

**‘DIS PLACE, MAN’:¹ A POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE OF THE VINE (THE
MOUNTAIN AND THE TEMPLE) IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

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‘Place is the beginning of our existence, just as a father’. Francis Bacon

‘She lived divided, straining to adjust to this place where she seemed to float, never to
light. . . .’ Michelle Cliff

‘Dis Place’² of Mine

I have been thinking a lot about fatherhood and place lately, since fatherhood has been my primary vocation for the past few years, and since my family recently moved from Portland, Oregon to Seattle, Washington. For the last ten years I have been flitting between a number of part-time and temporary teaching positions while my wife has worked full time outside our home. Every few months I have sent out my Vita—my ‘Innagaddavida, baby’—looking for the Garden of Eden, the abundant life Jesus was talking about in John 10—tenure, a real salary with health benefits, a retirement plan, and tuition-less college education for my children. I have spent countless hours sitting by the telephone, pretending to write scholarly essays while waiting for that special phone call.

Jesus! It’s beginning to ring! Is it really you?

‘Yes, I sent you my Vita a few months ago. Yes, I’m the one with the Ph.D. in Biblical Studies (New Testament) from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley

California. I finished my degree back in 1985. Before that I did an M.A. in Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, in Pasadena California. I finished that in 1979, and my first degree was a B.A. in Greek and Religion from Wheaton College in Illinois. You can see from my transcript that I graduated in 1973 with High Honors’.

Over the years I have gotten a few campus interviews, but never the final call that ends, ‘Τετελεσται’ (Jn 19.30). ‘The nightmare is over. We want you’. There is ‘no telephone to heaven. No voice to God.’³

Now I’m beyond desperation. Things have gotten so bad that I’ve taken to posting my Vita in the bathroom stalls of all the gas stations on Interstate 5 between Seattle and Tacoma, Washington, where I’ve been teaching lately.⁴ Using my car keys, I scratch my vital records into the gray metal dividers next to those racks of fluorescent-colored condoms and plastic joy rings.

‘For a good time, call Dr. Jeffrey L. Staley, Ph.D., at (425) 485-2278, or find him on the Worldwide Web at: <http://www.sarweb.org/staley/staley.htm>’. Or is it <http://www.staleywise.com/> or <http://www.igc.org/staley/>? How about trying http://artists.mp3s.com/artists/144/staley__thomsen_-_audiocan.html, <http://cnews.tribune.com/news/story/0,1162,wphl-sports-76155,00.html>, or <http://www.u.arizona.edu/~rstaley/>? I must confess that I’ve been teaching in so many different places that half the time I don’t have a clue as to who or where I am. So I dive into the nearest bathroom stall or log into cyberspace and pick out whatever custom-made identity seems to fit at the moment.

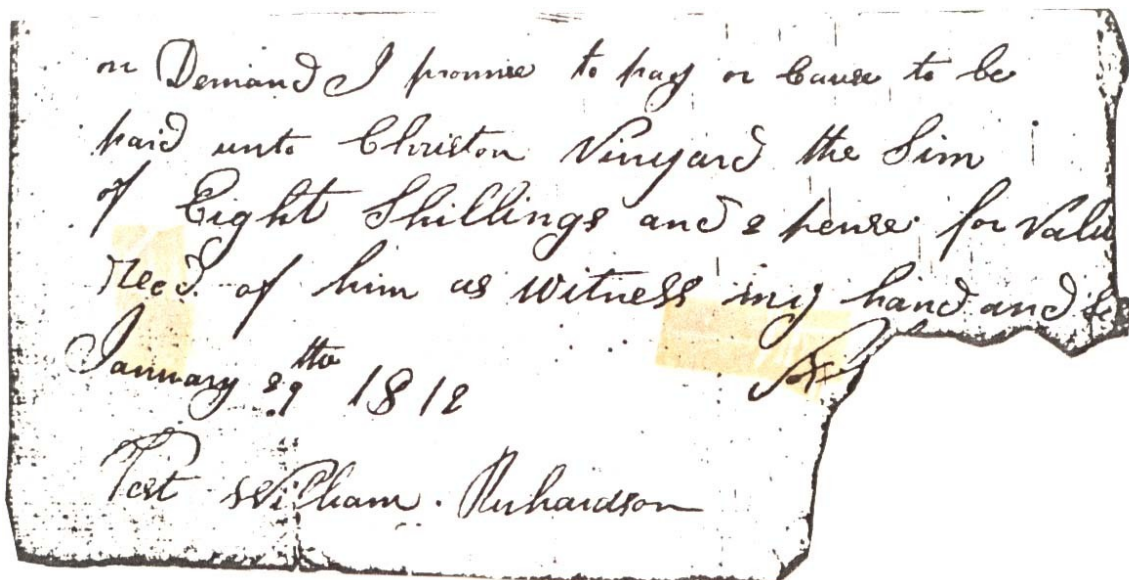
For the moment I am living in Bothell, Washington, a suburb of Seattle; near the corporate headquarters of Amazon.com and Microsoft, and a leisurely bike ride away

from Chateau Ste. Michelle Winery and the Red Hook Brewery. As a result of this recent displacement, I have decided to put aside for awhile my dream of securing a full-time, tenure-track position in New Testament.⁵ Instead, I have turned to writing about fatherhood and the politics of place;⁶ and in particular, the politics of ‘dis place’ as it relates to postcolonial studies of John.

‘Dis Place’ of My Fathers

When my grandfather Lloyd Malcolm Staley sold his father’s house and farm in Franklin County, Kansas at the beginning of the Great Depression, he could not have foreseen that he would be the last Staley to make a living at horticulture.⁷ Four generations earlier, in 1833, his ancestor Abraham Staley had packed up his family and meager belongings and moved west to central Indiana from a farm on the Roanoke River in Franklin County, Virginia.

