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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 Axiom 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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