaced by security guarantees, treaty obligations, forward deployments, small wars, and open-ended peace-keeping and nation-building operations. Yet the underlying logic of empire remains the same. Empires operate, not in terms of conducting relations *with* states, but in terms of prevailing over the relations *among* states; that is, empires try to abolish the structural anarchy of the international system by assimilating states into an overarching order.

Concurring with the above quotation, Richard Falk says,

USA is by circumstance and design an emergent global empire, the first in the history of the world. Prior empires had frontiers and boundaries, although occupying large expanses of territory, frontiers and boundaries, although occupying large expanses of territory, and exercised control from a distant centre that due to available technologies of communication and transportation were further away in time than is any part of the global world from Washington.

2 Cf. Ninan Koshy, "The Empire: Some Preliminary Reflections," *QUEST*, 3. 2, (November 2004): 65.

and the Union of the Socialist Soviet Republic (U.S.S.R.). After 1945, U.S. dominance was challenged by the Soviet Union ideologically-politically-strategically-militarily. Interestingly, despite total devastation and humiliation in World War II, Japan and Germany resurged economically.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the former U.S.S.R. gave the U.S. the space to exercise absolute power that has never been witnessed by any one single country within the nation-states system. This has erased all kinds of speculations and uncertainty about the Post-Cold War era. Those voices who had argued for establishing a new egalitarian, just, humane order and for deploying co-operative forms of security arrangements with other countries were silenced. Consensus emerged amongst the American military and financial establishments that the U.S. must consolidate and expand the hegemony it enjoys after the Post-Cold War scenario. Differences arose in terms of tactics, means and methods, but not with respect to the strategic goal or direction itself.

The global scenario has changed. The current global canvass portrays entirely a different arrangement and order. Zbigniew Brzezinski with characteristic bluntness has divided today's world of unique American hegemony into vassals (all of Western Europe and Japan), tributaries (most of the rest), and those who by virtue of capabilities or inclinations must be more carefully watched as potential challengers. These are Russia, China and Iran but not India, whose elite is thoroughly Americanized and where the NRI factor provides additional powerful glue for ensuring that it becomes a strong tributary with ambitions, however, to achieving vassal.³

By looking into the trajectories of history that took place in the twentieth century, it was undoubtedly termed as American Century. Neo-conservatives can see themselves as 'victors' by the way in which the re-ordering of Europe and the Pacific was carried out. Further, the Pacific was once again re-ordered after the surrender of Germany and Japan, followed by Eastern and Central Europe went through a process of reformulation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. All these configurations culminated in the

3 For more details see Achin Vanaik "Building a World Empire-II," *The Hindu* (16.1.2002): 10.

model for a new world order carefully designed and executed under the aegis of the United States.

The empire adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq at the beginning of the 21st century clearly posits U.S. military and cultural dominance. The U.S. exhibited to the world at large that empire rule consists of control over the internal and external policies of weaker nations. In today's era of asymmetric warfare, military might is the determining factor than ever before. The maxim that dominates today's world is wars that can make the world better. The empire doctrine pulled down Saddam Hussein's regime, which is a supposedly sufficient argument for the justification of waging war. This doctrine was conceived and developed by neo-conservatives long before the terror attacks on the twin towers. Cleverly manipulated mass-psychology of 9/11 certainly helped to create the initial climate in which the new doctrine found widespread support followed by an improvised version of a war against terrorism. This has given a new twist and a new phenomenon moving beyond conventional warfare where an economy could be attacked and seized.

The new doctrine clearly points to hegemonic unilateralism with a justification of self-defense. But this demands new burdens of proof. The forces of the empire convinced a section of global public sphere that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction and was in contact with the Al-Qaeda. Having failed to provide evidence, the Bush doctrine failed to offer a plausible explanation for the preventive use of military force but rather opted for a pre-emptive strike. In this way, the Bush doctrine offered new legitimacy for the pursuit of an empire world order. By pulling down Saddam's regime in Iraq, Empire and its allies seem to have established a global order that symbolize a new arrangement for that region.

Nonetheless, the way in which the empire went about its task of expansion both in monetary and military terms, provides a link in the chain in bringing about a new world order. The empire claims that it tends to replace the ineffective human rights policy, irrelevant polity of some nation-states, and the out-moded functioning of the world organization such as UNO, and thus justifies its unilateral role in the world to-day. The emergent empire kept aside the individual and collective moral appeals because of its immunity to

the individual scenes and ghastly images of death, destruction and devastation caused by the war. However, were there reasons to justify the war in Afghanistan and Iraq? Although there were no reason-based justifications through international law and instruments, the Bush doctrine of empire building replaced the international covenants and statutes by the unilateral world-ordering politics of a self-legitimized hegemony.

