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Nova Religio Symposium

African American Religion

Charles H. Long — *African American Religion in the United States of America: An Interpretative Essay*

Victor Anderson — *A Relational Concept of Race in African American Religious Thought*

Allen Dwight Callahan — *Perspectives for a Study of African American Religion from the Valley of Dry Bones*

James W. Perkinson — *Trancing Terror: African American Uses of Time to Trick the Evil Eye of Whiteness*

Anthony B. Pinn — *Black Bodies in Pain and Ecstasy: Terror, Subjectivity, and the Nature of Black Religion*

Jane Williams-Hogan — *Field Notes: The Swedenborgian Church in South Africa*

Book Reviews

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The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions

Volume 7, Number 1, July 2003

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Letter from the Co-General Editors

We are pleased to present a Symposium on African American religion with this issue of *Nova Religio*. Edited by Anthony B. Pinn, the symposium examines a number of theoretical issues important to the study of African American religion. Each of the contributors—and a highly distinguished group it is—provides "a method for the study of black religion," in Pinn's words. These essays will certainly provide a number of methodological starting points for future studies in new and emerging religions in black communities in the United States. We are proud that *Nova Religio* serves as the forum for this critical discussion.

We are also pleased to announce that with this issue, volume 7, no. 1, *Nova Religio* goes to triannual publication. This means we will be able to bring you articles and reviews in a timely manner, and that we will be able to publish your articles in a reasonable amount of time. We will be looking for articles from you, our supporters, to help meet the new demands made by triannual publication. We are grateful to the University of California Press for making this growth possible.

Catherine Wessinger
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Introduction: African American Religion Symposium

Anthony B. Pinn

ABSTRACT: This essay introduces five articles in a *Nova Religio* symposium focusing on African American Religion. The essays provide some means for re-imagining the study of African American religion in ways that allow for a much better understanding of African American participation in traditional and new religious movements.

Within the countless volumes on African American religion and religious experience the question of *how* we actually study religion and religious experience receives scant attention. Furthermore, the implicit definition of religion present in these volumes seldom involves anything other than institutions and their particular beliefs and rituals, truncated modalities of African American Christianity at best. While this information is important, it does not allow for a "thick" discussion, and as a result the study of religion and religious experience is usually presented as being synonymous with Black Church Studies. Yet there is more to African American religion and religious experience than this, but tapping into the complexities requires critical attention to the theoretical and methodological sensibilities shaping our study of the subject. Such a theoretical and methodological move promises to enhance our understanding in significant ways. Through such a move, we might better understanding the nature and meaning of the complex and varied modalities of religious experience in African American communities, including the Black Church as well as a full range of alternative religious practices and communities.

The essays in this issue provide a way of re-imagining the study of African American religion in ways that allow for a much better under-

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standing of African American participation in traditional and new religious movements. There is a concern expressed in these essays with the theoretical and methodological tools necessary to expand the canon of black religion so as to embrace religious practices that are "alternative" to the dominant Black Church paradigm, as well as emerging practices that express the continually evolving nature of African American religiosity. In so doing, black religious studies will share with new religious movements scholarship a concern with the multi-layered nature of religious expression, and this will allow for a better understanding of what it means to be African American and religious.

The invitation to guest-edit this symposium on African American religions affords an opportunity to step back and explicitly address the nature and meaning of African American religion/religious experience in its various manifestations, and also the theories and methods that might be said to undergird such investigations. The discussion this issue seeks to motivate requires attention to Charles H. Long, the scholar of the history of religions who, some thirty-years ago, pushed those involved in the study of various aspects of African American religion/religious experience to dig deep. I use Long's words to frame his contribution to the study of black religion, and by extension to give some sense of the challenge undertaken in the essays that comprise this symposium:

> In 1971 I published an article, "Perspectives for a Study of Afro-American Religion in the United States." In this article I attempted to specify some of the essential elements that had to be considered in any approach to African American religion. They were, 1) Africa as Historical Reality and Religious Image; 2) the Involuntary Presence of the Black Community in America, and, 3) the Experience and Symbol of God. This article of 1971 was followed in 1975, where in the William James Lecture at Harvard I addressed African American religion in "The Oppressive Elements in Religion and the Religions of the Oppressed." This lecture was devoted to religious experience and the problematical locus of "limit" or restraint in the case of African American religion in particular and religions of the oppressed in general. Does the power and authority of the oppressor in history define that limit or can these religions define another meaning and locus of limit for the organization of their lives? I returned to the meaning of African American Religion when in 1976 at a conference devoted to Civil Religion I addressed the meaning of African Americans in such a structure in "Civil Rights/Civil Religion: Visible People and Invisible Religion." The aim in this article was to show how any notion of Civil Religion in the United States would have to come to terms with the actuality, discourses, and denials related to the presence of African Americans as essential elements in any meaning of civil society the United States. Simultaneously and subsequently, articles and monographs from almost all the Human Sciences disciplines have continued a lively interest in the topic of African American religion.[1]

While it is true that numerous monographs and articles have been written over the years dealing with African American religions, little attention has been given to the nature and meaning of what we have come to call African American religions. The theoretical and methodological challenge posed by Long some years ago has gone unmet for the most part.

The essays in this volume, representing a variety of disciplinary perspectives and various levels of engagement with the academic elements of black religion/religious experience, take seriously Long's call for a rethinking of the study of black religion. What ties together these essays by Victor Anderson, Allen D. Callahan, James W. Perkinson, and Anthony B. Pinn is sensitivity to Long's impact on the study of religion in African American communities, and engagement with his work. While contributors for this special issue of *Nova Religio* were not required to make an explicit appeal to Long's writings, they were asked to allow the implications of his work to inform their reflections. Doing so entailed contributors exposing their thought to the types of questions Long proposed: (1) what is religion in the African American context? (2) How does one who studies African American religion uncover the "images and meanings" that inform and shape the religious experience and expression of African Americans? What are some of these images and meanings? (3) What is the impact of African American religion on the nature of life in the United States?

It is our great fortune to begin this discussion of African American religions with an essay by Charles Long in which he addresses the essential concern undergirding the above questions: the problematical nature of the meaning of religion, particularly as it concerns the development of African Americans. Anderson's approach to the assigned task takes shape through an engagement of race as a category of discourse in African American theology and philosophy. Callahan makes use of Long's work on signs and symbols to explore African American appropriations of the Bible. Perkinson uses Long's writings to assist in a discussion of the "African American" nature of African American religion. In a similar vein, Pinn uses Long's work on the first and second creations of Africans to develop an understanding of the elemental nature and meaning of African American religion.

Traditional depictions of black religion as the Black Church have made it difficult to sustain any type of meaningful exchange between those in new religious movements and those in black religious studies. For black religious studies scholars, such a depiction of black religion as synonymous with black Christianity made language of "alternative" and "emerging" religion difficult to embrace. Perhaps, from the perspective of many, to use such labels was to reduce black religion to the level of a "cult" or "sect." One can safely say there was an assumed link among these four categories. And earlier work in black religious studies had

firmly fixed these terms, "cult" and "sect," as markers of problematic practices. With the contents of this issue of *Nova Religio*, new possibilities for conversation emerge in that the complexity and thickness of black religious experience is presented here in ways that point to the potency of terms such as "alternative" and "emerging" for describing dimensions of the religious landscape of African American communities. It is hoped these essays raise useful questions concerning the study of African American religion and religious experience, and begin an important exchange between scholars of new religious movements and black religious studies. Such an exchange holds great promise and is long overdue.

ENDNOTES

[1] All these articles have been republished along with an Introduction as Part III, chapters 9 through 12 of Long's collected essays, in *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, 1999). This quotation framed the beginning of the first draft of the essay by Long found in this issue of *Nova Religio*. It was moved to the Introduction because it provides important context for Long's work, and the sensibilities that inform much of what is written in this symposium.

African American Religion in the United States of America: An Interpretative Essay[1]

Charles H. Long

ABSTRACT: This essay addresses the problematical nature of the meaning of religion as it is related to the formation and destiny of peoples of African descent in the United States. Moving beyond a narrow understanding of the nature of religion as expressed in much of Black Theology, for example, this essay proposes a "thick" and complex depiction of religion in the African American context through a recognition of its relationship to the contact and conquest that marked the modern world.

CHARACTERIZATIONS

Since the publication of Professor James Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* in 1969, there has been a steady publication of books and articles by him and his students defining African American religion within the orders of a Christian theology. These texts have been important in adding a theological dimension to the meaning of black cultural historical life. Before the advent of Black Theology, it was the tradition of African American sociologists undertaking the task of critique of American society who, in so doing, provided a meaningful structure for an ameliorative form for African American communities in the United States. As sociologists they operated out of an empirical epistemology and had little use for religious meaning except as an institutional and often a residual form of African American life.

While Black Theology hailed a new beginning for the study of the

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religion of African Americans in the United States, it was clear that from one point of view Black Theology was a Black Church Christian Theology. This raised a number of issues as it related to the ranges of black historical experience and its cultural religious life. In the first instance, black churches did not appear in North America until the latter decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth, and even then, in very selected regions of the United States. What of the religious life of African peoples in North America before this time? While black churches were often the center of social life for the community, by virtue of their ordering in terms of various Christian forms, all modes of black religion were not brought into the black church. In addition, we know from historical data that before Emancipation, black churches in the North often emerged from a prior organization of freed black persons, commonly known as African Societies.

Black Theology had to come to terms with the rise of African American Muslim communities and forms of Afrocentric meanings and communities in the United States. Furthermore, black theologians themselves found that they were increasingly turning to wider ranges of data for interpretation, e.g., slave narratives, black music traditions, rituals, literature, etc. Thus, the issue was whether the style and form of a Black Christian Theology were adequate for a profound understanding of the religious life of African peoples in North America.

Now given these wide ranges of data and methods, it is not easy to characterize in a precise manner the nature of African American religion in the United States. C. Eric Lincoln echoes this situation in his description of black religion. In one of his studies he says, "black religion is not simply white religion in blackface, neither is black religion a formal denomination with a structured doctrine." It is rather, says Lincoln,

> an attitude, a movement. . . . It represents the desire of Blacks to be self-conscious of black people about the meaning of their blackness and to search for spiritual fulfillment in terms of their understanding of themselves and their experience of their history. . . . Black religion, then, cuts across denominational, cult, and sect lines to do for black people what other religions have not done: to assume the black man's humanity, his relevance, his responsibility, his participation, and his right to see himself as the image of God.[2]

In a later work, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya present us with six dialectical models for an understanding of the black church—models which might be easily applied in the case of black religion. They are as follows: 1) the dialectic between the priestly and prophetic functions; 2) the dialectic between the other-worldly versus the this-worldly; 3) the dialectic between universalism and particularism; 4) the dialec-

tic between the communal versus the privatistic; 5) the dialectic between the charismatic versus the bureaucratic; and 6) the dialectic between resistance versus accommodation.[3]

We should consider the above remarks in light of David Wills' statement that, "The study of African American religious history still lacks an obvious entry point for persons seeking an obvious orientation to the field."[4] After stating the problematic of African American religious history, Wills goes on to suggest three models for the study of this religion. They are: 1) Pluralism and Toleration; 2) The Southern Encounter; and 3) The Encounter of Black and White from the Evangelical Wakening to the Present. It is obvious that much of the complex nature of African American religion is due not only to the peculiar situation of blacks within the culture of the United States, but equally to their formative meaning in the creation of the modern world itself. This accounts for Lincoln's statement that African American religion is a "movement" that cuts across denominations, cults, and sects. There is thus a very essential existential element in the nature of this religion. This accounts for the appearance of James Cone's initial work during the Civil Rights movement and within a context defined by that movement and the activities of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.

LEGACIES AND SOURCES

It is obvious that the problematical nature of African American religion is due to the fact of the enslavement of African peoples in North America. Slavery is an old human institution practiced by most of the ancient civilizations in various parts of the world. The slavery introduced in North America at this juncture of history was an anomaly. Even before the creation of the American Republic, the religious impulses of the Protestant Reformation expressed strong sentiments for the possibility that the human mode of being could define a meaning of self-determination that carried the meaning of freedom for ordinary persons. More than this was the advent of the American Republic through a revolution that stated its fundamental meaning in terms of the "birth of freedom" as coincidental with the founding of the Republic. There was, however, neither the eradication of the institution of slavery nor the emancipation of those enslaved. The American Republic at its moment of founding created the impossible dilemma of embracing and sustaining the institution of chattel slavery within a revolutionary democracy.

Chattel slavery is thus one of the general characteristics of the situation that defined and contained the meaning of Africans in the North American milieu. While being an institution legitimated in all parts of the United States at its inception, slavery was particularized in various regions of the country and differed in its relationship to the labor as

dictated by the environmental and economic motivations. Into the more general characteristics of slavery, several complex meanings and relationships emerged. Enslaved Africans had to learn the empirical and cultural languages and styles of those who owned them; they had to find ways to make use of and enhance whatever forms, techniques, and memories of their land of origin, and over time, they had to find ways of teaching and accepting newly-enslaved Africans within their slave communities. Sterling Stuckey has described the way in which enslaved Africans introduced newly-enslaved Africans into the North American community of Africans through the African ritual forms of the "ring shout." In this movement they created simultaneously a new form of African-ness while becoming Americans.[5]

Lawrence Jones coined the phrase, "they overheard the Gospel," in describing the reception of Christianity among the enslaved Africans. This eavesdropping was not, however, limited to the Gospel; it included the secret transmission of the entire American ideology of freedom, government, economics, etc. And in this secret hearing a new and different understanding of modernity was being transmitted. Thus there was forming not only a new American community among the slaves but another understanding and interpretation of America itself. On the specific level of religion, Albert Raboteau, Mechal Sobel, and Sylvia Frey have explored the actuality of this transmission and transformation of an American meaning among the enslaved.[6]

Because slaves, masters, and mistresses lived within the same spatial milieu and shared economic systems, they shared a rich communication. This communication was not on an egalitarian level, however, for the slave could hardly initiate and define the terrain of communicative exchanges. This fact has made for some confusion and given a sense of a common tradition stemming from the enslaved persons and their owners. Eugene Genovese, employing a Gramscian interpretation of hegemony, has portrayed this in terms of "The World the Slaves made," and Mechal Sobel as "The world they made together."[7] There was a kind of objective world created by the institution of slavery, but it was neither acknowledged nor known by the participants in the same manner. In the words of Ashis Nandy, within the slave system, regardless and in spite of the feelings of the participants, slaves and their owners had to remain, at best, "intimate enemies."

Overt and implicit violence was endemic to the institution of slavery, and though slave owners might haye among themselves found it necessary to limit and regularize this violence, the very threat of violence was the terror that underlay the system of slavery itself. Violence within the institution of slavery was legitimated when perpetrated by the owners but never legitimized if practiced by the slaves unless under direct orders from the owner, and then, never against a person or persons who were not slaves. Slaves knew that they could also undertake the use of

violence, and throughout the period of American enslavement there were instances of individual and collective violence against the slave systems by slaves. There are also several instances in which escaped slaves created their own maroon communities or took refuge with Native Americans.[8]

Enslaved Africans, forbidden to read or write, have not left an extensive written record. Access to their lives and experiences come by way of oral traditions that contain their testimony. I am using the term "testimony" as it has gained parlance in the works of Latina/o scholars. "Testimonio" means "to tell a personal story that contains a message from a surbordinated group involved in a political struggle"; it is experience as knowledge that motivates the telling and retelling of testimony.[9] For African Americans, these testimonies in the form of oral traditions bear witness to a meaning of time and space that has been hidden from the official ideological accounts of the story of the Republic.

One of the first and most extensive archives of these kinds of testimonials was that undertaken by the Works Progress Administration between 1936 and 1938. These consist of 194 interviews of former enslaved African Americans. John W. Blassingame has also compiled a volume of oral tradition of African Americans. In his introduction, Blassingame provides an excellent discussion concerning the critical and hermeneutical principles for understanding these testimonials.[10] Oral tradition and its testimonies become "sites of memory." The most general site of this memory for African Americans are those "places of terror"—spaces where through enslavement they came to know and experience this land. It is through stories and story-telling that these "memories" are re-membered and imagined as knowledge and resources for redemptive transformations. These memories play an important role in the work of many black novelists. We see this especially in Toni Morrison's novels and in Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*, as well as in his volumes of essays.

Black music was the other expression of the oral tradition as "testimonio." Whether from the "spirituals" or the "blues" traditions, this music and its musicians represent one of the most powerful and distinctive expressions of America as informed by the African American presence. The music not only speaks of the condition of Africans in the United States, it takes on social, psychological, and economic meanings within the wider culture of African Americans. John Lovell Jr.'s monumental study of the spirituals is an example of the impact of this music tradition. Miles Mark Fisher interpreted the spirituals as simultaneously expressing Christian meanings while sending subversive signals relating to escape from slavery. Douglas Daniel, working as a historian, has shown how the African American music tradition not only accompanied and in some cases preceded the migratory movements of blacks throughout the

country but also served equally as a mode of communication between musicians and disparate communities.[11]

REORIENTATION IN THE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RELIGION

If we follow closely C. Eric Lincoln's descriptive definition of black religion we are able to justify the ranges of data that contribute to its formulation. While the Christian denominational churches form a major and definitive meaning of black religion, black religion is not limited to this expression. This problem has been brought to light in a recent publication by Douglas R. Egerton. Egerton's work is a study of Gabriel Prosser's rebellion. While Egerton noted that several authors attributed Prosser's slave rebellion to Christian motivation, he could find no basis for any form of Christian interpretation in the impetus of Prosser. The interpreters had noted that there was a religious element and seriousness in the motivations of Prosser and thus attributed this element in an unwarranted manner to the Christian faith.[12]

In recent interpretation, Africa and the African meanings retained by the slaves have been seen as sources of the religious sentiment among African Americans. If, therefore, Prosser's motivations were religious, but not Christian, it seems that the African element is the only source remaining. Now, these two bases for the sources of the religious sentiment of the Africans enslaved in America have been seen as both dichotomous and simultaneous sources of the religion of African Americans. Instead of attempting to resolve this issue in the terms of the binary presented, it might prove salutary if we resituated the discussion.

First of all let us extract the meanings which might be gained from an examination of the term "religion" itself. Our word "religion" is from two Latin words, *"religio"* and *"religare."* The first meaning carries the sense of "seriousness," things done with gravity; the second meaning is the infinitive "to bind"; binding as the simple act of tying together, but on the social level, the acts, rituals and forms that bind together the exchanges of social life as in weddings, or those ritual acts and meanings that bind together a people or a nation. Whether we use either meaning, it is clear that these notions of religion conform to Lincoln's understanding of black religion. In other words, a religious dimension seems to be coincidental to the presence, sustaining, and expressive power of African Americans.

At this juncture it might be good for us to place the meaning of African American religion in the context of the modern *study* of religion. It is a well known observation that the *study* of religion is a "child of the Enlightenment." Two new sources of data fueled this new study and understanding of religion—the primitives and the "religions of the East" (the "Orientals"). The areas of the world peopled by those

falling into these categories were under increasing Western influence and dominance through colonialism, imperialism, and trade. The category "religion" was used to classify the cultural forms and practices of these new territories. The classification of the new forms of data under these categories gave rise to a new meaning of both the nature of the human and also of religion. Given the norm of reason as the hallmark of the Enlightenment, religion in general and the newer forms of data were placed under the sign of "unreason" or the non-rational. While the practice of religion and religious institutions remained as important modes of Western culture, they had, for the most part, lost their efficacious and normative meanings as the basis for the ordering of these societies. Religion from an Enlightenment point of view was distanced from the West in terms of time and space.

As the only nation coming into being out of the ideologies and norms of the Enlightenment, the United States of America presents us with a unique variation regarding the nature and meaning of religion. Whereas almost every other country in the world had some traditions that bound the people together as a unique entity, there was and has never been such a tradition in the United States, in other words, no *ancien regime*. This has meant that the American nation has had to have recourse to other modes of binding, and for most of its history, it has accepted the implicit notion that it is a nation bound together by the unity of the "white race." To be sure, the notion of a "white race" is vague and highly ambiguous, but it is nonetheless a highly guarded and intensely practiced meaning in the American Republic. This meaning of the religiosity of America is generally discussed under the rubric of "civil religion," though none of the proponents of an American civil religion have dealt with the issue of race as a part of its meaning.[13] Will Herberg's discussion raises the ethnic issue but finesses it within a discourse of religion. It is clear, however, from Herberg's work that neither African Americans, even though most of them would be classified as Protestant, nor Native Americans play any role in his formulations.

We must add this understanding of the religiosity of America as civil religion to the Christian Protestant traditions that emerged from the Reformation in the traditions of the Calvinists and the Wesleyans. Though these traditions do not define the nature of civil society in the United States, they are appealed to as the sources of moral discourses in the public realm. African Americans have engaged in discourses on both traditions through their appeal to the American Constitution and have equally been a part of the American denominational orders organizing churches in the Protestant traditions of most of the mainline Reformation traditions. Vis-à-vis the non-African American majority in the country, neither the Christian churches nor the U.S. Constitution have effected the inclusiveness embodied in their respective understandings of human community. So while these institutions are part and

parcel of the traditions of African Americans, they have been taken in a critical and prophetic manner rather than as descriptive of the ideals that they enunciate.

African Americans in the United States thus fall into an anomalous position. They are a necessary part of the constituting and formative sense of the American culture and nation, and precisely because they are, they are seen as apart, in the sense of apartheid, from how the majority of Americans understand themselves. There has therefore emerged in African American culture a critical history of protest and agitation regarding their legitimacy and rights as American citizens. One might say that this history often expresses the merger of a kind of African American civil religion within the confines of Christianity. James Cone's Black Theology is the latest example of the meaning of this amalgam of traditions. There are two fundamental questions concerning African Americans in the United States: the first has to do with whether the American status quo can or ever will acknowledge African Americans and their traditions as a primordial structure of the American reality. The second issue is this: to what extent should those who have endured a history of systematic and legitimized oppression wish to become a part of and continue such a system? This raises the possibility of an alternative.

In addressing the issue of alternatives I wish to turn to the African American intellectual, W.E.B. DuBois, for I perceive in his life and work a more comprehensive vision of African Americans in the United States from a world historical view, without losing the concreteness of their history and experience in the United States. He explored a range of meanings and situations, Africa and pan-Africanism, the nature of U.S. Constitution and law, America and its relationship to Europe and the world, etc. As one of the first trained social scientists in the United States, he carried out social scientific researches on almost every form of the social life of African Americans.

For this transitional move I wish to concentrate on his third book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. His first book, which appeared as the first volume of the Harvard American History Series in 1896, is entitled, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America from 1683-1870*. His second published work was *The Philadelphia Negro*, published in 1899. *Souls* appeared in 1903. Even for an accomplished intellectual and writer the text reveals, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, the mode of a "first naivete." It is a text about beginnings; it is not a text of the disciplines. It refers to those beginnings that define the archaism of the modern period through the tragic beauty of black bodies, the dilemma of the contact of peoples, the pathos and hypocrisy of evil, the aesthetics of tragedy, and the economies of reason and materialities. It is clear that this text centers on the situation of African Americans in the United States since Reconstruction. The references to Booker T. Washington, Alexander Crummel, Fisk University, and so on, make this clear. Yet,

given all this specificity through explicit reference and contextual stylistics, DuBois places this situation into a wider framework. In chapter two of *The Souls*, he states, "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, the relation of the darker races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and islands of the sea."[14] Again in the preface to the Jubilee edition titled "Fifty Years After," he writes,

> But today I see more clearly than yesterday that, back of the problem of race and color, lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements it; and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance, and disease of the majority of their fellowmen; that to maintain this privilege men have waged war, until today war tends to become universal and continuous, and the excuse for this war continues largely to be color and race."[15]

So, on the one hand, while DuBois concentrates on the specific situation of the African American people and presence in the United States, he is able to discern that this people and their presence constitute a much deeper issue than defined by race or the political parameters represented by the U.S. Constitution and its compromising history of evasion in the face of the issue of human freedom.

From another perspective, DuBois' text should be read alongside the other "mythological texts" of modernity such as those of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. For the most part these philosophical texts also posit some sort of primordial human past, but in abstract terms. DuBois' text speaks of a real beginning of modernity in the concrete temporal-spatial events of the Atlantic world from the fifteenth century to the present as expressed in the African slave trade and the ensuing conquest and destruction of peoples and cultures.

> The Atlantic world that begins with the commencement of the voyages of Christopher Columbus was initially seen in continuity with the worlds of the Mediterranean. While the religious style of this world was at that time expressed through the Latin meaning of the Catholic faith, even this style was being punctuated by the technological feat of the voyages themselves and the new geographical knowledge of lands and peoples. The full expression of the Atlantic world was under the aegis of a Protestant orientation stemming from the Protestant Reformation. The watchword of this reforming tendency was "human freedom." While the Mediterranean world might be seen as an incubator for the creation of gods and religion—those of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Jews, Christians, Manichees, and Zoroastrians—the Atlantic world, even in its religious modes of Protestantism, expresses strictures on the lively exuberance of the religious life.

The Atlantic world introduces us to the globalization of the meaning of humanity. It creates and intensifies the relationships among and

between all the peoples of the planet. The Atlantic is, however, not a revealer of deities, seers, and prophets; it is not under the sign of revelation but of freedom, civilization, and rational orders. This world manifests no regard for the layered thickness of time. It is a world justified by the epistemologies of Kant and Descartes, the English empiricists, and the ethical economies of Adam Smith and Karl Marx. The world of the Atlantic lives under the rhetoric and mark of freedom—a freedom that was supposed to banish the specter of the ancient gods and reveal a new and deeper structure of the meaning of human existence. The Atlantic reveals no "soul-stuff," no primordial ordering of time and space.[16]

Allow me to restate why I introduced DuBois at this point. I am not attempting to create a "religion of DuBois," nor am I asserting that DuBois' formulations are the key or answer to the modern religious situation. I am saying that his text is one of the first to explore an alternative ordering of the world that does not yield either to the temptations of binaries and separations or to the false illusions of continuities. DuBois recognizes that in the midst of those continuities that offered a more inclusive meaning of freedom in the modern world, there were fundamental and almost ontological discontinuities that moved towards another resolution. In other words, those who were oppressed in the modern period cannot hope that they will experience liberation in the terms of these continuities of freedom. In the case of the Africans enslaved in the Americas, they must go "back into the water" for a reorientation. They must realize that the slave and the enslavers sailed on the same boat, but they were making radically different journeys and defining radically different destinies. These fundamental differences arise because they are "on the same boat," and one must come to terms with them in this locus.

While the meaning of the continuity of freedom is expressed in America as the formation of an American "self" from the time of the first English settlements to the present, DuBois raises the issue of the "soul" as a critique, alternative, and new creative possibility for this new time and new space. And he discerns that this new ordering must perforce come to terms with the legacies of that voyage across the Atlantic—the meaning of Africa and the meaning of the Americas. DuBois' use of the veil in *Souls* is indicative of a subtle meaning that he is setting forth; in a fundamental sense, the veil is the caul which often covers a child at birth. In the legacy of African Americans, this is a portentous sign of something amazing or even wise. In other places the veil describes the falseness of separation between the two races, and at other times it highlights the permeable osmotic nature of this separateness. It is the travail of black folk that they must of necessity live through this situation and through the various meanings of the veil come to terms with the embryonic birth of the "soul."

Now while the American political and national culture is permeated with the rhetoric of freedom—which befits a country founded on a revolution—enslaved Africans did not experience this openness of American freedom. So while African Americans have often made common cause in these rhetorical expressions, it is clear that another meaning of freedom is being enunciated in the traditions of those who have been enslaved. David Brion Davis puts it this way in his discussion of Hegel's understanding of freedom and bondage:

> It was Hegel's genius to endow lordship and bondage with such a rich resonance of meanings that the model could be applied to every form of physical and psychological domination. And the argument precluded the simple and sentimental solution that all bondsmen should become masters, and all masters, the bondsmen. Above all, Hegel bequeathed a message that would have a profound impact on future thought, especially as Marx and Freud deepened the meaning of the message: that we can expect nothing from the mercy of God or from the mercy of those who exercise worldly lordship in His or other names; that man's true emancipation, whether physical or spiritual, must always depend on those who have endured and overcome some form of slavery.[17]

Davis' statement is congruent in content and tone with the way in which I see a profound religious dimension in the work of DuBois—with one exception. Those who have in the modern period overcome some form of slavery were opened to another and deeper experience of modernity than those who through the illusions of continuities of freedom debased others. From the intensity of the experiences themselves, or through remembrances and recollections, they experienced other forms of power beyond those of human agency, and therefore they are convinced that neither the gods nor the godlessness of the world of the oppressors can be efficacious in the name of freedom. The gods and the godlessness of the oppressive traditions must be reinterpreted from other perspectives, and such reinterpretations should bring about a new hermeneutical and epistemological situation.