Like his namesake of the Hebrew Bible, Abraham Staley traveled as if by faith, to a land he had never laid eyes on. The only possessions he passed on to his descendants were a few scraps of paper—one, a creditor’s note, reads:



on Demand I promise to pay or cause to be paid unto Christon Vinyard the Sum of Eight Shillings and 2 pence for value Recd. of him as witness my hand and seal
January 29th 1812
Wm. Richardson

I suspect that Mr. Vinyard never received the eight shillings and two pence owed him before my great, great, great, great grandfather left Virginia, for Abraham Staley died and was buried in central Indiana.

Abraham's son, Isaac, remained on the lush, verdant land just east of Indianapolis, growing wheat and corn, and working as a toll keeper on the National Road (that marvelous symbol of American 'Manifest Destiny') until his death in 1887. Isaac's son, Abraham E. Staley farmed in nearby Hancock County until moving to Missouri in 1867. Nine years later Abraham E. bought a farm in eastern Kansas, where my great grandfather, grandfather, and father were all raised.

Although my grandfather was forced to sell the family home and farm in 1929, he never lost his love for the earth or for growing things. Whether living in the suburbs of Kansas City, Kansas or in the central coast range at Atascadero, California, he would spend his leisure hours turning small plots of ground into thriving vegetable gardens. Today, as high-maintenance, luxuriant vineyards creep ever closer to the central California house where he and his wife spent their retirement years, I can still recall one peculiar detail of his gardening. His gardens were always laid out in the same order: onions, radishes, and lettuce on one side; beans, tomatoes, and corn on the other. For years my father and I have followed the furrows of his dirt-encrusted fingernails without fail, even though I don't particularly like green onions or radishes. It is a planting tradition that probably goes back generations to the gardening mothers in the Staley family.

For me, vegetable gardens have been an unconscious symbol of family rootedness. More than a source of vitamins and fresh produce; more than a way of reducing weekly

food costs; vegetable gardening has been a natural, physical way for me to say ‘This is my place, my home. This is where I have put down roots and will stay’.⁸

In my adult life I have had vegetable gardens in only three locales: in sunny southern California, where I lived for five years and borrowed a small plot from a friendly neighbor; in northern California where I went to graduate school; and in Portland, Oregon, where I lived for eleven years. In southern California I had to pull out yards of tangled, matted bermuda grass and pieces of old concrete in order to grow a few wizened carrots and phallus-shaped zucchini. In northern California I appropriated a piece of ground in my girlfriend’s parents’ backyard. While I was planting that passion fruit known as the tomato, Barbara and I announced our engagement to my future mother-in-law. In Portland, we bought our first house in part because of its large, raised-bed garden. There I taught my two children how to plant beans, carrots, and radishes.

I do not have a vegetable garden in dis new Seattle place.⁹ The soil is a thick stew of glacier deposited gravel and stone, fit only for growing horsetail ferns and marshland buttercups.

‘Dis Place’ in Two Recent Johannine Studies

In a provocative essay entitled ‘Territorial Religion, Johannine Religion and the Vineyard of John 15’, Gary M. Burge argues that the christology of the Fourth Gospel is oriented toward displacing the significance of place in the Christian experience.¹⁰ Burge’s article picks up a theme from Raymond Brown’s commentary that is well known to Johannine scholars, one in which the Johannine Jesus is viewed as replacing Jewish institutions and religious views.¹¹ But Burge takes this replacement theme in a new direction by focusing on Judaism’s identity with the land of Israel and showing how that identity is uprooted by

Johannine christology. Building upon insights gleaned from Walter Brueggemann's and W. D. Davies's studies on Israel's ideology of the land,¹² Burge gives Brown's 'replacement theme' an important political twist, setting it in the context of contemporary Israeli/Palestinian territorial battles and arguments over land—especially as these quarrels are portrayed within American evangelical Protestantism.

Gary Burge's argument for how the land of Israel is displaced in Johannine christology is intertwined with Jesus's use of the vine metaphor in John 15. Burge attempts to show that scholars who have focused only on a Christian, eucharistic context for the Johannine metaphor have limited themselves much too narrowly and have missed its important Jewish context.¹³ He argues that the 'vine had a far more diverse and popular usage' in Judaism, where it can refer to the land of Israel, wisdom, and the messiah.¹⁴ But for Burge, the vine image refers primarily to the land of Israel and reflects 'the Fourth Gospel's most profound theological relocation of Israel's "Holy Space"',¹⁵ since Jesus 'chang[es] the place of rootedness for Israel'.¹⁶ Thus, 'the people of Israel cannot claim to be planted as vines in The Land; they cannot be rooted in the vineyard unless first they are grafted into Jesus' (Jn 15.6).¹⁷ 'In a word, Jesus spiritualizes The Land'.¹⁸

Although it is not Burge's explicit intention to refocus contemporary discussions of Johannine christology, his emphasis on the significance of territory and place in ancient Jewish and contemporary Israeli politics points Johannine christology in an important new direction. The politics of place is a topic of crucial importance in our postcolonial world, at a time when many immigrant American families are beginning to explore the spirituality of their rootedness in 'the land',¹⁹ at a time when white, upper

middle class citizens of the United States have appropriated Native American expressions of geographical and tribal spirituality,²⁰ and at a time when daily news reports remind us of the struggle of people for land and independence in such far off places as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Arizona, Rwanda, Iraq, East Timor, South Dakota, Chechnya, Palestine, Northern Ireland, Nevada, Liberia, Turkestan, Sudan, the Amazon rain forests of Brazil—and the list goes on.²¹