Empirical projections clearly show that the American vision of an empire is cleverly devised and articulated. As envisioned, its tentacles are moving and spreading across the world. Over the last few years the war on terrorism has mutated into the more generic war on terror. By using this generic the Bush doctrine clearly sends a signal that either you are with the empire or with the enemies.

It is apparent that the emergent world order has generated vigorous debates all over. Some look at the recent phenomenon as positive, while others view it as disastrous. The neo-cons look at it with optimism because the U.S. led empire 'unilaterally' takes over the 'global mandate' that extends absolute power to intervene in the affairs of any country on the pretext of dismantling tyrannical, dictatorial regimes, military junta, and weapons proliferation for the promotion of human rights and establishment of democracy and global stability. The critics look at the emergence of the American empire as a serious threat to democracy, civil society and the sovereignty of nation-states, especially weaker nations and international organizations/ institutions.

The consolidation of American empire power that is gained by its military might is strengthened by its collusion with the global capital and the forces of market economy. The empire and capital collude and connive with one another. Therefore they need to be viewed as the two sides of the same coin. The current market-ushered economic order is overwhelmingly a web of power complexes consisting of handful of wholly unaccountable corporate oligarchs having scant respect for corporate social responsibility. In such an arrangement, markets assume greater power and those who control become its economic actors and others continue as non-economic actors standing outside the market forces. Uncontrolled and unregulated market is nothing but an alibi of the empire. Neo-liberalism thus serves as the sharp cutting edge

of the monstrous international economic and political power of the empire-capital. In a world of neo-liberal economic order 200 giant transnational corporations clutching the global business in their grip and thus controlling global trade and investments. More accurately,

*The Mega Corporation in its headlong drive for world supremacy embodies the grim exploitative complex economic, political, military, cultural – of world corporate power and its sectoral distribution. Compounding the power of the global corporation is the underpinning by NATO's military reprisal capability. They straddle the spectrum of economic activity: from manufacturing to banking; wholesaling to retailing; from large plantation agriculture to every conceivable niche of licit and illicit financial services. In the real world of big banking finance and insurance the phony distinctions between clean and dirty money have long since been obliterated.*⁴

Capital in the twenty-first century has assumed new forms and expresses itself in amazing ways. Capital and empire have become part and parcel of the grand design of U.S. empire building. To substantiate,

*the implication is clear. There is an integral relationship between American-style free market economics and American security in the world. Globalization and imperial security go together. Global capitalism, enforced militarily if need, is integral to empire building.*⁵

The United States usurps power with unequivocal claim posing as the only power on earth that can save the world from terrorism. Accordingly, the United States along with its allies employs all forms of tactics to unilaterally act against any nation that defies them by both military and economic intervention. In the name of war on terror the United States unleashes its military power and thus enforces global comity to follow free-market ideology of global capitalism. The modes employed, the strategies followed,

4 Frederic Clairmont, "The Global Corporation: Road to Serfdom," *Economic and Political Weekly* (January 08, 2000): 26.

5 Ninan Koshy, "The Empire: Some Preliminary Reflections," 75.

policies pursued and ideology used are toward building 'one world,' 'one economic unit,' 'one culture' and 'one language' under the American empire.

To prove this point, President George Bush in his opening remark in The National Security Strategy of the USA said, The United States will use this moment of opportunity (i.e. the war on terrorism) to bring democracy, development, free market and free trade to every corner of the world.⁶ In a similar vein, Klaus Schwab, President of the World Economic Forum echoes that The events of September 11 are a turning point to international economic and political order and to the globalization process itself.⁷ The current phase of globalization manifests entirely the grand scheme and vision of global capitalism and American empire respectively. It is turbo that unleashes tremendous force and power. Force is an integral part to the process of globalization.

Therefore the 'invisible hand' and the 'invisible fist' are inter-locked in such a way that global capital could maximize its profits only if its affiliates and subsidiaries are duly protected. For this it needs the support of the empire. The United States has been using its hegemony for its economic and political expansion. In the name of democracy, growth, development, human rights, progress and prosperity, all the nations of the world are forced to follow the neo-liberal economic principles of free market and free trade. The doctrines of the neo-liberals and neo-cons have infiltrated into the domains of global economy and geo-politics. US oligarchs and their Foundations with enormous money power have set up think tanks and bought up ideologues by setting up business schools and transforming university economics departments into bastions of almost totalitarian neo-liberal thinking. For example, the Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institute, the American Enterprise Institute and many others in the United States, the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute in the United Kingdom are all involved in promoting this project.

