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Diversifying Knowledge Production: The Other within Christianity

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Diversifying Knowledge Production: The Other within Christianity

ZAYN KASSAM, GUEST EDITOR

From the Editor's Desk

Tazim R. Kassam
Spotlight on Teaching *Editor*

IN ORDER TO GRAPPLE with the question of how to diversify formations of knowledge in the academic study of religions, Zayn Kassam, the guest editor of this issue of Spotlight, has brought together a group of scholars to reflect specifically upon the Other within Christianity.

The experiences of the contributors underscore the importance of paying ongoing attention to constructs of the Other (or others) built into the center/periphery discourses of and in academe. The basic premise is that by defining what constitutes knowledge, "Western" academe sustains hegemonic practices that subject and subordinate epistemologies and insights stemming from "other" racial, religious, and gendered identities.

Elizabeth Castelli points out that the concept of "Other" presents a dilemma in as much as it "threatens to reinscribe precisely the terms it seeks to disrupt." The Other also has many others within itself as illustrated in this issue of Spotlight. The concept of "minority" suffers from a similar problem. Such labels tend to reify the dominant structures that estrange, marginalize and dehumanize.

Yet another issue pertaining to the concept of Other(s) is that of representation: who may speak for whom? Expressing the frustration of many racial minority scholars who feel "boxed in," Kwok Pui Lan calls into question the postmodern claim that one can write and speak only from the position of one's own racial, sexual, etc., identity. Skeptics view minority studies as consisting of special interest groups that have given rise to divisive identity politics. They argue that in order to achieve the common good for the nation as a whole, we must transcend the particularities of what we are à la Rorty, who makes a distinction between *what* we are (our race, gender, etc.) and *who* we are (our aspirations as citizens).

The feminist philosopher Linda Alcoff counters reductive readings of identity politics as discourses of special interest groups doomed to politics of confrontation. In her book *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* (Oxford, 2006), she argues that identity is not just a concept that can be transcended or waved off with a magic wand. The fact is that people perceive, know, and interact with each other through their physical embodiment which is marked by race, gender, religion, and so forth.

Thus, any paradigm of knowledge that requires a surrender or erasure of embodied identities causes harm — social, economic, political, as well as psychological and spiritual. To quote Charles Taylor, "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion ... misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being." (Amy Gutmann, ed. *Multiculturalism: Charles Taylor*, Princeton: 1994, 25).

This truth is amply illustrated by Miguel A. De La Torre's agonizing ordeal for "doing scholarship from the margins" and Stacey Floyd-Thomas's experience of double jeopardy as a turncoat in her African-American religious community and a racialized, discriminated other in her classroom — so blatantly expressed in the question "What can a black woman teach me?"

Andrew Sung Park and Erin Runions expose the logic of the Other as despotic and demonic at another level: the ways that theology gets used by some Christians to signify as Other not only those who are not Christian, but also Christians gone astray. Park rejects the righteous self that is constituted by exclusive claims to an absolute, all-powerful God, and commends instead the spiritual exercise of "dialectical emptying" so as to focus on ethics versus theology.

Querying the dialectic of Christ/antichrist, Runions exposes the racialized and homosexualized Other created by apocalyptic narratives popularized especially by right-wing Christians. Their antichrist is not only a dark, sinister, violent devil, but also sexually perverse. African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and now all Muslims generalized as terrorists, must be feared and — emboldened by Rumsfeldian strategy and Huntingtonian ideology — converted by force, if necessary, to adopt "rational" norms of Euro-American "civilization."

Simeon Ilesanmi, Gastón Espinosa, and Andrea Smith address the wider legal, economic, and social structures that impact academic discourses in religious studies. In his analysis of immigration and First Amendment laws, Ilesanmi shows how rules of deference on the one hand make foreigners of immigrants (otherize), and on the other hand require their religious identities be unreflectingly treated as *sui generis* (self-authenticating).

Smith focuses her critical lens on the traditional grading system in higher education. She argues that it mirrors the impervious capitalist credo of meritocracy, a credo that denounces and marginalizes the poor and unsuccessful as lazy and irresponsible, and thus abandons them to their sorry and "deserved" fate.

Espinosa's historical overview of the long and winding road taken to establish the subdiscipline of Mexican-American religious studies gives hope in terms of diversifying the production and expansion of knowledge in religious studies. And in this vein, Linda Alcoff's theory of race, ethnicity, and gender as dynamic social identities that function as *interpretive horizons* provides a compelling epistemological basis for extending hospitality to knowledge of and from Other(s). Thanks to Zayn Kassam for bringing together the authors in this issue of *Spotlight* to illustrate the complex challenges involved in diversifying knowledge production in religious studies. RSN

Hegemonies of Knowledge Production

Zayn Kassam, Pomona College

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THE OTHER is most commonly viewed as someone who stands outside oneself, against whom one defines oneself, self here being understood as one's race, gender, culture, religion, etc. Three decades ago, in his analysis of media coverage on Islam and Muslims, Edward Said sounded a warning about the consequences of systematically otherizing particular races, classes, or religions:

"Carefully fostered fears of anarchy and disorder will very likely produce conformity of views and, with reference to the 'outside' world, greater distrust: this is as true of the Islamic world as it is of the West. At such a time — which has already begun — the production and diffusion of knowledge will play an absolutely critical role" (*Covering Islam*, 153).

In preparation for the Annual Meeting last year, the Committee for Racial and Ethnic Minorities at the American Academy of Religion decided to turn the question of the Other and of knowledge production on its head, and to ask the question uppermost in our minds: How do we as academics living and working in the hegemonic space of "the West" reflect upon the Other within, and how do we diversify knowledge production in that hegemon?

To that end, we held a Special Topics Forum in Washington, D.C., at the AAR Annual Meeting in November 2006 on the subject of "The Other Within: The Study of Religion and Diversifying our Knowledge Production." The panelists were Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Erin Runions, Andrew Sung Park, and Gaston Espinosa, with Grace Kim as respondent.

Given the enthusiastic reception to the forum and the energetic discussion that followed, we invited several others to reflect on the subject of the panel in the hopes of bringing the theoretical issues to the attention of scholar-teachers. The reflections featured in this issue of *Spotlight on Teaching* may stimulate further thought about the Other in our courses.

In order to focus our lenses, we invited only scholars of Christianity to reflect on the Other within. One question we asked was how might academics who study and teach about a tradition such as Christianity — considered to occupy a hegemonic space within the academy — reflect upon and contribute to knowledge production about the Other within the academy? We felt that such reflections would prove to be thought-provoking for all those engaged in the study of religion more generally, and with particular faith traditions specifically, because in a globalized world, every religious tradition has no choice but to interact or contend with the economic, political, military, and ideological power of what continues to be perceived by much of the world as the largely Christian "West." RSN

On Being the Academic Other

Miguel A. De La Torre, Iliff School of Theology

Miguel A. De La Torre is Associate Professor of Social Ethics and Director of the Justice and Peace Institute at the Iliff School of Theology. He teaches social ethics from a liberationist perspective. He has published over 13 books including the award-winning Reading the Bible from the Margins, Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins, *and* Santeria: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America.

CONSERVATIVES question my salvation, while liberals question my intelligence. This is what it means for a scholar of color to be the Other at an academic, religious-based institution. Five years of teaching at one of the most religiously conservative colleges in the nation, and two years of teaching at one of the most liberal seminaries in the country, has led me to the conclusion that most scholars of color, unless they assimilate to the dominant academic paradigms (and even then), will always be viewed with suspicion regardless of how many books and peer review articles they publish. Unfortunately, to be the racial or ethnic Other in an academic institution can prove costly, if not professionally deadly for the professor of color who insists on doing his or her scholarship from the marginalized perspective arising from their communities of color.

Unapologetically, I am a liberationist ethicist who fails to fit into the neat Euro-American labels of "conservative" or "liberal." Not surprisingly, I was dismissed as a "flaming liberal" at my previous conservative institution due to my emphasis on radical social justice. Then I was branded "conservative" at my present liberal institution because I take my faith seriously. Many religious-based institutions are baffled by those of us who do liberationist-based work. Their failure to understand academic Otherness increases frustrations for colleges and seminaries desiring, yet failing, in the process of recruiting and retaining faculty of color. Which scholar of color hasn't heard these complaints: "There's just not many of them," "We must maintain our academic excellence when hiring," or "They leave because they found a better job elsewhere."

During my tenure at a religiously conservative college I constantly struggled with students, administrators, and faculty who questioned my religious commitment. Students would gather at my office door and lay hands on it, praying for my salvation. I'm sure my door appreciated the prayers! "Do I know Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior?" was a common question I would hear. Ironically, I am an ordained Southern Baptist minister. Such a question concerning my salvation, while normally insulting to most who are of other faith traditions, was especially an affront to me. What it told me is that if I read the biblical text through the eyes of marginalized communities, a reading that leads to ethical conclusions that challenge Eurocentric power and privilege, in their minds, I cannot be a Christian.

> *"Conservatives question my salvation, while liberals question my intelligence."*

During my tenure at this college I also wrote bimonthly editorial columns for the local newspaper on current issues from Christian liberationist perspectives. As anyone familiar with liberationist ethics knows, the raising of consciousness within the community at large is integral to being an activist-scholar. I specifically wrote on national and local current issues concentrating on their racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist underpinnings. Not surprisingly, "hundreds" of letters were mailed to the editor questioning my faith as a Christian. Such letters proclaimed that I had lost my faith, I was a wolf in sheep's clothing, or I was simply the left hand of Satan. Such rhetoric seldom bothers me; however, it did take a toll on my family, particularly my preteen children whose school friends repeated their parents' taunting that I was no "believer."

This situation worsened when the school chaplain and the college president asked me why I was so angry. Others were paternalistic, saying that my anger stemmed from hating white people. Yes, I, too, can allow Jesus to heal me from my anger and the pain I harbored due to the ethnic discrimination I have faced in my early life (their words, not mine). In the minds of those who hold power in the academy, as long as I can be constructed as "just another angry Latino," my views — and the views of any scholar of color who challenges the dominant paradigm — can easily be dismissed as lacking objectivity. To be Other in the academy means that one's scholarship is reduced to an interesting perspective while ironically, the dominant Eurocentric culture's subjectivity is unquestionably objective.