But in an article published the same year as Gary Burge's essay, Tod Swanson appraises the Johannine sense of place more critically.²² Swanson is particularly concerned with the question 'What is it about early Christian interpretations of space that made it seem so universal and transplantable?', and he begins his discussion with a summary of Mircea Eliade's Cosmos and History. In this early work Eliade argued that ancient Judaism and Christianity set in motion a process of desacralizing space in the West, a process which ultimately made possible modern comparative studies of religion and ritual.²³ Eliade's fleeting reference to the Samaritan woman's question about the place of proper worship leads Swanson on a quest through the Fourth Gospel to find the clues to the Johannine reinterpretation of place.²⁴ Swanson does not claim to be a Johannine scholar, and he seems to depend too much on a Neoplatonic reading of the Fourth Gospel in order to prove his points about the Johannine ideology of place.²⁵ Nevertheless, he poses important questions for the contemporary interpreter of John's Gospel. He notes in his conclusion that

even as u-topian a religion as Johannine Christianity sustains an ethos, and every ethos competes for space in this world. Ironically, therefore, the very preparing of the nonterritorial place for unity actually remapped the

world in a way that displaced competing religious cultures. By delegitimizing all territorial-based religions it actually staked out a new kind of Christian claim to all of the territories of this world. There is, therefore, also a darker side to the Johannine myth that follows from its mapping of the outside world. . . .²⁶

Provocative as Swanson's and Burge's studies are, their essays begin outside their own physical worlds. They pull up colonialist and imperialistic elements from early Christianity and ancient Judaism that are beyond the realm of their own personal experience, and with these in hand they seek to cultivate John's Gospel in such a way that it can reconfigure contemporary colonialist and imperial situations. My strategy, however, is different. For here, in this essay, my scholarly voice and academic agenda is fractured by a personal story—the story of my own reading experience²⁷—a reading where ancestral uprootedness and experiences of displacement resonate with other, older memories of 'dis place'. For 'dis place' is as much about the colonized space of the Navajo Reservation in northeastern Arizona where I grew up, as it is about my own personal sense of 'dis place'-ment. In that former place where I was raised by fundamentalist Protestant missionary parents, we learned to quote John 3.16 in Navajo and would recite it to illiterate Native Americans living in a place named 'San Juan' by Spanish Catholic conquistadores.

I believe that 'dis place'—especially those fantastic landscapes of the American Southwest—have had a significant impact on how I read the Gospel of John. And so I seek to relate New Testament texts to the contemporary political context of those still living on the Navajo Reservation.²⁸ However, most of my hermeneutical effort has been

directed toward illuminating how my own personal understanding of Johannine narrative can be read out of the parched physicality of the San Juan valley which surrounded my childhood home. I have not attempted a political reading of the Gospel of John for those Euro-Americans and Native Americans who lived or presently live in the San Juan region of the American Southwest.²⁹ Yet Gary Burge's and Tod Swanson's essays provoke other Johannine scholars and me to ask new questions about the place of 'dis place' in the Fourth Gospel. What, for example, would a reading of the Fourth Gospel look like if we were to attempt to read its ideology of geography in the context of our own national story and its postcolonial contexts?

Leaving 'Dis Place' Behind

I am confused by 'dis place'. I thought this old Portland house would be our home forever. But today we are moving, leaving our ten-year *μὸνῆ* behind. The house is now empty, and it echoes hollowly as I pull the door shut and lock it so that no thief can sneak in. This is the only house my children have known, and I have lived in it longer than I have lived anywhere else.

We are moving to Seattle because of my wife's recent promotion. We both think that there might be more job opportunities for me in a larger metropolitan area. We will be 'homeless' during Christmas vacation, living in a condominium in downtown Seattle while we wait for the purchase of our new house to close.

After three months of desperate searching, we have finally settled on a \$180,000, six-year-old house that seems to be slowly sinking into a marsh just beyond our backyard fence.³⁰ We are twenty miles from my wife's workplace in downtown Seattle. Our real

estate agent is congratulating us on our purchase; trying, unsuccessfully, to convince us that the house is a great deal.

‘You know, the Seattle housing market is supposed to take off in the spring. You’re doing the wise thing, buying now’.

Three days after we move in we have to replace a 150-foot-long leaking water line. Maybe that’s why the house is sinking into the marsh.

‘No, no, no’, our new neighbors exclaim, ‘That’s not a marsh. It’s a protected wetlands! Can’t you read the signs? Now the wild blackberries that have invaded your backyard are another matter. The county has listed them as a ‘noxious weed’. So you can go in there and hack away at them to your heart’s delight’.³¹

But I can’t do that. An environmentalist friend of mine has told me that they are Himalayan Giant blackberries. And legend has it that the thorny vines slipped over to this country on nineteenth century Pacific steamships; on the backs of Chinese immigrants who, like my wife’s ancestors, were seeking wealth on the rail lines and mines of California and the great Northwest. So I can’t uproot them. They’re almost family. Besides, I have promised my children blackberry pies for Halloween and Thanksgiving.

Eventually I will discover that this particular blackberry probably originated in Iran and was introduced to Europe by Theodor Reimers of Hamburg, Germany. From there the famous nineteenth-century American horticulturist, Luther Burbank, introduced it to the Pacific Northwest wilderness. And there it took off—like, like a wild blackberry.³² So two years after we move into our house I spend six back-breaking months of labor cutting down and digging out the vines from my property that borders on

the wetland. But I do not attempt to eradicate the plants from the officially designated wetland itself. I need them for the blackberry pies I promised my children.