6 Quoted from Ninan Koshy, "The Present Phase of Globalization," *QUEST*, 2.2 (November 2003): 75.

7 Ibid., .75.

"Resistance" and "Subversion" as Ethical Categories & Bases: A Rationale

In such a scenario, how do we discern the global empire? What are the ways by which we measure and on whose side is God whom we affirm and profess? Both the President of the United States as well the victims invoke God by saying that God is on their side! What are the bases by which we discern God's presence and intervention in history? So what does public power mean in the Age of Empire? Does it mean anything at all? Does it actually exist? More importantly, has Christianity been exhausted its avenues of resistance against life-negating forces. Do we have any resources of hope? These are the questions that surface before us.

The context clearly portrays that defiance cannot be expected by the governments; it can only be enforced by people who can link hands across national borders. So when we speak of public power in the Age of Empire, I mean the power of a dissenting public, a public that disagrees with the concept of empire building. What are the avenues of protests available to people who wish to resist the Empire? Mass and peoples' movements in secular world keep protesting and involve in subversive actions locally, nationally and globally based on their ideological and political convictions. By resistance I do not mean only to express dissent, but to effectively force change.

In this historical, ideological, and theological situation where global empire claims absolute power and total control over against the sovereignty of God and gospel claims, it calls for a mandate that is critical and necessary for the integrity of our faith that warrants a faith stance. As theologians, the emergent context warrants us to respond to the empire-building design of the United States. Therefore, one of the pragmatic and plausible options before us is to construct a context-based theology which would play a supportive and contributive role to mass resistive and subversive movements that are engaged in thwarting the nefarious designs of U.S. led empire building in different parts of the world today. A Christian theology of resistance and subversion must take the form of a counter-discipline to empire. Theology of resistance and subversion could even perhaps be considered as a natural continuum to liberation theology.

Before entering into that domain, I would like to clarify definitional and conceptual meaning and understanding of resistance and subversion. For me, **subversion**⁸ and **resistance** are moral categories. It is important to know the meaning and content of these categories.

Orlando Fals-Borda, an organic intellectual, an active protestant layman committed for social change, and a leading Colombian sociologist was invited to join other notable intellectuals such as Buckminster Fuller, Norman Cousins, Lester Pearson, Pietro Nenni, Jan Tinbergen, and others to a consultation group on the future of the United Nations. He declined to be part of this by citing as one of his reasons the urgent need to return to Colombia in order to contribute as far as I can, to the liberating effort to make my country a better place for its people, and to its search for autonomy and dignity. For me this task is of the highest priority.⁹ He happens to be an ardent follower of fellow sociologist, Camilo Torres, whom he labels a moral subversive. However, Fals-Borda's life has exemplified three crucial choices:

To be a detached scholar or an active revolutionary intellectual.

To be an institutionally successful professional or a marginalized outcast. (One thinks instinctively here of Byron's tragic figure, self-exiled Harold.)

To be a maker of history or a Christian witness to transcendence.¹⁰

The above scheme sets a stage for theological dilemmas and political choices. The labelling of those who are against empire as terrorists, militants, anarchists, and subversionists is to justify the nefarious design of

8 'Subversion' is perhaps a more difficult term to justify since it is often conjures up ideas of armed or violent protest and revolution. There is little, if any, call to armed resistance in the Old Testament. The tendency is to overthrow of powers deemed evil to God, although there is a good deal of quiet satisfaction gained from contemplation of just what it is he will do to them, with, or without, the help of human agencies. However, 'subversion' means literally 'overturning', from the Latin *subvertere*. I have used it to describe the criticism, which seeks to deny the validity of the claims to power of those in power (cf. Rex Manson, *Propaganda and Subversion in the Old Testament*, London: SPCK, 1997, 174.

* *Orlando Fals-Borda, an organic intellectual and an active protestant layman committed for social change.

9 Denis Goulet, *A New Moral Order*, (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1974), 52.

10 Ibid., 53.

empire. Those who challenge, resist and subvert injustices, exploitation and unjust order are branded as terrorists. These utterances and attributes are value-loaded that ought to be de-mystified. Accordingly, subversion, as newly defined, is the moving power behind a wide range of efforts at radical correction of social ills.¹¹

However, Change becomes subversive only when it is fostered by rebel groups committed to the transition from one social order to another.¹² We have a number of people who belong to this stream, namely, Gandhi, Bhagat Singh, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Paulo Freire, Fidel Castro, Mao, Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Marighela, Cabral, Torres, and Bonhoeffer.¹³ Their models of resistance and subversion are of course profoundly moral as evidenced in their lives, witness, writings and sacrifices so that others may have life in all its abundance. Hence the counter violence they are obliged to employ does not destroy social welfare; rather, it removes obstacles to the construction of authentic social goods.¹⁴ On these lines, Fals-Borda warns,

*The guardians of the established order often forget that many subversives have in time become the heroes of a new society and the saints of a revitalised Church. Their attitudes and beliefs had not been accepted in their own time because these threatened vested interests. With historical perspective, the anti-social elements are seen to be others: those who defend an unjust social order, believing it to be just only because it is traditional.*¹⁵

Subversion has been defined and explained by the forces of empire as unconstitutional, extra-judicial, violence-prone, anti-rights, anti-democratic and so on. Subversion is usually connoted to militant and violent way of sabotaging the state apparatus. In general, the very word 'subversion' has

¹¹ Ibid., 57.