RELIGION, MATERIALITIES, AND CULTURES OF CONTACT

Two basic paradigms lie behind the construction of the modern Western self. On the one hand is a conception of the self based upon Descartes' famous, "*cogito ergo sum.*" On the other hand is Max Weber's explanation of the relationship of Protestantism to capital accumulation. In the Cartesian formula there are two forms of the self as "I"—the "I" of the "*cogito*" that in a miraculous "sha-zam" manner becomes the "I" of the "*sum.*" One of the most recent interpretations of the Cartesian

formula is that of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur sees the first ego of the *cogito* as an expression of the self in a moment of reflection; it is the "I think" which is the positing of the self as not dependent upon any other object in its modality of a thinking subject. This is a self that cannot express, show, embody, or admit the matter upon which it depends; it is empty and abstract. For the self to be shown, it must reappropriate other objects and substances so that it can become an existential being in a life-world.[18]

The second paradigm is that set forth by Max Weber regarding the beginnings of capitalism. Weber attributes the rise of capitalism to a form of Reformed theology prevalent in new communities in the Atlantic world. In Weber's view, Calvin's doctrine of predestination, allied with Luther's doctrine of "calling," led these Calvinist communities to practice a form of what he has called "inner worldly asceticism." Luther's notion of calling gave dignity to all vocations, thus bestowing prestige to all ordinary work. While acknowledging the dignity of ordinary work, Calvin's doctrine of predestination made it clear that no works, whether ordinary or extraordinary, counted towards one's salvation. Thus one is told to work with diligence, but at the same time one can not expect one's works, however noble, to play any part in one's ultimate salvation. This led to the accumulation of surplus resources, the basis for capital investment.[19]

Both of these paradigms locate a meaning of the "self" as a form of inwardness that must then negotiate with a world that is "out there." This "world out there" is necessary for the manifestation and showing of the self, but it does not partake of its inner constitution. This is one of the primary meanings of selfhood that has been evoked within the interstices of the creation of the Atlantic world economy of mercantilism and capitalism. What is clear here is that, however the self may be constituted, it is dependent on things, forms, modes, matter—stuff—that it does not create. In the case of the Atlantic world, one of those forms upon which a European American self depended was the bodies of Africans transported as chattel slaves into the New World as the basis for the accumulation of wealth and resources for the mercantile and capitalistic form of production. One can imagine the meaning of "freedom" for this form of a self in light of any notion of god or limits to the autonomous inwardness, privacy, and purity that was the essence of its mode of being.

I referred above to the fact that on the slave ships were Europeans and Africans, two human groups on the same ships but making different voyages. And these different voyages had to do with the very constitution of a meaning of the human within this time/space of the voyage as a passage into another form of human meaning. For the most part, the European enslavers define these voyages in the language of discoveries, new opportunities, ventures. In other words, while a difference is

defined between the world of Europe and the Americas, such novelty is muted by the practical and ideological meanings of continuity. There are no fundamental experiences of discontinuity. Indeed, they have characterized this time period in continuity with their own past as "the modern age," or modernity.

I am raising the issue of religion again in light of a new beginning—a beginning that also defines the hiatus between the old and the new as experienced within the holds of the slave ships in passage. Those enslaved within the hold were literally "entangled subjects/objects."[20] Those many slave-ships and their cargoes in the Atlantic Ocean mark a profound *site of memory* for the modern world. It is from this site that another perspective on the worlds of the Americas, Europe, and Africa may be gained. The entangled subjects/objects—the slavers, the enslaved, the formations of personhoods, theories of exchange, and ideologies of freedom and religion—are all intertwined within this entanglement. The world of modernity has only interpreted this site from the point of view of the enslavers, those who were in charge of the slave ships; this is the case whether the discourses were pro- or anti-slavery. DuBois' double consciousness as portrayed in *Souls* carries with it the vestiges of this site as a space of terror within the heart of the modern world of democratic values and ideologies of freedom. Making use of a religious metaphor in referring to the slave trade, he says, "they descended into Hell."[21]

What was being articulated as the nature and meaning of modernity was a world dominated by the West that overlooked, avoided, obscured, lied about, and denied the dependence of modernity on the *entanglement*, the fact that from those dreaded voyages out of which the world of modernity was a-borning, other and new realities were simultaneously taking place. African American religion must be placed within this wider context and while the specificity of the situation in the United States will always be the starting point for any interpretation, the larger reality is one inclusive of the religions and cultures of other enslaved and oppressed in the Americas but also as DuBois put it in *Souls*, "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line." That color-line is global, for the paradigm of the Atlantic world was extended and adapted to all parts of the world.

The conventional Western periodization of temporality as Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance, Modern, and here of late, as post-modern, is the designation of the history of the world as a prelude to the "rise of the West." The modern period is the only period in which most of the prominent participants had little or no say in the creation of the world that they had to inhabit and were known through the categories placed upon them by the various "sciences" of the West. While it makes rhetorical and practical sense to speak of this period as "modern," it is in fact the global period of cultural contact throughout the world. Instead of

speaking of the "postmodern" world as simply an internal critique of the "world that the West made" by and through the Western tradition and its categories, the contemporary period might better be called the "time of cultural contact." This designation would allow for a full critical discussion regarding all parties to the cultures that came into being over the last five hundred years. In other words, voices of the experience of cultural formations, values, and meanings can no longer be dominated by the discourses of the Western sciences. This does not mean an outright rejection of the West or its discourses, but it does mean that all discourses out of those cultures formed in various parts of the world over the last half-century, including Western culture itself, must be placed within the same arena, thus rejecting the Western temporal ordering of the world. This would bring about a very different discussion of all those meanings, images, and symbols related to what we call religion. African American religion as well as the religious life in all parts of the world would then assume another status and quality. Those cultures on one side of what DuBois defined as the "color-line" have, during the period of cultural contact, come to their own critical and creative meanings of religion and the religious life, and thus have come to very different assessments of their status and value. It is from this perspective that I read DuBois' *Souls* as a religious text stemming from the global cultures of contact. These religious meanings are not throwbacks to a former age, nor are they expressions of ignorance; they are often alternate perspectives on the nature of the human species and their world.

The language of *Souls* employs what Ann Kibbey has called "material shapes of language."[22] Kibbey's work shows how the rhetorical use of the material shapes of language were used polemically to incite the Puritans to violence against the Pequots as well as against Puritan dissenters such as Anne Hutchison. Material shapes in language refer to the rhetorical usage of the figurative and nonfigurative in discourse. Thus a discourse shows a correlation between the linguistic form, the material fact of speech, and the relationship between the positioning of words and the acoustical sounds as necessary for the production of a distinct meaning.

In DuBois' usage, the material shapes of language create a position beyond the binariness of race and racial discourses in American cultural languages. Such a language does not, however, move to an abstract universalism; it remains very concrete and employs this very concreteness to probe and move beyond dualism. The language is critical but not polemical; it repositions the issues such that they move beyond both the polemical egotistical explanatory scientific modes to a fresh and novel beginning point. And it is precisely through the specific concreteness of his language that the material shapes appear.

Now through the material shapes of language, DuBois nuances and echoes the materialities of the Atlantic world—the world of slavery, slave ships and enslavers, as well as the world of democratic values and

freedom. He will not, however, allow the bright promises of freedom to obliterate the horrendous terror that underlay the creation of the Atlantic world. It has been this world that has been denied and unspoken and unacknowledged. Any meaning of freedom or self or religion that does not take serious account of the events of formation of the Atlantic world will remain illusory. My continuing research in this area entails the exploration of an alternative epistemology that would resituate the meaning of modern "economy" and economic theory through a reflection upon the simultaneity of humans as chattel (matter) and bearers of souls. This aspect of the meaning of economic theory has been overlooked by all modern economic theorists. It is directly related to the religious meaning of fetish and fetishism (purported to have been derived from Africa as the earliest form of religion) and to the carry-over of this meaning into the form and meaning of matter as commodity.

ENDNOTES

[1] This article should be seen in continuity with earlier studies I have devoted to this topic. In "Perspectives for a Study of Afro-American Religion in the United States," I began an outline of some of the basic elements that had to be treated in any study of this religious orientation. In the William James Lecture at Harvard, "The Oppressive Element in Religion and the Religions of the Oppressed," I delineated the difference between religious dependence and limit, and historical oppression and domination. I showed how any notion of civil religion in the United States must of necessity deal with the meaning of enslaved Africans and the institution of slavery in America to have any validity, in an article entitled "Civil Rights/Civil Religion: Visible People and Invisible Religion." All of these articles are reprinted in *Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, 2d ed. (Aurora CO: The Davies Group, 1999). See also my bibliographical essay, "African American Religion in the United States," in *The African American Experience*, ed. Arvah E. Strickland and Robert E. Weems (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2001).

[2] C. Eric Lincoln, ed., *The Black Church Experience in Religion*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1977), 3.

[3] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), see chapter 1, *passim.*

[4] Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau, *African American Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

[5] See Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundation of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[6] See the following: Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: "The Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Mechal Sobel,

Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[7] Eugene Genovese's work, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974) is a bit disingenuous, since prior to this work he published another volume, *The World the Slaveholders Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971). Taken together these two works set up a binary that is not carried through in the later work. One can only support such a binary by giving legitimacy to the enforced silence of the oppressed.

[8] See Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1973). The term "maroon" refers to fugitive slaves who existed in a self-contained communities, often in the mountains or other hard-to-reach locations. Maroon communities successfully fought off slavers and maintained their independence.

[9] Teresa Longo, ed., *Pablo Neruda and the U.S. Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2002) , xxiii and 124-25.

[10] John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1977).

[11] See John Lovell Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1972); Miles Mark Fisher, *Negro Slave Songs in the United States* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1963); and Douglas Henry Daniels, *Lester Leaps In: The Life and Times of Lester 'Pres' Young* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002). For an overall history of black music see Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983).

[12] Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel Prosser's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1802 & 1803* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

[13] For discussions of civil religion, see Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* Vol. 96, No. 1, (Winter, 1967), 1-21; Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1960). See also Catherine Albanese's discussion of civil religion in *America, Religion and Religions*, 3d ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1999).

[14] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, The Jubilee Edition (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1973), 13.

[15] DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, xi.

[16] See Charles H. Long's, "Passage and Prayer," in *The Courage to Hope: From Black Suffering to Human Redemption*, ed. Quinton Hosford Dixie and Cornel West (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 15-16.

[17] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 564.

[18] See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).

[19] See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1958). Debate and controversy have surrounded Weber's bold thesis since its publication. The scope of this article does not allow for discussion of this aspect of his work. Two of the most trenchant critiques are found in Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. I, trans.

by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Urizen Books, 1978), and Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949).

[20] The phrase is taken from the title of Nicholas Thomas' book, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[21] W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 727.

[22] Ann Kibbey, *The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism: A Study of Rhetoric, Prejudice, and Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

A Relational Concept of Race in African American Religious Thought

Victor Anderson

ABSTRACT: This essay is a critical exploration of the ways that race is being constructed in the contemporary climate of postmodern philosophical discourse. The author seeks to forge an ongoing conversation among black philosophers and African American theologians around race in each discourse. Race is understood by the author as a deep symbol of Western culture that is paralleled to the primitive/civilization symbols that have structured Western intercultural encounters with African peoples. The essay proceeds by developing the concept of race as a deep symbol, drawing on the work of Edward Farley. It explicates how race is debated in contemporary black philosophy by focusing on Kwame Anthony Appiah's and Lucius Outlaw's conceptualizations. By turning to the hermeneutical theory of Charles H. Long, the essay attempts to construct a relational theory of race that synthesizes both Appiah's and Outlaw's perspectives and then connects the relational theory of race to black religion and theology.

In this essay, I hope to encourage conversation between two African American studies. Each field has developed relatively independent of the other in American universities and seminaries. Yet the independence of each discourse has also produced great distortions about each other's practices. However, the impact of postmodern thinking in philosophy and religion is testing the cogency of both disciplines. It is testing their distinctive contribution to American education and, in particular, the role of racial discourse in black philosophy and African American theology.[1] I look at race from a point of view that I believe will advance the intellectual interests of black philosophy and African American theology. Before discussing race as a "deep symbol" of Western culture, I briefly describe the historical relation of black phi-

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 7, Issue 1, pages 28–43, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2003 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to: Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.

losophy to black theology. Next, I examine Edward Farley's conception of "deep symbols." I argue that race might be best understood in line with Farley's criteria, although he does not himself make this connection. I then discuss the views of Kwame Anthony Appiah and Lucius Outlaw on the role of race in black philosophy. In the final section, I turn to Charles H. Long's hermeneutics predicated on his understanding of signs, symbols and significations. I use Long to suggest that the ambiguities of race in black philosophy are commensurate with the relativity of race in African American theology. Long's hermeneutics help in understanding the relativity of race, mapping its grotesqueries, and synthesizing race into a larger unity of life. Such a hermeneutics, I argue, is an appropriate possibility in both black philosophy and African American theology.

Black Liberation Theology and black philosophy are two insurgent movements in American intellectual history.[2] Each has impacted the ways that theology and philosophy have been done over the past thirty years in American universities, colleges, and seminaries. Yet the relation of African American theology to black philosophy has been relatively unexplored by African American theologians and philosophers. Suspicion and distortions abound among both groups of scholars. From the side of black philosophy, black theology was viewed as insufficiently critical of Western oppressive ideologies, including Christian theology. Some required a more rigorous Marxist ideology, while other black philosophers turned to Sartrean existentialism or black humanism for critically estimating meaning and value as academics.[3]

Early in the emergence of Black Theology, there was an initial exchange of ideas from black philosophers and theologians. However, black theologians quickly rejected the scrutiny of their project by black philosophers. They insisted that philosophers had not liberated themselves from the oppressive canons of rationality inscribed on black academic minds by the white philosophical canon. Therefore, African American academic theologians have paid little attention to black academic philosophy. Notwithstanding the relative detachment that both communities of scholars have enjoyed, African American theologians and philosophers hold great interest in criticizing the social, political, economic, educational, and religious conditions that have spawned modern racism which permeates all American mediating institutions, including the university. What opens black philosophy and African American theology to conversation is the problem of race and its significations in the late twentieth century.

RACE AS A DEEP SYMBOL

Conscious of the brutal effects of racism, slavery, and African colonization, many African American religious thinkers have tried to tran-

scend the demonic legacies of racism with a philosophy of religion that is constructed on the abstract universality of a de-racialized humanism.[4] Raising up "The Beloved Community of Humanity" as the controlling symbol of their religious philosophy, African American religious philosophers sought to disempower race as a defining category or symbol in religious metaphysics and ontology. Notwithstanding how formidable "The Beloved Community of Humanity" has been as a critical principle in African American religious thought, in our postmodern moment, its constructive possibilities are profoundly challenged by another ascending symbol of our times, namely, *Différence.*

Despite these prior attempts to define philosophical thinking by abstract universality, unity, and humanistic assumptions, I happen to think that race is an unavoidable symbol in critical religious thinking, even among those of us whose thinking is centered on such symbols as difference, embodiment, and particularity. I suggest that *race* may function as a deep symbol in metaphysical, political, social, moral, and religious thinking. It has this standing not only among Western European thinkers, but it also seems to function as a deep symbol among African American intellectuals. What does it mean to regard race as a deep symbol within African American critical religious thinking? In responding to this question, I turn briefly (unfortunately all too briefly) to an essay entitled, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* by the North American systematic theologian, Edward Farley.[5]

Farley's talk of deep symbols is located within the currents of postmodern life. For him, the postmodern signifies a social context in which many traditional societal norms, values, and institutions are in disarray, lacking contemporary consensus on regulative ideals that may function today as deep symbols. By deep symbols, Farley means words of power which "constrain and guide" persons in their various negotiations with postmodern life.[6] To be sure, Farley is aware that such words or symbols are not the conventions of any one institution such as religion, law, politics, science, etc. Nevertheless, they remain human conventions. They arise from the intersubjective and interhuman depth structures of human communities. They function as deeply-rooted categories of social meaning within our increasing, changing and developing stock of knowledge.

Deep symbols are so basic that one almost always feels them to be a priori, or at least, one is tempted to regard them as such. But they are historical constructs. As Farley warns, they are so basic that their "taken-for-granted" qualities often conceal their elusive qualities and ambiguities.[7] Deep symbols have at least four characteristics, says Farley. They function normatively insofar as they are regulative ideals. They enchant insofar as they keep society open to mystery. They are fallible insofar as they are vulnerable to historical change and corruptibility. And they are located in a master narrative that reflexively identifies and defines social

action in human communities.[8] According to Farley, deep symbols "can rise and empower, and they can lose their power and disappear."[9]

Among Farley's candidates for deep symbols are education, beauty, reality, rights, nature, freedom, community, and justice.[10] Noticeably absent are nation and race. The absence of these symbols is curious given Farley's formal account of deep symbols. For to qualify as a deep symbol, the word must formally have the quality of signifying a value or a set of values "by which a community understands itself, from which it takes its aims, and to which it appeals as canons of cultural criticism."[11] Surely, both nation and race meet these formal requirements. Race certainly seems to meet these requirements in African American philosophical and religious thinking. As a deep symbol, race has a duplicity that signifies cultural solidarity among groups of people, provides conceptual possibilities for social self-definition, and offers possibilities for individual transcendence within the community.

However, I think that the omission of race from Farley's constellation of deep symbols is no oversight. Rather, I take it that some pre-commitment on his part to a set of humanistic assumptions prohibits race from functioning as a deep symbol in philosophical and theological construction. I suspect that the erasure lies in Farley's respect for the human encounter where:

> [H]uman beings relate to each other, not merely as functionaries in a preprogrammed bureaucracy, but in mutual perceptions of their vulnerability, needs, pathos, possibilities, and mystery. In the sphere of relation human beings continue to experience mutual obligation, guilt and resentment, gratitude, limitations on their autonomy, and mutual activities of creativity. From such relations are born notions of personhood, justice, mutual obligation, and even truth and reality.[12]

One notes that it is not so much Farley's humanism that precludes race from functioning as a deep symbol. Rather, its omission is an inference from his insight into the interhuman sphere. Farley finds race to be dangerously oriented toward forms of totality in which "death camps, genocidal policies and events, malicious torture, and cynical nihilism" cut off the interhuman appeal.[13]

As a moral and philosophical theologian, I am sympathetic to Farley's judgment about such symbols as nation and race. Indeed, they are two of the most idolatrous symbols of human cultures. However, I think that for African American intellectuals, the suggestion of bracketing them is a cognitive feat near unimaginable. From my point of view, it is in embodied relations signified by these symbols that recognition arises not only of the resemblances but also of the differences among the human beings encountered in the interhuman relation. Moreover, such recognition of others is trained and nurtured in human communities

through myths, stories, lore, songs, and genealogies of ethnic and racial descent. Descent symbols therefore contribute to the stock of knowledge by which the symbolic universe of human situated lives is understood and negotiated. In the Western Christian theological tradition, for instance, the universal appeal of divine grace, redemption, love, and peace is not made to bodiless human entities or to faceless, de-racial or non-ethnic others (if such things were imaginable). According to this religious tradition, these divine gifts are extended to the nations, to the peoples of the earth, and to the kingdoms of this world. For Christian theologians, the power of the divine to transform the miseries of the human condition arises among situated selves who are embodied spatially, temporally, and historically.

I am cognizant of the ways in which symbols such as race and nation can be totalized. They can distort our understanding of the many ways that human identities are influenced by a constellation of other symbols such as individuality, freedom, and openness. Therefore, I want to keep a critical eye on the idolatrous tendencies of these symbols. Nevertheless, borrowing a term from Theodore Adorno, I cannot escape the *Sachlichkeit,* that is, the facticity of human relations, practices, and cultural activities that are signified by the symbols of race, nation, peoples, kingdoms, tribes, and tongues. Without repeating the more lengthy discussion of the grotesque that I put forward elsewhere, I regard race to be a grotesque symbol.[14]

The grotesque recovers and leaves unresolved basic sensibilities, such as attraction and repulsion or pleasure and pain, which are evoked by the symbol. The cognitive and moral non-resolution of the symbol renders it ambiguous and duplicitous. Nevertheless, the unresolved tensions evoked by the symbol leave open possibilities for creatively taking up the symbol, evoking innovation while resisting essentialistic reductions. Rather, the grotesque symbol plays on the absurd and sincere, the comical and tragic, the estranged and familiar, the satirical and playful, and normalcy and abnormalcy. When race and nation are taken as grotesque symbols, they not only evoke all of these ambiguities, they also fall under Farley's fallibility principle. As a deep symbol, race is relative and open to corruption. Inasmuch as deep symbols creatively constrain and guide human practices, they may also condition the possibility of totality. In this regard, Farley writes:

> As instruments of corrupted power, deep symbols can mirror the society's stratification of privilege. . . . Thus, the deep symbols can be so framed as to advance the privileged members and suppress the voice of the unprivileged. They still may function as deep values and ideals, but in those ideas lurk racism, the disenfranchising of women, the maintenance of social policies that favor an existing social elite.[15]

In this essay, I am not interested in defining race (indeed, the very idea of defining a symbol!). Here, I am mindful of Ludwig Wittgenstein's disdain for Frazer's *Golden Bough* and his admonition that when confronted by the mysteries of religion, one would do better to describe them and not explain away their power. Therefore, with regard to the symbol race, my task is to disclose its ambiguity, tracking its effects on black philosophy and suggesting its constructive possibilities for an African American religious thought and theology.

TWO ASSESSMENTS OF RACE IN BLACK PHILOSOPHY

In the United States, the debate over black philosophy has been going on for approximately 30 years.[16] Behind the debates are historically provocative questions: What is black philosophy? Who are its representatives? What is its canon of literature? What are its constitutive problems? To my mind, that persons ask such questions means that black philosophy is something for which an argument has to be made in support. A number of African and African American philosophers have discussed both historical and contemporary denials of black philosophy. I do not want to review this discussion here. However, I can present a summary of competing claims.

From a historical perspective, many European philosophers have argued that people of African descent are intellectually incapable of producing philosophical discourse. Here, one only has to recall the judgment of David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Jefferson.[17] To be sure, as African and African American intellectuals responded critically to the sentiments expressed by these thinkers, many did so in terms provided by the critics themselves. This has led more contemporary thinkers to argue that even if people of African descent were capable of producing a black philosophy, such thinking appears to mirror Western European thought rather than enunciating anything distinctively black. As they are stated above, both kinds of objections to black philosophy are instances of question begging. They make sense only if one already operates with an unquestionable definition of what philosophy is and agree on what the "essence" or "nature" of philosophical thinking entails. Given persons' peculiar conceptions of philosophy, negative critics of black philosophy deny the very idea of philosophical thinking.

I think that the more serious and interesting questions of black philosophy come from African and African American thinkers who operate out of the postmodern recognition of difference. Philosophy is by nature particular. Therefore, appeals to universal standards are based on the particulars of the particular, barring their being set aside altogether in light of difference. The particulars of the particular capture the gaze of the postmodern critic. In this regard, two philosophers are

worth discussing at some length: Kwame Anthony Appiah and Lucius Outlaw. I will start with Appiah's position.

In *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Appiah puts forward the position that race is an illusion. It is predicated on categories invented by the European mind to serve only European intellectual purposes.[18] His argument is simple enough, but its consequences are complex. Appiah understands that, as a symbol, race signifies no simple, concrete social relation. However, his primary criticism is that it can mean almost any thing to any number of people. It can signify biological determinants, social arrangements, a shared ancestry, or cultural specificity. He faults African American thinkers such as Alexander Crummell and W.E.B. DuBois for making race an empirical fact, that is, something that can be understood historically. But what is the historical reality that race brings to light? It cannot be color—there are just too many shades; it cannot be tribe—there are just too many families to try to come to terms with; the historical reality cannot be language—there are too many languages; and it cannot be a common culture—there are just too many differences among African people and people of the African diaspora.

According to Appiah, race may exist, but only as a rationalization of European cultural particularisms. It exists for ideological purposes. However, all that Appiah means here is that the category, race, when properly understood, is as arbitrary as are notions of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the like. Each of these words designate a land mass that shows essential or pervasive "traits" among those who inhabit these geographical spaces. Appiah thinks that such talk flies against any honest empirical study of human societies. When he examines W. E.B. DuBois's great essay, "The Conservation of the Races," he suggests that there is nothing to conserve except DuBois' own wishes, desires, and situated cultural longings. The problem is that DuBois attempts to make race an essential quality of human existence. Rather, it is only a concession to a socio-biological ontology that falls apart when its propositions are tested by genuine difference. Appiah explains that

> if we could have traveled through Africa's many cultures in those years—from the small groups of Bushman hunter-gatherers, with their stone-age materials, to the Hausa kingdoms, rich in worked metals—we should have felt in every place profoundly different impulses, ideas, and forms of life.[19]

Appiah recognizes that racial ideology exists. He also recognizes that it is a complex ideology that with every critical challenge expands its differentiating postulates from mere physicalism to include moral and cultural differentials. He does not think that all who appeal to race are themselves malicious in intention. However, he suggests that many

have in mind some forms of moral and social solidarity, which are worth pursuing in and for themselves. Nevertheless, he argues that because such moral actions are hard to garner agreement among people without some external constraint, many feel compelled to coerce or harness their moral affiliations and social sympathy by appealing to race. On his argument, no matter what moral intentions one may have in arguing for the conservation of the races, Appiah thinks that race ideology does not only distort the real particulars of particular people, it is also cognitively unsuccessful. He says that "the truth is that there are no races; there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask race to do for us."[20]

Like Appiah, Lucius Outlaw begins *On Race and Philosophy* with an account of the situation.[21] However, Outlaw's situation is focused on his experience as an African American, living in the South, educated under Jim Crow, and trained in professional philosophy at Fisk and Boston College in the 1960s and early 1970s. Having had his own racial consciousness awakened by the Black Power Movement (and its new Black Aesthetic rationalizations), he was led to question the relevance of black philosophers to these movements.

As did many African American intellectuals trained in American humanities departments, Outlaw also adopted the Enlightenment's liberal humanism that values freedom, self-autonomy, and moral action justified by the weight of uncompromising justice and reason and not by the coercion of race. However, he also suggests that such philosophical thinking is highly unrealistic in a social-cultural life-world defined by vicious racism and all of its absurdities in American life and thought. He would come to see black philosophy as a systematic discipline that tries to make sense of America's racist realities. The Black Philosophy Project was launched by African American philosophers to establish a place for themselves professionally, socially and intellectually in ways that take account of their new black consciousness.[22] It would also require the forming of a black philosophical canon and provide norms for how black philosophers would respond to and focus on the concerns and interests of black people.[23] For the project, philosophy is not just a task of reading a canon but also an active engagement with the concerns of black life. Outlaw would come to see the task of black philosophy as thinking "carefully and clearly about how we might resolve America's most persistent dilemma."[24]

For Outlaw, race and ethnicity are two of the most pervasive aspects of life in America. "That there are different races and ethnic groups, that each person is a member of one or more races and ethnicities, is taken for granted by most people."[25] Moreover, Outlaw is also prepared to take race as "a real, constitutive aspect of determinate populations of human beings."[26] What he means by "constitutive" in this previous sentence is the "about which" or the "facticity" on which black philosophical discourse turns. It is here, then, that he returns to an old argument

for an evolutionary, socio-biological account of the races, indeed, returning to DuBois' "The Conservation of the Races."

In summary, Outlaw argues that we need not reject the old notion of race as signifying "social-natural kinds" of populations; we need not accept the view that there are pure races—populations whose biological, moral, and social traits are absolutely determinate of a particular population so that a group is essentially differentiated from others. Nevertheless, he suggests that we may still be warranted in using race as "a group-identifying or group-characterizing term."[27] According to Outlaw

> it is not race that determines the cultural productivity of any group or that determines the moral significance of racial groups: that is to say, determines the regard we should have for racial and ethnic groups and their members, in themselves and in relation to one another.[28]

Rather, it is in the fundamental associations, affections, loyalties and attachments that bind groups of populations together, that race comes to function positively in our social stock of knowledge and participate in the symbolic construction of our social and cultural realities.