Challenging ‘Dis Place’-mentalism in the Gospel of John

Gary Burge’s and Tod Swanson’s articles offer me a hint of what future postcolonial readings of John’s Gospel might look like. But can the biblical canon—and the Gospel of John in particular—really displace the imperialist canons of a postcolonial world? Or will the Fourth Gospel’s politics of place continue to be used largely to cultivate colonialist and hegemonic agendas?

A number of years ago Ernst Käsemann argued that John’s christology was radically spiritualized and naïvely docetic in nature.³³ Does Burge’s argument that ‘Jesus spiritualizes the Land’ imply that the Fourth Gospel also hides a docetic geography behind its docetic christology?³⁴ Or is his essay overly naïve in its rejection of territorialism? In her book, The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, Marianne Thompson disputes Käsemann’s claim of the Fourth Gospel’s naïve docetism. She writes that John 1.14 ‘insists on the reality of Jesus’ humanity and flesh, and is actually anti-docetic, combating either the kind of view of Jesus which Käsemann delineates in The Testament of Jesus or an even more emphatic denial of his true incarnation’.³⁵ In view of this classic christological argument, my questions are these: If docetism represented a radicalizing of Johannine spirit christology in the early centuries of the church, a radicalizing that was alien to the intention of the Fourth Gospel, could the spiritualizing of Johannine geography in our day be equally alien to its intention, and thus be wrongly implicated in the demise of cultures and peoples struggling to maintain their land and identity? And could we then maintain an incar/national theology that would be

authentically Johannine; one that could be developed into a postcolonial geography of John's Gospel that was neither imperialistic nor territorial?³⁶ Is it possible to uphold an integral reading of the Fourth Gospel that values terra/tory without participating in terrorist activities?

In Place and the Politics of Identity, Michael Keith and Steve Pile argue for a much more complex view of land, territory, and place than either Burge or Swanson can envision; where multiple spatialities show that

the metaphoric and the real do not belong in separate worlds; that the symbolic and the literal are in part constitutive of one another. That meaning is never immanent, it is instead not just marked but also in part constituted by the spaces of representation in which it is articulated. These spaces of representation subvert the representation of spaces so that the ground we stand on becomes a mongrel hybrid of spatialities; at once a metaphor and a speaking position, a place of certainty and a burden of humility, sometimes all of these simultaneously, sometimes all of them incommensurably.³⁷

I return briefly to my own childhood place on the Navajo Reservation; to the politics of my own national geographics and muddled memory. In a world where European conquerors seized territory from the Navajo people (land which the Navajo doubtless took from earlier peoples) and renamed it St. John, I find troubling Gary Burge's description of Johannine christology as one that spiritualizes place. What does it mean to be the conqueror, the colonizer, the dominant people and say to those you have conquered, "Dis place" has been superseded by Christ'? That 'dis place' you once called

Jerusalem is now ‘Aelia Capitolina’; or that the place you once called ‘Old Age River’, or ‘One with a Long Body’, has now become the ‘San Juan River’?³⁸ That the Four Corners National Monument is more important than the Bear’s Ears? What happens to a people when borders, once signaled by obvious, topographical markers, now invisibly bisect the land as mysteriously as the doctrine of the two natures divides Christ?³⁹

In 1864 General James H. Carleton brought together his own staunch Presbyterianism with United States’s expansionist land policies. His plan was to convert the Navajo people to Christ by exiling them to the Bosque Redondo, three hundred miles from their traditional homeland.⁴⁰ The theory was that if you could get the natives off their land and turn them into Christian farmers, they would be convinced that the one God was not tied to territory. But as Robert McPherson notes, ‘[t]he Holy Land in the Middle East with its Jerusalem, Garden of Gethsemane, and Golgotha, are of no greater import to Christians than the Diné’s holy land is to them, circumscribed as it is by sacred mountains and containing the junction of the San Juan River and Mancos Creek, where Born for Water invoked supernatural aid to overcome danger and death, and the Bear’s Ears, where good triumphed over evil’.⁴¹ Within a few short years the government experiment was deemed a failure, and the decimated, destitute Navajo tribe was allowed to return to its native land.

So how can one say to peoples, ancient or modern, that ‘dis place’ is unimportant and has been superseded by a spiritual reality that appears to be only tenuously connected to the physical world? Burge fails to recognize the implications of his territorial arguments when he observes in a footnote that the ‘passion for “historic land ownership” pervades the cultures of the Middle East and lies at the heart of the Israel/Palestinian

struggle’, but ‘Western culture has few parallels to this experience’.⁴² Although Burge does not mention what those ‘few parallels’ in Western culture might be, I would venture a guess that there are more than a few parallels to the Palestinian experience in Western culture. The continuing arguments of the United States’s government over Native American land rights are one of the most obvious connections.

One way dispossessed people have maintained a connection to ‘dis place’-ment is by giving names to future generations of children that express the experience of exile. These people’s names function as verbal testimonies to, and as witnesses against ongoing colonialist and imperialist policies. This is what Isaiah the prophet seemed to be doing when he named his children ‘Shearjashub’ and ‘Mahershalalhashbaz’ (Is 7.3-9; 8.1-4). Not insignificantly, one of the most outspoken representatives of Native American theology and United States’s colonialism was given the name Vine Deloria Jr. by his parents, thus evoking Jesus’ famous ‘I am’ saying of John 15.1.⁴³ The vine—cut off, uprooted, and displaced from the land by three hundred years of United States colonial, imperial policies, has now become an individual’s name, a living person, a flesh-and-blood testimonial; a prophetic witness against colonialist displacement.⁴⁴