To do ethical analysis as a liberationist means, by definition, the creation of an uncomfortable space where complicity to oppressive structures that are normalized can be explored and challenged. Creating such an environment assures such a scholar that they will never be a "popular" teacher. Quite the contrary. Because no student (or faculty or administer for that matter) cherishes the prospect of unmasking how the present status quo is designed to privilege them, the scholar of color who relentlessly pushes such issues can expect push-back, at times manifested in dismissive, if not hostile ways. This is true at both conservative and liberal academic institutions.

Naively I first thought that liberal institutions would be better, but the liberal version of Othering the scholar of color admittedly caught me by surprise, even though I was warned by other scholars of

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Redemptive Difference: What Can a Black Woman Teach Me?

Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Brite Divinity School

Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas is Associate Professor of Ethics and Director of Black Church Studies at Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University, and an ordained pastoral counselor within the American Baptist Churches. She is the author of Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*, editor of* Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society, *and co-author of* Black Church Studies: An Introduction. *She is the 2007 recipient of the American Academy of Religion Teaching Excellence Award.*

AS A SEMINARY PROFESSOR, but one who is not a preacher, I am occasionally confronted by someone at church asking me, "Why are you wasting your time working at that *cemetery*?" This question stems not from an anti-intellectualism (stereotypically ascribed to the black church), but rather from a very reasonable hermeneutic of suspicion that: 1) questions whether the study of religion should ultimately lead to the weakening or demise of one's faith; and 2) resists the notion that something as sacred as one's faith should be exposed and subjected to the debasement and devaluation of all things black, which they perceive to be characteristic of predominantly white institutions. In my academic context, when I enter the classroom as a professor of Christian ethics and black church studies, the first thing that many students engage is neither my mind nor my subject matter, but rather the fact that I am a black woman. My very embodiment creates dissonance for many students who (as I've been told) immediately ask themselves, "What can a black woman teach me?" (Floyd-Thomas, 2002).

Further, as a black Christian, and a woman, in the academy, I function within a professional realm that is inclined to view my "racialized-engendered religiosity" as a three-fold impediment to my ability to engage fully in the "objective, critical" study of religion. I am either a little too much this or a little too much that; a kind of academic purgatory that serves to preclude me from being considered entirely legitimate. If we apply this to the faculty taxonomy that prevails in most predominantly white schools, I would be regarded as too Christian whereas the seminary/divinity schools would likely regard my Christian orientation as too black, and on both fronts too womanish.

Therefore, as a black scholar and black Christian, I function somewhere on the margins of two institutions, each of which exerts pressure on me to compartmentalize my life as a Christian from my life as a scholar, and each views my dual allegiance with suspicion. This is the reality for many of us who identify as racial-ethnic minority scholars who both study and practice our religion or faith. How do we process and respond to being treated as doppelgangers for "real scholars" in the academy and/or as "sell-outs" as people of faith in our religious communities? Such is the conundrum and curse of the tertium quid, described by W.E.B. DuBois (1903) as one

> straightly foreordained to walk within the Veil. To be sure, behind the thought lurks the afterthought, — some of them with favoring chance might become [human], but in sheer self-defense we dare not let them, and we build about them walls so high, and hang between them and the light a veil so thick, that they shall not even think of breaking through.

This crisis is the inevitable extension of the relationship between my personal convictions as a black Christian and my vocational goals as a scholar-teacher. However, this life is not mine alone, but it is the life of many religious racial-ethnic minoritized (RREM) scholars who are wedded to religious praxis and religious scholarship. It is this indeterminate, insider-outsider existence that enables us to mine the resources and cultivate the wisdom necessary to navigate these two worlds, and even transform them.

Many black scholars enter the ranks of the academy holding fast to the value of religion, along with the promise of education, thinking that the academy presents an ideal and viable context within which to teach religion so as to redeem the legacy of black religion. Disillusionment, however, comes fast and furious in the face of what Bible scholar Fernando Segovia calls the "alien" and "alienating" academic culture of deception that permeates theological education and religion scholarship. Many RREM scholars who experience the deception and alienation are torn between the hope of their religion and the promise of their education. Some scholars, such as Renita Weems (2005), are very careful and intentional in naming and identifying the hermeneutical dilemma:

> As a Hebrew Bible scholar and preacher, I reside in two homes — the academy and the church. These two are jealous, demanding lovers that insist upon my undivided attention and unswerving loyalty. They unrelentingly ask, "Which one will you be — a preacher or a scholar?"

This struggle is representative of the dynamic tension between modernism and postmodernism. In modernity there have been two things that have been objectified and against which the modern intellectual tradition has constructed itself: dark peoples and religion. This negative objectification has served as the quintessential "other" against which white Western intellectual identity has been constructed.

Modernity has been imbued with a Calvinistic orthodoxy that accepts the predestination of social stratification that separates a chosen elite from the disinherited masses. Conversely, postmodern rhetoric advocates a civic humanism that purports the primacy of reason over faith, professing a secular vision of equality for the previously disinherited. Modernist institutions have adopted postmodern agendas as their modi operandi, in order to advance into the next millennia (Giddens 1991).

> *"Therefore, as a black scholar and black Christian, I function somewhere on the margins of two institutions."*

Although couched in postmodern rhetoric, colleges, universities, and even seminaries hold unwaveringly to modernistic objectives, having undergone only a superficial transformation to combat the liberating potential that religion holds for marginalized people. The educational institution as a "learning machine" is the most instrumental means of doing this legerdemain, in that it is more concerned with designating social roles than dealing with human personhood (Foucault 1995). Thus, the self-reflection required for autonomy and agency is prohibited for minoritized groups. Consequently, their professional options are not self-determined, but rather imposed. Simply put, rarely do institutions grant the freedom and autonomy to their one and only professor of Asian studies, black church studies, Islamic studies, Jewish studies, Latino/a church studies, or Native-American studies to apply her/his expertise to design her/his positions or racial-ethnic programs. Therefore, RREM scholars find themselves in a double-bind: They are often precluded from lending their expertise toward shaping core courses that have become normative fields within a Eurocentric model while simultaneously their efforts to design programs for which they are the only experts in the institution are stymied, constrained, and resisted by the status quo.

Therefore, RREM scholars have found it necessary to construct a minoritized religious humanity outside the realm of the modern/postmodern categories of race and religion. The goal here is not to erase racial-ethnic or religious identities, but rather to act with the same authority on behalf of our religions and religious communities as have white religious scholars such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. As RREMs, we ought to be able to expect to do the same for the broad spectrum of our religious traditions.

Toward this end, *What constitutes the faithful pursuit of our profession as RREMs*?

To quote Martin Jaffee, a scholar-practitioner of Judaism:

> Religion is an intense and sustained cultivation of a style of life that heightens awareness of the morally binding connections between the self, the human community and the most essential structures of reality. Religions posit various orders of reality and help individuals and groups to negotiate their relations with these orders. . . . Religion is a method for connecting . . . worlds.

For religious scholars who are situated socially at the margins of both our faith communities and Eurocentric academies, our vocational task is not merely to reside on the margins and manage our two connecting worlds but rather to use the epistemological insight of being a *tertium quid* to change those worlds (Freire 1981). This entails undergoing a risky process of maturation and fortitude, a rite of passage marking not only a coming of age within our communities but also a coming to grips with their perversions — racism, ethnocentrism, misogyny, elitism, and xenophobia. To assist with this arduous labor as sustenance for the journey, I offer the following four womanist tenets as critical insights for RREM scholars:

A) **Claim radical subjectivity.** RREM scholars must unapologetically claim our insider/outsider vantage point, utilizing it as the point from which to teach and speak on behalf of our communities. Our pedagogical imperative is to allow our presence to serve as a reminder of the need for change and growth while simultaneously facilitating and enabling it.

B) **Cultivate traditional communalism.** Develop the ability to bridge both the academy and religious community in such a way as to use the practical wisdom of each to evaluate the qualities of the other. Of fundamental importance is to dispel the myths of "collegiality" and "political correctness," that are routinely adduced to maintain a veneer of civility, but in actuality serve more to undermine the formation of authentic, effective community (Copeland 1999).

C) **Practice redemptive self-love.** Redemptive self-love is the assertion of our humanity and authority as RREM scholars in contradistinction to white solipsism and religious anti-intellectualism. It is the practice of self-care in the midst of excessive scrutiny wherein we must protect ourselves from internalizing images of ourselves that suggest we are inferior, incompetent, heretical, or sacrilegious.

D) **Seek critical engagement.** Critical engagement is the unequivocal belief that we are agents of change who play a profound role not only in the liberation of our religious communities, but also in the true enlightenment of the academic study of them. A holistic and integrated sensibility can transcend the imposed stigma of being tertium quid by seizing the freedom to be ourselves.

See **FLOYD-THOMAS** p.xi

The Other within Mexican–American Religious Studies

Gastón Espinosa, Claremont McKenna College

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IN THIS ESSAY, I make a case for the inclusion of Mexican-American religions in the religious studies curriculum, as the Other Within that has for too long been at the margins of the academy. I propose that an ethno-phenomenological method and approach is one of many possible alternatives to interpreting Mexican-American religions at secular colleges and universities where they are required by the state and/or college mission statement not to promote or endorse a theological or religious worldview.

The Latino community in the United States has doubled from 22.4 million in 1990 to 44.3 million in 2006, making it the nation's largest minority group. The dramatic upsurge in the population and in scholarship on religion has created a need for new courses that take into account the changing demographics of American society. Despite these demographic shifts, little has been published on the history and theory of Mexican-American religions and even less on how to approach and discuss the subject at state and public universities that serve the U.S. Latino population, where restrictions on the separation of church and state are in full force.

This essay offers one approach to Mexican-American religions by examining the rationale for the field based upon the demographic and religious profile of the community, a working definition of Mexican-American/Chicano religions, and an ethno-phenomenological theoretical approach to interpreting Mexican-American religions that may help bridge the growing chasm between religious and theological studies. This essay is an outgrowth of my larger study on "History and Theory in the Study of Mexican American Religions," in editors Miguel de la Torre and Gastón Espinosa's *Rethinking Latino Religions and Identity* (2006).

Why Mexican-American Religious Studies?