According to Outlaw, recognizing that race is a social symbol that contributes to a social ontology requires some biological determination on which to ground its cognitive significance. That is, without such a factuality, race, like gender, is rendered only a social fiction, an illusion, or a social desire that is incapable of justifying the kinds of loyalties, affections, and obligations which groups of people owe to each other because they hold "natural" affiliations. He grounds his defense of race discourse on the evolutionary and human sciences from which race forms the logic of a social ontology where "the racial and/or ethnic life-world provides the resources and nurturing required for the development, even, of individual talent and accomplishment such that distinctive contributions can be made to human civilization."[29] Outlaw would have to show more substantively than he has here how race identity leaves open individuality while forging group loyalty, affections, and kinship for political success. However, this is a problem endemic to any social ontology that makes race a constitutive feature of human description.

Appiah and Outlaw disagree on the cognitive structure of race and their moral expectations for race. However, thinkers recognize that race is a social symbol and both argue that, notwithstanding its cognitive structure, as a social symbol, race functions as an ambiguous symbol. It can elicit social behavior and patterns by a group that the group desires to conserve in religious and mundane ritual practices, from telling the group's history or story in myths and folklore to educating the generations in the group's way of life. Appiah and Outlaw also see race as signifying a group's identity beyond physical traits. However, each theorist also sees race as a potentially dangerous, repulsive, and, as Farley would

have it, poisonous symbol.[30] Neither thinker holds illusions about the harm, evils, and atrocities perpetuated in the name of this symbol. Rather, each thinker holds high a moral imperative to eliminate malicious kinds of racisms. Each position is as persuasive as assessed in light of the cognitive structure of race, and on this criterion, Outlaw and Appiah are worlds apart. The one sees no empirical basis for justifying the cognitive standing of race. It is rendered a valuational proposition and not a fact of life for African peoples; for the other, race is entailed in "the taken for granted" social world of human relations in the United States. From my point of view, when race is recognized as a grotesque social symbol, the truth is that the social bonds or filiations formed by this symbol display unresolved ambiguities. Black philosophy is ambiguous and not absolute, relative and not simple, open to difference and particularity and not closed, and cognizant of both the light and dark potentials of race in our social experience.

RACE IN A RELATIONAL THEORY OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

In this last section, I want to place the discussion of race and its significations within the context of the hermeneutical theory of Charles H. Long as developed in *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion.*[31] I turn to Long's hermeneutics to deconstruct—or in Long's language—to "demythologize" race in a way consistent with Appiah's position. I also ask whether the concept might be reoriented in a manner consistent with Outlaw but in the context to African American religious thought. Any attempt to reclaim the concept of race under the symbol of difference involves the critic in the practice of deconstructing the symbol. In an essay on "Primitive/Civilization," Long argues that to understand the power of these symbols, one has to come to terms with their internal ambiguity or doubling. The power of the civilization lies its "othering" effect that requires the "other" in all its signification for structuring the cultural and empirical realities signified by the symbol. In this case, the meaning of civilization cannot be disclosed without the primitive as a co-present reality both culturally and empirically. Long says:

> The self-conscious realization of the Western European rise to the level of civilization must be seen simultaneously in its relationship to the discovery of a new world which must necessarily be perceived as inhabited by savages and primitives who constitute the lowest rung on the ladder of cultural reality. The sociogenesis and psychogenesis of this formation are equally formed by the explorers, adventurers, merchants, and literary artists whose field of opportunity and expression are the brave New World of savages and primitives beyond the Atlantic sea.[32]

On Long's argument, in the process of conceptualizing race in African American theology, we must realize that the symbols "race" and "races" are entailed in the cultural logic of the West. When put in Farley's understanding of deep symbols, the intentionality of race is fundamentally oriented toward "othering" and structuring a hierarchy of cultural, economic, historical, and religious differences that are maintained by domination. In this sense, the figures discussed in this essay are warranted in maintaining a hermeneutic of suspicion about the power of race as a symbol, just as Long holds suspicion about the concepts primitive and civilization. Here, one wonders whether race can be reclaimed for religious thought without reorienting its symbolic meanings away from totalization and toward a relational conceptualization. Long drives home this point in his discussion of primitive/civilization. He says:

> The problem surrounding the usage of the term "primitive" as a proper designation for certain cultures, histories, and religions must therefore be seen as a crisis of the term "civilization". Other terms have been forthcoming to replace the term "primitive"—noncivilized, nonliterate, old culture, and so on. These changes will not suffice, for the cultural language of civilization that brought forth the structure of the primitive has not changed.[33]

Long's criticism certainly seems appropriate when discussing the concept of race. Still, Long argues that the process of demythologization opens up to a hermeneutical of reorientation by which we might ask "whether we are able to discern a structure of symbols and meanings that will establish a new integrity for the status of the primitive religions, on the one hand, and demonstrate the proper place for this study within the history of religions on the other."[34] This is exactly what I have attempted to do in this essay on race drawing on the dynamics of signs, symbols and signification as developed by Long.

In agreement with Outlaw, I hold that blackness is a social sign. I am also in agreement with Appiah, however, that it is as arbitrary a sign as is any other linguistic convention by which persons negotiate their environment; signs such as, stop, go, caution, exit, enter, blue lights, red lights, 10 miles vs. 10 kilometers, white, black, etc. Independent of discrete social contexts and actions, such signs are arbitrary markings. However, placed within an environment of social action, movement, travel, traffic, and the like, the signs symbolize matrices of human behavior, commands, admonitions, and guidance. Together they form a whole scene of human activity: from stopping at red lights while traveling 10 miles, to being pulled over to the curb by police cars with blue lights for disregarding caution. Similarly, as a sign, race has no self-evidential meaning. However, when the sign is evoked, it refracts individuated

modes of behavior, wishes, desires, preferences, actions, and expressions of persons. It travels from a sign to a symbol. Such behavior, habits, desires, preferences, expressions and actions are what Long calls significations that can be given religious interpretation.

On Long's account, when one asks what is black religion, one is not looking for an essence or a formal abstraction from the concrete practices and historical reality of religious life. Black religion signifies different ritual, cognitive, and moral practices disclosed in the historical life-worlds of people of African descent. Whatever unity prevails among such communities, it may properly be understood as associational, or as a matter of family resemblances, without evoking essentialist notions of meaning and value. In the same manner, white theology, religion, or philosophy could mean nothing other than commonalities in thinking, language, and religious practices among North Atlantic intellectual communities and associated with persons of European origins (Irish, French, Italian, English, German, Dutch, and so on). To understand what black religion signifies, then, theologians and religionists need to first describe, as thickly as possible, the religious life-worlds of African and African American peoples before they inscribe religious meaning and value on the different societies of blacks. In an important passage, Long states the complexity of such a movement from symbolism to interpretation.

> Reflection proceeding from religious symbolism has the merit of correlating the interpreter on a search for inner being of self and humanity with a level of historical expression commensurate with this intention. As the interpreter moves from symbolism to rationality, another movement will become necessary—a movement back into the shadows of one's ego and history—for the interpreter will discover that one's being is mirrored in the reality of life and history and simultaneously created in the moment of interpretation.[35]

As the sign becomes a symbol, race constructs not only a social ontology, it may also express religious intentions within a people's historical self-understanding. However, racial significations need not determine malicious racial dichotomies, hierarchies, or domination. I propose that in African American religious thought, for instance, the symbol may signify a relational perspective in which African and African American communities, societies, lives, bodies, and cultures are understood as connected by webs of significance and circles of relations. Such relational circles are displayed adequately in the poetry of Alice Walker's "Womanist" and the Congolese folklore of "How the Crocodile Lost his Case."[36] Walker's poem commends a self-understanding of black women's identities that is open to circles of relations that circumscribe their self-interpretations: openness to men and women, sometimes

sexually; openness to the world of sun, moon, stars; openness to the world of social responsibility and generative care; openness to the wide expansions of sight and color; openness even to the opaque quality of purple and lavender.

"How the Crocodile Lost his Case" is a folktale of cosmic relational responsibility. In it, all the animals of earth gather to discuss the state of war between themselves and their human hunters. Each animal, from the N'kanka-fua, the armadillo, and the chicken to the hippo and crocodile, blames the other for the crisis in the animal world. The armadillo points to the weaverbird who is blamed for eating the corn that the humans planted. Not denying that it eats a grain or two, the weaverbird points to the vultures and hawks that eat the human's chickens. The chicken accuses the crocodile who eats human beings and their children. Of course the crocodile accuses the hippo that overturns the people's boat. To which the hippo replies: "If men hunt me, I sink their boats, and if they drown, do not blame me; I neither eat nor kill those men, it is the crocodile who does." Each animal sees the other as being responsible for inflicting harm on humans. In the end, it is the crocodile that becomes the culprit. In the back and forth of accusations, the crocodile exclaims: "'If I eat people, blame me not, do not accuse me lyingly! I did not make myself like this, no, it was God who made me so!' To this God himself answered from heaven: 'I did create you, but for peace. I never destined you for evil.'"[37]

Both Walker's poetry and much of African traditional religion commends a relational theory of religious life and meaning. In both sources, personal identity and moral responsibility are entailed within ever-widening circles of relations that are integrated into a whole. The relational theory renders human actions interconnected, dynamic, fluid, and open to determinate powers on which all our lives depend and from which all beings proceed and return. Race has to find its proper interpretative place in such a symbolic universe. It is a vision in which the whole world is recognized as a network of emanating life forces and creative possibilities. Following Long, sometimes these networks, forces, and possibilities are open to religious interpretation. Sometimes they are called gods, the divine, orishas, the ultimate, or the world. Insofar as race intends such religious significations, I think that it may constructively contribute to African American religious thought.

Race may signify a relational moral attitude toward the world and human life. Among all the particulars that circumscribe the lives of African and African American peoples, race entails circles of relations and affiliations between families, villages, provinces, cultures, and by greater enlargement, humanity. African American religious thought, then, connects these relations and affiliations to transcendent powers, to communities of others (ancestors and saints long absent from us, or recently departed). It sees connections between people's social lives

and their valuations of power in the land and sea, in the beloved country and in the diaspora, in sacred trees and haunts, sun, moon, and stars, and animals and plants with whom we share the earth and whose lives are contingent upon our own. This relational theory of religion limits racial descriptions based on any dichotomy between thought and life, ideas and action, and meaning and art. Rather, it reflexively relates a community's understanding of art, music, dance, stories, proverbs, myth, being, life, morality, aesthetics, and social identity. It synthesizes the relations into a unity of meaning and value.

To conclude, I hold that the relational perspective of religion that arises from reflection on race as sign, symbol, and signification as developed by Long may be quite useful to African American philosophers and theologians who want to transcend classical Western metaphysics based on abstract universality, hierarchy, domination, and dichotomies. The perspective that I am advancing takes its point of departure from the relational insights of African and African American thinkers and religious traditions. However, it ought not to be thought of as forming any radical discontinuities between the formal, cognitive standards of reasonableness that have governed Western thought. This is a lesson I take from both Appiah and Outlaw's debate on the nature and tasks of black philosophy. The symbols we evoke—whether they are "black/white," "occidental/oriental," or "primitive/civilized"—are fallible, relative, contingent, duplicitous, and vulnerable to social change. On Farley's description of deep symbols, none of these symbols are absolute.

Finally, in light of its ambiguous and relative quality, race might be best grasped as a deep symbol in African American philosophy and religion. However, it is a grotesque symbol at best. Following Long, the hermeneutical task of tracking its significations involves black philosophers and theologians in interdisciplinary conversation on the meaning, value, distortions, and cultural effects of race on our everyday lives and in black religion. This critical hermeneutical activity is the enduring legacy of Charles H. Long to African American religious thought and has formatively shaped the relational conception of race in black religion that I have tried to develop in this essay.

ENDNOTES

[1] Here, I do not want to get into debate over any differences between the methodology of religious studies and theology. However, I find any strong dichotomy of the disciplines inappropriate at the methodological level, distorting the relation between thought and life, actions and belief, history and explanation. Therefore, throughout the essay, black religious thought and African American theology will often be employed interchangeably.

[2] Both academic movements emerged simultaneously in the late 1960s and early 1970s as critical responses to the Black Power Movement. The Black Theology Project has been well documented by Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone in *Black Theology: A Documentary History,* Volumes I-II (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993). The black philosophical academy has only recently began to develop a documentary history, but among its notables are William R. Jones, Leonard Harris, Lucius Outlaw, Cornel West, and Lewis Gordon. In the late 1970s, an entire volume in the *Philosophical Forum* was devoted to Black Philosophy, "Philosophy and the Black Experience," *Philosophical Forum* 9 Nos., 2-3 (Winter/Spring, 1977-78). The publication of this volume represents an initial recognition of black philosophy by the American academy.

[3] See Lewis R. Gordon's, "Black Existential Philosophy," in *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy,* Lewis R. Gordon, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-10.

[4] Two African American religious thinkers who made this theme central to their intellectual labors are Martin Luther King Jr., and Howard Thurman. See James Melvin Washington, "Martin Luther King Jr., Martyred Prophet for a Global Community of Justice, Faith, and Hope," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.,* James Melvin Washington, ed. (New York: Harper/Collins, 1986), xi-xxvii; Lewis V. Baldwin, *Toward the Beloved Community: Martin Luther King Jr. and South Africa* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1995); Howard Thurman's classic, *The Search for Common Ground* (Richmond: Friends United Press, 1986), and Walter E. Fluker, *They Searched for a City: A Comparative Analysis of the Ideal of Community in the Thought of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King Jr.* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989).

[5] Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996).

[6] Farley, *Deep Symbols,* x.

[7] Farley, *Deep Symbols,* xi, 3.

[8] Farley, *Deep Symbols,* 3-12.

[9] Farley, *Deep Symbols,* 3 .

[10] Farley, *Deep Symbols,* 2.

[11] Farley, *Deep Symbols,* 3.

[12] Farley, *Deep Symbols,* 23.

[13] Farley, *Deep Symbols,* 24.

[14] Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 120-32.

[15] Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness,* 8.

[16] See, "Philosophy and the Black Experience," *Philosophical Forum* 9, nos. 2-3 (Winter-Spring: 1977-78): 912-13.

[17] See Richard Popkins, "Hume's Racism," *Philosophical Forum* 9, nos. 2-3 (1977-78): 211-26; David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 4-6.

[18] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House : Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[19] Appiah, *In My Father's House,* 174.

[20] Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 18.

[21] Lucius Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[22] Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*, xxiii.

[23] Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*, xxiii.

[24] Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*, xxiii.

[25] Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*, 1.

[26] Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*, 1.

[27] Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*, 13.

[28] Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*, 13.

[29] Outlaw, *On Race and Philosophy*, 157 .

[30] From a conversation with Edward Farley in the Fall of 1997.

[31] Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

[32] Long, *Significations*, 84.

[33] Long, *Significations*, 90-1.

[34] Long, *Significations*, 92.

[35] Long, *Significations*, 51.

[36] Alice Walker, "Womanist," in *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi-xii; also Jan Knappert, ed., "How the Crocodile Lost His Case," in *Bantu Myths and Other Tales* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 63.

[37] Knappert, "How the Crocodile Lost His Case," 63.

Perspectives for a Study of African American Religion from the Valley of Dry Bones

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ABSTRACT: In "Perspectives For a Study of African American Religion," Charles Long wrote of "three interrelated perspectives for the study of black religion": "Africa as historical reality and religious image," "the involuntary presence of the black community in America," and "the experience and symbol of God." I essay to show how Long's categories illumine a celebrated instance of African American biblical appropriation, the prophet's vision of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14, as emblematic of the perspectives of symbolic African absence, involuntary American presence, and collective theological experience of the slaves and their descendents.

More than three decades ago, Charles Long published "Perspectives For a Study of African American Religion,"[1] a proposal for a phenomenological overview of African American religion. It was an erudite challenge Long laid to the charge of scholars of the history of religion. To take up that gauntlet is beyond my competence and, happily, beyond my aspirations here. But in a brief space I essay to show how Long's categories illumine a celebrated instance of African American biblical appropriation. Long wrote in his essay, "To be sure, the imagery of the Bible plays a large role in the symbolic presentations [of the slaves]. . . . The biblical imagery was used because it was at hand; it was adapted to and invested with the experience of the slave."[2] There he delineated the elements that inform how slaves and their descendants adapted and invested an erstwhile alien text with their own experience. Long wrote of "three interrelated perspectives for the study of

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black religion": "Africa as historical reality and religious image," "the involuntary presence of the black community in America," and "the experience and symbol of God."[3] I offer for consideration here one instance of African American appropriation of the Bible that features these elements.

In the biblical imagination of the slaves and their progeny, we may understand the text of the prophet's vision of dry bones in Ezekiel 37: 1-14 as emblematic of the perspectives of symbolic African absence, involuntary American presence, and collective theological experience of the slaves and their descendents that Long delineated in his essay. This text is thus a recurring appropriation of the Bible in African American arts and letters.

> And the hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley, which was full of bones. And caused me to pass by them round about: and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live. And I will lay sinews on you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live, and ye shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, Son of man, and say to the wind, thus saith the Lord GOD; come from these four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel,: behold, they say, our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off from our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD. (KJV)

Ezekiel's message of life after exile is nothing less than the prophetic declaration of life after death, of a collective resurrection.

The biblical vision of the valley of bleached bones became a venerable topos in the African American vernacular. The Negro Spiritual "Dry

Bones," recalls the biblical vision of a dead, disjointed people: "Them bones, them bones, them dry bones/Now hear the word of the Lord." It is precisely in the broken, lifeless desiccation of exile that the word of the LORD comes as a mighty, rushing wind of restoration. We may glimpse the dawn of this text's special history of reception in the following testimony of an ex-slave from Kentucky, who explains how he and his companions would extemporaneously compose Negro Spirituals.

> Us old heads used to make them on the spurn of the moment, after we wrestle with the Spirit and come through. But the tunes was brung from Africa by our granddaddies. They was just militar[y] song . . . they calls them spirituals, because the Holy Spirit done revealed them to them. Some say Mas[ter] Jesus taught them and I seed them start in meeting. We'd all be at the prayer house the Lord's Day, and the white preacher he'd explain the word and read where Ezekiel done say—Dry bones going to live again. And honey, the Lord would come a-shining through them pages and revive the old nigger's heart, and I'd jump up there and then and holler and shout and sing and pat, and they would all catch the words . . . and they's all take it up and keep at it, and keep a-adding to it and then it would be a spiritual.[4]

The ex-slave reports that the musical patterns are from the battle anthems of West African origin, "from Africa." The songs were not merely African but "brung from Africa": the original carriers of the music were the "granddaddies" of the singers—abducted Africans. The preacher's presentation of the text provokes a spontaneous ecstasy of movement and musical expression, an epiphany: "The Lord" comes "a-shinin' through them pages." Hearing the preacher "explain the word" is tantamount to divine encounter.

Oscar Micheaux's 1925 silent film classic *Body and Soul*[5] is the film debut of Renaissance man Paul Robeson, who plays the charismatic, conniving, and abusive Reverend Isaiah T. Jenkins, a black flim-flam man and ex-con who poses as a preacher in a small southern town. Toward the end of the film, after Jenkins has robbed, raped, and bullied members of the local community, he preaches a sermon entitled "Dry Bones in the Valley." Occasionally refreshing himself with liquor that he drinks from a water glass in the pulpit, Jenkins launches into his sermon. He galvanizes the congregation, which responds with enraptured exclamations, jumping out of the pews, and shouting. Jenkins himself is a dynamo of oratorical flourish, moving behind the pulpit and pounding his oversized Bible with forceful gestures. The intertitle reads that this "is a sermon which is every black preacher's ambition." This without further comment: Micheaux implicitly expects that his audience is already familiar with the biblical text that Jenkins has taken for his sermon. Micheaux does not provide intertitles for the contents of the sermon in the silent film. Instead he relies on the physical expression of the actors

and the familiarity of the audience with the biblical text and the homiletical tradition that attends it in African American Christianity.[6] Micheaux implicitly recognizes that the text of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones has a tradition that is not only homiletical but also somatic. It is a text the interpretation of which is expressed in the body. The Spirit takes bodily form, animating the bones and stretching the sinews of its hearers.

Thus we may understand the vision of reanimated bones that overtakes Herald Loomis, the protagonist of August Wilson's play *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, as a vision of a vision. After a fit of ecstatic utterance, Loomis speaks of seeing skeletons rise up from the deep, take on flesh, and walk. "I done seen bones rise up out of the water," Loomis exclaims, "Rise and walk across the water. Bones walking on top of the water."[7] Ezekiel's valley of dry bones is the semiotic equivalent of Wilson's sea of souls. Just as the valley is the chasm that separates Babylon from Jerusalem, so the Atlantic yawns between America and Africa. As the wind summons the desiccated bones, the waves serve up the restless spirits of many thousands gone, and Loomis catches trance-like glimpses of so much water over the damned. The resurrection of lost African souls in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* suggests the "symbolic images" of Long's "perspectives" in the appropriation of Ezekiel's vision.

AFRICA AS HISTORICAL REALITY AND RELIGIOUS IMAGE

Long insisted in his essay that Africa—not as a national entity or continental location but as a symbol—is distinctive in African American religion.

> The image of Africa as it appears in black religion is unique, for the black community in America is a landless people. Unlike the American Indian, the land was not taken from him, and unlike the black Africans in South Africa or Rhodesia, his land was not occupied by those whom he considers alien. His image of the land points to the religious meaning of land even in the absence of these forms of authentication.[8]

In rehearsing the classic arguments among scholars of African American culture for and against the residua of so-called "Africanisms" in African American life, Long pointed out that "even a protagonist for the loss of all Africanisms, such as E. Franklin Frazier, acknowledges the persistence of 'shout songs,' African rhythm, and dance in American culture."[9] Long reminds us that Frazier, and W. E. B. DuBois before him, had recognized these songs as an important feature of the "soft culture" that survives the "breakdown of the empirical forms of language and religion."[10]

It was the "soft culture" of West African forms that inform the function of the preacher in American slave religion. The preacher, the first

member of three pillars of African American religion that DuBois encountered in the churches of the agrarian Black Belt, is a New World griot. In his reexamination of DuBois' claim that the figure of the African American preacher is in functional continuity with the West African office of the priest-king, Michael Gomez shows that contemporary reports of preaching in slave worship suggest that the preacher's role most closely approximates that of the griot, "the living repository of history and tradition in the West African setting."[11] The text for him is not an amulet or talisman—the "jack," "mojo," or "hand" of hoodoo or voodoo. He is not a conjuror, for he manipulates not things but words. The medium through which he communicates power is the story: to this day one of the traditional descriptions of what African American preachers do is "telling the story." As Gomez explains, the venerable West African griot, recounting stories of the past in the light of the present, "had the capacity to make the past present, to 'resurrect' the dead and present them alive, to place the listener within the habitation of the story."[12] The cultural precedent of the role of the griot was complemented in the role of the preacher in the Evangelicalism of the Anglophone New World. Preachers were the personal catalysts of religious experience in camp meeting religion. One of Evangelicalism's most influential champions of literacy among slaves was the movement's most famous evangelist, George Whitefield. "So pervasive was Whitefield's impact in America," observes Evangelical historian Harry S. Stout, "that he can justly be styled America's first culture hero. . . . By 1750 virtually every American loved and admired Whitefield and saw him as their champion."[13] John Marrant, a free African American preacher who would later advocate African American emigration to West Africa, was converted under Whitefield's preaching, the spiritual force of which provoked in him "a wounded spirit" and "distress of soul" that deprived him of appetite for three days.[14]

A report of Whitefield's preaching in the Old World gives us an insight into his effect on African Americans in the New. The German Lutheran Henry Melchior Muhlenberg told of a German woman who, after attending one of Whitefield's services, asserted that never in her life had she had "such a quickening, awakening, and edifying experience as when she listened to this man." Muhlenberg pointed out that she "understood nothing of his English sermon, but from his gestures, expressions, looks, and voice," she gained the "vivid impression that he was serious and sincere in what he said."[15] Though Whitefield would become a questionable advocate for the welfare of the slaves in his later years,[16] African Americans were among the multitudes that found the Evangelical preaching a life-changing synthesis of biblical text and "experimental religion" that could transcend differences in class, caste, and culture.

The affective dimensions of religion, its mantic potentialities, were

underscored in the Evangelical faith of the Great Awakening. As Albert Raboteau has observed,

> The emotionalism of the revivals encouraged the outward expression of religious feeling, and the sight of black and white converts weeping, shouting, fainting, and moving in ecstatic trance became a familiar, if sensationalized, feature of the sacramental and camp meeting seasons. In this heated atmosphere slaves found a form of Christian worship that resembled the religious celebrations of their African heritage.[17]

This overlap of Evangelical and African religious affect became a staple of African American Christianity. These features of religious expe-rience become numinous in the African American encounter with the Bible, "a-shining through them pages." The Bible became the medium through which Africans in North America held on to the precious vestiges of otherwise lost cultural patrimony that survived the protracted slaughter of the Middle Passage.

Those things from the past that become part of the exile's present are perforce portable. The African ancestors of the Kentucky slaves who endured the Middle Passage did so carrying little more than a tune. Music is the quintessentially portable element of exilic culture. And rhythmic West African music, always accompanied by some form of dance, is always somatic: music is sound that moves the body. The ring shout is the kinetic element of the Negro Spiritual. The Negro Spiritual, even as a musical performance, is not complete without dancing or swaying or rocking or tapping or clapping. At the turn of the twentieth century in his famous essay "Faith of the Fathers," W. E. B. DuBois identified three persistent elements of traditional African American Christian worship: the Preacher, the Music, and the Frenzy. "The Preacher" is the psycho pomp of the faithful, inciting them to fervor through enthusiastic, incantory exposition of the Bible. "The Music," syncopated, kinetic strains that Zora Neale Hurston called "dance-possible," is at once doleful and jubilant, "the one true expression of sorrow, despair, and hope." "The Frenzy," or "shouting" is marked by outbreaks of ecstasy that DuBois recognized as coeval with religion itself. This element of black religion was "the one more devoutly believed in than all the rest," according to DuBois.

> It varied in expression from the silent rapt countenance or the low murmur and moan to the mad abandon of physical fervor—the stamping, shrieking, the shouting, the rushing to and fro and the wild waving of arms, that weeping and laughing, the vision and the trance. All this is nothing new in the world, but old as religion, as Delphi and Endor. And so firm a hold did it have on the Negro, that many generations firmly believed that without the visible manifestation of the God there could be no true communion with the Invisible.[18]

This ecstasy is the "manifestation of the Spirit," "paroxysms" as historian Carter G. Woodson described them in his account of a traditional rural African American church service at the beginning of the twentieth century. The likes could only be found, Woodson remarked, in an insane asylum.

The premium placed on experience, where the spirit possession of West African religion meets the "experimental religion" of Southern Evangelical Christianity, was the spiritual heritage of slave religion. Some Christian slaves, rejecting the hypocrisy of the faith of the master class, "focused on the experience of God's spirit in states of ecstatic possession as the essence of Christianity."[19] The slaves contrasted "getting religion" in this way with the Christianity of the master class that they had come to know and despise: "They said their masters and families were Bible Christians, and they did not want to be like them."[20] The slaves themselves recognized the difference in religious sentiments. That is to say whites, even those sympathetic to the religion of the slaves, were not wont to "get religion" as they did. A humorous memory of one former slave makes the point.

> We went to church all the time. We had both white and colored preachers. Master Frank wasn't a Christian, but he would help build brush-arbors for us to have church under, and we sure would have some big meetings, I'll tell you. One day Master Frank was going through the woods close to where niggers was having church. All of a sudden he started running and beating himself and hollering, and the niggers all went to shouting and saying, "Thank the Lord, Master Frank has done come through!" Master Frank after a minute say, "Yes, through the worst of them." He had run into a yellow jackets' nest.[21]

Frederick Douglass later wrote of his own participation in the so-called "ring shout": "I was myself in the circle, so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see or hear."[22] Douglass said of slaves with whom he had worked in the fields, "Sometimes you may hear a wild, hoarse laugh arise from a circle, and often a song."[23] In the Babylonian Talmud, the rabbis said of the resuscitated skeletons, "they stood upon their feet, uttered a song, and died" (Sanh. 92b). Upon hearing the text, it was African Americans who likewise were swept up by the Spirit to stand on their feet and utter "a wild, hoarse laugh . . . from a circle, and often a song," to mock mortality in the land of permanent exile.