¹² Ibid.,

¹³ To counter the state violence, the victims employ arms or non-violent means to realize the hopes and aspirations of the victims. Although the non-violent espouses physical non-violence it violates the mechanisms of the oppressor causing psychological violence and physical impotence toward the oppressive forces.

¹⁴ Denis Goulet, 62.

¹⁵ Ibid., 62-63.

been understood as a negative term that expresses and creates resentment and fear psychosis amongst the people. On the contrary,

*Not only is subversion the forerunner of social construction; it is the vital moral force, which transforms passivity and exploitation into human dignity and liberation. A supreme sense of moral worth pervades the subversive enterprise in Latin America. Subversion represents a real possibility for renovation, freedom and collective fulfilment*¹⁶

Therefore subversionists should not be viewed as deviants, aberrants, or marginals as characterized by the Empire, but rather as moral interlocutors or as constructive agents of social change. Resistance is a dimension of protest or defiance or mobilization. 'Resistance' and 'subversion' refers to the way a group or community or a coalition or a union might tackle a context of a given system from outside employing tools or strategies developed outside the system. At the same time, resistance and subversion could also work from within the system with tools or strategies fashioned from inside. Sometimes resistance and subversion could also be extra-constitutional and extra-judicial. The means and ends employed do not concur with the constitutional propriety or the means employed justifies the ends. The interplay between resistance and subversion could lead to entirely different propositions.

Let us recollect for instance a series of global resistance and protests that took place in different sites thus far against the forces of empire. Chain of events clearly fashioned for human emancipation from the clutches of empire. Whether these global resistance and protests in a long run succeed or not is not the point. The point is that ordinary people garnered the courage to speak out and protest in millions their capacity to participate and create in the making of history. But history can be made only if people have both the vocabulary and vision of another world possible or an alternative world to struggle for. Those who believe in making history and raving a question: Is another world possible need to take note of the depoliticizing and incapacitating agency of the Empire that creep masquerade as visionaries of

¹⁶ Ibid., 63.

another world.

By the last two decades of the twentieth century, however, a gigantic process was set in motion a process of taming unruly and recalcitrant civil societies; a process of depoliticisation of people who had once been made aware of the possibilities of history

No longer do we find any idea of struggle and emancipation in these political vocabularies, only ideas of resignation. In the middle of these political languages that call for social capital and for building networks of trust vocabularies that conjure away the fact of political, social and economic oppression through semantic engineering anti-war protests and also the anti-globalisation protests stand alone. And we all know what happens to political struggles when they stand alone and bereft of support from attendant ideas of solidarity against anti-imperialism, they become isolated.¹⁷

The categories such as 'subversion' and 'resistance' although interchangeably used, for Christians they ought to be grounded biblically, theologically and ethically. However, from the scriptures what we derive is that 'subversion' and 'resistance' are not mutually exclusive, but instead intimately intertwined and interrelated. In other words, it simply means that subversion-resistance syncretism entails complex interplay where they are tried out in the context-specifics. These two categories supplement and compliment one another. Therefore, they are pragmatic terms. In short, these two do undergo numerous forms as and when the context demands.

Combating Global Empire: A Theology of Resistance and Subversion

The Need & Necessity, Nature & Character of a Theology of Resistance and Subversion

¹⁷ See Neera Chandhoke, "A text without a context," *The Hindu*, (16.4.1993): 10.