There has been a flurry of scholarship in the field of Mexican-American religions over the past 35 years. Despite this fact, the field has largely been subsumed under the rubric of U.S. Latino religions. People of Mexican ancestry have lived in the Southwest for more than 400 years — since 1598. Their history in the American Southwest predates that of the Pilgrims and Puritans at Jamestown in 1608 and Plymouth Rock in 1619. They have a number of rich and unique religious traditions (e.g., New Mexican popular Catholicism, Chimayo Pilgrimage site, Días de los Muertos), saints and spiritual healers (e.g., Our Lady of Guadalupe, El Niño Fidencio, Francisco Olazábal), brotherhoods and social-spiritual movements (e.g., Penitentes, Cursillo, PADRES, Las Hermanas), political leaders (e.g., Antonio José Martínez, César Chávez, Reies López Tijerina, Dolores Huerta), and religious leaders (e.g., Junipero Serra, Eusebio Kino, Patricio Flores), all of which have influenced U.S. Latino and American religious history.

César Chávez and the Birth of Mexican-American Religious Studies

Although missionaries, church historians, sociologists, anthropologists, museum folklorists, and others have written on the Mexican and Mexican-American religious experience in the American Southwest, the first self-conscious modern academic attempt to examine and define Mexican-American religions as a unique scholarly enterprise and field of study did not take place until 1968. That year the writings and intellectual foment stimulated by César Chávez, Reies López Tijerina, Virgilio Elizondo, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Enrique Dussel, Carlos Castañeda, and others served as major catalysts in the methodological and theoretical development of the field.

The spark that helped ignite the field came from an unlikely source — a former community service organizer (CSO) named César Chávez. Inspired by Father Donald McDonnell to fight for social justice and to unionize Mexican-American migrant farmworkers in 1965, Chávez and Delores Huerta organized the United Farm Workers organization in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Delano, California, to fight for better wages, housing, and civil rights. In March 1968, during his first major fast for social justice, Chávez penned one of the first significant historical, social, political, and theological critiques of the Catholic Church by a Mexican American in his essay "Mexican Americans and the Church." Echoing other Latinos throughout the Americas in the 1960s struggling for justice, he criticized the institutional Catholic Church's lack of support for the Mexican-American people and called on it to work for social change and political and economic justice.

Chávez's critique and faith-based activism had a profound impact. His writings were widely cited and followed in Chicano periodicals such as *El Grito del Sol* (1968) and by a number of Chicano and Latino scholars and theologians such as Rodolfo Acuña, Octavio I. Romano, Francisco García-Treto, Virgilio Elizondo, Juan Hurtado, Antonio Soto, Moisés Sandoval, Anthony M. Steven-Arroyo, and later by Andrés Guerrero and others. Chávez's efforts, along with that of the African-American, Chicano, American Indian, feminist, and other liberation movements, inspired an emerging generation of Mexican Americans and U.S. Latino scholars to use their scholarship to fight for social, political, and economic justice.

At the same time that Chávez, Tijerina, and others were fighting for social justice in the United States, Catholics and Protestants were engaged in a similar struggle in Latin America. Catholic bishops, priests, and scholars met at the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968, where they began to articulate a theology of liberation. Liberation theology grabbed the imagination of Mexican-American scholars when the Peruvian priest and theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez asked his colleagues if their theology would "be a theology of development [i.e., capitalism] or a theology of liberation?" Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation* (Spanish, 1971; English, 1973). This question directly affected Mexican-American scholars like Virgilio Elizondo, Yolanda Tarango, Andrés Guerrero, Jeanette Rodriguez, and many others. Gutiérrez argued that the authentic starting point for any Christian theology is commitment to the poor, the "nonperson," and that conscientization, contextualization, and praxis are the keys to realizing this liberation. He called on scholars and clergy to focus on the importance of economic factors in oppression.

Chicano Catholic Influences

Virgilio Elizondo also played a pivotal role in the birth of Mexican-American theology and religious studies. A native of San Antonio, Elizondo was convinced that Chicano historian Jesus Chavarra was right when he stated, "As long as you do not write your own story and elaborate your own knowledge, you will always be a slave to another's thoughts." This was one of the reasons why he co-founded and used the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio, Texas, to publish such scholarship on Mexican-American and U.S. Latino religions as editor Moises Sandoval's *Fronteras: A History of the Latin American Church in the USA Since 1513* (1983). He went on to write his own now-classic studies *Christianity and Culture* (1975), *La Morenita: Evangelizer of the Americas* (1980), *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise* (1983), and *The Future Is Mestizo* (1988).

Elizondo's academic writings signal the formal birth of Mexican-American theology and religious studies. He was one of the first persons to argue that Chicano/a scholars should create their own field of study and publish revisionist theology and church history that is academically "objective" and rigorous. His mestizo paradigm contended that Mexican Americans are like Jesus because they are religious outsiders who are rejected by the racial and religious establishment for being from a racially and theologically impure multicultural region of Galilee. For this reason, Elizondo called on all Mexican Americans to be proud of their mixed racial and popular Catholic theological heritage. The work of Elizondo and other U.S. Latinos contributed to what Ana María Díaz-Stevens and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo called a resurgence in the study of U.S. Latino religions.

Chicana Feminism, Women, and Religion

Gutiérrez and Elizondo directly influenced (along with other women like Gloria Anzaldua) to varying degrees the rise of Chicana religious feminism and later *mujerista* theology through the work of Chicanas Maria Pilar Aquino, Yolanda Tarango, and Cuban-born Ada María Isasi-Díaz. Díaz and Tarango wrote *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (1988), one of the first U.S. Latina feminist theologies. They, along with Jeanette Rodriguez in her book *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment Among Mexican American Women* (1994), sought to create a Hispanic cultural, feminist, and liberation theology that captured the sentiments and struggles of women. They saw their work as scholar-activists "militantly" fighting against Anglo-American and Latino multilayered sexism, patriarchy, classism, and economic oppression. Their work was methodologically important because it called for: a) a sharp critique of Latino sexism, classism, elitism, and patriarchy; b) Latino men to share leadership and the theological enterprise with women; c) more inclusive theologies; and d) Latina agency and a shift in the focus away from "orthodoxy" (right belief) to "orthopraxis" (right practice).

Davíd Carrasco and the Decentering of Mexican-American Religious Studies

The intellectual and methodological development of the emerging field of Mexican-American religious studies comes to its maturity in the work of Davíd Carrasco. His work marks the methodological crystallization of a Mexican-American religious studies paradigm that expanded the theoretical boundaries of the field. His scholarship shifted the focus away from the orbit of liberation theology and institutional church histories to the increasingly pluralistic framework of religious studies. He analyzed Mesoamerican and Mexican American/Chicano religions in light of interpretive categories such as sacred time, sacred centers, sacred spaces, world-making, world-centering, world-renewing, and what

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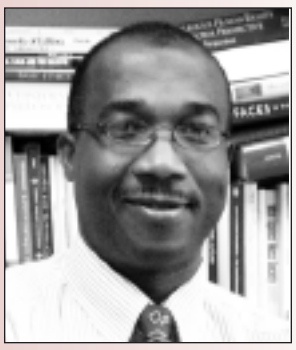
Whose Religion? Immigrants and the First Amendment

Simeon O. Ilesanmi, Wake Forest University



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THE CONTENTS of religion and the contexts in which we study it, especially in the West, are rapidly changing. Among the factors that have been adduced for this change are globalization and immigration, two trends that are also best explained in terms of their mutual interplay. Understood as the process that has compressed the world into a shared social space, thanks to the forces of economics and technology, globalization has also been accompanied by bundles of material benefits and burdens that are being disparately distributed between the countries of the North and South.

Ironically, this asymmetry in the regional experience of globalization has subverted the logic of reciprocity that the defenders of the process usually invoke to justify it, triggering a form of unidirectionality in South-North relationship as instantiated in the accelerated movement of peoples from the former to the latter. The noticeable increase in both legal and illegal immigration to the developed countries of the North is a predictable consequence of their disproportionate advantages within the global order: "First, they are the source of much of the modern culture of consumption and of the new expectations diffused worldwide. Second, the same process of global diffusion has taught an increasing number of people about economic opportunities in the developed world that are absent in their own countries" (Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 23).

While the economic and social impact of immigration on the host societies remains the subject of prodigious intellectual debate, its cultural dimensions, especially in the religious sphere, have also not escaped scholarly attention (Olupona 2006). That the new immigrants are changing the American religious landscape, for instance, is now a relatively uncontroversial assertion to make. Even then, "the focus of much of the literature on new immigrant religion," as noted by Carolyn Chen, "has been on the happenings within the religious institution, and little attention has been given to their public presence and relationship to those outside their institutional walls" (2002, 217).

One of the outside institutions with which immigrant religious communities have to deal is the law of the host country, and in the context of this essay, the U.S. law. Although every individual immigrant to the United States, especially a legal immigrant, must deal with this institution, the religious communities face a special challenge because of certain religion-related provisions in U.S. immigration law. An examination of these provisions and how the relevant organs[1] of the state interpret and apply them provides us with an interesting picture of a dynamic interaction between two cultural complexes: the religious "other" (the immigrant) and its construction by an institution other than religion. The secular state, through the avenues of law and other administrative agencies, joins religion scholars in the wider debate about how to understand religion and the privileges that should accrue to those acknowledged as its guardians.

In this essay, I will discuss the provisions on religious workers in U.S. immigration law to illustrate the relationship and tension between these alternative structures of meaning and cultural systems. The tension exists not only between the state and religious communities, but also among state institutions themselves, particularly between traditional curators of law (the courts) and the administrative agencies in charge of immigration matters, whose decisions will determine whether or not judicial review is warranted. I argue that the rule of deference that the courts have articulated when adjudicating on religious visa applications has important implications for scholarly debate about the nature and public understanding of religion.

When Congress enacted the religious worker visa program in 1990, the intent was to allow U.S. religious denominations to fill positions with qualified religious workers from abroad. Historically, however, the practice of hiring foreign ministers to serve U.S. religious congregations is as old as the country (Hoge and Okure 2006).[2] But until the 1990 legislation, religious organizations had limited success in hiring nonminister religious workers from abroad because of their inability to meet the stringent visa requirements imposed by law. The Immigration Act of 1990 simultaneously relaxed the requirements and expanded the definition of religious workers, encompassing clergy and lay religious workers, with eligibility for visa on either a temporary or permanent basis (Aleinikoff et al. 2004, 26, 30). The new law was thus a welcome relief for many religious denominations, including the Catholic Church and Protestant churches, as well as Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and other communities that rely heavily on the religious worker visa program to maintain and serve their communities.

