

Abstract

THIS DISSERTATION MAKES A CONTRIBUTION to the growing bodies of literatures which take seriously postcolonial critiques of religious being and doing. With a particular focus on the seventeenth century Archbishop of Armagh and theologian, James Ussher, the work makes problematic efforts to understand his ministerial work, his writings and his theological corpus without reference to the spatial context in which he lived and moved and wrote. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from science studies, human geography, literary theory, postcolonial studies and cultural materialism, the work seeks to show the ways in which Ussher's spatial biography, his scholarly activities and his networks of association and power, are all meaningful contextual arenas which inform a situated understanding of his works and activities. The story is told through a structure based on the great postmodern triumvirate of knowledge, space and power, with these three mapping onto the themes of theology, biblical studies and ministerial praxis: Ussher's thinking, reading and acting form a parallel structure through which his life can be viewed and analysed with eyes sensitized to colonial contexts at different scales, by means of a located, postcolonial hermeneutics. Conclusions are drawn about both Ussher, as an emblematic contributor to these discursive regimes, and about the practice of the analysis itself. Gestures are made towards the wider and more contemporary applicability of studies of the church and its members which take space as a seriously-considered theme. In that sense the work is one of historiography and it makes claims about the necessity for theologians and theorists of ministry, and church historians particularly, to draw insights from the academy outside of theology and history, to enrich their studies with the work of those whose writings are concerned with human being and doing more broadly, particularly in geographical senses.