Years after the Civil War African Methodist Episcopal bishop Daniel Alexander Payne was scandalized to find that the "heathenish ritual" of the ring shout was still practiced by "Praying and Singing Bands" of black Methodists he encountered as far north as Philadelphia and Baltimore. Payne gives the following account of the ritual, which he witnessed at a "bush meeting": "After the sermon they formed a ring, and with coats off sung, clapped their hands, and stamped their feet in a

most ridiculous and heathenish way."[24] Payne later disputed with the leader of the ring about the religious efficacy of these "'Fist and Heal Worshippers,' as they have been called."

> [The leader of the ring said]: "Sinners won't get converted unless there is a ring." Said I: "You might sing till you fell down dead and you would fail to convert a single sinner, because nothing but the Spirit of God and the word of God can convert sinners." He replied: "The Spirit of God works upon people in different ways. At campmeeting [sic] there must be a ring here, a ring there, a ring over yonder, or sinners will not get converted."[25]

Payne complained that "the ignorant masses" of black Christians were inured to the ring shout, staunchly defended by its practitioners as "the essence of religion."[26] And what he saw as "an incurable religious disease" not only affected "the stupid and headstrong" among the rank and file of the faithful, but more unlikely worshippers. Payne despaired that "some of our most popular and powerful preachers labor systematically to perpetuate this fanaticism. Such preachers never rest till they create an excitement that consists in shouting, jumping, and dancing."[27] Though Payne and his ecstatic co-religionists may have agreed on "the word of God," it was the operation of "the Spirit of God" that proved controversial.

We find here a synthesis of ecstasy and exegesis that forecloses an opposition of the religion of the Spirit and religion of the Book in the provocative, well-nigh spontaneous alternative interpretation of the biblical accounts of divine deliverance that Evangelical Christian slaves told and retold in song and story. We encounter here not a question of the Bible versus ecstatic experience, but the Bible *as* ecstatic experience. The African American encounter with the *mysterium tremendum* is sound and fury—"kinetic orality," as Cornel West has put it. It is the oral kinesthetics of rhythm—movement in sound—through music, the sound of implied movement, and dance, the movement of implied sound, invoked in the spoken word "a-shinin' through the pages" of a biblical passage recounting the embodiment of myriad souls in an oracle of mass incarnation.

EXILE: THE INVOLUNTARY PRESENCE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN AMERICA

Charles Long observed that the corollary of the presence of Africa is the absence of the Africans, an enforced absence from their native land and an endless exile in a hostile world. "From the very beginning, the presence of slaves in the country has been involuntary; they were brought to America in chains, and this country has attempted to keep them in this condition in one way or another."[28] The descendants of the New World

Africans "have neither a clear Hebraic nor what has become a Christian interpretation of history. . . . [T]he historicity of these two traditions was related to the possession of a land, and this has not been the case for blacks in America."[29] Theologian Cheryl J. Sanders has called attention to these perspectives and uses the language of exile to talk about "the predicament and state of mind of critical thinkers who self-consciously maintain a sense of racial and cultural identity with another country or nationality,"[30] permitting "honest appraisal of and response to white racism without, at the same time, having one's own identity totally shaped by it."[31] Sanders writes of the exilic sensibility of African Americans throughout their tortured sojourn in modernity: "African Americans have responded to the experience of exile and alienation in America by expressing their longing for some place or space—geographical, cultural, spiritual—where they can feel at home. African Americans constitute a unique category among North American exiles because they are the descendents of the only group of Old World people whose presence in the New World has been involuntary."[32] Exile is the experience of African Americans as strangers in a strange land and in the light of the biblical hope that illumined their tortured North American sojourn. Sanders reminds us that Long's essay had pointed out that African Americans share the plight of all exiles: to be a people without a place.

The prophet Ezekiel receives his oracle in Babylon, the land of captivity. God sends a spirit from the four corners of the world to completely restore the people of Israel. Once restored, God will then restore them to a land of their own: "and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land" (Ezekiel 37:14). The Babylonians had conquered Judah, destroyed the Temple, and took many Jews to Babylonia as prisoners. Inspired by the prophet Ezekiel, they continued to hold to their ancestral god in their unprecedented absence from the very land in which God had revealed God's self to them. The ongoing revelation that marked their peculiar history would now continue in exile.

Thus the catastrophe of exile did not end Israel's story. The vision of the valley of the shadow of death is followed in the book of Ezekiel by an oracle of the reuniting of the dispersed tribes of the nation, restoration of the monarchy, and the reestablishment of the sanctuary. Clan, king, and cult would one day be revived. Immediately following the vision of the dry bones Ezekiel receives another "Word of the LORD" that describes the nation's full restoration.

> The word of the LORD came again to me . . . Thus saith the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land . . . Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling-places,

> wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Ezekiel 37:15, 21, 23-27).

But this was not a vision that African exiles embraced in their North American captivity. Absence itself is significant in the vernacular tradition: it says nothing of the complementary vision of Ezekiel 37:15-28, the other half of the chapter in the book of Ezekiel. Of course, Ezekiel chapter 37 is not a seamless whole. The two distinct visions constitute its composite text as we have it. Early in the liturgical life of the book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel 37:1-14 went its own way in Jewish synagogues as the accompanying reading from the Prophets or *haphtarah* for the Passover and its Sabbath. Syriac versions of the text have a separate title for Ezekiel 37:1-14, and in some Syriac lectionaries this text is the Easter reading. Tertullian knows the text of Ezekiel's vision of dry bones as "a celebrated passage in all the churches of Christ" (*omnium ecclesiarum Christi lectione celebrata*), and in Latin tradition, the passage was read at Easter eve baptisms of catechumens.[33] What ancient redaction of the visions had put together, reading practices of subsequent ancient communities had put asunder. American Christian slaves followed suit.

In the African American tradition there is no register of the latter vision. We may observe this silence in a sermon featured in a famous northern California radio broadcast of African American preacher Carl J. Anderson in 1969. In the opening of his sermon Anderson historically situates the exilic career of Ezekiel:

> While in Babylon, Ezekiel was with them in servitude
> He heard their cry as is recorded in the one hundred thirty-seventh number of the Psalms
> Judah had lost her political existence as a nation
> And the temple was destroyed . . .
> And the walls of Jerusalem were torn down
> And the gates had been set on fire . . .

The last two lines of this part of the sermon echo the Judean report of the destruction of Jerusalem that so anguished Nehemiah: "And they

said unto me, the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days" (Nehemiah 1:3-4). When Anderson moves to the climax of the sermon in his description of the desiccated bones Ezekiel encountered in the desolate valley, he likens that desiccation to the spiritual dryness he finds in the church: "And these bones were dry. Do you understand me? They were so dry no footsteps could be heard anywhere. Yeah, it's a sad thing. Yeah, to go to church and find Christians all dry." The preacher concludes with an existential, thoroughly personalized reading of the Spirit's advent in the valley. There is no peace to Jerusalem, but peace for the solitary soul.

I was in the valley of dry bones
Yeah, I had no God on my side
Yeah, I didn't have no spirit
To make me shout
But when I found the Lord
I found joy
Yeah, joy was found
I found joy
Peace to my dying soul

There is no mention of Ezekiel's oracles of the new temple and Judean repatriation. The sermon implicitly testifies to a homiletic tradition treating the Valley of Dry Bones that focused on the desiccation of the Spirit's absence and eschewed the destiny of national restoration.[34] Neither the poets of the Negro Spirituals nor the preachers of African American Christianity suffer Ezekiel to speak of life after exile.

There is no post-exilic moment for the slave singers, for they never return home. The glory of the Lord was to be revealed not at the end of the exile but the end of the age. Existence after exile would be realized in the eschaton, and that day would not be the day of small things but the Day of the Lord. The Negro Spiritual sets to music the post-exilic oracle of Isaiah 60:1, "Arise, shine, your light has come/And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you," while transforming its tense: "Arise, shine, for thy light is a-coming/ My Lord said He is coming by and by." Here the end of exile has become eschatology. The composers of the Negro Spiritual did not allow the verbs of the opening verse to remain in the perfect tense: "has come" and "has risen" are changed into the progressive present "a-coming" with its strong accent of futurity. When American slaves sang of Zion's walls in the Negro Spiritual "Great Day," they sang of building, not rebuilding, and of a dream under construction in the future: "Great Day, Great Day, / The righteous marching, / Great day, / God's going to build up Zion's walls"[35] —a "Great Day" yet to come.

The same tradition that remembered Ezekiel's valley of dry bones set an implicit interpretive bond on the Bible's stories of the end of captivity.[36] It is the bond of historical experience. African Americans could collectively recollect the challenge of constructing a community. They could not relate collectively, however, to reconstructing one. Africans in America could not return to the land of their nativity. The Africa that lost them to slavery in the Atlantic world had perished with their freedom. As Kenyan historian Ali Mazrui once observed, African slaves in North America have been denied the right to be homesick. Consequently the bards of the Negro Spirituals sang of Ezekiel as one of those biblical exiles that never returned home.

Ezekiel is remembered in the Negro Spirituals as a man in perpetual exile. The opening vision of the book of Ezekiel features resplendent rotating wheels of a rolling celestial throne: "Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces. The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel" (Ezekiel 1:15-16). The Negro Spiritual "'Zekiel Saw the Wheel" renders in verse God's dramatic presence among the exiles: "Way up yonder on the mountaintop/ Wheel in the middle of a wheel./ My Lord spoke an' de chariot stop,/ Wheel in the middle of a wheel./ 'Zekiel saw de wheel, Way up in the middle of the air./ 'Zekiel saw the wheel,/ 'Way in the middle of the air." The rotating "wheel within the wheel" is Ezekiel's vision of God "on the road," as it were, riding into exile in his mobile throne.

Ezekiel is a priest, and in the opening of his book he is identified as such: his worldview bears the profound impress of his vocation. But restoration for him has no relation to holy law. Ezekiel's grasp of holy law makes for condemnation, not restoration. He is at odds with the priestly tradition to which he owes so much of his formation. For him, holiness is a failure in Israel. The nation was never faithful in abiding by priestly prescriptions and proscriptions anyway. God's holiness would not be nailed down to a temple the cultus of which, in Ezekiel's priestly opinion, was sacrilegious from the start. But whereas priestly tradition in the Bible fixes the holy presence of God, the *kabod*, in a sanctified place and space, the *kabod* of the book of Ezekiel is not fixed. The point of Ezekiel's dramatic inaugural vision is precisely that the *kabod* of God is mobile. In exile the priest does not draw nigh unto the Holy; it is the Holy that draws nigh unto him.

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

Long asserts that African American theology posits that God's power to change the world is a paramount divine attribute: "The essential

element in the expression and experience of God is his transforming ability." Because "society at large was not an agent of transformation, the inner resources of consciousness and the internal structures of his own history and community became not simply the locus for new symbols but the basis for a new consciousness for the black."[37] The vision of the Valley of Dry Bones is a dramatic transformation of hopelessness into hope, destitution into destiny, death into life. The exiled Africans experienced the transforming power of God through the text of the oracle. As the ex-slave from Kentucky recalls, it is the Lord who illumines the souls of the slaves through the preached text of Ezekiel 37:1-14. Divinity shines through the pages of the Bible, the book that Reverend Jenkins totes on his shoulder as he prances from one side of the pulpit to the other at the climax of his sermon on the Valley of Dry Bones in *Body and Soul*. The oracle of God's reviving spirit does not merely recount an event of divine presence: the words of the text now signify that presence. Ezekiel's luminous text is a verbal image and likeness of God. The text is iconic.

Ezekiel, so self-conscious about his own prophetic vocation as a writer, is engaged in the production and, literally, the consumption of texts. Unlike Jeremiah, who hears the divine Voice (Jeremiah 1:9), or Isaiah, who encounters a divine vision of God in the Jerusalem temple (Isaiah 6), Ezekiel receives his prophetic call as a scroll inscribed on both sides which he is then ordered to eat. The prophet's complex oracles did not coalesce through successive stages of oral tradition but were literary compositions from the beginning and circulated in literary form in the Babylonian Jewish community. His text came to mediate the divine presence in a community of exiles.

Centuries later in Palestine under Roman rule, another Jewish community read God's presence through Ezekiel's texts from self-imposed exile at Qumran. The poets of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice from the Qumran scrolls (4Q400-407) riff on the words and images of Ezekiel's inaugural vision in chapter 1, especially the language of the throne chariot in 4Q404, 1, 2:1-16 and 4Q405, 20-21-22. The Qumran poets structure the liturgy of the songs, however, by using elements of Ezekiel's vision of the restored Jerusalem temple in Ezekiel chapters 40-48, especially the heavenly ascent recounted in chapters 40-42. The eschatological community in the Judean desert had placed itself beyond the traditional means of mediation. Yet they had access to God through the sacred texts they had taken with them in their retreat into the wilderness and their selective evocation of those texts.[38]

Like the Qumran exiles, Christian slaves in the United States invoked the divine presence through the text of one of Ezekiel's oracles. They chose as their iconic text, however, not a vision of heavenly worship but a prophecy of earthly renewal. Whereas the Qumranites sought participation in an unsullied, angelic liturgy in an uncorrupted temple, the exiled Africans and their descendants yearned for a collective resurrec-

tion that included the resuscitation of their brutalized bodies and exhausted hopes. The text called for those who appropriated it to be animated, and to respond with music and movement to the transcendent God iconically implied in the text. "Let us comfort and encourage one another," African Methodist Episcopal pastor William Paul Quinn once exhorted his antebellum congregation, "and keep singing and shouting, great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of us. Come thou Great Deliverer, once more awake thine almighty arm, and set thy African captives free."[39] Ezekiel's vision expressed a hope that the resurrected captives would rise up to live in a land that they could call home.

The text of Ezekiel 37:1-14 was "at hand," as Long has put it. But the slaves and their descendants took this text in hand with a discriminating discernment as they sought the "symbolic images" that would signify their collective condition of perpetual exile as it was and as they hoped it would be. It is a text that signifies in one dramatic image the death of the African past, the involuntary sojourn of the present, and the divine encounter that takes place in the historically unprecedented context of a Babylonian captivity. In arts and in letters, African Americans have understood Ezekiel's vision to signify their own forced and perpetual exile in a strange land marked by the bleached bones of "many thousands gone." But it also hearkened to the hope of restoration in which each and all would be made whole. God would dramatically set this miraculous restoration in motion. This "expression and experience of God," in Long's words "is his transforming ability." By this miracle of life over death, says the prophet Ezekiel, the exiles "shall know that I am the LORD." And Ezekiel 37:1-14 not only recounted a vision of a somatic restoration, the reassembly of bodies broken in the Middle Passage, but also called forth a somatic response that drew on the patterns of African song and dance that survived slavery's holocaust and continue to inform to style and sensibility of African American religion and so much else in the life of the slaves and their descendents. Charles Long's "perspectives" help us to appreciate why and how the slaves took the text of Ezekiel's exilic vision in hand, and how they did so in a spirit of religious innovation that breathed into an old biblical oracle a new life of significations.

ENDNOTES

[1] Charles H. Long, "Perspectives for the Study of African American Religion," *History of Religions* 11 (1971): 54-66. Reprinted in *Down by the Riverside: Readings in African American Religion*, ed. Larry G. Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 2000): 9-19. I cite Murphy's pagination throughout this essay.

[2] Long, "Perspectives," 14.

[3] Long, "Perspectives," 10.

[4] Jeanette Robinson Murphy, "The Survival of African Music in America," in *Popular Science Monthly* 55 (New York, 1899): 660-72; Slightly modified in James Abbington, "Biblical Themes in the R. Nathaniel Dett Collection," in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, ed. Vincent Wimbush (New York: Continuum, 2000), 282.

[5] *Body and Soul*, 35 mm., Micheaux Film Corporation, USA, 1925.

[6] Judith Weisenfeld, "'For the Cause of Mankind': The Bible, Racial Uplift, and Early Race Movies," in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, ed. Vincent Wimbush (New York: Continuum, 2000), 736-38.

[7] August Wilson, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 53.

[8] Long, "Perspectives," 12.

[9] Long, "Perspectives," 11.

[10] Long, "Perspectives," 11.

[11] Michael Gomez, "The Preacher Kings: W.E.B. DuBois Revisited," in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, ed. Vincent Wimbush, (New York: Continuum, 2000), 510.

[12] Gomez, "The Preacher Kings," 510.

[13] Harry S. Stout, "George Whitefield in Three Countries," in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies in Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 61-2.

[14] Cited in Dorothy Porter, *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837* (Boston: Beacon, 1971), 431.

[15] *Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, Vol. 2, trans. Theodore Trappert and John Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 696.

[16] While still championing the education of black people and tirelessly fundraising for charitable associations, the Whitefield of the 1750s and thereafter became "Americanized." In 1751 he realized the long-held aspiration of owning a plantation with a complement of slaves. Abolitionist Evangelicals condemned Whitefield for his capitulation to the Peculiar Institution, among them Quaker Anthony Benezet and German Pietist Johan Bolzius. Meanwhile, with the indispensable aid of slave labor, Whitefield became wealthy in the West Indian lumber trade. The personal power of the role of the Evangelical preacher explains why an itinerate, slave-holding British Calvinist is celebrated in the elegiac poetry of Phyllis Wheatley and mentioned again and again in the autobiographies of Arminian African slaves in North America.

[17] Albert Raboteau, "The Black Experience in American Evangelicalism: The Meaning of Slavery, " in *African-American Religion : Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York : Routledge, 1997), 94.

[18] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 704.

[19] Raboteau, "The Black Experience in American Evangelicalism," 97.

[20] Raboteau, "The Black Experience in American Evangelicalism," 97-8; *Ameri-*

can Missionary 12 (January 1868): 9; and *American Missionary* 14 (September 1870): 194, 221.

[21] Benjamin A. Botkin, *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 27, modified.

[22] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Dover Publications, [1855] 1969), 99.

[23] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 104.

[24] Daniel Payne, *Recollection of Seventy Years* (Nashville: AME Sunday School Union, 1888), 253.

[25] Payne, *Recollection of Seventy Years*, 254.

[26] Payne, *Recollection of Seventy Years*, 256.

[27] Payne, *Recollection of Seventy Years*, 255.

[28] Long, "Perspectives," 12.

[29] Long, "Perspectives," 15.

[30] Cheryl J. Sanders, *Saints in Exile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 106.

[31] Sanders, *Saints in Exile*, 125.

[32] Sanders, *Saints in Exile*, 129.

[33] G.A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), 397.

[34] Carl J. Anderson, "Ezekiel and the Vision of Dry Bones," in *Talk That Talk: An Anthology of African American Storytelling*, ed. Linda Goss and Marian E. Barnes (New York: Simon and Schuster/Touchstone, 1989), 199-205.

[35] "Great Day," in *The Books of American Negro Spirituals*, Vol. 2, ed. James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson (Viking Press, 1969; reprinted New York: Da Capo Press, 1977), 56-7.

[36] See Allen Dwight Callahan, "Remembering Nehemiah," in *Black Zion: African American Religious Encounters with Judaism*, ed. Yvonne Chireau and Nathaniel Deutsche (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 153-67.

[37] Long, "Perspectives," 17.

[38] See Steven S. Tuell, "Divine Presence and Absence in Ezekiel's Prophecy" in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, SBL Symposium Series 9, ed. Margaret S. Odell and John T. Strong (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 97-116, especially 109-13; Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1985), especially 52-6, 226, 303.

[39] W. Paul Quinn, *The Sword of Truth Going "Forth Conquering and to Conquer": The Origin, Horrors, and Results of Slavery Faithfully and Minutely Described . . .* (1834); reprinted in *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837*, ed. Dorothy Porter (Boston: Beacon, 1971), 635.

Trancing Terror: African American Uses of Time to Trick the Evil Eye of Whiteness

James W. Perkinson

ABSTRACT: This essay engages the ideas of historian of religions Charles Long to examine the significance of African American work with creative uses of time and timing as a survival tactic inside the regimes of enslavement and racialization. The modern form of domination that has taken shape in the history of European colonization and imperial aggression has clearly elevated the disciplines and technologies of the eye as its *modus operandi*—nowhere more evident than in the emergence of racialization schemes as the primary form of social shorthand governing the on-going project of accumulation and control. The struggles of African heritage peoples in the "New World" against such have regularly interrupted the controlling monologue of the eye with ever reinvigorated and re-innovated polyphonies of the ear. The resulting consciousness is a primary modality of a profoundly religious creativity.

> You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? (Luke 12:56).

For example, the structure of call and response places the intervals for calls and responses very close together, thereby enabling feelings to be expressed at or near the moment they are being felt. One can even say that if the audience and performer are spiritually locked into the cadence of the call and response pattern, the impulses and their release will occur almost simultaneously. Nonetheless, one cannot just come in *any* time. One must "drop in" or "drop out," as Grace Holt has said, in such a way that will not interrupt the rhythmic interactive flow. The same is true of black musical performances. As Charles Keil puts

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it, feeling is engendered to the extent that the rhythms conflict with or exhibit the pulse without destroying it altogether. Consequently, entering any ongoing black performance and being considered *on* time, whether it be music, conversation, or argument, requires that individuals coming in keep "careful track of the pulse."[1]

INTRODUCTION

In a recent workshop I helped facilitate on the arts and social change—exploring what I like to call the politics of rhythm—a strange and fortuitous visitation took place. The workshop was part of a gathering of "Word and World," a new seminary initiative seeking to do theological reflection in interaction with grass roots organizations on the front lines of social struggle. The first such gathering was being hosted by activists in Greensboro, North Carolina, whose commitments had begun during the 1960 Woolworth's sit-ins, continued through the 1979 demonstration shot up by the KKK and neo-Nazis, and more recently involved blockades of K-Mart stores in connection with a union organizing drive seeking to redress blatant discriminatory practices in pay and treatment of African American employees. The middle-aged wife of one of the activists attended my workshop for the first time on the last day of the week-long event, and by the end of the session, had become the agent of a remarkable epiphany. Amy (we'll call her for the sake of anonymity) identified herself as "multiple" when first introduced and then added, in somewhat disconcerting little-girl-like giggles, "we receive information from many places." Over the course of an hour and a half, I became aware that much more than just multiplicity was present. But I didn't catch the full significance until the end.

At the conclusion of the workshop, after fostering the creation and performance of two group poems by the participants—which had heated up the space ritually—I had begun to close the session when an older participant interrupted me, wanting to recite his own individual offering. Ed had never produced a poem in his life, but after a couple of days of listening to me unpack the Jewish and Christian religions as encoding a "tradition of the groan," privileging the cry against oppression as the centerpiece of their histories, he had suddenly found an idiom being discussed that instantly resonated with his years of experience advocating for death-row inmates in Georgia.[2] He had somewhat furtively mentioned mid-week that he had composed a poem the night before, and I had immediately started kidding him, saying he had better watch out, I would "out" him and push him to read in public before the week was over.

But I was totally unprepared for what he did on this last day. He hunched up in his chair, almost started crying, regained control and

then offered a series of small groans, rising in a quietly tortured crescendo, until he suddenly vented a piercing cry, and then returned to the softer tones of the moan. That was it. Not a single word spoken. The group was lanced wide open. Faces screwed up in tears. Shoulders heaved in sobs. But even more rending was Amy's response. She leapt up instantly, shot over to Ed, pulled him up and embraced him in a long, deep enfoldment of mother-arms that was somehow ancient and young at once. A sense of the uncanny swept through the group. It was as if the room was suddenly penetrated with another universe, breaking in upon the present one without obliterating it, unfolding some heretofore unsensed layers of time and space. We were still "us"—there seated on plastic chairs, with the ping-pong table in the background, sunlight angling onto the floor. But we were also suddenly in the presence of something else—a kind of primordial awareness that was "knowing us" in ways we had not even been aware were accessible. The experience was shamanistic.

And it augurs the argument to be offered here. Historian of religions Charles Long has long advocated a study of African American religious experience that seeks to systematize the elements of that experience across the formal differences between Black Church, Black Muslims, Black Jews, Black Power, Moorish Temple Science, folk culture, spirituals and blues, and all manner of Trickster tales and wails of horns and corn field hollers.[3] The effort here is one small gesture towards that end, which would itself be but the late beginning of a story that has been long unfolding under the surface of all things American.[4] Indeed, the group that afternoon in Greensboro was racially mixed, about half white and half black, and represented a cross-section of cultural heritages, North and South. The subject matter all week long had been the power of African American innovations in the modality of time and timing to subvert the Caucasian control of space. And Amy's intervention had been "right on time."

I do not know her official diagnosis. Undoubtedly, the medical community would pigeon-hole her pattern in terms of paranoia or schizophrenia or some other such psychopathic problematic. But the local Greensboro community recognizes her modality as also mediumistic. Such multiplicity has a long pedigree of therapeutic vitality in traditions African and ambient.[5] Amy herself, in my conversations with her later in the evening, continued her polymorphic "presentation"—gently probing my own psyche under invocation of Ogu and Shango, Ezulie and Legba. At one point she led me in soft chant of the name of the iron-*orisha*,[6] laughing and telling me that all of her "persons" greeted me. Even later, at a bonfire in the presence of the entire Word and World gathering, she allowed herself to be prevailed upon to sing, despite no little reluctance and distress within her, and made up a riveting song about the "burning sadness" she was seeing into on all sides. The camp-

fire was momentarily haunted. The visitation occasioned from some other space or parallel world found no ready category in such a *pro forma* Christian gathering. The category I would venture, however, is "possession," working an ancient key of polyrhythm. But as possessions go, it was peculiar, because Amy was conscious *of* her alternative consciousness. This was a spirit hovering at an intersection between worlds, aware simultaneously of both, aware of herself as aware.

Said another way, what Amy instantiated, both in the workshop and at the bonfire, was a living, walking modality of antiphony.[7] The potency of her reaction to Ed in the afternoon had everything to do with the instantaneousness of her availability to him. She did not miss a beat in the rhythm of her reply. His "call" opened a new horizon and demanded "response"; she immediately synchronized with the severity and sonority of his expression. The result was a gathering of the whole group into the groan he had ventured. He had cut down to the bone; she had given the skeleton flesh. Especially remarkable was the economy of the experience—an initiation entirely without words, a baptism by way of sound and its syncopation, a negotiation of suffering and its shifting into safety and symphony by sonic mediation alone. Later, watching Amy struggle to sing at the campfire was like witnessing the birth of blues, the very deliverance of a primordial sadness from its own debilitating solitude by an equally wrenching use of words. A community gathered in celebration of the soft April night was suddenly plunged into a seething subcurrent just below its more acceptable "happy face." In either instance, Amy was host to an orchestration that demanded timing as its primary medium, a body-in-motion acting as a living chorus for the depth-dimension of the community.

THEORIZATION

The solicitation was sacral in that it stands as emblematic, in my own experience, of the kind of incandescent and incantatory eloquence that Long has continuously argued is quintessentially religious in Afro-diasporic experience.[8] For Long, the modern African American (in the hemispheric reach of that latter word) *agon* has been a continuous negotiation of terror by means of an uncanny form of transcendence.[9] In the slave trade, modernity fell upon the African body like a terrifying bird of prey, picking at the meat century after century and carting it away to feed its young in a far-off place. More recently, the predation has grown more subtle but no less traumatic. Truth-telling in the face of such terror has required deep work at the edge of delirium. As we shall see below, Long is himself exemplary of the trickiness involved in trying to lure modernity into self-confession.

But the black struggle to survive is itself witness to a travail that is pan-global in scope. In Long's analysis, Afro-diasporic experience articulates

an agony characteristic of indigenous experience around the world in the modern period.[10] Modernity has thus far emerged in history as a modality of irresistibility. The commercial rapacity unleashed across the face of the planet beginning in 1492 has admitted to no limit.[11] Its capacity to conquer, colonize, enslave, "civilize," and metabolize local cultures has so far proven irrepressible. Every gesture of resistance has sooner or later been engulfed and repackaged as a new modality of expansion.