The eligibility hurdles faced by petitioners for religious visas revolve around three broad inquiries that USCIS officials are required to make. The first is whether the petitioning employer is religiously qualified; second is whether the position to be filled is a religious vocation or occupation; and the third evaluates the religious qualifications of the visa beneficiary (Aleinikoff 2004, 26, 30). Because Congress did not provide the criteria by which religions may be qualitatively appraised in these three respects, many applications have been denied on the ground that they do not meet the test. On the religious character of the employer, for example, USCIS service centers have often ruled that petitioners must show that they have been classified as a "church" or are a subsidiary of an organization so classified. Specific elements of such designation include some form of ecclesiastical government, a recognized creed and form of worship, religious services and ceremonies, etc.[3]

An important question is whether the discretion of USCIS officials to make these determinations regarding the character and qualifications of religious employers and workers hired for religious jobs is absolute. The position of the courts is that the authority to make these determinations must be exercised within the constraints of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which limits governmental authority over religious institutions and religious exercise. In 1871 in the case of *Watson v. Jones*, the U.S. Supreme Court argued that the deference rule is required by the right of religious institutions to determine their own religious identity: "The law knows no heresy, and is committed to the support of no dogma, the establishment of no sect. The right to organize voluntary religious associations to assist in expression and dissemination of any religious doctrine . . . is unquestioned."[4]

Applying this rule to religious workers' visa appeals, the courts' reasoning seems to be motivated by the suspicion that government officials may sometimes intrude too far into the religious doctrine, governance, or qualifications of petitioners and applicants. This may particularly occur in situations involving minority religions or religious occupations unfamiliar to the adjudicating officer. Immigrant religions, their workers, as well as mainstream religious denominations, are all benefiting from this hospitable judicial outlook.

A representative example is *Jin Soo Lee v. Immigration and Naturalization Service*, a case dealing with the criteria used by religious organizations to select their leaders, and the training required of leaders within a religious organization. The court reversed an INS decision that a beneficiary was not a bona fide "religious worker" under the applicable regulations.[5] Acknowledging elsewhere that "The task of distinguishing a religion from something else (e.g., a delusion, a personal credo, or a fraud) is a recurring and perplexing problem, and the outer limits of what is 'religious' may be ultimately unascertainable,"[6] the court observed that "INS officials, no more than judges, are equipped to be oracles of theological verity, and it is unlikely that either Congress or the Founders ever intended for them to be declarants of religious orthodoxy even for aliens."[7] In short, INS must accept the good-faith explanations of a religious order "as to what it means to be functioning within a religious occupation of that order."[8]

The judicial rule of deference is instructive for how the study of religion is conducted, especially the effort to understand and 'represent' the religion of the 'other' in the context of our teaching. The rule vests the right of representation in the religious practitioner and grounds this right not only in the practitioner's subjectivity, but also in the presumed autonomy and uniqueness of the religious sphere which requires a distinct logic of understanding. The instrumental significance of representational right lies in its being a precondition for the mediation of social goods, such as being approved for an immigrant religious visa. For, when the right is vested in an agent other than the one whose interest is at stake, the court fears misrepresentation and arbitrary adjudication as the likely outcomes. The deference rule thus preempts the temptation to impose exogenous constructions of reality upon the subject of inquiry and legitimizes the subject's prerogative to draw the boundary within which matters germane to the subject's identity and interests are articulated and settled.

The rule of deference privileges experience in explaining the contours of religious worldview and validates this experience in determining how religious considerations should bear upon public policy. Hence, it thrusts itself into the perennial debate about methodology and interpretation in the academic study of religion. By conceding lexical priority to an insider's perspectives in the discursive practice of explaining and analyzing religious data, the rule shares a latent affinity with hermeneutics and a more intimate one with phenomenology, whose claim to methodological fame is anchored in its twin tenets of *epoche* and *eidetic* vision that enjoin scholars to study religion with an attitude of empathy and openness to experiential immersion (van Leeuw 1938, 1968).

In effect, the rule relies on an understanding of religion as *sui generis* and restricts the qualifications to speak on its behalf to either devotees or scholars with an appreciative view of its intrinsic value, although it is silent on the issue of which dimensions of religion — belief or the material (ritual) — should receive scholarly and interpretive attention (Godlove 2002). It is therefore not surprising that some scholars have challenged the validity of this approach to the study of religion. Not only is the insider-outsider dichotomy considered simplistic (Westerlund 1991) in that it relies on "a suspect understanding of religion" (McCutcheon 1997, 449), the approach is also criticized for misconstruing the proper role of the scholar of religion. McCutcheon assigns the role of critic, rather than of reproducer and translator, to religion scholars, whose task is to uncloak and lay bare "the conditions and strategies by which his/her fellow citizens authorize the local as universal and the contingent as necessary" (454).

It is not clear, however, that being an intellectual and a critic, as McCutcheon understands these labels, entails explaining away religion or reducing it to epiphenomenal reflections of historical and contextual conditions and functions. Certainly, there are scholars who see the issue quite differently (Griffiths 1998; O'Connor 1998). Religious visa petitioners are also likely to be frightened by this interpretation of religion, for it would make it difficult, if not impossible, to represent themselves *credibly* before the adjudicating officers. Scholars of religion are possibly unique among intellectuals in being among the few who seek to

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Homosexualized and Racialized Enemy as Anti/Christ

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I'VE BECOME interested of late in the way that racialized and homosexualized antichrists appear in discourses concerned with the threats to family and nation. As constantly proclaimed, there are at least two threats to the nation right now, both of which are elaborated in apocalyptic terms. One is, obviously, the threat of terrorism. The other is the threat to the family from gay marriage. Given the long tradition in U.S. history and culture of finding the antichrist behind any and every political threat (Boyer; Fuller), it is not surprising that the racialized Middle Eastern Muslim antichrist and the homosexualized antichrist are seen to be behind terrorism and gay marriage, respectively.

Because these depictions of the antichrist are othering in the extreme, it is imperative to emphasize in the classroom that the traditions producing the antichrist bear close relation to those producing the Christ. Indeed the Christ and the antichrist are figures built from cultural difference, both borrowing from the religious traditions of the surrounding Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Conveying such ideas in the classroom is no easy feat (and not one I profess to have mastered), since even liberal atheist students can be protective of received ways of reading the biblical text. Students do not necessarily want to know that these figures borrow from other cultures' myths, let alone that there might be more affinity between the Christ and the antichrist than usually recognized. Nonetheless, I think it is important at least to try to approach these issues, as part of a larger strategy of teaching students about the multiple ways in which scripture depends upon the excluded Other.

In what follows, I would like briefly to look at some appearances of the racialized homosexualized antichrist, then to problematize the exclusion of this figure by showing the family resemblance to Christ, and finally to indicate how I approach this material in the classroom.

Racialized Enemy as Antichrist

Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden have of course been designated as possible candidates for antichrist by conservative Christians like Jerry Falwell (2001) and Hal Lindsey (Kinsella 2005). But since these figures are no longer visible or viable candidates, Islamic militants in general have taken their place. Armageddon Books sports over a dozen titles produced since 2001 that situate Muslim terrorism within the timeline of biblical prophecy. These include: *Christianity and Islam: The Final Clash* (Robert Livingston, 2004); *Muhammad's Monsters: A Comprehensive Guide to Radical Islam for Western Audiences* (David Bukay, editor, 2004); *War on Terror: Unfolding Biblical Prophecy* (Grant R. Jeffrey, 2002); and *The False Prophet* (Ellis H. Skolfield, 2001). In this discourse, the racialization is not precise, but Islam does seem to stand in for brown.

The naming of the Muslim terrorist as antichrist also operates in coded fashion in Bush's speeches. For instance, in a speech on the war on terror (October 6, 2005), without ever mentioning the antichrist, Bush painted an apocalyptic and antichristic picture of "the enemy." The speech began with an apocalyptically drawn recollection of 9/11. Within this frame, the enemy was described as "Evil men, obsessed with ambition and unburdened by conscience," who in "their cold-blooded contempt for human life" are "the enemies of humanity." The description of these men as "part of global, borderless terrorist organization" taps into the fear in apocalyptic thought that the antichrist will establish a one-world order (see, for instance, Kjos).

Gay Antichrist

Another strand of apocalyptic biblical interpretation has recently informed Christians that the antichrist may be gay (hence a threat to the family). The antichrist's probable sexual orientation is derived from a particular way of translating one verse in the book of Daniel — whose metaphorical depictions of Antiochus Epiphanes IV as a boastful, apostate ruler have been interpreted in apocalyptic Christianity to be describing the antichrist. One such text, Daniel 11:37, has been translated as follows: "He [the proud ruler] will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women" (NASB). With this translation in hand, TV and Internet evangelist David Reagan (one among many) interprets this verse saying, "Daniel indicates that [the antichrist] will be a sexual pervert, most likely a homosexual. As Daniel puts it, the Antichrist will show no regard 'for the desire of women' (Daniel 11:37)."

Indeed, some commentators blame the antichrist's sexual orientation for the problems facing marriage today. So for instance, Joseph Chambers of Paw Creek Ministries (North Carolina) suggests that marriage is under threat from the antichrist and his "sodomite" followers:

> Satan is on a rampage to defile the family of humankind and the future family of the redeemed. . . . I do not believe that there is any question but that the Antichrist will be a homosexual. The world is literally hell-bent on making the sodomite lifestyle the order of the day. . . . Sodomites are thrilled to destroy any institution that stands in their way. Their motives and methods cannot be called anything but demonic (2005).

So racialized and homosexualized antichrists acts as a threat to the nation, to the family, and to Christians' final future.

Filiations

One is tempted to ask if the antichrist's lack of regard for the desire of women proves that he will be gay, what does that say about a certain insistence on Christ's lack of regard for women (as, for instance, made manifest in much commentary on *The Da Vinci Code*)? What difference is there really between the sexuality of Christ and the antichrist?

More substantively though, the figure of the antichrist represents strands of Ancient Near Eastern culture that are also gathered in the Christ figure, but disavowed. To illustrate, let me take a brief look at another place in Daniel (7:1–14), which is thought by many literalist apocalyptic interpreters to describe the antichrist. Daniel 7 famously allegorizes the history of the political threat posed to the Jews by their various colonizers, culminating in the Hellenizing project of Antiochus IV. In the vision, beasts rise from the sea, one after another. A little horn growing from the horns other beasts symbolizes a particularly deceitful and destructive ruler, who rises to power and sets up an abomination that causes desolation. The little horn is, happily, defeated by the Son of Man, who comes on the clouds and is given authority by the Ancient of Days to reign forever.