While Burge ends up with a naïvely docetic, de-politicized view of ‘the Land’ in Johannine theology, Swanson ends with its opposite; with a Thomas-like credo that would seem to state ‘Unless I see the lay of the land with my own eyes, and put my toes in the dirt of that place, and my fingers in its streams, and my nose in its indigenous plants, I will not believe’. Thus Swanson’s concluding critique of the Johannine ideology of place argues that ‘[t]he meaning of a place is not transferable. It is in the memories of the dead who are buried there. It is in the taste of that particular spring. It is in the way

the dirt and heat combine with the footprints of ancestors on that particular pilgrimage road. And it is part of the meaning of such sacred places that their presence is irreplaceable'.⁴⁵

Contrary to Burge's and Swanson's arguments, I believe that the rhetorics related to ubiquitous and localized places in the Fourth Gospel can also be played out in at least two other important ways, and that the image of travel implicit in Swanson's pilgrimage metaphor may open up a way to critique them both.⁴⁶ In the first scenario, after the invaders have appropriated the land of the vanquished, they can say, as Jesus does to the Samaritan woman, 'Why should you be concerned with land and "dis place"? The hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem' (Jn 4.21).

'Place is unimportant', say those conquerors like Jesus, who, to the Samaritan woman, must have represented the typical Judean—responsible for destroying her people's temple in 128 BCE. 'Those Judeans are all alike', I can hear her muttering under her breath. 'They take away more and more of our land, and then turn around and tell us that place doesn't matter. We've heard it all before. It's a different face, but the same old shit they're feeding us'.

On the other hand, Jesus's statement, ' . . . neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem . . .' can sometimes have a totally different meaning when spoken by one victim of oppression to another. And both Jesus and the Samaritan woman fit this description. Both have fallen under Roman domination, that ruthless imperialistic regime which will not stop its quest for power until the entire Mediterranean region is under its sway.⁴⁷ And just as the Samaritan temple had once been destroyed, so also will the

Jerusalem temple one day be destroyed (Jn 11.48). Furthermore, although Jesus's own words suggest that he displaces the displaced, Jerusalem temple (Jn 2.19-22), he also will be destroyed, displaced by that same Pax Romana (19.10).

But one victim of oppression can also say to another victim what Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, and it can be heard as a liberating voice. No place—neither the sacred places that have been wrested from the victims nor the ancient places that the oppressors view as sacred, are unique, special places of the gods' presence and power.⁴⁸ Thus, the gut-wrenching experience of being ripped from one's land can sometimes be assuaged by the voices of other alienated, dispossessed peoples who are witnesses to God's subversive activity on behalf of the oppressed—an activity that is quite separate from any authorized sacred space.⁴⁹ For Rome is no more the center of God's power and activity than is Jerusalem, Antioch, or Nazareth (Jn 1.46).

Can we, as Johannine interpreters, nuance the ideology of Johannine topography in such a way that it can be liberating for oppressed peoples without seeming to grant theological license to the conquerors? Is a reassessment of Johannine christology possible, one that challenges contemporary scholarly 'orthodoxy' (which dismisses Johannine temporal, geographical, and religious portrayals of Jesus's life in favor of the Synoptic view) without succumbing to a naïve docetism?

Toward A Renewal of 'Dis Place'

Three months after moving we are beginning to feel at home on our new cul-de-sac in Bothell. In my morning walks around the neighborhood, I discover that 'dis place' is truly a postcolonial community—despite the cookie-cutter sameness of the two-story, pastel-painted houses in the new development. Next door and just down the street from us

are recent immigrant families from the Ukraine, India, and Russia. In the other direction, homes are inhabited by Thai, Pakistani, Chinese, Hispanic, and African-American families. I think there are only three ‘fully white’ families in the subdivision of forty houses.

On the hill behind our house are spiked Nike missile silos, pointed at the former Soviet Union. They are momentos from the Cold War of the 1950s-80s and the United States’s imperialist attempts to ‘overcome’ the world (Jn 16.33). Ironically, our former hometown, Beaverton, Oregon was the corporate world headquarters of Nike shoes. The remnants of that other, more sinister Nike overshadows our backyard, reminding us that invisible power—whether military or economic—is not easily destroyed (Jn 19.10-11). It quietly mutates and reconfigures itself. Like blackberries that build up tolerance to pesticides.

Our friendly Ukrainian neighbors tell us that if we need anything, ‘just give us a call’. We don’t, but we watch their two old aunts who live with them plant cabbage and garlic in their backyard in February, next to our overgrown patch of ‘noxious weeds’. The former citizens of the Soviet Union work hard for the multinational computer companies and “dotcoms” sprouting like viney blackberries around the suburbs of Seattle.⁵⁰ The Indian family works for a pharmaceutical company, trying to patent a new generation of Viagra look-alike drugs. ‘Livin’ the vida loca.’ They are all busy making the world safe for American capitalism, while I struggle to find a part-time teaching position.

Within three months, two of the families have moved up and out of the neighborhood as they quickly climb the corporate ladder of success and excess. They are fast learners. Much quicker than I.

I remember when we first broke the news to our children that we would be moving from Portland to Seattle. My eight-year-old daughter sobbed the entire evening and could not be consoled.

‘But this is the only house I know!’ she wailed. ‘All my friends are here! And what about my treehouse and the garden? What will happen to them?’

I tried to comfort her, but I didn’t do a very good job. After all, I had never lived for more than ten years in the same house, and I had no full time job keeping me in Portland. So why should we stay? Yes, we did have a remarkable, close-knit neighborhood; wonderful friends; a progressive, caring church; and the marvelous scenery of Oregon’s rocky seacoast—all which we still miss from time to time. So perhaps, like those wetland blackberry vines, we have left rhizome fragments⁵¹ still deeply sunk in Oregon soil.

So why, indeed, did we move? And who are we becoming in this new place to the north? Who can tell?⁵² Can the God of Abraham, Jacob, Isaiah, and the Samaritans trace our sinewy, woody roots to Seattle and make us whole in the transplanting aftershocks of new schools, neighborhoods, friendships, and careers?