Almost ineluctably, the experience at the center of the resulting institutions and polities has been one of seeming confirmation of an operative *myth of superiority.*[12] Early modern European projections of Christianity as the absolute religion and final arbiter of things unseen in the encounter with its others around the globe eventually was sublimated, in the so-called Age of Reason, into a secularized conviction of the priority of the seen and the ascendancy of the voyeur: Christian supremacy attached to pallid appearance and gave birth to white supremacy.[13] Euro-Enlightenment (and subsequent North Atlantic-Democratic) "development" schemes for the rest of humanity have indeed carried out a rearrangement of resources and a technocratic empowerment that would seem to redeem the "presumption of superiority" that makes Euro-culture the model-to-be-emulated, even as those very schemes enervate and undercut that very possibility.[14] In the calculus of dollars and digits, missiles and widgets, the claim seems un-gainsaid. The liberal promise of universal political rights in purported blindness to class position or blood line has, in fact, been made the ideological cover of a rapacious concentration of wealth and wherewithal in domains largely white and "right."[15] The myth has yet to meet its match.

But Long has been savvy in signifying on the presupposition.[16] Recognizing that no little part of the experience of violent dismemberment experienced by those who have suffered the West has been the deconstruction of their operative myths of origin—leaving them not only physically violated, socially uprooted, and economically consumed, but metaphysically sundered from any explanatory scheme that would answer to the trauma—Long has mastered the mastery.[17] For instance, taking in hand the innovation of Lutheran historian of religions Rudolph Otto, Long has applied Otto's formula in a manner that simultaneously reveals and queries Western cannibalism. Where Otto offered up the *mysterium tremendum et fascinọsum* as a single category that would leverage comparison across the colonial map of meaning, Long has broken open the elocution on the hard anvil of oppression.[18] Yes, the Ultimate comes in the form of a mystery that is both alluring and overwhelming. But in the masticulations of the modern Moloch that is global capital, experience of the Absolute itself has been torn into pieces. "Fascination" is the spiritual privilege only of the powerful; "terror" is

the watchword of their prey.[19] Long's genius is to have recognized that colonial and postcolonial cultures around the globe have had to resort to a desperate re-creation of themselves under the aegis of the Absolute understood as *tremendum:* shards of dismembered myth are imbricated with shreds of empirical knowledge imposed by the conquerors to reconstruct a cosmos now stalked by an unintelligible Power of violence.[20] For the rest, the West itself emerged as militant Trickster, ever showing a face partially hidden, fetishizing materials and juggling objects in disappearing acts and sudden materializations that answered to no observable logic that could be discerned, on the ground, in the conquered colony.[21]

The response around the globe has been the innovation of religions of the oppressed such as *Voudou* Rite, Ghost Dance, Holiness Church, Cargo Cult, Millennarian Revolt, Rasta Reiteration, and indeed Black Syncopation *writ large*, created by communities of contingency, laboring to re-figure their fragility in forms of identity that serve survival in impossible circumstances.[22] Of course, from the point of view of the conquering culture itself—and its academic and popular media of interpretation—such innovations of the colonized are dismissed as superstitious mumbo jumbo. (Or worse. That *voudou* drums and *orisha*-inspired inventions of iron weaponry, in the eighteenth-century French colony of San Domingo, became major tools of the only successful national slave revolt in human history, was much too dangerous a memory to be allowed popular recall.[23] *Voudou,* in particular, had to be effectively suppressed as "demonic.") But for the conquered themselves, such creative mythic probings of their now inscrutably "lithic" circumstances—more often than not—more accurately represented the absurdity of their calamity than the reasoned discourses of political economy and anthropology.[24] One way or another, their ritual reconfigurations gave voice to an irreducible contradiction that could not be rationally solved, but only creatively survived, in (spite of) its inanity. "Divinity" was worked up ritually as the "Profound Otherness" under whose tutelage these invading others could be dismissed as temporary aberrations.[25]

CONTEXTUALIZATION

But it is also arguable that this terrifying global takeover by light-skinned Europeans was nowhere organized as ruthlessly and relentlessly as in the various schemes of chattel slavery and the resulting racisms that have trammeled their social settings ever since.[26] And here Long's proposal to re-examine the religious consciousness that has resulted erupts from under his own skin. His work trumps the trick he is interrogating.[27] Euro-theory like that of Otto or of Gerardus van der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade or Karl Marx, Joachim Wach or Leopolde von Ranke, all becomes so much fodder for a tantalizing reconstruction.[28] Long's academics are

erudite, but with a difference. The sensibility his ability elaborates is quintessentially African. But its identity is not genetic as much as it is rhythmic.[29] The arguments he raids and recants are not so much reversed as riffed. They are made to yield a syncopated insight, their cadence caterwauled into a different temporal payoff. What in jazz improvisation or hip hop verbalization is explored "off the beat" also shows up in Long's instinct to use theory against itself.[30]

But his is not individual genius alone. It is backed by both chorus and community. DuBois before him accomplished a similar "sounding," bending Hegel to host a pan-global Africanism, figuring Freud in service of a dark-faced freedom, replaying Marx all along the color line.[31] The ancestry to be honored here is epochal—a long line of figures known and unknown, the mind of Morrison, the zeal of Zora Neale, the eloquence of Ellison, the frank funk of the off-timing sistah who, when asked her reaction to the Queen of England's visit, said, "Well, she's fascinating. But so am I."[32] "Fascination," inside the tribe that continually has to transvalue terror into a measure of triumph or at least titillation, is a common commodity. The resulting culture of style is broadly boasted, extensively entertained in patterns of call/response-elaboration whose permutations are virtually limitless. At the heart of such an improvised culture of survival is an intuition about *time* that borders on the *infinite*. Not alone an African understanding, but arguably nowhere as deeply explored or as heavily taxed with the burden of existence as in dark-skinned struggles to survive, is the instinct to *counter spatial incarceration with temporal liberation*. In Long's terms, the resulting "black" consciousness is irreducibly a consciousness that is "religious." But how so?

PER-SON(IF)IC-ATION

The modern form of domination that has taken shape in the history of European colonization and imperial aggression has clearly elevated the disciplines and technologies of the eye as its *modus operandi*.[33] It is almost as if the ancient idea of the "evil eye," the quintessential look of envy, intending "ravagery"—an eyeball opening like a mouth to covet and consume—found elevation to a position of global hegemony in the white European project of "eating" its others. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the emergence of racialization schemes throughout the European world order as the primary form of social shorthand governing the on-going project of accumulation and control.[34] Dark skin color in modern social structure has again and again been made the anchor of hierarchized regimes of perception. Although continuously contested by the peoples they "organize"—and continuously revised in response (by those with power)—such schemes continue to manage access by way of immediately perceptible difference.[35] Today that man-

agement has gone high tech. But whether the question of moment is securing oil in Iraq (in 1991 and 2003) or secluding CEOs from the death throes of the corporations they have manipulated into insolvency (as in 2002), proximity to (or distance from) the prerogatives and priorities of pallor is more determinative of political outcomes than any other single gate-keeping category. The gated community—as indeed the "gated" country—is the rather obvious economic analogue of this social form of surveillance that parses space by way of race.[36]

Here modern emphasis on phenomenal appearance (masking "noumenal mysteriousness") begins to enter into the constitution of the human subject. Enlightenment epistemologies privileging the vaunted transparencies of the unimpeded gaze threaten in our day to find global institutionalization in satellite systems and sophisticated softwares that make the entire surface of the planet an outdoor prison. Already in many protected terrains, the surveillance camera is coded to react to those not evincing the right appearance.[37] Skin surface is not alone the deciding signifier, but neither is it very far down on the scale of "what causes alarm."

The resulting form of human being—in this apotheosizing and absolutizing of the (light of the) visual—is not yet clarified. But the shift to a valuing of the image as all in contemporary social concourse is perhaps indicative of the prospect.[38] Foucault's nightmare of the panopticon may be more than a metaphor "to think with." Already populations of color around the globe find themselves not only caught in a heavily policed and policing social category, but simultaneously contained and coerced in the global economy it manages. No longer is the primary axis of conflict West and East, but North and South. And the naturally produced "southern sunscreen" of melanin registers large in the calculus that controls.

In such an ambit of visual hegemony, work with sound is often dismissed as counterfeit. For those with little else to work with, it is actually a form of "counter-fate." It regularly interrupts the monologue of the eye with the polyphony of the ear. And just as African tones of brown have anchored the bottom of the global regime of color, so African explorations of audition have arguably sounded the deepest depths of subversion of that visual regime.[39] Robert Farris Thompson has enumerated the degree to which an African cultural sensibility has surreptitiously rebounded upon American culture, like an unanticipated return of the repressed from the bygone years of enslavement.[40] "The entire Western world," he says, "now rocks to an African beat."[41] Whether this is comprehended as divine eruption or as demonic disruption depends, of course, upon things that cannot be seen—like one's ultimate myth of existence. What it is generally not denominated as, however, is "mere play."

For the young denizens of American inner cities, for instance, the

hip hop sound that emerged in the late 1970s constituted the latest in a long line of black sonic innovations that gave meaning to a meaningless world.[42] The urban space they were forced to inhabit might not be owned by them, but it could be taken over, an hour at a time, by a boombox or a turntable and made to yield a temporary form of community, constituted in rhythm, calibrated in syncopation, ravaged in the pleasures of incantatory rhyme. A building could be "tagged" in vibratory syllables shouting visionary images of a better world, making "bad" shout "good" without changing a single letter. For the parents of the white suburban youth who soon after began ravenously consuming such ribald ghetto products, however, the sonic penetration of their children constituted a crisis worthy of a congressional hearing.[43] In both suburb and city, space was relativized in an alternative time(ing), a category of the eye overcome by a solidarity of the ear.

TRANSFIGURATION

This tactic of timing has durability. Much of the cultural prodigality of African Americanity has worked the dimension of rhythm—whether in its long line of musical creation, its intervention in sartorial styles, its modalities of meaning-making in preaching and painting, story-telling and play-making, textile-weaving and word-smithing, signifying, theorizing, analyzing, rhyming, and "lying"—that it has been called, at times, the community of the third ear.[44]

The attempts to identify what is specific to the quality and character of the interventions and influences are endless: Gates' notion of tropic revision, West's kinesthetic spirituality, Mark's code-switching, Smith's conjuring, Gilroy's sublimity, Anderson's grotesquery, Earl's "pearls" of obscurity, Morrison's funk, Hurston's specifying, Baker's blues-crying, all the bent notes and broken lines and domination-defying intensity of precocity of black bombast and beauty that remains and grows as America's most valued cultural contribution on the international scene.[45] Much of it is a labor of multiplicity—opening out the paradigmatic register of irony under the syntagmatic chain of linearity in everyday speech, opening out percussive backbeats and slides and syncopations under the melody line in song, dance and walk alike, opening out unaddressed pain under the policies of vaunted equality, opening out prophecy under the skin of ordinary folk marching down southern lanes, opening out indestructible spirituality inside the chain of slavery, opening out granite-faced determination inside the ghetto-house of despair.[46] Everywhere, everywhere—not settling for the singularity of the offered space, but unfolding multiple layers of possibility, triple times, quadruple identities, inside "the one."

It is perhaps this instinct, this necessary creation of an incarcerated population, continually stippling the shadows with light and light with

shadows, that marks the modality as religious. Puritan America birthed itself under a Calvinist imagination of an infinite Divine Majesty; African America discovered the divine hidden under its own skin, in an *infinity of the miniscule* that is never *not* able to exploit what is seemingly too tight. Charlie Parker's sax is here the symbol: no interval of beat too tiny that it cannot be populated with a profligate crowd of bopping, hopping, squawking creatures of sound. Time is augured as the infinity that space cannot erase. Strangely, in this sense, blackness is precisely the modality of living a plurality.

MYTHOLOGIZATION

In any case, Long's call for a methodology commensurate with the creativity exactly raises the dilemma that is the heart of the delirium.[47] Long's insistence that the hallmark of colonial experience was the rupture of the operative myth of origins also underscores the import of the temporal.[48] Such myths themselves encoded the experience of space as riven with a faultline that remains inscrutable—a place back in the mists of time where the community (that such a myth anchors) was nestled up close to the gods, *chthonic* deities and sky *divas* in intimate converse with their creatures.[49] But then the unimaginable happens. For some unfathomable reason, a minor infraction—peeling the banana the wrong way, stepping in the wrong puddle, seeing one's shadow—occasions a rent of cosmic scope. The sky recedes, the earth shrinks down, the gods retire beyond sight. Only the story remains to recall the intimacy . . . and bridge the break with "a reason," however unreasonable. The narrative itself both opens and closes the rupture.

But in the violence of colonial takeover, indigenous myths were ruptured irreparably. Now a new "origin" of terrifying inscrutability required a completely new work of myth.[50] This was not a rupture only vaguely remembered in the old stories; it was immanent, indiscriminant, ineluctable. It re-initiated the community in the meaning(lessness) of utter contingency.[51] It answered to no available schema. It submitted to no ritual redress. In its "maw," the community's entire relationship to time was shattered and swallowed up in something larger and un-narrate-able.

But for the displaced populations of African slaves, the mnemonic break was double. Not only is communal time ruptured, but its space of memory is forcibly sheared away. For slaves, there is nothing concrete left but the mouth of the slave ship. Both time and space "disappear." The only remaining referent is the body itself, now stolen in a category of darkness and returned alienated, as (somebody else's) mere property. It is excised from its geography, extracted from its history, made to carry its memory in the radically reduced mode of mere physicality.[52] The black body—now nothing in its own right—is also everything. The skin

surface has been made to know the raw edge of rupture as its (now) primary tactile experience. In slavery and its aftermath, black physicality is forced to become, in a bizarre manner, the very incarnation of such a "break." It is made into its own myth of origins.

While there is much here that cannot be ventured in so short an article, suffice it for our purposes to recognize the radicalization of time involved. Long nods towards the depth-dimension of this alteration by noting that for the people so violated, history becomes not so much a theater of eventful action, nor a background for mystical escape, but a modality of initiation.[53] Divinity, he argues, is experienced not in terms of a "confirmation of their being within the structures of America," but rather in the "self-critical" mode of a "transformation of consciousness," an altered awareness of occupying time and space perpetually in the form of crisis.[54] And I would argue, then, that it is no accident that the "break" becomes a hallowed "space of living" for this community under greatest colonial duress. It is rupture itself that is hollowed out in African refusals to be entirely governed by the racializing eye of whiteness, the rupture with their own past that they are made to bear in the Middle Passage, the rupture they create in the English grammar used to garrote their memory, the rupture they proliferate with sound in breaking Euro-musics into "swinging" universes, the rupture they live as a new form of human consciousness.[55]

SELF-POSSESSION

To circle back to where we began this writing, Amy is emblematic of a historical dilemma become a spiritual prolegomena. Her mode of multiplicity reads like nothing so much as slave conversion narratives, in which the height of the transformative experience is a consciousness of oneself from a reference point somewhere outside of oneself. In *God Struck Me Dead,* one ex-slave recounts,

> I died and saw a deep hole, and a little man called to me saying, "Follow me. ". . . I don't know how I left, but I do know how I went to heaven. I declare to you I saw myself in two bodies. Little me was standing looking down on the old, dead me lying on a cooling board. . . . I am not hell-scared or devil-dodging, for I know that I have died and don't have to die anymore.[56]

Another affirms,

> When I was converted I seen myself in two parts. I was converted at home. I was converted twenty-four years this September. I wasn't at church or mourner's bench. I seen myself in the spirit; I seen one of my spirits washing the feet of the other spirit.[57]

Neither is remarkable for being unusual in the assembled narratives.

The experience of being rendered "multiple"—of suddenly inhabiting more than one body at once, of occupying different dimensions of time in the same space, of crossing a threshold between life and death and looking back from the one to the other, of being conscious of more than one consciousness—lies close to heart of religious liberation in African American experience. But it is not alone the possession of that community. Very recently a white friend of mine told me of his own strange multiplication at a moment when he accidentally stepped into an empty elevator shaft in a darkened building and fell fifteen feet:

> My consciousness instantly snapped up six feet above my body and watched the fall elapse in slow motion for forty-five minutes, during which time I saw all kinds of images of people and events, and then suddenly snapped back into my body and began feeling the pain of a broken ankle, shoulder and back.

The difference is, the African American community has been made to remain in that alternative consciousness, to live there, suspended between the watching and the pain, a community investing a space of time outside the conformity of clock time, where it cannot be beaten even while it *is* being beaten, a community harbored in the off-beat, in the overtone, hovering, like the spirit, at creation, over the unformed un(i)formity of capitalist chaos.

What happens—over time—if a community is made to exist at such an impossible place of no-time, is made to live time "u-topically," outside of any topography it can claim as its own, or, what may be the same thing, is made to live space "u-rhythmically," in the beat of no one beat, e-ternally, dwelling there where time itself is multiple, plastic, not yet a coordinate of space, there where consciousness emerges as hyper-conscious? This impossibility is the simultaneous gift/affliction DuBois formalized as "double-consciousness," the liminal space between worlds where the veil, dropping like a wall, also reveals that arbitrary exclusion *as* arbitrary.[58] Either side of the wall-bifurcating space is an infinity of time, is the possibility of off-timing. While such an unmasking of modernity as a Trickster—claiming serious authority for an ordering that is itself so much smoke and noise—must never be allowed to go bail for the serious challenge and no-saying such an aberration deserves, neither must such a monstrosity be "absolutized" by the resistance offered. Here Long's proposal for a study of African American consciousness as religious finds its effervescence. Modernity has spelled doom for perhaps the majority of the world's peoples (as well as an exponentially increasing percentage of the world's other life forms). It has leveraged that doom largely in the ledger of color. But in so doing, it has also forced color into a modality of divination. Time has been mined as the dark body of God.

ENDNOTES

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[2] James W. Perkinson, "Theology and the City: Learning to Cry, Struggling to See," *Cross Currents* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 105, 112-13.

[3] Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 174, 178, 196.

[4] Long, *Significations*, 177-79.

[5] Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), xiii; Edward Bruce Bynum, *The African Unconscious: Roots of Ancient Mysticism and Modern Pyschology* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 81, 86-7, 94, 97; Joseph Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); xi, 180, 184-85, 191-95; Morton Marks "Uncovering Ritual Structures in Afro-American Music," in *Religious Movements in Contemporary America*, ed. Irving I. Zaretsky and Mark P. Leone (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 67, 87, 94.

[6] Technically, in Fon-inspired Haitian organizations of possession cult activity, the possessing entities are called *lwa*. I am here, and in what follows, taking poetic license to talk about the phenomenon in terms more likely to be recognized across the Caribbean and North America as derivative from West Africa and now common to Brazil and Benin as well as Brooklyn, N.Y. and Brighton, England.

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[8] Long, *Significations*, 164, 190, 196-98.

[9] Long, *Significations*, 165, 170.

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[11] Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "The Other"* and the Myth of Modernity (New York: Continuum, 1995), 117, 122.

[12] Long, *Significations*, 123.

[13] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 160-64; Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 54-5; Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 60-4; James Perkinson, "Rage with a Purpose, Weep Without Regret: A White Theology of Solidarity," *Soundings* 82, nos. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 1999), 439.

[14] Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c. 1500- c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1-2.; Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 13, 21, 53.

[15] Ruth Frankenberg, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Mat-*

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[19] Long, *Significations*, 123, 165, 169, 196.

[20] Long, *Significations*, 110, 139, 166-67.

[21] Long, *Significations*, 137, 167; Robert J. Foster, "Your Money, Our Money, the Government's Money: Finance and Fetishism in Melanesia," in *Border Fetishism: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*, ed. Patricia Spyer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 63, 67.

[22] Long, *Significations*, 111, 166-67, 197.

[23] Jon Michael Spencer, *The Rhythms of Black Folk: Race, Religion, and Pan-Africanism* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1995), xv; Robert Farris Thompson, "The Flash of the Spirit: Haiti's Africanizing Vodun Art," in *Haitian Art*, ed. Ute Stebich (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers/The Brooklyn Museum, 1978), 28-9; Karen McCarthy Brown, "Systematic Remembering, Systematic Forgetting: Ogou in Haiti," in *Africa's Ogun*, ed. Sandra T. Barnes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 86.

[24] Long, *Significations*, 139, 153-54, 167, 178, 197.

[25] Long, *Significations*, 167.

[26] Jorge Klor de Alva, "Is Affirmative Action a Christian Heresy?" *Representations* 55 (Summer), 66-7; Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas*, 122.

[27] Long, *Significations*, 8-9, 167.

[28] Long, *Significations*, 25, 29, 74, 196.

[29] Spencer, *The Rhythms of Black Folk*, ix, xvi; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 202; Bynum, *The African Unconscious*, 87, 93-5.

[30] Kristin Lattany, "Off-timing: Stepping to the Different Drummer," in *Lure and Loathing: Essays on Race, Identity, and the Ambivalence of Assimilation*, ed. Gerald Early (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 165, 172; Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, xiii-xiv; Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan Uniersity Press/University Press of New England, 1994), 39; Spencer, *The Rhythms of Black Folk*, 151, 165-69.

[31] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Greenwich CT: Fawcett, 1961), xiv, 15-17.

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[40] See also Bynum, *The African Unconscious*, 74.

[41] Talk given at the African American Museum of Detroit, 8 November 1997.

[42] Rose, *Black Noise*, 61.

[43] Spencer, *The Rhythms of Black Folk*, 165, 171-73.

[44] Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 68, 70.

[45] See Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 45, 51, 75; Cornel West, "Black Culture and Postmodernism," 93; Marks, "Uncovering Ritual Structures in Afro-American Music," 61; Theophilus Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5, 8, 18, 40-2, 113; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 120, 203,216; Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 129-31, 137, 158; Riggins Earl Jr., *Dark Symbols, Obscure Signs: God, Self, and Community in the Slave Mind* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), vii, 130-31; Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 62, 68, cited in Susan B. Willis, *Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 83-109 and Dwight Hopkins, *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 57-60; Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on the Road* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 194-95, cited in Willis, *Specifying*, 15, 30-1; Houston Baker, *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 11, 110-12, 135-37; Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6, 27-9.

[46] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 49.

[47] Long, *Significations*, 196-97.

[48] Long, *Significations*, 110, 165, 177.

[49] Long, *Significations*, 30-1.

[50] Long, *Significations*, 139, 167, 170.

[51] Long, *Significations*, 161, 165, 167.

[52] Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Seattle Bay Press, 1992), 27-9. Notice this is not at all the same as the old argument that Africans were a people without history, but rather an attempt to imagine the radicality of the *historical* rupture slavery imposed.

[53] Long, *Significations*, 181.

[54] Long, *Significations*, 180.

[55] Long, *Significations*, 139, 155, 180, 183.

[56] Clifton Johnson, ed., *God Struck Me Dead: Voices of Ex-Slaves* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 143.

[57] Johnson, *God Struck Me Dead*, 168.

[58] DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 15-16.

Black Bodies in Pain and Ecstasy: Terror, Subjectivity, and the Nature of Black Religion[1]

Anthony B. Pinn

ABSTRACT: This article argues that at its core, black religion involves a quest or struggle for complex subjectivity. It is a wrestling against efforts to dehumanize those of African descent historically documented through the process of slavery, disenfranchisement, etc. This depiction of the nature of black religion does not promote a static reality, unchanged through the ages. Religion is not essentialized in that sense. Rather, religion's core is responsive to changing existential conditions and is manifest through ever-evolving institutions, doctrines, rituals, and so on. Scholarly attention to this theory of black religion requires a new method of study. Pushing beyond conversation regarding method most often presented in terms of a hermeneutic of suspicion, this article concludes with the outline for a new hermeneutic of style.

At times black religious studies makes concessions to non-Christian realities, yet its conversation effectively excludes these realities as anything more than elements external to the true focus of black religious experience, understood as being the Christian faith. Recent work by archaeologists which affirms black religious diversity, for example, should make it difficult to maintain this position with any integrity. In short, what we are learning about the religious life of enslaved Africans, combined with contemporary and overt appreciation for "non-Christian," so to speak, forms of religious experience serves as a theoretical and methodological challenge to narrow depictions of African American religious experience and identity. Put in the form of a question: Is there a link between these seemingly divergent traditions? Within this essay I respond to this question through a discussion

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of black religion's nature, sensitive to the challenges of history of religions and the diversity of black religions, framed by several major assertions: (1) that the elemental nature of black religion is an impulse or feeling toward complex subjectivity; (2) that religion so conceived is displayed through the body; and (3) that a method for studying religion so conceived must involve attention to the body and its presentation.

My attention to the decentering of Christianity as synonymous with black religion, as well as my increasing attention to the work of historians of religion, has raised for me the possibility of thinking beyond religious institutions and doctrines that dominate my published work up to this point. These institutions and doctrines are important but, if historian of religion Charles Long is correct, attention to them does not uncover fully what it means to be black and religious. This is because they—institutions and doctrines—are simply ruptures in a group's historical context through which religion is manifest. Therefore, institutions like the Black Church and the Nation of Islam and their theological positions provide what Charles Long refers to as "a language for the meaning of religion."[2] To more fully understand black religion requires investigation of that which underlies historical manifestations of religion. It entails effort to articulate black religion's center or essential nature. Drawing on a rather loose use of history of religions, I argue that black religion's elemental nature involves an impulse or feeling toward complex subjectivity.

THE SHAPING OF BLACK BODIES

Development of the slave trade and later systemic mechanisms of dehumanization (or objectification) subjected Africans and their descendants to a type of existential and ontological degradation by which they were transformed into objects of history. This status as objects is articulated in early justifications of the slave trade. Furthermore, the treatment which enslaved Africans suffered speaks to this degraded existential and ontological status. While slavery ended, the status of free blacks did not improve. For instance, the pseudo-sciences and popular literature during the early twentieth century continued the dehumanization process and gave materiality to the idea of inherent inferiority through descriptions of black bodies. The novelist Thomas Dixon reinforced earlier depictions when providing the following description of a black man who had been accused of raping a young white woman: "His thick lips were drawn upward in an ugly leer and his sinister bead-eyes gleamed like a gorilla's. A single fierce leap and the black claws clutched the air slowly as if sinking into the soft white throat."[3] Such depictions were common within the American popular imagination and made the restriction of life options for blacks that much easier to develop and enforce with zeal. With this in mind, the words of Cornel West ring

true: "the notion that black people are human beings is a relatively new discovery in the modern West. The idea of black equality in beauty, culture, and intellectual capacity remains problematic."[4]

During slavery and freedom, forms of violence with ritual qualities developed and served to reinforce the assumed inferiority and thingness of blacks.[5] For example, through slave auctions and lynchings—what I call rituals of reference—an effort was made to reinforce the overdetermined or fixed black identity that render black Americans an odd form of life that looked somewhat human but was ontologically no more significant than cattle. Concisely stated, these rituals of reference served as celebration—as accounts of lynchings and auctions attest—for white participants in that they restored social and psychological balance, and provided whites with confirmation of their dominance and status as the creators of history. In addition, these rituals of reference, by forcing the "thingafication" of blacks, promoted a sense of existential and ontological terror and dread, as an interview of Tabb Cross and Lewis Smith in 1861 illustrates:

> the continual dread of this separation of husband and wife, parents and children, by sale, which may arise from the improvidence, misfortune, death, or other accident in life, happening to the owner, is inseparable from a state of slavery. It may happen at any moment, and is one of the greatest miseries hanging over the head of the slave. His life is spent in the fear of it. The slave may forget his hunger, bad food, hard work, lashes, but he finds no relief from the ever-threatening evil of separation.[6]

With respect to lynchings, the display of mutilated bodies served not only as a warning to other blacks, but also as a source of terror. Those viewing the remains and knowing the flimsy reasons for lynching had to think: what prevents this from happening to me? Furthermore, in response to those who raise questions concerning the decline in lynchings that took place in the 1950s and argue an end to torture and terror as a tool of white supremacy, an extension of Foucault's analysis of the prison system is useful. While transferring the context to the United States, pay attention to Foucault's argument. He argues that a "certain political economy of the body" is at the center of modern methods of law and order. Even when this focus on flesh does not involve extreme violence, as was the case during an early period, it remains clear that "it is always the body that is at issue."[7] That is to say, as lynchings decrease, the use of legal means of discipline such as prison sentences gain ground. But even this points to a type of terror of the body, the continuing need to destroy flesh for the preservation of social order. To neglect this act of sacrifice could result in social chaos.