Scholars of apocalyptic literature have spent some time trying to determine the historical background and mythic antecedents to Daniel 7, both for the beasts and for the Son of Man. Scholars have argued over whether the text borrows from Babylonian or Canaanite myths of creation. (Shea 1986, Collins 1992, Wilson 2000, Lacocque 2001, Mosca 1986, Walton 2001). In both Babylonian and Canaanite myths, the favored god defeats the chaotic sea god, or sea monster, in order to establish order, creation, or sovereignty. In the Canaanite myth, the rain god Baal, rider of the clouds, defeats the god of the sea (Yamm) and the god of death (Mot). Baal is much like the Son of Man who comes upon the clouds, in victory over the arrogant and deceitful little horn. It is possible, as John J. Collins argues (1997), that in Daniel, the Canaanite Baal is renamed and resymbolized as the Son of Man.

Of course, in the Christian tradition, Daniel's Son of Man becomes Christ. Not to put too fine a point on it, Baal becomes Christ. Yet Baal is also a chief rival to Yahweh's monotheism in the Hebrew Bible. Baal is the icon of idolatry (see 1 Kgs. 18:25–26). As such, he becomes associated in another way, in contemporary apocalyptic interpretation, with the antichrist. The Canaanite Baal, then, gives rise both to the antichrist beast and to the victorious Son of Man figure, who becomes the divine-human son of God. The antichrist shares a cultural history with the Christ. The recognition of cultural difference in the Christ must at the very least change the understanding of the threat of the Other. If, in some virulent, xenophobic, anti-Islam sites, Baal has been associated with Allah and with the antichrist, what happens to this insult if Baal is another form of Christ?

In the Classroom

Because students are defensive about the Bible, I find it best in my "Biblical Heritage" course to let them make the connections themselves, for the most part. Thus, I reverse the order presented here to begin with the Ancient Near Eastern precursors to apocalypse, moving to apocalyptic texts more broadly, then to Daniel, the interpretation of Daniel in the Christian Testament, and subsequent uses of Daniel in defining the antichrist. Along the way, I ask students to think about the relations between the various figures, in the hopes that they will see the connections between Christian figures and Ancient Near Eastern mythology, between what they find to be culturally normative and culturally "other." Finally, I look at contemporary manifestations of apocalyptic thought, and ask them to consider what exclusions apocalyptic thought enables, and what makes the rhetoric persuasive.

In my "Celluloid Bible" course, however, I take a slightly different (and less comprehensive) approach that is well received. There, I use images of the antichrist to illustrate ongoing orientalism in culture and film, whereby men of Eastern cultures are feminized or homosexualized in some way (the satirical representation of the homosexual relation between Satan and Saddam in the movie *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* [1999] is a good conversation starter). Here — at one remove from the biblical text itself — students easily understand how the othering process works to buttress false notions of cultural purity and religious hegemony.

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Dialectic Emptying: Self and the Other Within

Andrew Sung Park, United Theological Seminary

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IN THE HISTORY of epistemology, knowledge is related to the obtaining of power — the will to power. To Michel Foucault, the will to knowledge is the will to power. Western epistemology has been used to dominate human relationships. To know God is to receive the power of God. In ancient Egyptian culture, to know a god's name is to gain his/her power. The Western pursuit of religious knowledge may be to ask, as Moses did, the name of God to obtain divine power.

Using the name of God as the Almighty, some right-wing Christians have recently attempted to overpower progressive Christians and non-Christians as "others." George Lakoff (2006) of UC–Berkeley examines the structure of the right-wing worldview and finds an intriguing metaphoric implication of family in it.

It is understood in the right-wing view that the world is evil and children are bad in nature and need disciplines. The Father ought to teach his children right from wrong. When disobeying, they should be disciplined with painful physical punishments. Punishment is required to make them docile (Foucault 1979).

The strict father as the moral authority demonstrates a natural moral order: "Those who are moral should be in power. The Moral Order legitimizes traditional power relations as being natural, determining a hierarchy of Moral Authority: God above Man; Man above Nature; Adults above Children; Western Culture above Non-Western Culture; America above other nations" (Rockridge Institute). Anything against this moral order is evil. Evil destroys this moral order. Punishment must be dispensed to maintain moral bookkeeping.

Furthermore, right-wing ideology treats the nation as a family since we owe its existence to our "Founding Fathers." Applied to politics, the government metaphorically plays the role of the strict father. Just as in the family, the government must be an instrument of moral authority, upholding and extending policies that increase moral strength.

When this strict-father model is extended to the world, the United States is the father of all nations because it is the strongest. The United States cannot allow any child to surpass it economically and militarily.

The power of God legitimates and ratifies the will to power. Christianity is superior to other religions because the Christian God is more powerful than other gods. The West based on Christianity has been more powerful than the Orient, due to its omnipotent God.

In his book *Why I Am Not A Christian*, Bertrand Russell (1957) criticizes Christians because they worship power, not God. He considers people as like the savage willing to prostrate himself before his gods. He calls such a religion of power worship "the religion of Moloch."

In Russell's eyes, Christians are true idol worshipers and power-mongers because they worship the almightiness of God.

We do not know exactly what the almightiness of God means in human terms. By claiming God's almightiness, we project ourselves mighty. By associating with such an almighty god, we think ourselves powerful.

> *"God as the Courteous Companion never threatens 'other' ideas of God"*

Alternative Visions

How do we unlearn the ideology of the conquest mindset that attempts to dominate the Other with coercion? How do we deconstruct the right-wing ideology that threatens the justice and peace of the world?

Lakoff suggests that we replace the strict father family model with the Nurturant Parent family model of the progressive worldview to ensure the well-being of people. In the model, the task of parents is to nurture and raise their children to nurture others. Nurturance involves empathy and responsibility. He applies these values to politics, too. This model offers a practical way to treat the Other with respect and care.

By 1947, Emmanuel Levinas opposed the direction of the Western philosophy when he saw it preoccupied with issues about the nature of existence and knowledge. Levinas criticized Martin Buber for treating the relation of I and Thou as reciprocal and as a tool to assure my own being.

To him, knowing myself should not be the focus of epistemology, but the ethics of serving the Other should be. Thus, ethics precedes ontology (Levinas, 1969).

In contrast with Levinas, Anselm Min (2004) argues for the triple dialectic of totality, infinity, and solidarity. Unlike Levinas, who places the values of totality and infinity opposite, he bridges them with solidarity.

The Method of Dialectic Emptying

A dialectic emptying is to locate a true solidarity between I and the Other. It is dialectic because both I and the Other are dynamically and dialogically interactive through emptying. To transform our power-worship world, we need to empty our self and our images of the Other.

This dialectic emptying involves three movements.

First, "I" cannot be the source of truth, but I can empty myself to host truth. "I" cannot grasp truth in solidarity with the Other alone. Before solidarity, emptiness creates room for truth coming in and filling in the relationship between I and the Other. The Other within also finds room in I only in the act of emptiness. The dialectic emptying is not only to pour out the agendas of "I," but also to understand the agendas of the Other. The emptying self is different from I. This emptying self is not a substantial being, but a relational entity interacting with the divine Spirit. It is coming from "beyond," not self-producing or self-inducing. The empting self pours "I" off daily and relieves itself by receiving the divine Spirit. By opening the self to the Spirit, the emptying self emerges to empty I. Thus, emptying oneself is opening oneself. By opening myself to the Spirit, "I" open room for the Other. By relating to the Spirit, 'I" begin to understand the Other. Understanding the Other does not aim at grasping the Other as an object and constructing one's own knowledge.

Dialectic emptying also finds my true self in me. By removing all the internalized and projected images of myself, I can see who I am (existence) and who I ought to be (essence). For Kwok Pui Lan (2005), diasporic imagination recognizes the diverse experiences of Chinese in the world. Although there is no permanent essential self set before me, I strive to find my true emerging self through emptying myself in interaction with the Other.

Second, dialectical emptying means to negate the distorted image of the Other including God. We need to deconstruct the popular image of the Other as either superior or inferior to us. We measure up others into hierarchical categories as we meet them. In the popular mind, arising from a mindset of conquest, there is a hierarchical cosmic totem pole. Generally speaking, from its top are God, angels, white males, white females, white children, ethnic males, ethnic females, ethnic children, animal, plants, and soil. This mindset of hierarchical order discriminates against the weaker, as seen in the natural moral order of the right-wing worldview. Dialectic emptying means to negate the hierarchical rank of such a "natural" order.

Dialectic emptying also tears up the image of God as the all-powerful and all-controlling and as the Strict Father. If God in the highest is controlling all God's creation, all of us come to emulate the controlling power of God. Knowing the name of such a god derives from the will to power over others. Radical emptying even eradicates such a desire to ask the name of an Absolutely Almighty God to possess "His" power.

Third, to empty our idea of the Almighty God as the Strict Father, we need to have the image of God as our Humbly Hospitable Companion. Abraham was called the friend of God. Treating God as our Companion, we come to know the Other as our company on our journey. God as our humble Companion deconstructs all other oppressive, exploitive, unjust, and judgmental authorities against the weaker and provides a new ground for mutuality, open communication, and fair relations. God as our Companion does not undermine our respect for God or the qualitative difference between Creator and the created, but increases our mutual trust, open communication, and love. When God as the Other becomes our Companion, all others can be our friends because of such a hospitable God.

Such an image of God as the Courteous Companion never threatens "other" ideas of God in other religions. God as our Companion makes all relationships horizontal.

God as our Courteous Companion dismantles the image of a strict father, the president as a strict father, and God as the ultimate Strict Father. We in postcolonial Christianity need to empty ourselves to make room for the Other by emptying our idea of God as the Almighty Strict Father and by providing the image of God as our True Companion.

Conclusion

In this postcolonial world, we come to know, communicate with, and be in mutual penetration with the Other by emptying the self and the Other. This dialectic emptying invites God as our Companion to this life's journey and debunks the subjugation of the Other through dismantling the idol of the Strict Father God and through building up the communities of openness, fairness, care, trust, freedom, and peace.

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Transmodern, Transnational, Transdisciplinary, Trans. . .

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Kwok Pui Lan is William F. Cole Professor of Christian Theology and Spirituality at Episcopal Divinity School. Her publications include Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology *(Westminster John Knox),* Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World *(Orbis), and* Introducing Asian Feminist Theology *(Pilgrim). She is co-editing two forthcoming volumes,* Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology *(Westminster John Knox) and* Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians *(Fortress).*

IF TAN DUN (2002) can use ancient shamanistic rituals, video footage, and his classical musical training to compose a symphony, and Yo-Yo Ma can play his cello accompanied by Persian bamboo flute and other musical instruments along the Silk Road, what is not possible these days?