‘Of course!’ I say to myself, without really thinking. Yet I am afraid that perhaps we have lost something vital in the move, in this displacement.

As we were loading the final boxes in our van, I had a sudden urge to leave a mark behind—a finger in the dust of our Portland property. I called to my children, and took them out to the treehouse that their uncle had built for them in our backyard when my son was just a toddler. We climbed up it and sat and carved our names on its living

walls with a Boy Scout pocketknife: ‘Ben and Allie played here, 1986-1996.

BWS/AJS/JLS’.

I want my children to remember their lives there as parts of themselves cut deeply into ‘dis place’. And I want them to go back and visit that place at least once before they die; to trace strong fingers in darkening wood. I want them to tell their children stories about a father who lived there with them; who once believed, and so planted a garden, weeded it, and watched it grow good things, strong things—life-sustaining things.

I recall my family history with its slow, plodding movements across the great expanse of this continent: The family roots in Virginia, in Indiana, Missouri, and Kansas; my grandfather’s sadness in selling the family farm during the Great Depression; his vegetable gardens. Will I find in this new place solid ground to plant a new garden and a new life? Is there a politics of place, a theology of space in the Gospel of John that can move people beyond their own clinging, human desire to be here, here and now? ‘Can one be simultaneously at home and on the way, secure and unstable, located within clear boundaries and constantly moving across boundaries, attached to place and yet detached, grounded in the present and stretching toward the future?’⁵³ These questions are at the heart of contemporary understandings of rhizomes, diasporic communities, and globalization, and no doubt the twenty-first century will see an increase in the number of down-to-the-earth, ‘dis placed’ political readings of the Fourth Gospel. Like the essays in this collection, they will be readings that are critically resistant to the dangerous edges of Johannine ideology, and at the same time they will be nurtured and sustained by the book and by a wide variety of Christian faith communities.

I am a selfish person. I want to see readings of the Gospel of John that will revitalize the Gospel in the experience of the church. These readings will bridge the gap between the distancing effects of historical-critical methodologies and the personalizing, pietistic, and 'orthodox' readings of the church that have so often gotten mired down in the Fourth Gospel's ideology of 'dis place'. I want to plant native vines and restore a struggling wetland. I want to repay my ancestors' debt to Christan Vinyard and to Vine Deloria Jr., then sit down on my deck and watch a wild, untamed fecundity take over.

¹ This phrase is intended to evoke both Jacques Derrida's concept of 'déplacement' and the problems of deferral (see Patrick Chatelion Counet, John, A Postmodern Gospel: Introduction to Deconstructive Exegesis Applied to the Fourth Gospel Biblical Interpretation Series 44 [Leiden: Brill, 2000], pp. 158-61), and a postcolonial reading context (see Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg [eds.], Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996]). And speaking of déplacement, my present essay is displacing an earlier version which appeared as 'The Politics of Place and the Place of Politics in the Gospel of John', in Fernando F. Segovia (ed.), 'What is John'. II. Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel. Symposium Series 7 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), pp. 265-77.

² For the complex, postcolonial meaning of 'dis place' that informs this essay, see Michelle Cliff, No Telephone to Heaven (New York: Penguin, 1996); esp. pp. 14-16, 117-118, 189. On the more specific significance of 'dis,' dialects, accents, and 'lingua vernacula', see Cliff, No Telephone to Heaven, p. 38-39, 74-75; Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, Michael Holquist (ed.), Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (trans.), (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 301-31; and Douglas Burton-Christie, 'Words beneath the Water: Logos, Cosmos, and the Spirit of Place', in Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans, Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (eds.), (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 324-25.

³ Cliff, No Telephone to Heaven, p. 16.

⁴ I am part of what William Leach calls 'the new labor pools [which] include native-born Americans, skilled and unskilled, who work under contract for short periods of time, travel anywhere to take up temporary employment, and often live hand-to-mouth' (Country of Exiles: The Destruction of Place in American Life [New York: Random House, 1999], p. 66, cf. 73-74).

⁵ 'Moving is often synonymous in our culture with "getting ahead". We often admire and aspire to emulate those whose frequent moves signal boldness of vision, dynamism, upward mobility,

willingness to stride forth into the expanding horizons of the future', writes Douglas Burton-Christie ('Living Between Two Worlds: Home, Journey and the Quest for Sacred Place' Anglican Theological Review 79 [1997], p. 419).

⁶ The expression 'politics of place' comes from an important collection of essays on postmodern geographies, entitled Place and Politics of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1993) where the editors, Michael Keith and Steve Pile, divide their introduction into two parts, 'Part 1: The Politics of Place', and 'Part 2: The Place of Politics'. Cf. Mary Ann Tolbert, 'Afterwords: The Politics and Poetics of Location', in Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (eds.), Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States. I (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 305-17.

⁷ On the etymology of the word culture (Latin 'colere'), and its relationship to husbandry and colonialism, see Terry Eagleton, The Idea of Culture. (Malden, MA : Blackwell, 2000), pp. 1-2, 27.

⁸ 'To be rooted', says geographer David Sopher, 'is the property of vegetables' (quoted in Douglas Burton-Christie, 'Living Between Two Worlds', p. 419). But 'to be rooted is [also] perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul' (Simone Weil, The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties toward Mankind, Arthur Wils [trans.] [New York: Harper, 1952], p. 43).

⁹ James Combs writes that '[i]n the final analysis, gardening perpetuates that most civilized and mature of emotions: hope. At every uncertain moment of individual or social life, there is the potential to abandon hope for despair. . . . Gardening gives credence to holding out hope, since eventually it does rain, and the heat wave passes, and the buttercups return, and the seasons heal the wounds of the land and of the soul' ('Gardens of Earthly Delight', The Cresset 63 [2000], p. 30).