The empire's ideology claims that it is absolute and omnipotent thereby demanding perennial sacrifices from the vulnerable and defenseless. As against this, I would like to propose a theology that would play a significant role. A theology of resistance and subversion is a theology with a dialectic comprising word-flesh, human-divine, material-spiritual, this worldly-other worldly, immanent-transcendent element. This theology acts as the base, source, power, critique and a principle of alternative hope and vision. In view of this, our theological task is to look at the ground realities and offer alternatives to the life-negating force, which is the empire. I think that the crucial theological factor that should be taken into consideration for us is to identify, discern, and locate the right place-time and appropriate movement-momentum of divine transcendence. It means, as CHANG puts it,

in other words, to rethink how we can reclaim God's transcendence in a way that does not negate our physical world but as the intimate ground of being that sustains and enlivens the whole of creation and, at the same time, as the ultimate ground of being (Tillich) that shakes the foundations of the earth, that challenges our rigid disbelief in the heavenly possibilities. Probably, once again, our generation needs a Barthian reaction against what is taken for granted by the neo-liberal utopianism of today, although by Barthian we should no longer mean a dichotomy between God and the physical world. As a process, there is an ontological interdependence, not independence, between God and the physical world and therefore we are not only spiritually but also physically connected with God we need a strategic transcendentalism, if you will God-with-us is always and must be the God-beyond-us, the God beyond the infinite chain of market evolution ¹⁸

Therefore, theology ought to place the victims, the weak and the vulnerable nations at the centre, since majority people of these countries are disempowered and disfranchised, but certainly represent imago dei. In God's

¹⁸ Yoon-Jae CHANG, "Economic Globalization and the Neo-liberalism of F.A. Hayek: A Theological Critique," *Quest*, 2.2(November 2003): 32.

being we derive our being. In our being we manifest God's being. These two statements compliment each other. It is dialectical and inherently linked with one another. Any doctrine or system vis--vis such an empire that relegates human beings or nations as non-entities should be countered. Any attempt by empire to minimize human worth, human dignity, and sovereignty, ought to be challenged. Since the existence of a vast majority of people across the world is in jeopardy it is essential to explore and evolve a theology that would oppose the doctrine of empire building. In that we ought to explore the God who empowers and instills hope to those who live in desperation and hopelessness.

We are constantly told and reminded that resistance and subversion is futile. The proponents of the empire reiterates and reinforces that the emergence of empire is out of a natural process to combat a war on terror in order to bring stability and democracy to a world which is gripped with fear and terrorism. In the process they have co-opted god in their imperial expansion by legitimizing the empire as part of God's order. In conjunction to this rhetoric, the massive Christian following and church follows the imperial rhetoric and involved in chanting. The claim of the Empire that God is with them in the Empire expansion legitimizes the Empire as being the part of God's order and God's agent in history. The Church and its congregation pray for the success and advances of the Empire. For them, there is no God transcendent over the empire and firmly believe in the cosmos of the market - a demi-god. This is not something new. People at different epochs of history faced similar rhetoric, hardships, meted-out brutal violence. Forms and modes of oppression may be different, people survived because resistance and subversion marks the entire period throughout the human history and continues even today. Resistance and subversion continue and should go on when quality of life and sanctity of life is affected.

In such a context, Christian faith propels and Christian mandate prompts us to respond and act upon to the current state of empire building because it emits evil, sinful exclusion, cruel enslavement. However, in our despair and vulnerability we derive courage to speak as well as to act since we believe in hope and resurrection. It is this process that facilitates to confront the powers of oppression, dehumanisation and idols of death, which try to rule over the world, which is not theirs, but of the Lord. Hence, the targets of

resistance and subversion may be direct and take on a tangible form or that may be indirect in the sense of process. The issue at the bottom is control. The impetus for resistance and subversion politics is not only material or technical, but spiritual and decidedly intertwined with the theological principle that overarches. Apparently the creatures and the created order bleed. Precisely because of these reasons our God of the Bible and history acts in an opportune time, which is beyond human comprehension. When and how ought not to be our purview.

The Subversive Voice of God in the "Word of God"

The notion of a certain race, class, caste, community or nation claiming to have a divine right to a particular geographical area of territory or beyond was prevalent in ancient societies and also prevails in the modern age too. On these lines, a forthright and uncompromising theological expression of the right of Israel to the land of Canaan is also found in the Deuteronomic literature. It is nothing, but the subversive voice of God that we find in the book of Deuteronomy. The Deuteronomists admonished those who acted against those who violated and negated God's law and whose acts could be considered as subversive. In this sense Deuteronomy is by and large subversive. To substantiate,

Indeed, it is in this matter that Deuteronomy introduces another of its 'subversive' elements. We have seen how strong is its propaganda about the right of Israel to the land of Canaan. But, just as the Deuteronomists make the Davidic covenant a conditional one, so the Deuteronomists emphasize that the Sinaitic covenant, made with the whole community of Israel, is a conditional one. In another real sense, the land is not their by right. It is God's land and it is his gift to his people. But the gift has conditions attached to it. if they fail to observe his laws, those laws which make every man and woman among them responsible and all members of the community, especially the poor and the weak, the responsibility of all, they will not find the land the prosperous place they expected and, ultimately, might even lose it. This is expressed most clearly in the

blessings and curses which form the sanctions in chapter 28 for their behaviour in the land. The threats of loss of fertility of the land and of defeat by invaders lead up to the ultimate climax threatening that the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt will be reversed: 'Yahweh will bring you back to Egypt in ships, by that very way which I promised you would not see again, and there you will offer to sell yourselves to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will want to own you' (28.68). Thus there is an element of subversion even about the main plank of Deuteronomy's propaganda.¹⁹

The Deuteronomists clearly point out that whoever, whether kings or priests are in a position to exercise mediatory role to enforce law, which can be observed by anyone and everywhere. This would help to bind the factions and divisions in the community. How the law is to be followed and put into practice becomes the new force to be reckoned with.