"The problem is that we are not making music," you might say. And this is precisely the problem in our field of religion. Our thinking and our identity politics have boxed us in. It is time to give ourselves a break!

No wonder one of the leading intellectuals of our time, the late Edward W. Said, was an avid music lover. Think about contrapuntal in music, which has two or more independent but related melodic parts sounding together. If we can cultivate this capacity to hear more than one sound in a single time frame, we will learn to interpret history differently.

Toni Morrison, too, loves music, and she likes jazz.

The study and writing of religion should be lively because that is the aspect of culture which makes people "sing." Yet, we have created boxes, paradigms, and subdisciplines to make sure that our work is boring enough to be considered academic and "objective." It is funny that, for a long time, behind the mask of objectivity stood a white man sticking his nose into other people's religion and fitting things into his scheme.

It is equally hilarious to think that we can speak or write only from the perspective of our race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other finer details within our ensemble of identities. It would be absurd to restrict Yo-Yo Ma, who was born in Paris and grew up in New York, to playing only "Chinese" music. Mind you, I was invited to fill the slot of "Asian Christianity" in this *Spotlight* issue. Fortunately the invitation also says "or as she sees fit," which prompted me to write about the Trans. . . . I need to tell the readers that one of the most invigorating conversations I have had in recent years was talking about Schleiermacher's Affekt Theology with Thandeka.

I first attended the AAR Annual Meeting as a graduate student in 1985. All the new things that my women colleagues were doing fascinated me. The womanist group was just forming. Carol P. Christ was talking about her initiation into the Goddess. The Asian and Asian-American feminist doctoral students were finding each other. The sense of exploration and excitement was palpable in the air. What was charming was that we were not afraid to take risks and make mistakes, because we knew that we were probably saying something that had not been said before.

Now I must say that the annual meetings and the production of knowledge in the field of feminist and womanist studies in religion are less enticing. Often they are too predictable or repetitive. Some of this predictability has to do with the fact that the works of a selected few pioneers have been "canonized" or "codified" to the extent that we must begin with them or go through them — either expanding or critiquing their ideas. How many times do we need to read about Alice Walker's four-part definition of "Womanist"? How tedious to read repeatedly that white women have universalized their experience when doing theology? It would save a lot of ink if they simply call their theology white women's theology, to avoid false advertising.

There is also the persistent inertia in religious studies that results in a time lag between theories produced in other fields and their applications in our field. Poststructuralist theory had lost its critical edge and was on the wane when religious scholars began to catch on. A quarter of a century lapsed between the publication of *Orientalism* and the first books on postcolonial theology. No wonder our colleagues in the university would think that we are the curators of the Buddha, or Jesus, or Mohammad, or whatever — most useful for the occasional exhibit such as the box with the inscription of James, brother of Jesus. But for most of the time, our quaint wares can be best left where they are — in museum display boxes.

Religion, derived from *religio*, means to bind together. And in our world of fragmentation, strife, and a widespread sense of homelessness, the study of something that binds or is loosening its binds should be very appealing. Religion has direct bearings on war, violence, immigration, civil society, transnationalism, diaspora, flexible citizenship, and even clean water for all. We should be fascinated by how religion is being reconfigured, reimagined, and lived out when peoples and cultures collide, coexist, and commingle. Yet when bright young students want to do such kind of research work, they bump against a very out-of-date departmental ethos and disciplinary structure in our graduate programs. Or they are simply told not to be too daring if they want to get a job.

Can our religion departments or divinity schools serve the needs of the twenty-first century? I often wonder. Recently I was asked to speak to the Asian students' society of a divinity school on the East Coast and I asked them if their courses or curriculum pay any attention to the issues in Asia-Pacific. I am befuddled that this geopolitical area featured so prominently in the discourses on "the Pacific century," "the clash of civilizations," "the world is flat," and even "the axis of evil," receives so little attention in our divinity schools. In the weekend section of *Financial Times* last April was a feature article on "A Tale of Two Cities" — and it was about Hong Kong and Shanghai. Has anybody found the "fast forward" button yet for revamping our curriculum?

> *"There is also the persistent inertia in religious studies."*

We would hope that new things will emerge because of sheer luck. Pasteur's assistant went on holiday, and the culture was spoiled and did not kill the chickens. A light bulb blinked in Pasteur's mind, and he discovered immunization. In the field of humanities, creativity is a much slower process and is often the result of cross-fertilization of ideas and the meeting of unlike minds. We will need to cultivate a reading habit outside our field to catch up with the world, since the study of religion is so backward looking. I would not have written this piece if I had not accidentally picked up *Telling True Stories on Narrative Journalism* at the Harvard Coop.

If our scholarship is to have some intellectual appeal, broadening our scope and updating our subject matter is crucial. The articulation and the embodying of the new must also be refreshing. Here I want to say something about the writing of new knowledge. In her recent book, Emilie Townes is not satisfied with the objective description of evil in society, and turns to narratives, especially those written by African-American writers, to probe "the deep interior material life of evil and its manifestations" (2006, 5). Townes has been experimenting with writing disjointed lines that suggest poetry, and she includes this genre in her book. She uses this device when she asks us to imagine what happens when Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* speaks. Her poetic words become subjective and intimate, opening a window to the interior life she is trying to convey in the book.

Catherine Keller writes about theopoetics. Her work *Face of the Deep* exemplifies a new genre, which may be called postmodern theopoetics. She selects a great idea, chaos, and runs with it, sprawling the Bible, theology, literature, science, and spinning along the way. This is not a tourist guidebook with maps and easy markers to help you find your way. If you have not been jolted by the work or if you could summarize it in four or five axioms, the work would have completely defeated its purpose. The book's theopoetical form embodies the ideas of chaos and *creatio ex profundis*.

You think Anne Lamott is funny and honest? Luckily we have a serious theologian who can moonlight as a comedian — Marcella Althaus-Reid. Only she can write "When God Is a Rich White Woman Who Does Not Walk" or "Gustavo Gutiérrez Goes to Disneyland" and get away with it (2004). Ever since she put "Indecent Theology" on the map, those of us doing vanilla or decent theology are so frightened to have our theological skirts lifted. One can disagree with her, but one can't wait to see what she will do next in poking fun at our theological voyeurism. Similar to Gayatri Spivak, she can write Derrida, Marxism, and feminism within one sentence. But thank God (literally), she is so queer.

These days I appreciate more and more what Barbara Christian has said that theory by people of color is "in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" (1990, 38).

But I am also drawn to the silences or what has not been said. In the preface of *Journeys by Heart*, Rita Nakashima Brock writes, "My Asian sensibilities lie under the surface of the book like ancient stones overgrown with weeds and new grass" (1988, xvi). It's only when I had a chance to learn about "articulate silence" in Asian-American literature (Cheung 1993) that I began to hear the sound coming between the ancient stones and the new grass. What is not fully said allows readers to imagine words of their own.

The *Los Angeles Times* reports, "With Ma, the cello found its accessible hero, an artist possessing tremendous technical brilliance and musicality." If we are not satisfied to be technicians of the sacred, we had better make sure that our works "sing," too. Think outside the box, color outside the lines, and say it well, with guts!

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From Theorizing the Other to Theories of Others

Elizabeth A. Castelli, Columbia University

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WHEN I TOLD a friend of mine about this writing assignment, she said, "The 'other' within Christianity? Do you mean 'God'?" Glib and provocative at once, her question sparked a longer reflection on the status of the assignment itself: who, indeed, is the "other" within Christianity? The question is a perilous one, of course, since it threatens to reinscribe precisely the terms it seeks to disrupt — otherness itself, the term always constituted in relationship to that which is not other: selfhood, sameness, identity. Approached in this way, who is the other within Christianity? The heretic? Woman? The postcolony? And how can one theorize that other while avoiding the pitfalls of reification?

I soon despaired of the possibility of engaging such questions meaningfully in such a short essay, so I took a different tack, trying to read for theory outside of the metropole. Since I have a longstanding interest in the afterlives of the Bible — in questions of appropriation and reception, of mediation and remediation — I thought I would use these questions as a lens for identifying less explored sites of knowledge production. Work on biblical afterlives seeks to reorient biblical studies away from exegesis traditionally conceived and toward paying attention to the work that the Bible does in the lives of individuals and communities, whether as a foundational text, an artifact, or a cultural or artistic inspiration (see, for example, Watt; Crapanzano; Harding; Edgar). Over the last two decades or so, there has been important work in biblical studies that focuses on so-called *ordinary readers*, and I view the project focused on biblical afterlives as both cognate to but distinct from this work — a supplement, as it were. Some examples will illustrate the point.

One rather startling afterlife of the Bible came to my attention in the newly published ethnography by anthropologist Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church* (2007). (The book is the second volume in a new series, edited by Joel Robbins and published by University of California Press, devoted to the emergent field of the anthropology of Christianity. See also Engelke 2004.) In *A Problem of Presence*, Engelke invites his readers into a sustained encounter with the Friday apostolics, a small group of Zimbabwean Christians who describe themselves as "the Christians who do not read the Bible," who instead receive the Word of God "live and direct" from the Holy Spirit.

Dismissed by some other Zimbabwean Christians as "primitive" and "mad," the Friday apostolics nevertheless take their rightful place in a long historical lineage of Christians who have struggled over the materiality of writing and its capacity to mediate revelation. And whereas students of Christianity might be tempted initially to dismiss the Friday apostolics as a heterodox aberration or an ethnographic exception, Engelke challenges such facile responses by elegantly showing how this community articulates, embodies, and inhabits a complex postcolonial theoretical stance, what Engelke calls "the semiotics of immateriality."

Along with this mode of signifying practice — a practice that is profoundly performative and embodied — comes a radical critique and rejection of the Bible as a material object, a thing that becomes "stale" and "falls apart," a document transmitting the propaganda of Europeans, a dangerous artifact. As Engelke analyzes it, the Friday apostolics' elevation of immateriality is no simple asceticism: "To say that the apostolics want a faith in which things do not matter is not to say that they are renouncing the world. It is, rather, to suggest that they are making specific claims about how God becomes present through words, objects, and actions that exist within a hierarchy of significative and expressive forms. The semiotics of live and direct faith hinge on the assertion of immateriality" (17).