¹⁰ Burge argues, 'John finds in his christology an answer to the Jewish yearning for place. Christ is the place of God's promise' (his emphasis), in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 389.

¹¹ The Gospel According to John. AB 29a (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), pp. cxliii-cxliv. See also R. Alan Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), pp. 199-202.

¹² W. Brueggemann, The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); and W. D. Davies, The Territorial Dimension of Judaism (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

¹³ Burge, 'Territorial Religion', p. 392.

¹⁴ Ibid. Cf. Craig R. Koester, Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), p. 244-47.

¹⁵ Burge, 'Territorial Religion', p. 392.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 393. However, Edward Casey reminds us that 'the Hebrew word Makom, the name of God, means precisely Place', and that '[a] rabbinical commentary on Genesis exclaims, "Why is God called Place? Because He is the place of the world, while the world is not his place"'. Philo of Alexandria follows suit, [arguing] "God Himself is called place, for He encompasses all things, but is not encompassed by anything"' (Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993], p. 17); cf. Jonathan Z. Smith, To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), p. 88; and Douglas Burton-Christie, 'A Sense of Place', The Way (39) 1999 pp. 59-72.

¹⁷ Burge, 'Territorial Religion', p. 393 (his emphasis).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 395.

¹⁹ Wendell Berry, A Place on Earth. Revised Edition (San Francisco: North Point, 1983) and Wallace Stegner 'The Sense of Place', in Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West (New York: Penguin, 1992), pp. 199-206.

²⁰For example, see Fred Pfeil's chapter entitled 'Guerrillas in the Mist: Wild Guys and New Age Tribes', in White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference (New York: Verso, 1995),

pp. 167-232.

²¹ As Doreen Massey writes, ‘Since the late 1980s the world has seen the recrudescence of exclusivist claims to places—nationalist, regionalist and localist. All of them have been attempts to fix the meaning of particular spaces, to enclose them, endow them with fixed identities and to claim them as one’s own’ (Space, Place, and Gender [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994], p. 4; see also Patricia Yaeger, ‘Introduction: Narrating Space’, in Patricia Yaeger (ed.), The Geography of Identity [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996], pp. 9-17; and Mark Raper, ‘Refugees: Travel under Duress’, The Way 39 [1999], pp. 27-38).

²² ‘To Prepare a Place: Johannine Christianity and the Collapse of Ethnic Territory’, JAAR 62 (1994), pp. 241-263; reprinted by permission in this volume.

²³ Ibid. p. 241. See also Musa Dube’s response to Swanson’s essay, ‘Savior of the World but not of This World: A Postcolonial Reading of the Spatial Construction in John’, in R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), The Postcolonial Bible (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), pp. 118-35.

Mary Ann Tolbert reflects on similar issues, but without reference to the influence of Johannine theology, in ‘Afterwords: Christianity, Imperialism, and the Decentering of Privilege’, in Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (eds.) Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective. II (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 347-61.

²⁴I am using the word ‘place’ instead of Swanson’s less precise use of the term ‘space’, since many postmodern geographers have been quite careful to distinguish between the meaning of the two terms (for example, see Massey, Space, Place, and Gender, pp. 4-10; cf. Yaeger, ‘Introduction: Narrating Space’, pp. 18-30; and Tim Cresswell, In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), pp. 149-62.

²⁵ For example, see Swanson, ‘To Prepare a Place’, pp. 246-47, 258.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 257.

²⁷ See especially, The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism, Diane P. Freedman, Olivia Frey, and Frances Murphy Zauhar (eds.) (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Paula Gunn Allen, Off the Reservation: Reflections on Bounday-Busting, Border-Crossing Loose Canons (Boston: Beacon, 1998); and Heather Kerr and Amanda Nettelbeck (eds.) The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism (Nedlands: University of Western Australia, 1998).

²⁸ Reading with a Passion: Rhetoric, Autobiography and the American West in the Gospel of John (New York: Continuum, 1995), esp. pp. 192-98. See also my more recent reflections regarding the mapping narratives and landscapes in ‘Narrative Structure (Self Stricture) in Luke 4:14-9:62: The United States of Luke’s Story World’ Semeia 72 (1995), pp. 173-76, 206-09. Cf. Swanson, ‘To Prepare a Place’, pp. 260-61.

²⁹ On the problem of speaking for others, see my Reading with a Passion, pp. 227, n. 88; pp. 237, n. 4; cf. my ‘Changing Woman: Postcolonial Reflections on Acts 16.6-40’ JSNT 73 (1999), 113-35.

³⁰ ‘The place between water and land functions most overtly as a threshold. Its presence signifies the necessity of passing from one state to another’ writes Margaret Anne Dooley (The True Story of the Novel [New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1996], p. 321. And again, ‘The muddy margin is a place to start from—perpetually a point of departure and rebirth’ (335). Douglas Burton-Christie adds, ‘To inhabit such a world means learning to dwell in a landscape where borders are fluid and permeable, where life unfolds in unexpected ways in the continuous movement of species back and forth across the borders’ (‘Into the Body of Another: *Eros*, Embodiment and Intimacy with the Natural World’ Anglican Theological Review 81 [1999], p. 13).

³¹ On the ecological significance of borders and centers, see Gary Meffe and Ronald Carroll, Principles of Conservation Biology (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, 1994), pp. 237-64. These authors make a strong argument that ecosystems with weak centers and active borders are much more likely to be destroyed than ones with strong centers and undisturbed borders.

³² D. L. Jennings, Raspberries and Blackberries: Their Breeding, Diseases and Growth (New York: Academic, 1988), p. 46.