By and large in the Old Testament we find a clear slant that God is in favour of the vulnerable and the afflicted. The prophetic books particularly deal with the structural injustices especially abused by the monarchical and religious institutions. This is where the 'prophetic subversion' takes a pivotal role to point out abuse of power and authority. The state always uses the ecclesiastical structures and religious institutions as means of controlling mechanisms. In spite of it, the prophetic books elucidates that God uses prophets to warn and instruct God's people. By these acts God exercises God's control over history.

For example, Nathan tells David a parable. There were two men in the same city. One was very poor, owning only one lamb, and the other very rich owning flocks and herds. When a guest came to the rich man's house he took the poor man's lamb for the feast than one of his own. David being the king and the ultimate arbiter of 'justice' came out with righteous anger and passed a verdict that the rich man should die or should make reparation of four times the amount he stole. Then follows the famous indictment that we find in the Old Testament: 'you are that man', says Nathan. The prophet uses

¹⁹ For more details and information see Rex Mason, *Propaganda and Subversion in the Old Testament*, (London: SPCK, 1997), 88.

this parable cleverly by trapping David to pass judgement on himself. It is a clear case where a prophet standing up to the abuse of power and privilege by a king.

The other incident features Elijah, which appears in I Kings 21. Naboth, one of the citizens of Israel owned a vineyard that he inherited from the previous generation. The vineyard was within the Ahab's royal domain. He wanted to own Naboth's land, offering another piece of land located on the edge of town. Naboth rejected Ahab's proposition on the ground that the family ownership of land was as sacred inheritance and thus refused to move out. This act of refusal was in conformity to the covenant relationship with God, having equal rights.

Moving on to Amos, Amos's activity of prophecy especially extends during the reign of Jeroboam II. The first half of 8th century was considered as a period of considerable security and prosperity for Israel. But then a period of internal crisis kept Assyria busy at home and delayed her imperial expansion. At this time, Jeroboam occupied the throne wherein he faced no threat from outside. So he indulged in military expansion. In 2 Kings 14:25 speaks of his expansionism and Amos (6:13) alludes to the boasting of his contemporaries about their military victories. So Amos 'subverts' the religious claims of the nation state of Israel whoever and whatever may be the person God judges all on the same moral and ethical basis of action.

*But Amos subverts those claims also in another way. God intends to dispense with the whole political and religious establishment of Israel. He has passed sentence on it. The wealthy will not live in the stone houses they have built or the great estates they have wrested from their rightful owners (5.11). The nation will be defeated in battle (2.13-16; 3.11; 6.1-7). In particular, the royal house of Jeroboam will be destroyed (7.9) together with the official sanctuaries whose cult supported that royal power (3.13f; 5.4f; 7.8f.).*²⁰

On similar vein prophet Micah who belongs to the later part of the 8th

²⁰ Ibid., 106.

century BCE could be grouped along with others. Micah's words and Isaiah's as well could concur with one another. Both the books have almost similar oracles. Nevertheless, their critique of Judah's social and political life posits a number of commonalities as we find in Isa.5:1 ff and Mic.2:1. Both of them attack the greedy acquisition of land and property, at the expense of the poor which Isaiah and Micah describe in Isa.2:2, 5:8; Micah 3:1-3. Micah in his oracles drives a clear message that the leadership ought to dispense by ensuring fairness and justice for all. Instead of protecting the poor who relied on the leaders, the rulers protected the rich and the affluent to amass wealth. God describes those who have been negated and ruthlessly crushed as 'my people'. Such description of them was not only ominous for the leaders, but is highly significant for our understanding of the enormity of the prophetic subversion

The Scripture especially the prophetic texts contain subversion and resistance tones. In conclusion, the prophets cited above engaged in their critical vocation and countered the dominant order. This critical vocation is nothing but 'subversive' and 'resistive', derived not only by divine right, but divine right they exercised in varied modes. Therefore, in the Old Testament we could discern 'prophetic subversion and resistance' and these two have proved to have powerful and lasting relevance then and also now.