The Friday apostolics construct their Christian identity by means of a signifying practice that claims to be unmediated/immediate. At the same time, they have generated an indigenous theoretical idiom that critiques the domination of European missionaries and colonialism and rejects what they see clearly to be the quintessential material artifact of that domination: the Bible. As idiosyncratic as this example might be, I want to suggest that there are important insights that we might take away from the self-construction of the Friday apostolics as "the Christians who do not read the Bible" and Engelke's generous and textured portrait of them. First, the Friday apostolics are undeniably theoreticians in their own right. Through their embodied performances — dressing in striking white garments, gathering in the wilderness (where all forms of mediation and inscription are forbidden), praying and singing — and through their considered responses to Engelke's exploration of their religious sensibilities, the Friday apostolics articulate theories of textuality, reading and literacy, materiality and immateriality, transmission and interpretation, and modes of resistance. Second, the Friday apostolics' example invites us to rethink the currently dominant tendency to collapse biblicism with the lived experience of Christianity, the legacy of two different strands of modern engagement with the Bible: Protestant evangelicalism and its tendency to represent itself as Christianity *tout court*, on the one hand, and professional biblical studies and its tendency to fetishize the text itself, on the other. To take the theoretical positions of the Friday apostolics seriously — to focus on the exceptional character of the Friday apostolics and their refusal to read the Bible as an occasion for thinking anew about the practices of biblical reading — is to open one's own theoretical assumptions to critique and revision.

Still, the Friday apostolics occupy an extreme end of the continuum along which the exploration of biblical afterlives might be mapped. For if the Friday apostolics position themselves and their religious practice as unmediated, others embrace rather different strategies of theorization and mediation (and remediation) in their enactments of biblical afterlives.

Take, for example, Marie José de Abreu's recent work on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement in Brazil (2005), focusing on the media-savvy efforts of Padre Marcelo Rossi, former bodybuilder and physical education teacher turned priest, to reorganize for his followers their notions of the universe and their own subjectivities, using scripture as the template. For scripture to be the template for such a project is far from unusual; but Padre Marcelo's techniques for achieving this reorganization of thought and self-understanding are. Blending traditional practices — the rosary cycle — with "pneumatic technologies" including his well-known "aerobics for Jesus," Padre Marcelo establishes a complex connection between technology and scripture, body performances and inspiration, and his own star power and the remaking of subjectivities among his large numbers of followers. (The uneasy relationship between Padre Marcelo's celebrity status in Brazil and traditional church authority was recently displayed when the Pope visited Brazil in May of this year; see Rohter and Fisher.)

Padre Marcelo's pneumatic technologies and his ease with the practices of media emerged, as de Abreu explains, in a complex political and theological terrain: Padre Marcelo and his charismatic renewal movement, in contrast to Brazil's strong tradition of liberation theology, insist that "spirituality and politics do not mingle" and turn to the New Testament story in which Jesus distinguishes between the things of God and the things of Caesar as a prooftext (de Abreu 333). The contrast is practical as well as metaphorical: the practices of liberation theology's biblical interpretation are grounded in lived and temporal realities; those of the charismatic movement express what de Abreu, following Gaston Bachelard, calls "the aerial imagination" (326). In a country where a Pentecostal conglomerate actually holds the trademark on the word "gospel" (Rohter), the traditional modes of thinking about sacred texts — safely sequestered from media and market flows — are most certainly left wanting.

Indeed, the flow of capital meets the dispersal of biblically inspired sound waves in Adele Horne's important 2006 documentary, *The Tailenders*, a portrait of the Los Angeles-based Global Recordings Network, a Christian missionary organization that translates Bible stories and disseminates them by means of low-tech, "hand-crank" technology to regions of the world that have been as yet unmissionized (see Horne; Castelli). Horne, whose documentary won the Axium Truer than Fiction Award at the 2007 Independent Film Awards, follows the GRN missionaries from LA to the Solomon Islands, India, and Mexico, capturing on film the "translation" process — from written text into spoken word, from English into numerous indigenous languages, from speaking body into the disembodied sound of analog recordings.

Defining American Protestantism as the syncretic blend of Christianity and technology, Horne shows how the project of the GRN missionaries is tied up with and implicated within the processes of global capital, and how the introduction of even the most primitive technology can usher in far more dramatic cultural changes for the communities touched by GRN. Horne also shows how the missionaries' technical bricolage is matched by their willingness to exploit the psychic, social, and economic tools that lie at their disposal: taking advantage of the homesickness of migrant workers in Mexico by offering gospel stories in their mother tongues, using the "five steps of selling" as a marketing model for missionary work, allowing interviewees encountered in Indian shanties to believe (mistakenly) that the evangelistic interviewers have come from the government to help them.

"The Tailenders" — those communities who are the last to be touched by global efforts at evangelization by Christian missionaries — are swept up in the waves of multiple global flows: globalization, evangelism, and mediatization. How they theorize the experience of the disembodied voice speaking in an uncannily familiar idiom but translating the selected contents of a book inscribed in a temporally and geographically distant place remains the unknowable part of this story. Perhaps this unknowability is also a suitable place to suspend this discussion, with the recognition of our own lack of mastering the theories of others.

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Survival Strategies for an Ethnic Studies Professor

Andrea Smith, University of Michigan

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I TEACH A BROAD RANGE of classes at the University of Michigan, including "Introduction to Native American Studies," "Native American Religious Traditions," "Advanced Topics in Native Religious Traditions," and "Gender/Race and the Christian Right." In teaching religious studies classes that also focus on the dynamics of race and gender, I have come across a number of challenges. These challenges are compounded by how I am also gendered and racialized in the classroom. The nature of these challenges was exemplified in my first experience teaching a lecture class, "Introduction to Native American Studies," at UC–Davis. I thought that I explained the subject material in a very balanced fashion. However, I soon received a flood of hate mail from my students (one went so far as to send me a computer virus!) complaining about the political indoctrination of the class. I became very discouraged, and blamed the inchoate racism of the students for this experience. After reflecting on the pedagogical strategies that I had learned in my masters program, as well as through my experiences teaching popular education as a grassroots organizer, however, I decided to employ alternative approaches when teaching my next classes at UC–Santa Cruz. These students responded positively, and I received some of the highest course evaluations for those semesters.

The overall question that helps me guide my pedagogy is not what material do I want to teach to students, but what would enable students to learn and engage the material? The students I teach are quite diverse. In one class, the majority of my students were in engineering; in another class, the students were self-described evangelical Republicans; in another class, I had a sizeable number of students training to be dental hygienists; in another class, I had all women of color. To do student-centered teaching, I am thus forced to engage in a considerable amount of experimentation because pedagogical approaches that work with one group of students will not work with another group. My commitment to experimentation means that some experiments work better than others, while some fail miserably. Ultimately, I am always open to trying new approaches, even radically changing my teaching direction during the course of a semester if my approach does not seem to be effective. Learning from my teaching mistakes enables me to teach even more effectively in the future. Every class poses new challenges for me, but I will describe just a few of them, along with the strategies I have employed to address them.

Student Performance Anxiety

My teaching goal is to inculcate into students a passion for learning. I feel that if they develop this passion, then they are more likely to have academic success throughout their career. However, I began to see that my process of grading students was actually interfering with their learning process. That is, students were starting to focus more on what they thought they needed to do to receive an "A" rather than on really learning and engaging the material in my classes. So I decided to take the risk of experimenting with my grading strategies. I now see grading not as a strategy to monitor what students have learned, but as a strategy to encourage them to learn. In some classes, where the work is organized around group projects, I have relied on student peer grading. In other classes, I have graded their work on effort and improvement. In other classes, I have relied on student grading contracts whereby the students contract to do a certain level of work for a certain grade.

I have noticed that very few academics, including those who see themselves as having radical politics, question the traditional system of grading. It is important, it is frequently argued, to grade strictly in order to ensure that students work hard. However, curved grading systems are structured such that, even if every student works hard, many will have to have fail because not everyone can receive an A. In this respect, the grading system mirrors the system of capitalism. Everyone can get ahead we are told, if we just work hard enough. But in reality, a capitalist system requires that only a few people can become truly wealthy. Because of the fiction of meritocracy that structures both systems, those who do not become wealthy in the capitalist system are deemed the undeserving poor, just as those who do not reach the top of the curve, no matter how hard they work, are deemed academic failures. Those then who do not succeed become disqualified as subjects who can speak about its capitalist logics. The poor are complaining simply because they are "lazy" and want a "free ride." Those who do not receive "A's" are complaining because they are bad students.

In the end, however, it is not clear to me that grading promotes learning. I found that students actually worked much harder under nonpunitive evaluative structures than when they performed for a grade. I set up individual meetings with all my students to ascertain their learning development. About 80 percent of my students in these meetings tell me that the most difficult challenge they face in my class is that this is the first class in which they were required to think! (And these students are often graduating seniors!). They inform me that even in humanities classes, they feel that they are not encouraged to develop their own analysis but merely to recite the instructor's analysis. Furthermore, their fear of receiving bad grades often inhibits students from exploring new ideas and analysis. I find students learn more when I emphasize process over product.

The Fear of Political Indoctrination

I often hear students complain that gender and ethnic studies classes are sites for political indoctrination. This complaint is particularly acute in classes that fulfill distribution requirements. When students fear indoctrination, they can become unwilling to entertain ideas and analysis that differ sharply from their own. My challenge then is to promote a learning experience where students become open to engaging with diverse intellectual and political viewpoints.

The first strategy I employ is to rely less on lecture-style teaching approaches and more on interactive strategies. I have frequently noticed that there is nothing more frustrating for students than to have to listen to political opinions with which they disagree for an extended period of time with no opportunity to speak their own minds. Students inwardly fume until such time when they have the opportunity to complain to administrators or write scathing evaluations. Thus, even in large lectures, I find it necessary to devote a significant portion of lecture time to student discussion. Using a variety of strategies, such as organizing debates, using small group discussion, in-class reflection papers, and skits, I try to create a space for students to express their views, particularly dissenting views, so as to minimize student frustration. In doing so, students remain more engaged with the material even if they disagree with it. In fact in one lecture class, I brought in a friend as a plant to start a disagreement with me. When students saw that it was okay to disagree with me, they started participating much more freely and complained much less about political "bias" in the lectures.