These rituals of reference were necessary to maintain the world as whites had created it, and to do so through the symbolic manipulation

of black bodies and the subsequent fostering of terror. Rituals of reference are meant to counter this slide into chaos by maintaining the established—or sacred—societal order with its myths of creations and meanings that place whites at the heights of meaning and being, that make sense of the world through a mythology of white supremacy. For the status quo society, these rites mean order. But for Africans and their descendants, these rituals entail a collapse into meaninglessness, into nothingness, in that these rituals force, in numerous ways, blacks into the position of nonbeing as historical objects or objects of history. In contrast to this, for whites "being" includes the potential for transhistorical existence, and this potential is reinforced by the restrictions placed on blacks.

RELIGION: AN IMPULSE TOWARD COMPLEX SUBJECTIVITY

History is marked by resistance to this mutation into objects. Perhaps the best example, certainly the most comprehensive, is found in the form of black religion. Put another way, the story of black religion is one of resistance to this objectification, a wrestling with history through which black subjectivity was asserted and black bodies reclaimed. What Long says concerning slaves remains relevant. He argues that slaves were involved in a struggle to both recognize "the opaqueness of their condition" and move beyond it through the development of various modes of religious consciousness. In short, the false consciousness that slavery sought to impose was creatively countered through a new identity forged within the context of religious identity.[8] Novelist Richard Wright speaks to this origin of religion in response to dread and terror when saying that within each person lurks an element of "primal fear and dread" with great impact on our movement through the world. While strong, this dread does not go unchallenged. Rather, there also exists in the human a "reflex urge toward ecstasy, complete submission, and trust. The springs of religion are here."[9] As Long and Wright note, this terror or dread gives rise to the historical manifestation of religiosity. Allow me to explain by way of a scenario, one primarily concerned with a hermeneutical take on the application of black religious forms.

Throughout the United States, black Christians gather. While the sermon is the central element, rituals such as congregational singing, prayer, and testimonies are also important. All these religious activities are meant to enliven the Christian's resolve to live a Christ-like existence, and to provide "contact" with God through praise and worship. It is understood by all gathered within these services that God sent Christ to die on the cross for the redemption of humankind, and those who believe in God must follow the example of Christ, the god-human redeemer. In the same cities and neighborhoods in which these

Christian services take place, members of the Nation of Islam also gather. They come to reflect on the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, who was the last prophet sent by Allah to redeem the blacks of North America. During their meeting they give little attention to song and do not give praise to a spirit-God. Rather, they proclaim that Allah, or God, dwelt in human form and that black people are in fact divine beings. In still other locations within these same cities, black practitioners of Voodoo (or what some may refer to as *Vodou*) gather to celebrate the lwa—the gods—and make request. Devotees of the lwa offer gifts and when possessed by a particular god, they dance in a way that reflects that particular deity. It is likely that practitioners of these traditions see no substantive similarities between their practices. Christians would be offended by the deification of humans present in the Nation of Islam, and the Nation of Islam would object to the idea of a spirit-God present in the Black Church and Voodoo. While practitioners of Voodoo might be more receptive to many of the theological and ritual ideas within the Black Church, they might find Christian cosmology too restrictive.

Although I acknowledge strong differences between these various traditions, I also argue that there is a central and shared basic structure to all these divergent practices. That is to say, the rituals and doctrines, institutions and practices, of black people represent only the historical manifestations of a more basic impulse, an impulse which is the progenitor of all phenomena we label black religion. This underlying impulse is the urge within all three traditions to construct and celebrate the subjectivity of blacks, whether as significant children of god, as gods themselves, or as the sons and daughters of the gods. Long's observation with respect to religions of the oppressed such as cargo cults or millenarian movements is applicable here:

> [T]he problem of identity for colonized and neocolonized societies is the same issue of consciousness, but it is not simply an attempt to create a new consciousness among the oppressed but a new form of human consciousness and thus a new historical community.[10]

Enslavement and colonization did not merely warp the oppressed's sense of self. Rather, both acts of violence had at their core a desire to remove all traces of their humanity. There is, then, a manner in which contact and conquest as experienced by communities of the oppressed requires, if it is to be countered, the fundamental "creation" of their human-ness.

In arguing for complex subjectivity as the center of black religion, I am aware of thinkers such as Lewis Gordon who argue that humans cannot be understood as subject or object, or even a combination of the two. Rather, humanity is best defined by "ambiguity," a complexity and

multidimensionality. My sense of complex subjectivity is meant to maintain Gordon's notion of being.[11] This basic structure or primary impulse accounts for the black Christians' talk of connection to the image of God in ways that subvert racist/sexist depictions of blacks as inferior beings. It accounts for the Nation of Islam's proclamation of the black person as god. And, it accounts for the recognition of the human's connection to divine powers found in traditions such as Voodoo. That is, this push for subjectivity is often expressed in theistic traditions through notions of transcendence, and in other cases (such as humanism) through an embrace of human potential and creativity.[12]

RELIGION AND THE BODY DISPLAYED

A theory of black religion's nature and meaning so conceived highlights the body as having importance for religious symbolism and for methodological considerations. That is to say, as Long reminds us, black bodies during the period of slavery held several interconnected meanings. The most obvious meaning was the economic wealth the work of these bodies produced, and the sexual pleasure these bodies could offer. In addition, black bodies also presented a visual justification for the ideology used to philosophically buttress the slave system. In a sense, black bodies held meaning in that they served to produce goods; on the other hand, the justification for slavery generated by "these bodies of opacity" also rendered them meaningless.[13] Keeping Long's insight in mind, the centrality of a quest for complex subjectivity as the core of black religion is discernable through attention to black bodies and the cultural production reflecting them. That is to say, whereas some forms of black religion seek existential and ontological meaning through a downplaying of the body, it is more common for the body to serve as the primary mode of expressing this new status.[14]

The above understanding of the body's relationship to the nature and meaning of black religion must be supported by a revised theory of the body. Regarding this, I promote an understanding of the body as constructed and as lived, as being a physiological and biochemical reality set in historical experiences. The signs of age do not lessen many ways in which society seeks to essentialize the black body as symbolizing of ontological and existential restrictions. In addition, some might argue that the body is not a unique mode of expression in African American communities. All humans share this physiology. Yet this shared human physiology is not enough to negate the value of the movement of black bodies for an understanding of the African American religious experience because, as Mary Douglas notes, this shared physical form does not produce universal symbols. Furthermore, the social system in which black bodies dwell determines patterns for the presentation and function of black bodies represented in religious experience as opposition

and struggle. In short, the social system seeks to determine the ways in which the physical body is perceived and used.

Even the importance of dressing for Sunday, still a common practice in historically black denominations, speaks to a deeper sense of religiosity, because this alternative attire symbolizes a commitment to a full range of life options that extend beyond the economic value of muscle. Work clothing was not designed to enhance or celebrate the body but rather to enhance the ability to labor and to clearly mark time spent "on the clock," so to speak. But Sunday clothing pointed out the beauty of the black form by highlighting its presence, and this presence was amplified further through a range of "culturally distinctive bodily movements that characterized religious celebration."[15] In the twentieth century, Black Pentecostal churches in particular exemplify this thrust. The call to be in the world but not of it has often been played out as a need to bring the body under control. Think in terms of restrictions on sexual expression and dance, clothing and appearance, or pleasure in general. Others have expressed a rejection of oppressive and dehumanizing social ordering through an embrace of the bodily movements discouraged by many black churches. In other words, using the period of slavery as an example, every time the enslaved African celebrated or embraced his or her body through dance or the wearing of fine clothing, it served to deconstruct the popular assumption that the black body was good only for work undertaken to benefit others.[16] This process of deconstruction continued in the cultural arena in the defiance expressed in the blues.

Clearly, the relationship of control between the social system and the physical body is antagonistic; it is a fight by individual persons for a reconfiguration of the former. The former seeks to disembody, to use Douglas' term, interactions in ways that for African Americans revolve around invisibility, as being less than fully human. For African Americans, social control and subjectivity (that is bodily control) are oppositional and adversely related. That is to say, the loss of control over black bodies (on a variety of levels) was a necessary component of the social system. Structures were put in place to guarantee this loss of control. I believe this process is what Ralph Ellison had in mind in *The Invisible Man.* It informs the struggles endured by characters in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* as well as many novels by Toni Morrison. And, it is the process (the denial of black rage and being) Richard Wright struggles against in novels such as *Black Boy* and *Native Son.*[17] In the latter, Wright points to this pattern when describing the birth of the character Bigger Thomas:

> As my mind extended in this general and abstract manner, it was fed with even more vivid and concrete examples of the lives of Bigger Thomas. The urban environment of Chicago, affording a more stimulating life,

made the Negro Bigger Thomases react more violently than even in the South. More than ever I began to see and understand the environmental factors which made for this extreme conduct. It was not that Chicago segregated Negroes more than the South, but that Chicago had more to offer, that Chicago's physical aspect—noisy, crowded, filled with the sense of power and fulfillment—did so much more to dazzle the mind with a taunting sense of possible achievement that the segregation it did impose brought forth from Bigger a reaction.[18]

Again, religious experience, when viewed in light of the black body and its struggle against the social system, entails a stylized movement against warped depictions of African American identity, against limitation on being. Let us take as our example a rather secular practice that speaks to the body's role in religious experience as quest for subjectivity—the 1800s parades and strolls by African Americans in northern cities. With a greater sense of freedom in the North, African Americans often explored themselves religiously through experiments with the body, decorating it and moving it in ways that fought against the societal tendencies of the day.

I believe much of what is involved in this struggle for full humanity, the movement to overcome fixed and overdetermined identities, is stylistic in nature. It is a form of display. The importance of this style of presentation is in part affirmed through the white backlash, the manner in which style of presence was limited through Jim Crow regulations and extralegal punishments such as lynching. It was expected that African Americans would both look and act the part of the inferior being. White American enforcement of that expectation was not simply a matter of socioeconomic and political maintenance. Rather, at its deeper levels, it was an effort to quench the religious yearnings of African Americans, to break their consciousness and reduce it to a demeaning subhumanity. In this way, white Americans avoided the creation of complex subjectivity through the alternative creation of black objects.

CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND THE DRIVE TOWARD MEANING

Enslaved Africans pushed toward subjectivity by rethinking their social and cultural context, and often expressed this process in the decorative arts.[19] As Bill Arnett notes, every great quilt, whether it be a patchwork, applique, or strip quilt, is a potential Rosetta stone.

> Quilts represent one of the most highly evolved systems of writing in the New World. Every combination of colors, every juxtaposition or intersection of line and form, every pattern, traditional or idiosyncratic, contain data that can be imparted in some form or another to anyone."[20]

These decorative arts and their complex linguistic and symbolic concerns point to a venue for the subjectivity struggle that is foundational to religious experience. Clearly, the creative impulse represented in this art pointed to African American struggle against an essentialized identity as beasts of burden. In other words, through textiles African Americans rejected an essentialized understanding of self as chattel without history and began the development of a more complex subjectivity through the preservation of African sensibilities and outlooks encoded into quilts and other "everyday" materials. The actual patterns and techniques point to the style of this struggle for subjectivity and rehearse the collected stories—religion—that summarize this religious experience.

The quilts and wall collages that decorated modest dwellings served as the inspiration for visual arts in the twentieth century. Romare Bearden used the wall collage style in his own artwork. Growing out of the social realism of his early work, Bearden gradually moved away from mainstream thematics and style and embraced the cultural context and sensibilities of his youth. This shift, which Bearden named "prevalence of ritual," is apparent in his collages such as the "Conjure Woman" and "Carolina Shout." Such pieces express the realities of his North Carolina home as well as the continuation of this certain style of ritual in places such as Harlem.[21] This continuity between recent visual arts and slave quilts and collages is extremely important. This is particularly true because the longevity of slave quilts was compromised due to heavy use and poor supplies. Other forms of the visual arts have lasted longer and provide even more vivid examples of religious experience's links to culture and cultural production.[22]

Guy C. McElroy argues that black artists in the twentieth century are responding to depictions of African Americans that are distorted, in that white artists seek to support a sense of blacks as "grotesque buffoons, servile menials, comic entertainers, or threatening subhumans. Such images denied African Americans humanity and complex subjectivity."[23] For example, William Sidney Mount gave great attention to the fine points of life in his paintings. In so doing, artistic representation of African Americans served to reinforce popular perceptions of the lazy and intellectually weak black. What leaked through these paintings was a need to ease racial tension by denying blacks beauty and vitality.[24] In other cases, white artists directed their gaze on the black body and rendered it exotic. As the "Ethiopian Form," a painting by Paul Outerbridge Jr. suggests, the black male body is desired for its depiction of masculinity, a play on the "bestial" or "natural" quality of the black body that serves to render women invisible while it essentializes the black male body, making it valuable only to the degree it can be consumed.[25] Through voyeuristic means and more deadly turns, many whites attempted to "live vicariously through African Americans, projecting

their own fantasies onto the bodies of black men and women."[26] In this sense, minstrel shows and other forms of voyeuristic exploitation amount to the demonic—life working against life through a process of imposed reification of stereotypes and essentialized notions.

Black artists countered this with images of African Americans that demonstrated a stronger sense of humanity and subjectivity. This was the case in the visual arts through the work of artists such as Tanner and Wilson; but it was, in a more general sense, the nature of all artistic expression. Alain Locke's *The New Negro* points to this dimension of the arts. Albert Barnes, a contributor to Locke's volume, says the following concerning African American art:

> The contributions of the American Negro to art are representative because they come from the hearts of the masses of people held together by like yearnings and stirred by the same causes. . . . It is a great art because it embodies the Negroes' individual traits and reflects their suffering, aspirations and joys during a long period of acute oppression and distress. . . . It has lived because it was an achievement, not an indulgence. It has been his happiness through that mere self-expression which is its own immediate and rich reward. Its power converted adverse material conditions into nutriment for his soul and it made a new world in which his soul has been free.[27]

The arts are important, because within African American life, they have been more than a self-indulgent process devoid of larger content. That is to say, art, in the words of Houston Baker, is "a product and producer in an unceasing struggle for black liberation. To be 'art,' the product had to be expressivity or performance designed to free minds and bodies of a subjugated people."[28] In short, art is symbolic of the struggle against status as objects of history, an expression of a desire to be subjects or shapers of history.

A METHOD FOR THE STUDY OF BLACK RELIGION

Finally, I would like to make a few comments concerning method in the study of black religion. Attention to the body as suggested here is useful but far from problem-free. African American cultural and historical memory, for example, are fragile for a variety of reasons, and this affects the level of epistemological certainty with which we approach resources. Nonetheless, hermeneutical approaches in black religious studies have often failed to recognize the problematic nature of cultural and historical memory.[29] Furthermore, modes of interpretation such as a hermeneutic of suspicion borrowed by many in black religious studies, including black theology, ethics, biblical studies, and history, are limited in that they point out the bad faith of the "status quo," but offer little in

the way of construction beyond race and gender. A hermeneutic of suspicion and other popular approaches fall short, in part, because they are text driven and give little attention to the style of presentation, the style of "being."

A failure to recognize the style of presentation—the significance of aesthetics—in the quest for complex subjectivity can result in missed information.[30] By aesthetics in this context, I point toward a mode of interpretation that is driven by concern with and attention to "beauty" and the "beautiful" within African American life. A hermeneutic of suspicion is concerned primarily with socioeconomic and political manipulations of tradition and history, and it thereby presents liberation in terms of new structures. But I suggest a hermeneutic of style that is in tune with the manner in which African Americans have responded to terror and dread through modalities of "beauty" beginning with the display of the body as act of "being."

This is a warning that resources for the study of black religion are not always as they read, but rather we must give attention to how they flow. I suggest a hermeneutic of style. I am not in a position to outline in detail this hermeneutic of style; however, I would like to briefly suggest sources for its construction. First, the application of aesthetics as a mode of interpretation within black religious studies will require greater interaction with scholars in cultural criticism and literary theory than is currently the case.[31] However, this hermeneutic is committed to an appreciation for both written and non-written forms of religious expression. Concerning this appreciation of non-written materials, I suggest that archaeology's growing interest in African American life holds promise. Driven by its historical moment of inception, the 1960s and 1970s, this form of archaeological inquiry concerned itself with better understanding the "story" of those who had been ignored by the official record of American life.[32] It seems reasonable to believe that the work of these social scientists, when devoted to an understanding of the complex relations and interactions within African American communities as opposed to the recovery of "Africanisms," will unearth, so to speak, information related to the African American quest for complex subjectivity (i.e., foundational form of religious experience). Plantation archaeology may also serve to point out the need for scholars of African American religious experience and expression to give attention to the religious signification of architecture. That is to say, archaeology might help us understand the manner in which material culture speaks to the quest for subjectivity and meaning via physical structures and physical space.

Black religious studies relies heavily on materials from the nineteenth century. However it is possible that archaeological findings and analyses may result in a richer epistemology and also greater comfort with non-written text materials that undergird my suggested shift away

from a hermeneutic of suspicion. It should be noted that the usefulness of archaeology here is not limited to physical excavation but also as a metaphor for the excavation of knowledge related to essentialism and identity. It is a way of going under what is stated or assumed. Such explorations should provide useful information on the "material manifestations that integrate African-American identity," in that through archaeology, black Americans are observed in the process of meaning-making, the formation of identity, the struggle against overdetermination.[33]

ENDNOTES

[1] This essay brings together many arguments and claims I make in a larger project, the Edward Cadbury Lectures for 2001-2002 (University of Birmingham, United Kingdom). The Lectures were published by Fortress Press under the title: *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

[2] Paget Henry, "African And Afro-Caribbean Existential Philosophies," in *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon (New York: Routledge, 1997), 15.

[3] Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905; reprint, Ridgewood, NJ: The Gregg Press, 1967), 323.

[4] Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 47.

[5] Orlando Patterson's *Rituals of Blood* and the work done by René Girard on sacrifice have been helpful in the development of this perspective. Orlando Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (New York: Basic Books, 1998); René Girard, trans. Patrick Gregory, *Violence and the Sacred*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

[6] John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 347.

[7] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 25. It is worth noting that, while Foucault was aware of the racialized nature of the U.S. prison system, he gives no real attention to this in his study. For information on the race and class dimensions of imprisonment, see Mark Taylor's *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

[8] Charles Long, "Perspectives for a Study of Afro-American Religion in the United States," in *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 177.

[9] Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers/Perennial Library, 1966, 1987), xxv.

[10] Charles Long, "The Oppressive Elements in Religion and the Religions of the

Oppressed," in *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 166.

[11] Lewis Gordon, "Existential Dynamics of Theorizing Black Invisibility," in *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, ed. Lewis Gordon (New York: Routledge, 1997), 72.

[12] I have found Victor Anderson's work helpful here. See *Beyond Ontological Blackness* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

[13] Charles Long, "Freedom, Otherness, and Religion: Theologies Opaque," in *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 197.

[14] The manner, however, in which the physical body is "constructed" in ways that are often oppressive, results in this being a difficult connection to make. Additional work on this issue is necessary, but for now my argument revolves around an admittedly vague interest in understanding existential freedom and the development of identity in relationship to the physical targets of social practices.

[15] Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 176.

[16] White and White, *Stylin'*, 84.

[17] Ralph Ellison, *The Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, [1952]); Alice Walker, *The Color Purple: A Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982); Richard Wright, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: Harper & Brothers [1945]); Richard Wright, *Native Son* (NY: Harper & Brothers, 1940).

[18] Richard Wright, "Introduction: How 'Bigger' Was Born," in *Native Son* (New York: Harper & Row/Perennial Library, 1966), xv.

[19] Floyd Coleman, "A Foreword" and Maude Southwell Wahlman, "A Foreword," in Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard's *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 6, 8. Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983) remains an important text for those interested in the expressive or material culture of African Americans.

[20] Cited in Maude Southwell Wahlman, "A Foreword," in Tobin and Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View*, 8-9. Also, Dobard, "Stitching Ideas into Patterns," in Tobin and Dobard, 30-1.

[21] See The Studio Museum in Harlem, *Memory and Metaphor: The Art of Romare Bearden, 1940-1987* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African-American Artists From 1792 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993); Ralph Ellison, "The Art of Romare Bearden," in *Going to the Territory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), cited in Maude Southwell Wahlman, "A Foreword," in Tobin and Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View*, 10.

[22] For information on my use of these terms see Anthony B. Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience* (Minnéapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), chapter 5.

[23] Guy C. McElroy, "Introduction: Race and Representation," in *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710-1940* (San Francisco, CA and Washington, D.C.: Bedford Arts and Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990), xi.

[24] McElroy, "Introduction," xiii.

[25] Hazel Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 56, 62.

[26] White and White, *Stylin'*, 90.

[27] Albert C. Barnes, "Negro Art and America," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Atheneum, 1986), 19, 20.

[28] Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Afro-American Poetics: Revisions of Harlem and the Black Aesthetic* (Madison, WI : University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 13.

[29] I have in mind, for example, Dwight Hopkins' read of slave narratives in light of Toni Morrison's essay titled "The Site of Memory" (in Cornel West, et al. *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990], 299-305) in which she raises questions concerning the historical "accuracy" of memories contained in literary records. For a useful discussion of fragile cultural memory see Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*, chapter 5.

[30] Michele Wallace, *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 2.

[31] See Addison Gayle Jr., *The Black Aesthetic* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971).

[32] Theresa A. Singleton, ed., "An Introduction to African-American Archaeology" in *"I, Too, Am America": Archeological Studies of African-American Life* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 1.

[33] Singleton, "An Introduction to African-American Archaeology," 4.

Field Notes: The Swedenborgian Church in South Africa

Jane Williams-Hogan

ABSTRACT: The Swedenborgian Church, also called the New Church, was established in South Africa among English-speaking settlers in 1850. It is based on the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). Swedenborg's "new" Christianity emphasizes, among other things, the internal meaning of the Bible, life after death, and the special spiritual qualities of black Africans. These field notes are based on a trip to South Africa in August 2000, and examine how the two primary types of Swedenborgian churches are adjusting to post-apartheid South Africa today. The English-speaking New Church is associated with the General Church of the New Jerusalem headquartered in the United States. Also affiliated with the General Church are a number of Zulu and Sotho congregations. The General Church has a hierarchical structure, a male priesthood, and primarily white leadership. One of the English-speaking societies has a school from preschool through eighth grade, and a Zulu-Sotho congregation sponsors a preschool. The New Church was established among black Africans independently from the General Church in 1909. Today that group is called the New Church of Southern Africa. It is congregationally structured, has a male priesthood, but a strong Women's League.

In the year 2000 I had the opportunity to visit five congregations of the General Church of the New Jerusalem in South Africa. These field notes are an interim report of what I observed during my visit, as well as a preliminary report about the independent New Church of Southern Africa. Both organizations are Swedenborgian, accepting the "revelation" of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) concerning the "Last Judgment" and the "Second Coming." These groups are of interest first

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because they profess faith in the written revelation of an eighteenth-century Swedish scientist and philosopher who became a visionary testifying about the "Lord Jesus Christ" and the "New Christian Church." And second, because the General Church congregations are part of an international, multi-cultural and multi-racial organization headquartered in the United States with primarily white leadership, and the New Church of Southern Africa is an indigenous black organization that today has no direct international ties.

The number affiliated with both groups is about equal, with each having approximately 15,000 congregates. Together these two organizations represent 60% of the total number of 50,000 members in all Swedenborgian groups worldwide. The 15,000 members of the New Church in Southern Africa represent the largest concentration of Swedenborgians in the world.

My agenda was to visit as many New Church societies as feasible during my short stay and, in so far as possible, get inside the life of the New Church in a post-apartheid South Africa. I wanted to develop a better understanding of the new and changing South African culture and to assess the opportunities and difficulties such changes would present to the New Church there. To those unfamiliar with the Swedenborgian Movement, the preliminary findings of my research trip need to be put in both a general and a particular historical perspective.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

In the history of religion Swedenborg is noted for his visionary experiences. These experiences changed his focus from science and philosophy to revelation and theology. From 1749 until his death in 1772 he published eighteen different titles that he believed contained a new Christian dispensation. His first work, *Arcana Coelestia* or *Heavenly Secrets* (1749–1756), was an eight-volume presentation of the inner or spiritual meaning of the biblical books of Genesis and Exodus. His last work, *Vera Christiana Religio* or *True Christian Religion* (1771), detailed the theology of the New Church. His most famous work is *De Coelo et ejus Mirabilibus et de Inferno ex Auditis et Visis* or *Heaven and Hell* (1758). In it he discusses the awakening of the individual in the spiritual world after death, the process he or she undergoes to arrive at his or her final spiritual destination in either heaven or hell, and then he describes the lives of angels in heaven and evil spirits in hell.

What makes the investigation of Swedenborgianism of interest to the general scholar of new religions is not only his new definition of Christianity and his descriptions of the afterlife, but the fact that he never attempted to found a church or any organization based upon his spiritual experiences of "things seen and heard."[1] He wrote most of his revelatory works anonymously. He claimed authorship only at the end

of his life, and in his last work, he clearly stated that he was called only to write and publish the revelation he had received. This did not prevent others from developing an organization, however. Only fifteen years after his death a church was established in London in 1787 based upon his religious writings by a group of individuals who had never personally known Swedenborg. That church was called The General Conference of the New Church, and is still in existence today.

Even before the British Conference was founded, Swedenborg's writings became available in many of the British colonies, both in the original Latin and in translation. They were first shipped there by believers or later brought there by members of the British Conference. They were sent to the colonies of Pennsylvania and Massachusetts in America in 1784, they were carried on the flagship of the fleet sent to the penal colony in Australia in 1788, and they were brought to Durban, South Africa in 1850. Today the Swedenborgian New Church is found around the world in Europe, North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania.[2]

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH IN SOUTH AFRICA

Swedenborg's teachings about the unity of God, and the reality of the spiritual world have a universal appeal, but they also reinforce some traditional African beliefs in an active spiritual realm. In addition to these teaching, however, Swedenborg wrote specifically about the spirituality of Africans. Their special qualities are mentioned throughout his religious writings. Jean Evans, who wrote *A History of the New Church in Southern Africa* has summarized these teachings: "Africans are the best, gentlest and most intelligent of all the gentiles, receiving goodness and truth more easily than any other race. They are capable of great enlightenment through heaven from the Lord. They long for [spiritual] information, and rejoice when they get it. . . . They are particularly perceptive of the Doctrine of the Lord."[3]

The New Church in South Africa can point to three independent beginnings—the Durban Society (1850), the Mooki Movement (1909), and Mofokeng's mission to Lesotho (1911).[4]

The Durban Society

The current Westville English-speaking society in Durban can trace its origins back to 1850 and the arrival of James Ridgway, his wife Susannah, and their five children in Port Natal, South Africa. A lawyer from Cheshire, England and a member of the British General Conference, he brought with him a complete set of Swedenborg's writings. Initially the family worshiped alone in their own home, but soon others

came to join them on Sundays. By 1890 the group had grown so large that they decided to build a church. It was opened for public worship in 1892. A school was begun at the same time. The church was first enlarged, and then a new larger facility was built early in the twentieth century. In 1972 more growth prompted the society to purchase land in the Westville suburb of Durban, where the Kainon School could expand. Although the congregation was originally part of the British General Conference, in 1915, the congregation called a General Church minister from the United States to serve them. It has been part of that organization ever since.

The General Church itself was founded in 1897 in the United States as an international organization. Its founding was based on doctrinal and organizational principles that differed from the General Convention, the first Swedenborgian organization established in the United States. Both the General Convention and the British Conference felt that the writings of Swedenborg were inspired, but the General Church believed that they were direct revelation from God. In addition both the General Convention and the British Conference are organized congregationally, while the General Church is organized hierarchically with an episcopal form of government. Today the two congregationally structured organizations also ordain women. This is not true of the General Church.

The Mooki Movement

The New Church of Southern Africa traces its roots back to David Mooki's discovery of Swedenborg's *True Christian Religion* in a second-hand book store in Krugersdorp in1909. Mooki was so inspired by what he read that he left the African Catholic Church to which he belonged and formed his own church in 1911 which he called the New Church of Africa. After reading this one book by Swedenborg, he was convinced of the theology it contained—that the One God of heaven and earth was the Lord Jesus Christ and that He had made his Second Advent. It is important to point out that this organization was the first genuinely African New Church established. It was not an off-shoot of any Western New Church organization, but was the fruit of an African response to the teaching of Emanuel Swedenborg.[5] At the same time that Mooki formed his own church, he set about to find a New Church body older than his own that he was convinced existed somewhere in the world. This was vital because they were unable to register with the authorities as a completely independent black church.[6]

In 1911 he met Samuel M. Mofokeng, and through him made contact with the Swedenborgian movement in England that same year. Nonetheless, it was not until 1917 that a permanent link was forged between these two groups and Mooki's church came under the supervision of the Foreign and Colonial Missions Committee. In 1919 the

Reverend James F. Buss arrived in Krugkersdorp to instruct the ministers and leaders as they said, in "the way of the New Church."[7] David Mooki was ordained 23 January 1921, and two weeks later nine other ministers were ordained. At this time there were approximately 2000 members in 100 different congregations.