From the New Testament perspective, God shall not tolerate the way in which His *cosmos* is managed. This pre-supposes that God is unhappy with the management of His cosmos. God's true intent and motif to humanity and His created order have been abused and fractured. In view of this, we see in John 9:39; Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind'. This verse could probably be interpreted differently that the humans have plundered and indiscriminately exploited God's *cosmos*, which bleeds and wounded. Even the religious authorities in the process have reduced religion by including those who are financially privileged by posing morally upright. Jesus gives a clear mandate that the rich and the powerful, and the religious authorities have become blind because of the power and wealth, but others clearly see what they are up to. In view of this, he warns that Jesus says 'For judgment I came into this world.'

The Domination System is filled with greed and expansionistic attitude. As faith communities we are given the responsibility to build a new order so that the power and privileges enjoyed by the rich world be toppled. The protest and revolt by the oppressed as we see in the Exodus portrays that God sees, judges and liberates. Jesus says, 'I have overcome the world' (John 16:33). Jesus conquered the world in spite of Satan's tempting offer to Him shows that the Domination System has the capacity and capability to subordinate anyone with tempting offers. But Jesus refuted all those that the Satan promised. His act exemplifies the negation of the negations of the Domination System. The New Reality eschews exploitation, oppression and subjugation.

The Subversive- Breath and Resistive-Resilient Spirit of God

When empire preaches the false gospel of absoluteness and supremacy of empire-god, and declares the death of nation states, welfare, protest and people's power, the task of resistance and subversive theology is to prophesy to the breath and resist to the death that blows from different directions so that dry bones may raise from the valleys and margins and come back to life with renewed vigor and added resilience so that they may stand firmly on their feet. It is like tornado or typhoon or gale that blows from all directions raising the valleys and the dry bones to life and hope.

A valley full of dry bones that we read in Ezekiel 37: 1-28 is indeed a good metaphor. God took Ezekiel to a valley. In this vision he saw the white bones of an army killed in battle. They were scattered across the valley and made white by the sun. God instructed the prophet to speak to these lifeless bones. When he did this there was a noise and the bones came together. As he looked flesh came on the bones and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. At God's command, Ezekiel called on the four winds to breathe into the dead bodies they might become alive. In his vision, he did this and the dead men came to life before his eyes.

This has a historical connotation. In Babylon the sons of Israel felt like dry bones. They lost their hopes. Their spirit felt dead. God had to awaken them to new life before they could be one people again and return to their own

land. This may be a picture of Israel and Judah coming together again as one nation. The context we live in is almost the similar to that. The current global context portrays one of despair, hopelessness, and humiliation. A vast majority of people and nations are under the clutches of the United States and mega corporations. Nations and people are told to fall in line and follow their doctrine stringently. In this way, the empire is acquiring supreme power leading to demi-god. As against this, the biblical vision extends a picture of hope and a great promise. It means that the victims and the subjugated people around the world shall come back to life with renewed spirit. The wind blows with force from all the directions and the silenced and exploited people rise up like a mass or huge force from four different corners of the world with renewed rigor and strength like a world army to combat against the forces of empire.

Undoubtedly a theology of resistance and subversion is the locus of our very being and becoming as we respond to diverse powers and principalities. These two are nothing but normative principles that negate life and thus become the focus of one's faith articulation and theologizing. A theology of resistance and subversion is grounded in a redemptive activity of the silenced nations and uprooted communities. It is embedded in a particular philosophical/ideological and theological mooring. It is a theology of the present, where the past and the future meet. Its primary focus is to translate the sovereignty and dignity of nations from the domination of the forces of empire. It identifies with the life-affirming forces and shows solidarity with the forces that work against empire building.

Where we live is a dwelling place of God, and therefore we become a dwelling place of God since God became incarnate in Jesus. We are filled with Christ-ness of flesh and blood, an incarnate God. In this way the finite bears the infinite. A theology of resistance and subversion revolves around moral agency and closer relationship with the indwelling God. This moral agency generates and instills resistance and subversion in the face of systemic domination and expansion of empire. It bridges indwelling communities of the faithful and dismantles structures and ideologies of empire. The working concepts of moral agency that entails resistance and subversion are central to theologizing. Christ's indwelling is the locus of a theology of resistance and subversion that extends moral identity, purpose,

vision, norms, and agency. The centrality of resistance and subversion as ethical categories posits moral agency that draws sustenance in the crucified and living Christ dwelling in and gradually transforming the community that yearns for freedom, equality, and dignity. Resistance and subversion impinges upon one another and thus linked with Christian-praxis.