My second strategy that addresses this project is my previously described approach to grading. I have noticed that students will not freely express their opinions if they feel their potentially dissenting viewpoints might negatively impact their grade. When students are under a grading system where they can feel secure in voicing opinions that may be very different from my own, they feel freer to share what they really think. When they can make their voices public, it is possible for me and other students to

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DE LA TORRE, from p.ii

color teaching at similar institutions. In fact, I have found that many liberals would be incredulous when their own complicity in racist structures is questioned. After all, "they" marched with Martin Luther King, which in their minds gave them nonracist credentials for life. As long as I riled against the Religious Right, everyone was happy. But when I began to explore how liberal religious and academic thought is as damaging to scholars of color as it was when done by conservatives, then I discovered that my scholarship became suspect.

I have had students in class voice their concern, to my presence, that a person with my views should not be working at such a liberal institution. I had one student who, after taking a class on liberationist thought with me, claimed in class that my work lacked a cutting edge. Another questioned my pedagogy when I quoted an inflammatory statement made by Fanon, expecting the class to go to the library and find out what he was talking about. I even had a student walk out of class, claiming she'd had enough, during a difficult discussion on how white-skin privilege creates an inactive false hope.

The issue, as I see it, is not whether I know my material, or am cutting edge, or am effective in my classroom pedagogy, or lack the skill to effectively discuss white privilege. The issue is something else. You just know that if I were a Euro-American professor, none of these students, even if they were upset, would have offered such a public and direct rebuke. They were able to voice such a challenge because in their eyes, I am perceived as powerless to negatively affect their graduate (specifically doctoral) work. Consequently, it is safe for them to exercise their white power and privilege when a man of color questions their constructed reality, which, like their more conservative classmates at other institutions, is still based on white supremacy and privilege.

My intelligence is also challenged by students (as well as by some faculty and administrators) when I allow the spirituality of marginalized communities to inform and impact my scholarship. I am a man of faith whose first act when coming to the office is to light a candle to my Virgencita del Cobre, who enjoys visiting Pentecostal storefront Latino/a churches where I can "dance" in the Spirit and maybe — if truth be told — even speak in tongues. It is crucial for my scholarship to be rooted in the experience of my people so that I can effectively function as an organic intellectual. Only then do I find the work I do as an ethicist relevant. My Euro-American colleagues who rely more on the so-called European Enlightenment Project usually view the spirituality of scholars of color as proof that they lack academic rigor. The quest for "academic excellence" becomes code-language for fluency in Eurocentic meta-narratives.

> *". . . dismissed as angry . . . we will continue to be the Other."*

Perspectives arising from marginalized communities might be interesting, but they always fall short of "academic excellence." Books and papers written from these perspectives are usually seen as lacking depth, or too "churchy" for academia. Failure to operate from the Eurocentric canon, or the insistence of participating in the spiritual practices of one's community of color, is viewed with suspicion by many liberals. Yet, for many communities of color, the spiritual is as crucial as the intellectual, and for those scholars of color grounded in these communities, the false dichotomy created between the academic and the spiritual prevents us from fully exploring all the dimensions of our community. And if truth be told, it erodes the academic excellence that is trying to be maintained.

To be Other within the academy means that the scholar of color must publish three times as much as a white colleague just to receive half the recognition, struggling to prove they are worthy of being in their particular institution. This is not because students, colleagues, or administrators are necessarily racists (although some obviously are). It is because the power structures within the academy are racist for them. While no graduate student of color who lacks proficiency in Eurocentric thought can ever obtain a doctorate, let alone employment, Euro-American graduate students can obtain a PhD and never have to read or know the literature developing within marginalized scholarly communities. Or as one recent candidate for a Bible opening responded to a question I asked, "No books written by blacks or Hispanics about the Bible exist to the best of my knowledge."

As long as our scholarship remains on the margins, as long as our scholarship continues to be seen as irrelevant, lacking in academic excellence, or merely the "forced" diversity quota tacked onto the cannon, as long as we are easily dismissed as angry or simply hating white people, we will continue to be the Other. RSN

FLOYD-THOMAS, from p.iii

To give expression to these four womanist principles, one will have to embody what social critic bell hooks (1994) describes as engaged pedagogy. She claims:

> That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that there is an aspect of our work is that not merely to share information but to share the intellectual and spiritual growth of our [communities]. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our [communities] is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.

We are called, therefore, to knowledge production that does not detract from our religious heritage, racial-ethnic identity, or academic training, but to lend the expertise of each to infuse the other so as to make these worlds livable and lovable again. The RREM scholar's demonstration of merging previously antagonistic realms actually offers a demonstration of a more inclusive, imaginative, and intimate production of knowledge about the sacred.

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ESPINOSA, from p.iv

Carrasco calls "center/periphery dynamics." Unlike early cultural anthropologist Manuel Gamio's negative view of Mexican Indian influences on Catholicism, Carrasco celebrated the cultural and religious hybridity of the Mexican-American religious experience.

Toward a Working Definition of Chicano Religions

At the 1996 *New Directions in Chicano Religions Conference*, Charles Long challenged the participants to define what they meant by Mexican-American/Chicano religions and to then explain how it differed from any other religious phenomena. I argue that the Mexican-American cultural blending, reimagination, rearticulation, and poetic reconstruction and aesthetic practice of "Mexican" and "American" religious rituals, customs, traditions, practices, beliefs, and symbols in the United States gives them a Mexican-American or "Chicano" inflection that sometimes differentiates them in application and form, though not necessarily in function, from Anglo-American religious practices. Mexican-American religious practices and traditions both resonate with their Mexican counterparts while at the same time exhibiting a blending, a combining, a fusing, or a mixing with Anglo-American practices and traditions to create a new combinative hybrid reality that is neither entirely Mexican nor entirely American but is in fact Mexican-American or Chicano. This blending is illustrated in religious traditions like the Catholic Cursillo and in the East L.A.-birthed Victory Outreach Pentecostal movement.

Ethno-Phenomenological Approach to Religion

One approach to interpreting Mexican-American religions is an ethno-phenomenological methodology that seeks to bridge the open hostility between religious studies and theology. Such a method listens to and draws upon the important discoveries and insights from religious studies, theological studies, and the above-noted disciplines and influences. Scholars using this approach seek to analyze the world of their subjects on their own plane of reference through a methodology that respects and holds in balance both the perspective of the skeptical, irreligious, and noncommitted secular outsider and the devout and committed religious insider. An ethno-phenomenological approach offers a scholarly framework that engages in what Ninian Smart has called "bracketed realism," whereby the scholars' own religious beliefs (or lack thereof) and ideological political positions are bracketed or suspended and not superimposed or projected on to their subjects. While personal subjectivities and values are unavoidable, a scholar should nonetheless try to describe and analyze the religious phenomena in such a way that is not only critical but also recognizable to the practitioner. The ethno-phenomenological approach desires to generate new scholarship that examines the way ordinary people find hope and interpret their very real and imaginary universes. Perhaps by so doing, we can transform the Mexican-American religious experience as the Other Within into a robust and rigorous academic field of mainstream scholarly inquiry. RSN

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SMITH, from p.x

converse with these views. It is only through conversation and debate that people can have true intellectual exchange.

As one example, during the course of a meeting of my "Christian Right" course, I focus on the topic of homosexuality. I had a significant number of evangelical students who all believed that homosexuality was a sin. The class also consisted of student leaders of campus LGBT organizations. This class could have been politically contentious, or some students could have felt uncomfortable sharing their opinions. But because the class structure had fostered an atmosphere in which people could express their viewpoints and respect the viewpoints of those with whom they disagreed, the students all had a group hug at the end. The evangelical students said that they were reconsidering their positions on this topic, and the nonevangelical students said that they had learned that Christians were not as closed-minded as they expected them to be. Of course, not all contentious conversations end this way, but I have found that they can be structured to promote open interaction for participants across political and religious differences.

Student Consumerism

A number of academic conferences I have attended recently have featured panels that address the academic culture of student as consumer. That is, students assert that since they are paying for education, they have the right to the education they want. The response to this trend by some is to assert that education should be less student-centered.

My experience suggests, however, that ironically this trend is really the natural consequence of complete lack of student power within the classroom. It is because they feel no real voice with which to disagree or to affect the classroom that they begin to insist on their rights as consumers. So I have thus employed the strategy of reconstructing classroom authority to address this issue.

My strategy is to build collectivity in the learning process itself. I tell students at the beginning of every course that the class is for them to learn; that they have both the collective right and responsibility to change the class if it does not meet their needs. Then, I conduct periodic evaluations of the class (oral and written). When an issue is brought to the table, I ask students what they think would be a good way to handle the issue rather than just address it directly myself. I found that students feel more empowered to make suggestions as the class goes on and assume responsibility for making appropriate changes.

Rather than position students as individual learners who have discrete relationships with me (and hence if the classroom interaction is unfavorable, I am the person they will blame), I attempt to position students as in relationship to each other. I frequently have them grade each other's work, and structure the learning around group processes.

I have noticed that students become less entangled in battles of authority with me when they recognize their own authority to shape the direction of the class.

Conclusion

There is no fail-safe method for teaching religious studies material that can be politically contentious. As I teach new groups, I find that I can never become pedagogically complacent. Generally speaking, however, these approaches have enabled me to teach to intellectually and politically diverse students. RSN

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delegitimize the very object of their intellectual investment in the name of methodological sophistication and theoretical elegance. That religion can cloak nonreligious interests is not in dispute, but to assert that religion is nothing more than this seems exaggerated. As Wayne Proudfoot has argued, while scholars of religion may explain religious experience "in terms that are not those of the subject and that might not meet with his approval" (1985, 197), he warns that the subject's experience "must be identified under a description that can plausibly be attributed to him" (194–195). As such, "to describe an experience in nonreligious when the subject himself describes it in religious terms is to misidentify the experience, or to attend to another experience altogether" (196). Avoiding what Proudfoot characterizes as "descriptive reduction" seems to be the same danger against which the rule of deference is designed to guide us.

Endnotes

[1] In addition to the courts, the other relevant state institutions vested with the power to administer the religious workers visa program are the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly known as the INS) and the USCIS service centers (formerly known as Administrative Appeals Office (AAO).

[2] See also *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, 143 U.S. 457 (1892).

[3] 8 CFR §214.2(r)(2).

[4] 80 U.S. (13 Wall.) 679 (1871), 728–29.

[5] 541 F.2d 1383 (9th Cir. 1976).

[6] *Unification Church v. Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 547 F. Supp. 623 (D.D.C. 1982), 628.

[7] Ibid.

[8] *Tenacre v. Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 78 F.3d 693 (D.C. Cir. 1996), 697.

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