David Mooki died in 1927. Nonetheless his church continued to grow and flourish. In 1933 the Mooki Memorial College was established in Orlando. Mooki's son Obed was trained there and became a driving force in the establishment of the New Church in Southern Africa. In 1961 the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion amalgamated with the New Church, swelling the membership to 25,000 with 114 ministers, 39 churches, and 15 manses.[8] In 1970 the mission of the New Church became completely independent and Obed S. D. Mooki became its first President. He continued in that capacity until his death in 1990.

OBSERVATIONS AND PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

I visited five General Church societies, three in Kwa Zulu Natal, and two in the Johannesburg region of Gauteng. The General Church has two English-speaking mixed race societies in South Africa, one in Westville, Kwa Zula Natal and the other in Bucculeuch, Gauteng. The society in Westville also has a school that currently serves both New Church and non-baptized students from pre-school to the eighth grade. It is called the Kainon School. I attended one Sunday service in Westville, and I also attended a Pastor's Council meeting. I was given a tour of the school from the pre-school through the upper grades. I visited two of the Zulu-speaking societies in Kwa Zulu Natal. I attended Sunday services in both of these societies, one in Clermont about ten minutes from Westville, and the other in Impapala in Zululand about two hours north of Durban. On both occasions I had lunch with the pastor and other invited guests. In Gauteng, I visited the church in Diepkloop, one of the non-English speaking societies in the Johannesburg area, and attended a Sunday service there that was given in both Zulu and Sotho. I also visited the society's pre-school while it was in session. During my stay in Gauteng, I also attended a Sunday Service in Buccleuch, located in between Pretoria and Johannesburg, and the home of a mixed race congregation.

I also visited the headquarters of the New Church in Southern Africa in Orlando, Gauteng. I had an interview with the current president of the organization and was given a tour of the church, the old campus built in the 1920s, and the recently completed theological school and dormitory building. I had the opportunity to learn about the fate of the New Church in Southern Africa, since the death of Obed Mooki in 1990.

Certain patterns emerged from my observations of these different

New Church congregations and organizations in South Africa. The priesthood in all of the New Church organizations currently operating in South Africa is open only to men. This reality has an important impact on the all of the black congregations. In the two English-speaking General Church Congregations, though women cannot be priests, they can and do play important lay leadership roles; the same is not true in the Zulu- or Sotho-speaking congregations.

In the New Church of Southern Africa, Mooki's group, the priesthood is also only open to men, but there is a very strong and active Women's League that has played a vital role in that organization from its very beginning. Obed Mooki's wife, Eulalia, was the driving force in this organization for many years, and in this way, she was seen as an equal partner in the church with her husband. The strength of the Women's League may be a factor in the ability of the New Church of Southern Africa to recruit men for the ministry. Organizing women to support all the functions of the church may give women a subtle but important hand in the recruitment process, ensuring that in each new generation men are nurtured to fill their essential functions in the church. At the time of my visit twenty-five men were in the process of theological training. But it is also true within this organization that men did not expect to be full-time paid employees of the church. This also meant that they attended theological school on a part-time basis. Nonetheless, as in all the black congregations, the pool of men actively involved with the church was considerably smaller that the pool of active women.

The most important problem facing the New Church in Southern African at the time of my visit was the schism that occurred shortly after Obed Mooki's death. The new president absconded with the bulk of the church's funds, and set up a rival organization in Bloemfontein, Orange Free State. He took approximately 5,000 members of the church with him. The schism, although perhaps not surprising after the death of a powerful and vigorous leader, affected the attractiveness and efficacy of the organization in the process of routinization. An important consequence that I was unable to assess was the degree of membership loyalty. Crucial at such times is the ability of the second generation to recruit the third generation in order to ensure the organization's future. Whereas both indigenous and international organizations have a stake in the future, a hierarchical, multicultural, and multiracial international organization may be able to provide greater resources to sustain the future, even to a weaker organization than one that is indigenous and troubled by schism.

All the black African congregations, including the New Church of Southern Africa had similar patterns of attendance regarding age and gender distribution. In general the congregations were composed primarily of women and children. Little boys up to the age of ten or so

attended church, but then there is a sharp drop off with very few or no teenage boys, and very few adult men. In the General Church societies, they were at best 12–14% of the congregations. This low figure creates serious leadership issues for these congregations. Black South African culture requires male leadership, thus low male church attendance translates into a small pool for current and future leadership development, whether lay or priestly.

In the English-speaking congregations the number of males and females was relatively equal and in Westville there were approximately the same number of adults and children. Two-thirds of the children were white and one-third were black or Indian. The adult population at church was composed of young adults and middle aged members, with fewer people over the age of fifty in attendance. In Westville there were approximately twelve non-white adults at the service out of a total attendance of 120. The non-white participants were members of the professional black elite of South Africa who can live in Westville since the end of apartheid. They are not necessarily members of the General Church, but have chosen to send their children to the Kainon School perhaps more for reasons of class than religion.

There was a similar pattern in attendance at Buccleuch, but the size of the congregation was smaller, approximately seventy-five to eighty people were in attendance, again fairly evenly divided between men and women with a similar age distribution. Ten to twelve children were present and three or four of them were black. The number of black adults was not more than six. But those six were well-educated and some of them had lived in exile during apartheid from the 1970s onward. Some of them had been raised in the New Church and were therefore church members. They returned to South Africa after Majority Rule was established. They are upper-middle class and seem not have a lot in common with their less well-educated native-speaking sisters and brothers. Class differences may create for them an even greater barrier to creating one New Church than race.

Another surprising observation was the fact that no children from the Clermont society attended the Kainon School in Westville. The two congreations are only ten minutes apart by car, but they inhabit two different and unequal worlds. Westville appeared lush and green to the eye, Clermont stood on barren brown hills strewn with trash, supporting little vegetation to hide its poverty. Members of the Westville society had attempted to open the Kainon School to the children from Clermont in the early 1990s, but were informed by government officials that if they did so, it would result in the revocation of their license to maintain a school. Confronted with such a threat they dropped their plans to include the children from Clermont at the Kainon School. However, the possibility of developing a school at Clermont never seemed to have occurred to them. It was unclear to me why, after the end of apartheid,

the Westville society did not develop scholarship funds for the children from Clermont so that they could include fellow New Church children in their new open policy. This lack of inclusion will have negative consequences for the church both in South Africa and internationally.

The most important problem facing the General Church in South Africa today is the continuation of church patterns that developed under apartheid that no longer fit either the current reality in South Africa or the broader aims of the international church. This challenge no doubt confronts many other voluntary organizations in South Africa at this time of transition. The General Church in South Africa is a two tiered church—on the first tier are the Westville and Bucchleuch societies, and on the second tier are the societies like those in Clermont, Impapala, and Diepkloop. Without providing the second tier societies with the educational opportunities that could make them equal to those in the first tier in the next generation, the universal vision of a New Christian Church will seem hypocritical and unattractive to the rising black generation and it will die.

ENDNOTES

[1] Emanuel Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1997), no. 68.

[2] I have written extensively on the history and sociology of the formation and development of the New Church and have also attempted to develop a sociological theory that would account for the peculiarities of is growth.

[3] Jean Evans, A History of the New Church in Southern Africa: 1909–1991 and a Tribute to the Late Reverend Obed S. D. Mooki, privately published book (1991), 10. See Emanuel Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia, no. 2604, and Last Judgment Posthumous, in Posthumous Theological Works (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1996), no. 116.

[4] Because I did no research on the groups that developed as a result of Mofokeng's mission, I will not present the history either.

[5] Andrew M. T. Dibb, "The History of the New Church in Lesotho," unpublished paper written while a student at Unisa, South Africa, 1995, 23. See also Jean Evans, A History of the New Church in Southern Africa.

[6] Jane Williams-Hogan, "Swedenborgian Expansionism in Wake of European Colonization and Post–World War II American Hegemony," to be published by the University of Bordeaux in 2003, unpublished manuscript, 13.

[7] Evans, A History of the New Church in Southern Africa, 25.

[8] Williams-Hogan, "Swedenborgian Expansionism," 18.

Book Reviews

The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature. By David Suzuki with Amanda McConnell. Prometheus Books. 1998. 277 pages. $25.95 cloth.

Take a breath of air, and you inhale the self-same argon atoms exhaled by woolly mammoths of the Pleistocene. The insides of our lungs—the numerous alveoli—connect us with earth's atmosphere: "We are a part of the air, which in turn is a part of all green plants and every other breathing creature," writes David Suzuki in the chapter "The Breath of All Green Things" in his book *The Sacred Balance.* Or as Hamlet put it, "Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay/ Might stop a hole to keep the wind away."

Suzuki, Vancouver-based geneticist and science-television host, joins company with philosophers such as Paul Shepherd and nature writers like Annie Dillard (both of whom he quotes), to ask one of humankind's oldest questions: What went wrong? And whom do we blame? How did we leave the Garden, lose the language of the animals, become so separated from the world? Do we blame Descartes for dualism? Galileo for calling mathematics the language of nature, Plato for teaching the doctrine of forms? Or, further back, the first agriculturalists and the domesticators of animals?

Without even dealing with the question of "religion and ecology," Suzuki moves right past the so-called great traditions, although he quotes Australian Aborigines and speakers from Canada's First Nations on their perception of humanity's former relationship to nature. To his mind, neither "scientism" nor the major religions can any more deal with the onrushing environmental crises: resource depletion, overpopulation, global warming. In fact, to use a word like "resource" itself betrays that the speaker is trapped in dualism, in a belief that body and psyche end at the surface of the skin. The ultimate crisis will not be met with a technological fix, for Suzuki asks, "How can we reenter the world, restore its spirits, and celebrate the sacred?"—all concepts beyond the customary bounds of science and technology. "Here in the West we have exorcised the spirits and cut ourselves loose from the living web of the world. . . . We may feel despair, grief, and guilt about the damage we cause—but we seem unable to change the way we live. How has this happened? Is it because we have lost our religion? Or is that a consequence rather than a cause? Perhaps it is the inevitable consequence of 'modernization,' as human societies have moved away from immediate dependence upon the land."

No matter where the blame lies or if it lies, the crisis is here. The world's religions have failed, in Suzuki's implicit judgment—he does not say how but apparently takes their lack of leadership in the environmental crisis as evidence enough. Meanwhile, science and technology are failing us as well, for "our cultural narrative does not include these beliefs [an afterlife, a sense of the sacred among us], so our experience of them is stunted, truncated, painful. The consequences are threatening indeed—the denial of value, the negation of being."

Suzuki sees the answer to the world's problems—to establishing a relationship with nature that goes beyond seeing it as "resources"—in a form of psychologically informed scientific pantheism. He rejects the halfway house of "stewardship," writing instead: "believing that we have the responsibility of 'managing' all of [interdependent life] becomes a terrible burden. But if we look at the world through the lenses of all of life together, we may recognize the origins of our destructive path and realize that we are not the 'managers'; there is wisdom enough for self-management in the web of living creatures that has survived for more than 3.6 billion years."

Seeking the sacred in the here-and-now rather than the hereafter, Suzuki sees little value likewise in new religions or revivals of archaic ones; rather, he calls for "an ethical system soundly based on ecology," together with a scientifically based understanding of our physical participation in the world, not a dead world of matter extraneous to us but one in whose processes we share.

Earth First! asserts, "No compromise in defense of Mother Earth!" Suzuki's "no compromise!" includes three levels of "non-negotiable needs:" clean air, water, soil, food, etc. to meet our biological needs; love and communities for meeting our social needs; and "finally, as spiritual beings, we have to know that there are forces in the cosmos beyond human understanding and control, that we are indissolubly part of the totality of life on Earth, caught up in an endless process of creation."

Chas S. Clifton, University of Southern Colorado

The Myth and Ritual Theory. Edited by Robert Segal. Blackwell Publishers Inc. 473 pages. $31.95 paper.

The Myth and Ritual Theory, edited by Robert Segal, is genuinely indispensable for teachers of myth who prefer to center their approach in traditional materials. For those who have grown weary of putting on library reserve hard to find or out of print works by classic scholars in the field of myth and ritual, this book is a god(s)send. Here is Gilbert Murray's amazing "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Mythology"; Robertson Smith's ornery "Lectures on the Religion of the Semites;" T. H. Gaster's principle argument from his fine work, *Thespis*; several

pieces from Sir James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*; as well as twenty-five other pieces, all addressing in one way or another the complexities of the subject of myth and ritual. Does myth precede ritual? Or follow it? Can these two things be disentangled? The editor wisely does not take sides in the debate but allows it to be articulated in all its glorious ambiguity. After introducing the subject in the first section titled "Development of the Theory," Segal goes on to demonstrate the application of the theory to the ancient world, how it is applied worldwide, how the theory has affected the study of literature, how it has been revised, and finally, how it has been evaluated. The last chapter, "Evaluations of the Theory" brings into radical question the entire enterprise which made reputations for the so-called "Cambridge Myth and Ritual Crowd" as well as colorful mavericks like Lord Raglan with his compelling and perhaps preposterous list of 22 elements in the typical journey of the mythological hero.

Some of the material will seem impenetrable to today's students. One of my students in a 300-level course on Myth in which I required the book was incensed that the frequent Latin phrases in Professor Murray's essay were not translated. And clearly it is difficult to get our young millennial fin de sieclists to sense the intellectual excitement that was in the air a hundred years ago as Murray, Jane Harrison, F. M. Cornford, and the incomparable Sir James George Frazer all believed they held the key that unlocked the mythic treasures behind civilizations high and low. Yet some students did sense that excitement as they pondered the chicken and egg question of myth and ritual and saw the theme go through metamorphoses at the hands of adepts such as Northrop Frye, Jessie L. Weston, and Claude Levi-Strauss. They began to understand what it was in *The Golden Bough* that moved T.S. Eliot to write *The Waste Land*, or Shirley Jackson "The Lottery." They even took up the thorny question of how a work of discredited scholarship, which is what *The Golden Bough* is to most people they days, can still be profoundly valuable.

This is an anthology of immense value to teachers of myth and of myth and literature. The course packet of badly photocopied pages from out-of-print works can now be replaced with this handsome paperback from Blackwell.

There are, of course, flaws in the book. There are typos. In the brilliant essay on Oedipus Rex by Francis Fergusson, Oedipus's palace is located in "Thebes." Some of the essays are much too abbreviated, in particular those by Mircea Eliade and T. H. Gaster. The depth psychological approach to the subject—clearly important, however misguided—is missing. But these are mere cavils. Segal has done teachers of myth a great service by assembling these pieces into a single volume. It deserves to be widely adopted.

Reviewed by Michael Sexson, Montana State University

Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930. By Thomas G. Alexander. University of Illinois Press. 1996. 399 Pages. $24.95 cloth, $16.95 paper.

Originally written in the late 1970s as one part of an unpublished sixteen-volume official history marking the sesquicentennial of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Thomas G. Alexander's book was finally published in 1986 by the University of Illinois Press. Then, ten years after its original appearance, it was reprinted for the first time with a foreword by Stephen J. Stein and an added selected bibliography by the author.

This rich work, so frequently quoted and considered by many to be a classic as well as the most thorough and objective analysis of this historical period, still has much to offer its familiar readers as well as those who are just discovering it. In order to embed his book in the historical continuum of the Mormon Church, Alexander establishes the trends that prevailed prior to 1890 before commencing a detailed description of the period up to 1930, and then by defining the directions for the subsequent development of the Latter-day Saints. The era he introduces to the reader is probably the most significant period of all. During these formative years, the Church banned polygamy—this is how Utah achieved statehood and began developing major economic and political ties with other states and the federal government—and managed to move closer to the religious mainstream in the US. In addition, the Church expanded its international missionary efforts, establishing wards all over the world.

Alexander introduces, analyzes, explains, and discusses in detail a wide range of issues relevant to the era, be they internal or external, secular or theological, political or economic, individual or societal. His arguments are convincing and well-founded, supported by extensive research of archival and published, primary and secondary sources. All this is presented in an engaging, non-technical style.

The result is a complete social, cultural, political, and theological history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; a source equally useful to members of the scholarly as well as the lay world.

Reviewed by Irén Annus, Attila József University

UFOs and Popular Culture: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Myth. By James R. Lewis. ABC-CLIO. 2000. xl + 393 pages. $75.00 cloth.

This volume will tell you most of what you need to know about its fascinating topic. Entries cover everything from Abductees to UFOs in the Book of Zechariah, with contributions by some twenty-three scholars, including several of the top writers in the field, such as Jerome Clark,

Hilary Evans, and John Saliba. There is an excellent Forward by Thomas E. Bullard on UFOs as folklore and popular culture, and a valuable Introduction by James R. Lewis, editor and writer of many of the articles, which includes a discussion skeptical of UFO skeptics.

Shorter pieces deal with major UFO contactees, observers, researchers, groups, and episodes, as well as UFOs in various books of the Bible. A particularly interesting feature, which fits the popular culture thrust of the volume, is a set of brief summaries of films with UFO and alien themes, ranging from fifties cult classics like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1956; this one has been called the worst film of all time, though there are doubtless other contenders for that title), to perhaps the best and most famous, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and the beloved *E. T.* (1982).

Longer articles cover such general topics as "Ancient Astronauts," "Conspiracy Theories," "Humor and UFOs" (one of the best), "UFO Religions," and various academic and other hypotheses about the phenomenon. A general strength of the book is its relating of UFOism to science fiction, including film, and to religions such as "I Am" and Scientology promoting cosmic soteriological motifs; all this undoubtedly had important interactions with the development of flying saucer lore. There are useful bibliographies and appendices giving a chronology of the UFO legend, documents related to Heaven's Gate, and addresses, including websites, of UFO spiritual and other organizations.

Inevitably, a book by many hands will not be entirely consistent in perspective or quality. Some of the longer contributions, such as "Abductees" (John Whitmore) and "Psychosocial Hypothesis" (Jerome Clark) maintain academic detachment, while others, such as "Pyramids" (Kay Holzinger) and "Mars" seem a bit more believing and New Age. This is as it should be; a major virtue of a book like this ought to be the exposure it provides to various methodologies and points of view.

There are spots, however, where careful editing would have been in order. The Comte de Saint Germain appears in several places, including the Index, as the "Compte"! John C. Campbell, the famous sci-fi editor, seems confused with Joseph Campbell the mythologist (p. 266). While the Theosophical concept of Mahatmas or Masters no doubt had some influence on the "Space Brothers" of UFOism, certain of the relevant articles here seriously confuse three strata of the doctrine: the helpful but quite human teachers of Blavatsky, the organized world-hierarchy of Theosophy's "second generation" (C.W. Leadbeater, Alice Bailey), and the Ascended Masters of the 1930s "I Am" Activity; it is also incorrectly implied that Blavatsky "channeled" such entities.

In general, though, this is a reliable source on the UFO perspective it inculcates, as popular culture, and a wonderful read. As the twentieth century transits to the twenty-first, there is some evidence that the former century's UFO enthusiasm is imploding. UFO book sales are down,

and the mysterious vehicles seldom appear in the news, although the Raelians have been generating headlines with tales of human cloning. But if UFOs are now mostly history, all the more important is a summary like this of what it was as popular culture back then. Despite the price, this encyclopedia belongs in college and university libraries, and on the shelves of scholars concerned with its area.

Reviewed by Robert Ellwood, University of Southern California

Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration. By Milton C. Sernett. Duke University Press. 1997. 345 Pages. $54.95 cloth, $18.95 paper.

One of the most important chapters in African American history was the Great Migration (1916-1918), when thousands of Southern blacks migrated to Northern cities. This migration altered the course of African American cultural and social life. By the 1940s, African Americans were as much an urban as a rural people, if not more so. Milton C. Sernett, Professor of African American Studies at Syracuse University and editor of a landmark collection of primary sources entitled *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (1985), provides in this volume for the first time a comprehensive social and intellectual history of the black Protestant denominations affected by the Great Migration. His scholarship is extensive, careful, and attentive to change and development over time. Sernett examines not only the initial phases of the Migration, but also subsequent decades, when the effects of the Migration were felt in Northern cities and Southern rural areas alike.

Before World War One, European immigrants supplied Northern industry with a seemingly bottomless labor pool. The war ended that immigration temporarily, so Northern industrialists enticed Southern blacks to move northward. The migrants interpreted their journey as a second Exodus (the first being the emancipation of black slaves in the nineteenth century), fleeing the white pharaohs of the South as the Hebrews had done in the Bible. Downplaying functionalist explanations of economic push and pull, Sernett focuses our attention on the dehumanizing conditions of millions of Southern blacks during the Jim Crow era. He sees the Great Migration as a religious response by an oppressed people to the overwhelming problems facing them in the South.

Migrants confronted considerable challenges in Northern cities: a faster pace of life, poor housing, and low-paying jobs. They found community and uplift in black Methodist and Baptist churches. The pressing social and economic needs of large numbers of displaced migrants compelled black Northern churches, in conjunction with black intellectuals

like W. E. B. DuBois, to construct a philosophy called "instrumentalism." This perspective on church life insisted that black Christianity must offer more than an other-worldly theology. It must provide the practical means for African Americans to improve their social and political status. Instrumentalists pushed black churches to systematically attend to a number of social issues: education, employment, housing, emergency relief, and job training.

Those interested in a detailed analysis of black Protestantism during the Great Migration need look no further than this book. But readers of this journal will find Sernett's minimizing of black NRMs somewhat troubling. He assigns them a minor role in the debate about the importance of black storefront churches (Pentecostal and Holiness) in the urban North. He argues that the storefront churches must not be lumped together with "esoteric and exotic groups" like Father Divine's Peace Mission, Sweet Daddy Grace's United House of Prayer for All People, Timothy Drew Ali's Moorish Science, Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, or various black Jewish groups (p. 194). These movements "have drawn popular and scholarly attention far out of proportion to their numbers in comparison to the mainline Protestant denominations, or, for that matter, to the newer Pentecostal and Holiness churches." (p. 205) The storefront churches were natural extensions of black Southern evangelical piety, transplanted to an urban setting. Scholars of NRMs are more apt to place the black NRMs on a continuum with storefront churches, but Sernett draws a clear line separating the latter from the former.

Black NRMs do not fit easily into Sernett's thesis. They are anomalies. Sernett explains their existence by arguing that they appealed to a tiny percentage of black migrants who craved solace from oppressive economic conditions and an impersonal urban environment. Missing from his analysis is the possibility that some black migrants were dissatisfied with black Christianity. The Nation of Islam insisted on this, and the notion could reasonably be implied from the rhetoric of other alternative groups. The very presence of non-Protestant movements in the black migrant population revealed the failure of black churches to meet pressing metaphysical needs. When black migrants tried to interpret their places in a new urban world, some of them found inadequate the explanations provided by traditional black churches. They turned to alternatives that offered not only comfort and companionship, but meaning. Because Sernett downplays black NRMs, his thesis suffers. Rather than allowing non-Christian minorities to emerge in his narrative as critics of black Protestantism, he relegates them to obscurity. As a result, readers might get the somewhat misleading impression that black non-Christian, quasi-Christian, even Roman Catholic movements and organizations were virtually invisible, and that the only important religious tradition during the Great Migration was Protestant.

Sernett's book is more accurately subtitled "African American Churches and the Great Migration." His focus is on black Protestant denominational life. This is an important story, and Sernett tells it well. He has set the standard for future scholarship on black churches and the urban North. But his book is not about the wide spectrum of religious traditions in African American life during and after the Great Migration. We must await a future study that correlates in a single narrative all of the religious groups involved in the black migration from South to North.

Reviewed by Mike Ashcraft, Truman State University

Catholic Lives, Contemporary America. Thomas J. Ferraro, editor. Duke University Press, 1997. x +274 pages. $19.95 paper.

After an uncomfortable passage from the heyday of the iconic All-American priest in the 1940s, when their rapidly assimilating but still recognizably "ethnic" religion was gaining acceptance and even attaining a certain celebrity in the national consciousness, through the ecclesial and social fragmentation of the sixties and its prolonged aftermath, Roman Catholics are making a comeback of sorts in contemporary American culture. Or so this engaging and provocative collection of essays attempts to demonstrate, by putting on a winning display of what editor Ferraro, an English professor at Duke University, immodestly but accurately calls "a splendiferous conversation and debate, auto-ethnography to revisionist purpose especially," conducted by "spirited virtuoso writers, within and along the borders of the academy, who have thought much about contemporary Catholicism, yet through diverse professional lenses and with regard to different phenomenological foci" (p. 2).

There is a catch. The lion's share of the burden of representing the "Catholic lives" of the volume's title falls on ex- or post-Catholics, academics who no longer believe the doctrines of the faith nor feel particularly bound by its historic rituals, practices, institutions and authority structures. Despite their detachment from or repudiation of the institutional church, the editor contends, these "cultural Catholics" extend "fundamental Catholic discourses—iconicity and ritual, original sin and sacramentality, intercessory mediations and corpus christi" into "social and cultural contexts beyond the narrowly religious, including where least expected" (p. 9).

Cultural as a qualifier to *Catholicism*, Ferraro insists, "does not necessarily mean dilution or dissolution—a draining of the religious imagination into banal secularity—but can in fact signify the opposite, a form of transfigurative re-envisioning that refuses to quarantine the sacred." Perhaps. But even if we accept the self-aggrandizing claim that the "auto-ethnography" of the cultural Catholic is, at bottom, an exercise in the

sacralization and transfiguration of the mundane, we are left with the poignancy of a project that ensures itself no heirs. Having rejected the ancient faith as well as the specific cultural-cum-institutional system by which it was conveyed, cultural Catholics offer no substitute for historic Catholicism's integrative, semiotic worldview, no comparable program of moral and spiritual formation in a tradition or traditions of wisdom. What they have taken, absorbed, transformed and now marketed, they have not seen fit to hand down in any assimilable form. The clever cultural Catholic is a supernova, gracing us momentarily with a dazzling view of his death trajectory across the night sky of the new millennium. Banal secularity has an open field before it.

The elevation of the ironic, the suspicious, the ambivalent—or the merely indifferent post-Catholic—to the status of exemplar turns on three assumptions. First, in order to exploit the new moment of celebrity one must inhabit the margins, whether of the academy (contributors Camille Paglia, Richard Rodriguez), the institutional church (the writer Mary Gordon, the feminist religious studies professor, Mary Jo Weaver) or theism itself (the novelist and essayist David Plante, the literary critic and novelist Frank Lentricchia). Second, one must define oneself over against "straitlaced white-bread (because white-bred) America" (as Ferraro puts it), and look down one's nonconforming, defiantly ethnic nose at "blond, crewcut America" (as Rodriguez puts it). Thus, the volume abounds in aggressive contrasts between an earthy, vital, polysemous, dark, gothic, and more than faintly pagan Catholicism, on the one hand, and a bland, hyper-rational, homogenizing Protestantism, on the other.

At the present cultural moment, however, neither the pose of marginality nor ethnic defiance of a severely weakened Protestant hegemony suffice to distinguish the cultural Catholic among the crowded field of aspirants feeding on multiculturalism. Indeed, in the postmodern, polycentric milieu of the contemporary academy, where all the action unfolds "on the margins" anyway, the mere claim of minority status hardly gains a hearing. By contrast, the willingness to look beyond ethnicity, in order to see the religion simmering beneath and sometimes apart from it, might gain "Catholic lives" renewed cachet in "contemporary America"—or in the contemporary academy, at least. In any event, this seems to be the third, and decisive, assumption that shaped the choice of essayists. Taking religion seriously is bound to arouse the curiosity, and perchance the interest, of their skeptical colleagues.

The vantage point, however, must be proximate and remote at the same time, an authorial feat that requires a continual crossing over and back between the familiarity of the communicant and the ironic distance of the critic. When the iconic All-American priest makes his appearance, for example, in Gordon's rendering of Bing Crosby's Father Chuck, the character immortalized in the popular films of the

forties, *Going my Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*, it is as an "idealized and desexualized figure," whose "vow of celibacy is a kind of self-castration" and who offers only the pose of intimacy. Gordon's Crosby/Father Chuck—and, by analogy, the "typical" parish priest—is a kind of flim-flam man in clerical collar and straw hat.