The indwelling Christ, mediated by the moral agency invigorates the elements of resistance and subversion that eventually transform individuals and communities to get involved in struggles for the establishment of better world order. In this sense moral agency is subversive. There is no going back, because the world we live-in is a dwelling place of Christ crucified, who lived and died for the sake of abundant life for all, and whose saving-activity for human being could not be stopped by any force on earth that includes the entire cosmos. God's dwelling place is where the powerless and the humiliated stay because this is where God revealed and vivified compassion and suffering.

Theology of resistance and subversion is both a categorical ethical imperative and the moral power for faith communities to develop resilience in order to oppose empire. Resistance and subversion to empire requires courage. Courage is an ingredient of subversive moral agency. It is a theology that unleashes the power of God who is righteous and tolerant, but vindicates justice. It is a theology that is premised on moral agency for living toward the flourishing of creation and resists and subverts empire building that render death and destruction flows from embodied communion in which God incarnate is received and given.

The empire as an idol or demi-god is given and granted the ultimate loyalty and devotion by many countries of the world. It is nothing but idolatry of the empire. On the contrary, it is not absolute as the First Commandment says: You shall not have any other gods before me. The empire and those who run it have become gods. Is the global empire led by the United States a new manifestation of the holy Roman empire of the 21st century? Those who defy the supreme authority of the empire shall be considered as infidels and enemies, and so they should be annihilated. The *imago dei* clearly means that we represent God's image and whoever or whichever force that damages and tampers that *imago dei* should be resisted, and if need arises, evolve

subversive ways and means to counter . Imago dei is resonates human dignity and human worth. It means fuller or total or complete. In this connection the empire must be resisted with righteous anger and prophetically.

The Gospel mandate and ethical imperative demands that the idols of our time i.e., empire must be named and exorcised. As we read in the Book of Revelation, the beast, dragon, hydra, devil, Satan, and all the forces of empire are exposed and subverted. The power of the Spirit that raises the dry bones into life with flesh and blood instills courage and resilience spread like wild fire into all directions countering, subverting, and destroying the evil and satanic forces of the empire by establishing new heaven and new earth here and now. The force that is unstoppable flows from the indwelling spirit of the resurrected Christ, which is a historical continuum that sustains and revitalizes power for countering and resisting the forces of empire thereby enabling a resilient new flourishing life.

In the history no kingdom, no empire, and no civilization that subverted, manipulated, and acted against God's order, design, and arrangement has been spared. God intervened and acted in human histories in numerous ways that could never be predicted. It is that beyondness we could hardly discern, but without fail in His own time and at the right moment. And those who fail to heed to that warning would have to meet the disastrous consequences.

Conclusion

A theology of resistance and subversion entails conflictual and confrontational politics. This we see in Jesus who was filled with righteous Spirit and righteous anger that empowered Him to question the life-negating forces. All these confrontational politics against the empire led Jesus to suffering and death. Theology of resistance and subversion is grounded on confrontational Spirit. This confrontational aspect of Jesus' life and witness, mission and ministry, death and resurrection occupies the center position, because it demands risk-taking' daringness leading to 'death'. Those who fail to recognize this factor cannot be a partner. A theology of resistance and subversion extends solidarity at a time where global empire is forging resistance. Our faith is challenged by the emergent empire phenomenon. A

theology of resistance and subversion is both prophetic and movement oriented. It involves resistance and subversion till empire is dismantled. It is possible by joining hands with movements of life-affirming, effecting alternative global politics and economic arrangement.

Abstract

The corollary of the global empire is the natural alignment of the ideology of neo-liberalism. Hence, any discourse on empire building will have to take into consideration the convergence of socio-economic, politico-cultural and religious dimensions. Through an analysis I have pointed out the inter-connections between empire and capital, neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism of the present era of empire building. Though these two are separate categories, in the process they are connected and thus reinforce and consolidate their logic of control, expansion, and domination. In a context like this, what ought to be the response of Dalit and Minjung theologians?

This article shows that convergence arguments and discourses from the proponents of empire-capital is contested by the writer and apparently proposes a counter-veiling subaltern theological convergence that could perhaps become one of the prescriptive theological modes. Further, this paper interrogates and critiques the empire-building project of the United States and its allies which should be resisted by all means in view of the deeply engrained universal principles premised on sovereignty, mutual respect, co-habitation, inclusivity, equality analysis, and global ethical principles. In this paper, it is apparent that interrogation and examination of the convergence arguments in the debate of empire building faces strong resistance from the deeply engrained Biblical and theological principles of subversion and resistance rooted in praxis as a countervailing theology to the growing phenomenon of empire-capital expansion.

Key words

global empire, globalization, resistance, subversion, Deuteronomist, Gospel, idolatry, Roman Empire