³³ The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in Light of Chapter 17. 2nd edn. trans. Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) p. 26; cf. p. 66, 70.

³⁴ 'Territorial Religion and the Vineyard of John 15', p. 395.

³⁵ (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988), p. 122.

³⁶ This question essentially turns Culpepper's discussion of Johannine exclusivism and universalism on its head ('The Gospel of John as a Document of Faith in a Pluralistic Culture', in Fernando F. Segovia (ed.) What is John? Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel. [Atlanta: Scholars, 1996], pp. 121-25).

³⁷ 'Introduction', 23 (their emphasis). Cf. Swanson's more simplistic assessment where 'taking over the authority of centers comparable to Mt Gerizim or the well of Sychar [implies that] Christians disenfranchised the natives of those places from the symbols that had empowered their ownership of territory' ('To Prepare a Place', p. 259; cf. Aleida Assman, 'Space, Place, Land—Changing concepts of territory in English and American Fiction', in Monika Reif-Hüsler [ed.], Borderlands: Negotiating Boundaries in Post-Colonial Writing ASNEL Papers 4 [Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999], pp. 57-68; esp. pp. 62-64.

³⁸ Robert S. McPherson, Sacred Land Sacred View: Navajo Perceptions of the Four Corners Region. Charles Redd Monographs in Western History 19 (Salt Lake City: Brigham Young University Press, 1992), p. 49.

³⁹ Staley, 'Narrative Structure (Self-Stricture) in Luke-4:14-9:62', pp. 174-76.

⁴⁰ Clifford E. Trafzer, The Kit Carson Campaign: The Last Great Navajo War (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1982), pp. 83, 239.

⁴¹ McPherson, Sacred Land Sacred View, p. 73; cf. Casey, Getting Back into Place, pp. 34-37.

⁴²‘Territorial Religion’, p. 386, n. 12. Cf. Rashid I. Khalidi, ‘Contrasting Narratives of Palestinian Identity’, in The Geography of Identity, pp. 187-222. On the slow development of Christian holy places, see Blake Leyerle, ‘Landscape as Cartography in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives’, JAAR 64 (1996), pp. 119-43.

⁴³ For a brief biography of Vine Deloria Jr., see Jace Weaver, That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 124-32. The origin of Vine’s first name was related to me in a conversation with Jace Weaver, in 1998.

⁴⁴ Regarding naming in Native American cultures, Gail Guthrie Valaskakis argues, ‘Old names are uttered and new names are formed in the experience of everyday life and the ideological struggles of continually-constructed identity and community. These names speak of the reality of the personal and the public in the discord of lived experience’ (‘Indian Country: Negotiating the Meaning of Land in Native America’ in Cary Nelson and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar [eds.] Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies [New York: Routledge, 1996], p. 162).

⁴⁵ Swanson, ‘To Prepare a Place’, 262. Or as Jonathan Z. Smith writes, ‘Place is not the creation of personality; it is what forms or imprints personality’, To Take Place, 30. To be fair, Swanson has added a footnote to the current version of his JAAR essay (reprinted in this volume). That footnote describes the conflicting complicities of Johannine and ‘dis place’-ment in a more nuanced manner.

⁴⁶ As Neil Smith and Cindi Katz write, ‘The notions of travel, travelling identities and displacement represent another response to the undue fixity of social identity. ‘Travelling’ provides a means for conceptualizing the interplay among people that are no longer so separate or inaccessible one to another. Travel erodes the brittleness and rigidity of spatial boundaries and suggests social, political and cultural identity as an amalgam, the intricacy of which defies the comparative simplicity of ‘identity’ (‘Grounding Metaphor: Towards a Spatialized Politics’, in Place and the Politics of Identity,

78; cf. Casey, Getting Back into Place, 273-314; Philip Sheldrake, 'Travelling Through Life?

Subversive Journeys' The Way 39 [1999], pp. 5-15; and Valaskakis, 'Indian Country', pp. 160-61).

⁴⁷ As Musa W. Dube so forcefully argues, 'It is . . . quite tempting to locate the conflict in the Gospel [of John] as a reflection of conflict between national Jewish groups or conflict within the Johannine community itself, while overlooking a very important factor: the presence of empire. . . . The presence of the imperial power, the Roman Empire, is the catalyst for the vicious competition of local groups' ('Savior of the World but not of This World' in R. S. Sugirtharajah [ed.] The Postcolonial Bible [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998], p.128).

⁴⁸ Douglas Burton-Christie notes that '[i]n the New Testament we also see resistance to the wrong kind of attachment to place . . . [when] Jesus declares to the Samaritans that soon true worshippers will look neither to the Samaritans' holy mountain nor to the Jewish holy city of Jerusalem, but will worship "in spirit and truth"' ('Living Between Two Worlds', p. 426).

⁴⁹ See, for example Anton Shammas, 'Autocartography: The Case of Palestine, Michigan', in The Geography of Identity, pp. 466-75.

⁵⁰ Leach, Country of Exiles, pp. 71-73.

⁵¹ On the image of the rhizome in postcolonial theory and its relationship to ideas of space and displacement, see Jaishree K. Odin, 'The Edge of Difference: Negotiations Between the Hypertextual and the Postcolonial' Modern Fiction Studies 43 (1997), pp. 598-630; esp. p. 606-07; and Stuart Moulthrop, 'Rhizome and Resistance: Hypertext and the Dream of a New Culture', in George P. Landow (ed.), Hyper/Text/Theory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 299-319.

⁵² This is a paraphrase of Douglas Burton-Christie's questions in 'Into the Body of Another', p. 23.

⁵³ Douglas Burton-Christie, 'Living Between Two Worlds', p. 428.