It comes as little surprise, then, that the most transparent expression of personal commitment to Christianity (and to the Christian church) comes from the pen of a Protestant, the theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. Like most of the essays, Hauerwas' hilarious and affectionate reminiscence of his tenure on the faculty at the University of Notre Dame is witty, insightful, evocative and written with panache.

The editorial strategy works best when serious and sustained engagement with Roman Catholicism, rather than ironic detachment from it, informs the author's critical perspective. "Virtually Normal," Andrew Sullivan's moving reflection on his coming to terms with his identity as a homosexual Catholic, provides the most powerful illustration of the struggle entailed in remaining a practicing and committed Catholic; the essay's tone, as well as its content, suggests why such a struggle might be worth enduring. "The truth will one day, I pray, overcome the current doctrine of the Church on the matter of homosexuality," he writes. "To say this is not to oppose the Church, but to hope in it as a flawed institution that is yet the eternal vessel of God's love." The life and spiritual journey memorialized in this mode registers, convincingly, as both deeply alienated and profoundly Catholic.

The postmodernist imperative—abandon as hopeless all efforts toward coherence and consensus— provides a ready-made justification for the volume's failure, shared by most multi-authored collections of essays, to achieve consistency of theme, style, length and substance. But this complaint is muted by two splendid essays which create a thematic canopy under which the shorter or less programmatic pieces can be gathered.

Robert A. Orsi, a professor of religious studies at Harvard University, turns in a typically thoughtful and imaginative tour de force on the cultural construction of holiness and suffering, and the intimate and sometimes perverse relation between the two, during the period extending roughly from the end of World War I to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). The longest chapter, it is also the first, and sets forth several themes echoed and extended in subsequent chapters. "Mildred, Is it Fun to be a Cripple?" is a model of careful historical research (in the American Catholic devotional literature of the period) and vividly remembered personal experience (in this case, the author's lifelong relationship to his Uncle Sal, who suffered from cerebral palsy), filtered through the perceptions of an accomplished cultural anthropologist.

Orsi argues that devotional Catholicism was ambivalent toward the congenitally handicapped and the chronically ill. Popular theology

celebrated them as God's chosen ones, but virtually ignored their actual experiences and emotions, thereby coercing these "victim souls" into a passive sanctity (a bullying which Orsi's Uncle Sal, to his everlasting credit, vigorously resisted). Orsi emphasizes the perversities of this system but gives insufficient attention, in my opinion, to the abundant compassion, care and generosity it evoked from nurses, families and young women and men (such as the author himself). Genuine, uncomplicated self-gift—a kind of striving toward "holiness"—is possible, one must allow, even within so flawed a theological anthropology. But no reader familiar with the devotional ethos will deny the power and truth of Orsi's insights.

Likewise, historian James T. Fisher's evocation of a "Catholic Lost Generation" serves larger thematic purposes by capturing the cultural style of Catholic teens and young adults come of age in the aftermath of Vatican II. In the late sixties and seventies this cohort fled the explicitly religious in search of "the authentic" (which usually meant "the ethnic"), only to be drawn irresistibly into the sacramental imagination and "elusive spirituality" of the cultural heroes they lionized and sought to emulate. These included, by Fisher's account, such unlikely figures as the Beat novelist Jack Kerouac, the jazz artist Charlie Parker, and the sportswriter Pete Axthelm. Through Fisher's charged descriptions one encounters the shared religious sensibilities, social concerns, and constructions of knowledge—the "voice"—of the conflicted cohort to which many of his fellow contributors to this volume also belong.

In locating and naming the undercurrent of residual Catholicism stirring beneath the surface of contemporary discourses of ethnicity, gender and class, the writers showcased in *Catholic Lives, Contemporary America* demonstrate "how religious habits of inquiry, even when (perhaps especially when) held provisionally, may enhance the still honorable pursuits of critical self-reflection, ethnographic understanding and objective knowledge." It should come as no surprise, Ferraro continues, that as writers and professors with Catholic backgrounds inhabit the "secular" academy, the Catholic culture that they bear, reproduce and transform "reemerges as a cluster of performative predispositions—not only or primarily a choice of subject or pronounced belief." The Catholicizing of culture is to be found "in how, not just what, culturally Catholic intellectuals do: in the style and rhythms and unstated operations of their writing and scholarship, yet also in how they approach the classroom and public lecture hall."

Playful, dazzling exhibition of the (post-) Catholic "how," without sustained attention to the Catholic "what," may be gratifying to the virtuosi, but it is perhaps too subtle an educational strategy for a generation untutored in even the outlines of Roman (or American) Catholic history, theology and spirituality. The highest praise I can offer this extraordinary collection of essays is to say that I will make it required reading

for Notre Dame undergraduates in my courses in American religious history and American Catholicism. But they will read these accounts in conversation with historical and theological texts that not only acknowledge and detail the considerable civilizational and cultural achievements of Roman Catholicism (in greater depth but along the lines that Paglia, Orsi, and Sullivan, among others, do here), but also contemplate the possibility that institutional affiliation was not always, and might still not be, an inherently immature choice. The up-and-coming generation won't get the joke, after all, unless there is a *there* there for them to deconstruct.

Reviewed by R. Scott Appleby, University of Notre Dame

Charismatic Christianity: Sociological Perspectives. Edited by Stephen Hunt, Malcolm Hamilton, and Tony Walter. St. Martins Press. 236 pages. $65.00 cloth.

Charismatic Christians now comprise approximately one-third of the world's Christian population. Although Charismatic Christianity's fluid nature makes sociological study difficult, this collection of ten essays actually provides analytic frameworks and reaches concrete conclusions about this evasive phenomena. And while a few of the essays seem exploratory and underdeveloped, the real value of this collection can be found not only in its conclusions, but in the questions it indirectly poses. In that sense it is both useful and provocative.

Aside from one chapter on Latin America, the authors focus primarily upon the British experience over the past thirty years. In the introduction the editors define Charismatic Christianity (or neo-Pentecostalism) in terms of charismata (gifts of the Spirit) and second-baptism, although the definition broadens with each successive author. The editors also frame the chapters in response to questions regarding the nature, evolution, and significance of Charismatic Christianity. In true sociological spirit they ask: How does neo-Pentecostalism relate to contemporary society? From a theoretical perspective they assert that it displays attributes which are, sometimes simultaneously, anti-modern, modern, and postmodern (p. 4). Andrew Walker, for example, argues that Charismatic Christianity is more modern than anti-modern or post-modern because it has equipped many of its adherents with the values of ascetic Protestantism so useful in the modernist enterprise, and so essential for social mobility in a capitalist economy (p. 36).

Other authors examine contemporary manifestations of Charismatic Christianity. Nigel Wright contends that the impetus for the 20-year-old Restorationist movement derives from the reinvigoration of New Testament patterns of church life by Charismatic Christianity (p. 62). Stephen Hunt shows how Vineyard Ministries International attracts con-

sumeristic seekers with charisma, with an attractive ideological worldview, by the demonstration of divine power, and by making Christianity relevant to the lives of its members. Philip Richter describes the nature of the Toronto Blessing and discusses its influence locally, upon evangelical churches, and globally, in terms of its worldwide legitimating power. Paul Chambers investigates the internal life of a neo-Pentecostal house church in South Wales during the 1970s and 1980s and illustrates how innovation reshaped the structure, identity, and power relations within the church leading to its eventual demise (p. 140-41).

In the book's final essay, Martyn Percy provides an insightful and reasonable assessment of the future of Charismatic Christianity. Percy suggests that neo-Pentecostalism's playful engagement with truth, the potential exhaustion of new experience, and the decentering of power threaten to loose neo-Pentecostalism from its already shifting mooring (p. 222).

Reviewed by Jonathan Cordero, University of California, Santa Barbara

Encyclopedia of White Power: A Source Book of the Radical Racist Right. Edited by Jeffrey Kaplan. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press. 585 pages. $99.00 cloth.

The *Encyclopedia of White Power* is an extremely topical, useful and enlightening volume, which seeks to delineate the "Euro-American White Power subculture." The volume has three basic components: An introductory essay by Kaplan (pp. xvii-xxxvi); encyclopedic entries on militant racist individuals, groups, ideas, and events (pp. 1-437); and a documentary "Resources" section including internal movement histories and other essays and letters by racist luminaries (pp. 439-563). Although most of the basic entries are written by the author, some represent "guest entries" written by outside experts, including a few racist movement activists. Some of the entries written by Kaplan are, as the author notes, "far lengthier than one would expect in an encyclopedic work" (p. xxv) and, moreover, contain abundant primary source writings and interview materials. These materials, combined with the extensive documentary "Resources," allow movement notables to tell their own story and to present their view of their issues and problems. Such perspectives are supplemented by analyses by Kaplan and by other scholars who are also extensively quoted in the author's entries.

Kaplan believes that the resulting "kaleidoscope of views" will allow readers to receive a deeper and more differentiated understanding of the subject matter than would be afforded by one hegemonic voice. Nevertheless the author realizes that his "insider/outsider" approach with its distinctive opening to movement self-analysis could be controversial. His important introductory essay is partly devoted to justifying

his "unorthodox" approach, and more broadly to explaining why inquiring minds should not be entirely satisfied with the perspectives on right-wing racism purveyed by the "watchdog" counter-movement which has enjoyed a near monopoly of recognized expertise on right-wing racist movements. To watchdog groups such as the Anti-Defamation League the revolutionary racist subculture appears as "an arena of undifferentiated evil," a world of vile "hate groups" which are "inherently given to violence" (p. xxvi). The watchdog demonology definitely "contains an element of truth," but it misses other elements. It may also backfire in the sense of preparing the way for "a new generation of seekers to reject our [anti-racist] wisdom . . . when they discover for themselves that those whom we had portrayed as the embodiment of all modern evil are simply people like ourselves" (p. xxxiv).

One element which Kaplan thinks has tended to be downplayed in existing literature on the radical racist subculture is its "millenarian religiosity"—the "powerful apocalypticism" which appears "to be a primary force driving the movement" (xxxi). Increasingly American culture is perceived within the movement as irretrievably lost to corruption and race mixing, such that the movement as "righteous remnant" must separate itself. The growing "push for separatism" is reflected in the burgeoning "Zionist Occupation Government" (ZOG) discourse (pp. 367-72) and additionally in the spread in recent decades of survivalist "rural compounds or settlements throughout the American heartland" (p. 370). Thus, "even in the more sophisticated reaches of the radical right wing, the view that the U.S. government has become the agent of a triumphalist Jewish conspiracy has become accepted orthodoxy" (p. 371). Reaction to the events of Waco and Ruby Ridge has, Kaplan notes, strengthened this conviction.

Today's racist millenarian religiosity has an additional dimension. A key entry on Adolf Hitler, which deals with the contemporary image and meaning of Hitler for different racist groups, discusses how George Lincoln Rockwell reconstructed the figure of Hitler as "a kind of religio-political savior whose life and death became a tale of selfless sacrifice with strong parallels to the life of Jesus." It is partly in this context that we see "the widespread acceptance of Holocaust revisionism and Holocaust denial throughout the Euro-American radical right from the 1970s to the present day" (p. 136). At present, "the popularity of Hitler—suitably reinterpreted—is on the rise throughout the radical right . . . much of the discussion . . . has strongly millenarian overtones, with Hitler emerging as an End Time savior" (p. 137).

It is ironic that notwithstanding Kaplan's empathy and his willingness to present "insider" accounts, some aspects of his presentation could not be more ominous and alarming. On the other hand Kaplan's discussion of George Lincoln Rockwell (pp. 261-66), while more than adequate, points to the one respect in which this reviewer has been slightly disap-

pointed. In *American Fuehrer* (1999) Rockwell's recent biographer Frederick Simonelli identifies two innovative conceptual areas in which Rockwell modified received Nazism in directions which would integrate veneration of Hitler with other American right-wing racist elements: 1) Rockwell reconfigured Hitler as a Jesus-like savior and thereby made Hitler more attractive to Christian Identity racists; and 2) Rockwell coined the term "White Power" and ultimately abandoned the original Fuehrer's standards of Nordic-Germanic purity in behalf of a broader pan-white emphasis. Kaplan is very good on the first theme, particularly in the Hitler entry, but he devotes relatively little attention to Rockwell's second innovation. This seems strange because Rockwell's latter "achievement" helps explain why Kaplan can conceptualize his topic as the "White Power" movement. The degradation of blacks had essentially been a sort of afterthought for the original Nazis.

As Kaplan has argued elsewhere but also makes clear in this volume, a substantial reversal has transpired in terms of the direction of fascist influence between Europe and the United States. Before and immediately after World War Two, fascism and antisemitism tended to be European imports to the U.S.A.

> More recently, however, American ideological and theological exports such as the Ku Klux Klan, Christian Identity, and the Church of the Creator have made strong inroads into the European radical right. Moreover, even such distinctly European ideologies such as National Socialism are, with due reverence to the shade of Adolf Hitler, being re-exported to Europe, not only in the form of agitprop materials, but also through the leadership of such American adherents as the late George Lincoln Rockwell, Gerhard Lauck, and William Pierce (p. xix).

One reason for this striking reversal is apparently the American First Amendment, which allows racist and even fascist organizations to develop and flourish and racist-fascist materials to be produced and disseminated in the United States (and exported abroad) without eliciting the criminal sanctions which European (and especially German) authorities are eager to apply. Thus Gary "Gerhard" Lauck, an American Nazi and fervent Germanophile, developed a flourishing business manufacturing and exporting to Europe racist-fascist propaganda and novelty items, including a computer game which allowed the young player to act as a "virtual" concentration camp commandant! Lauck constantly "deified all things German and vilified all things American" only to be eventually extradited via Denmark to his beloved Fatherland, which put him in prison. He may not be missed much because, "Since 1995, the explosion of Internet technology has revolutionized the German movement and made obtaining National Socialist propaganda, bomb-making recipes, and secure communications as easy as logging on to a computer" (p. 172).

The "Resources" section of the *Encyclopedia* contains some important internal documents of the movement including Klansman Louis R. Beam's influential tactical essay "Leaderless Resistance;" George Lincoln Rockwell's evocation of the swastika "In Hoc Signo Vinces;" Rick Cooper's impressively researched movement history, "A Brief History of White Nationalism;" and the wilder, anonymous "Deguello Report." Kaplan notes that internal movement documents are often pervaded by recriminations and "tend to characterize some widely recognized movement figures as secret Jews, secret homosexuals, secret government agents, and, during the Cold War years, secret communists" (p. 417). Although many of these charges are unfounded—the standard currency of factional fights—Kaplan's biographical entries reveal that there are in fact quite a few gays in this macho, homophobic subculture, as well as a significant number of informers and a few persons of Jewish origins (one luminary committed suicide after his Orthodox Jewish background was aired in the media).

It is understandable that some movement commentators are pessimistic about the flawed nature of the movement and the persons it tends to attract. Particularly interesting in this respect is Harold Covington, a longtime leading activist who is also a gifted and somewhat self-reflexive writer. The "Resources" section includes Covington's essay, "The Movement's Fatal Fascination;" however, a more interesting piece, a message delivered to National Socialist faithful in 1988, is quoted extensively in the lengthy entry on Covington. Describing how a movement rival deposited feces on his doorstep, Covington characterizes the movement as the "Bowel Movement:" a pit of seething internal jealousies and hatreds carried on by "dysfunctional morons." Yet Covington soldiers on "in order to continue even the most tenuous, faintest contact with that wonderful, unspeakably beautiful and life-giving ideal of Adolf Hitler" (p. 90).

Like Harold Covington, Jeffrey Kaplan is a fluent and often humorous writer. He has produced a riveting, fascinating volume which is informative, analytical, and sometimes very alarming; but which is also, in this reader's view, basically objective.

Reviewed by Thomas Robbins, Rochester, Minnesota

Exploring the Labyrinth. Making Sense of the New Spirituality. By Nevill Drury. Continuum, 1999. 228 Pages. $18.95 paper.

Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity. Edited by Paul Heelas with the assistance of David Martin and Paul Morris. Blackwell, 1998. 338 Pages. $24.95 paper.

At first glance the two books being reviewed here may seem an unlikely duo. Heelas' book is an edited, cross-cultural and interdiscipli-

nary volume that addresses scholarly and theoretical questions such as, "Should religion today be theorized in terms of modernity or postmodernity? Have religions become liberated from the differentiations and dedifferentiations of the grand narrative? Could it be the case that modernity is too complex and variegated, with too many strands or cultural trajectories, for religion to become "post"? The volume asks these questions in the hope of arousing interest in the contemporary investigations of new religious phenomena. Drury's study, in contrast, presents a detailed investigation covering Eastern and Western spiritual paths discussing transpersonal psychology, global ecology, shamanism, astrology, new physics, Kabbalah, yoga, Wicca, and the thinkers such as Jung, Wilber, Capra, Casteneda and Stanislav Grof.

But Nevill Drury's concerns are of quite another kind. As a self-proclaimed New Ager, or New Spiritualist, he puzzles over the necessity of an unfettered spirituality that is attuned "to the natural rhythms of the earth and cosmos" (viii). Drury does not hide his feelings and beliefs. He is of the New Age generation that moves away from the conventional religions, but also acknowledges spirituality as an innate dimension of the human dimension. He is concerned with amalgamating diverse world and folk religions, and his book is intended as a contribution toward a restructuring of spirituality and religious institutions so that they will be programmatically more responsive to the new, millennial human needs. He sees interesting connections, for example, between traditional shamanistic practices—with an interconnected universe and human world traversed by spirits as well as devoted specialists— and the New Physics that argues for the consciousness-based universe. In fact, Drury calls this way of thinking *spiritual humanism.* As he defines it, spiritual humanism is: "a form of humanism which finds a sacred or spiritual dimension at the deepest level of human experience and which acknowledges this dimension as one which transcends the limitations of formal religious allegiance" (p. x).

The theme that ties these two seemingly different books together, and the focus of this review, centers on the implication that religion and religiosity have been fundamentally altered at the end of the twentieth century. Thus, Drury is concerned with the legitimization of alternative religious thinking and practices by saving what is acceptable from traditional, more conservative world religions; and the contributors in Heelas' volume are concerned with analyzing changing religious experiences by arguing for their interconnectedness with modernity and postmodernity. The issue cuts many ways, and one needs to read each volume on its own terms before arriving at a more general overview or conclusion.

Exploring the Labyrinth. Making Sense of the New Spirituality presents a strong case for a universalist and humanist approach to religion and religious studies. Drury's approach is committed to a positive experience in

all human spirituality. He argues that the roots of the New Spirituality go back not only to well-known names of the Theosophical Society, but also to Jung (archetypes, persona, ego, anima, animus, shadows, etc), Freud (id, libido, dreams), Abraham Maslow (transpersonal psychology), Stanislav Grof (the COEX system, holotropic breath therapy), Alan Watts (Zen Buddhism), and Timothy Leary (psychedelic experience). For Drury, Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad all had a "transformative experience" or altered states of consciousness. This is a bold claim that needs to be substantiated much more than the author cares to venture. But clearly, ideas from the East are more influential for New Age Spirituality at the moment. Reincarnation, karma, fasting, meditation, yoga, and chakras, and the healing arts (acupuncture, shiatsu, macrobiotics, Tai Chi Ch'uan) are all household words today, forming a systematic belief system as well as an acceptable way of life for millions around the world.

In contrast, he also describes the Western tradition, giving specific attention to neopaganism, Gnosticism, Wicca, Tarot, Astrology, and New Age. He also describes shamanism and the way in which it was rediscovered in the 1960s and 1970s. While this is certainly true, one may want to be careful about conflating all trance-centered religious experience with shamanism. Drury is at his best when he describes these in a plain language through which he introduces a rich world of spirituality. For the novice this will be new information; for specialists, this may be just a well-written, and well-argued overview of the philosophical and religious traditions.

Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity is an excellent collection of scholarly arguments about the state of religion, and religious studies, at the end of the twentieth century. It is one of those books that will be read over and over again by graduate students and scholars for both ideas and content. After setting the tone about religion in modernity and postmodernity, Paul Heelas makes a convincing claim that there is very little novel in the postmodern theorizing about religion. In fact, a few authors in this volume want to contradict this. Steven Bruce (chapter 2) even goes as far as to claim that "postmodernity . . . is unnecessary" and even to be "avoided," as a useful terminological invention. For him, modernity can be credited with providing the foundation for New Age "dedifferentiation" of the religious realm. For him the emergence of the "cultic milieu" since the 1960s is emblematic. My only question to Bruce is whether he had known about Colin Campbell's 1972 article on the "cultic milieu," and if so, would he have used this term, and its connotations, differently?

Mark Taylor and Zygmunt Bauman (chapters 3 and 4 respectively) both write about the postmodern consumerist world as it breaks the boundaries of the self. However, for Taylor, this is the "collapse of differences," while for Bauman, it is the emergence of fundamentalism as

it provides an alternative rationality for the ills of the postmodern society. In contrast to these concerns, the late Ninian Smart argues in chapter 5 that in our era we find, not the detraditionalization, but the "retraditionalization" of religions, a phrase that includes the nationalist persuasion as well. In other words, for Smart, "the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Resurrection of Christ occurred in the same miasma of old time" (p. 87).

Such a dedifferentialist notion continues in the rest of the book's chapters: Lawrence's study on fundamentalism and religious ideology (chapter 6); Martin's analysis of American Pentecostalism with a critique of Bauman's notion of religious fundamentalism (chapter 7); Hefner's analysis of Indonesian Muslims (chapter 8); Davis's study on the theory of Being Japanese (chaper 9); Roberts' account of the making of Europe as a modernist religion (chapter 10); Don Cupitt's chapter on the idea of "post-Christianity" (chapter 11); Ward's reexamination of the term kenosis (chapter 12); Milbank's discussion on sublimity (chapter 13); Blond's description of the theological philosophy of perception (chapter 14); and Hart's final chapter on the impossible, as seen through the lens of the debate between Yves Bonnefoy and Maurice Blanchot concerning the relationship between poetry and the sacred. While it is hard to do justice to each chapters' analytic detail and richness of source material, it is easy to see how this book locates the contemporary study of religion in terms of general theorizing, covering such issues as liberalism, fundamentalism, choice, globalization, nationalism and what postmodern religion might look like. The book achieves its aim in addressing important issues by asking how the study of religion can be better integrated with recent developments in the study of culture.

Reviewed by László Kürti, Miskolc University, Hungary

Adventures of a Church Historian. By Leonard J. Arrington. University of Illinois Press. 1998. 250 pages. $29.95 cloth.

The title of this book written by Leonard Arrington—the renowned and well-respected Latter-day Saint historian—takes us back to the era of literary travelogues, reminding us of the novels of Sterne, Swift, Defoe and Twain, among others, wherein the hero's physical trips—the focus of the book—also become the basis for the intellectual and spiritual journey through which he grew and developed. This biography, however, mainly provides an account of the author's intellectual adventures, his professional journey as a historian, with loose ties to his spiritual, religious and physical explorations.

Throughout the pages his professional life is revealed as embedded in the wider framework of researching, teaching and writing history within the Mormon Church. All the significant spiritual leaders of the

Church as well as its outstanding historians are incorporated in this travelogue; their views and opinions are voiced, complemented by a summary and evaluation of their work as seen by Arrington. This book, a historical document and metahistory, offers a thorough picture of the role and treatment of religious history in the Mormon Church in the past four decades. It also describes inside fears, debates, struggles and problems, as well as the discrepancy between the need to defend the Church and to reveal the truth. This fight resulted from the changing of the guard, that is the maturing of a new generation of historians who believed they must not only have loyalty to their faith and Church, but also integrity as historians who strive for accuracy, veracity and impartiality in their scholarly work.

This book is ultimately the saga of one of those alternative voices originally branded by the Church as too rebellious and left-of-center, and the process in which this voice has become part of the mainstream and of an emerging group of noted new Latter-day historians who are respected by scholars outside the Mormon Church. This book is the narrative of the coming of age of Latter-day Saint historical writing and research. This book is a must for everyone who would like to be introduced to what happened in the field of history in the last 40 years in the Latter-day Saint community. It maps all the major players who have had a significant impact on the field, all the outstanding publications, journals, institutions, associations, decisions and events. It is also for all those students and scholars of history who struggle through the contemporary requirements, responsibilities, dilemmas and debates emerging in the field regarding what history is and how it is to be treated in our (post-)modern age.

Reviewed by Irén Annus, Attila József University

The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond. By Timothy Miller. Syracuse University Press, 1999. 329 pages. $49.95 cloth, $24.95 paper.

This is the book by Timothy Miller for which we have been waiting: a study of the greatest recent wave of communal living in American history by a scholar of communalism who is among the most insightful, and religiously sensitive, now practicing the art. Well prepared for the task by earlier biographical work and such books as *The Quest for Utopia in Twentieth-Century America*, by the 60s Communes Project of which he is co-director, as well as by numerous communal visits and interviews with members and ex-members, Miller brings to this work both mature scholarship and contagious enthusiasm. *The 60s Communes* links the new foundations of that tumultuous decade to the long history of communalism in the United States, showing that the former did not arise *ex nihilo*. The book then analyzes 60s communes according to

type, indicating that they ranged from those striving to enact a secular utopian vision to those based on spirituality, whether conservative Christian, Eastern, or Jewish; from those which fit the 60s stereotype of nudity, sex and drugs communalism very well indeed, to those based on the strictest lifestyle precepts. The differences in concept and "culture" among the thousands of 60s communes was considerable, even as the ultimate motivation of most of them—rejection of the "world" of consumerism, alienation from the earth, and private nuclear families, and a concomitant desire to explore alternative ways of living and loving—is broadly similar. The types are all illustrated with colorful examples.

We are then led into a survey of the various experiences of 60s communes with the practical aspects of life: governance, money, work, food, housing, birthing and child-raising. Here, too, one finds mighty contrasts. There are not a few humorous and pathetic stories: idealistic but naive young people from the city trying to go back to the earth but knowing next to nothing about farming; communards no less idealistic about free land and open societies and thereby finding themselves abused by slackers, druggies, or worse. Some communes were well-supported by wealthy patrons, and a few established successful farms or businesses, but a great number found their dreams continually tested by shortages and squalor. Food was a much-debated issue: whole-grain versus refined flour, vegetarianism versus meat. Housing ranged from private family cabins to wide-open sleeping halls.

Most of the thousands of 60s communes did not last, of course, though one can still find hundreds that have managed to survive across the decades. The reasons for failure were for the same reasons many such ventures—apart from monastic orders and a few religion-based groups like the Amish—have generally collapsed: the clash of utopian hope against ordinary human weaknesses, leading to personality conflicts, economic disasters, simplicity fatigue, and the sheer boredom, after initial enthusiasm, of living in utopia rather than the varied, privatized, sensuous world "outside."

Yet Miller found that, despite the failures, most ex-members he and his colleagues in the 60s Communes Project interviewed looked back on their communal experience positively, holding that, even if it did not endure, it shaped their lives and values in deep ways, and even evoked a certain nostalgia. "Overwhelmingly," Miller writes, "the reaction of those contacted was great enthusiasm for the preservation [by the Project] of what they almost all thought was a high point in American history as well as in their own lives" (p. 234). The vivid 60s still live on in countless American hearts and minds, and Miller's writing is evocative of an era as well as being an acute historical/sociological study. *The 60s Communes* is highly recommended for all libraries as well as the per-

sonal shelves of historians of communalism and of twentieth-century America. It will probably also be used in sociology and American studies classes, and find its way into the hands of many general readers, including ex-communards, for whom the 60s have inwardly not yet died.

There is a useful appendix with addresses and dates of all known 60s-period communes both extinct and surviving.

Robert Ellwood, University of Southern California

1950: Crossroads of American Religious Life. By Robert Ellwood. Westminster/John Knox Press, 2000. 256 pages. $18.95 paper.

Readers of Robert Ellwood's previous socio-historical analyses of American religion, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening* and *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace*, are familiar with his ability to weave copious and sometimes disparate information together in a way which allows one a sense of the ethos of a decade. In *1950: Crossroads of American Religious Life*, Ellwood once again incorporates discussion of politics, philosophy, religion, history, economics and ideology with a focus less on religion *per se* than on the *zeitgeist* of the middle of the twentieth century. From Karl Barth to William F. Buckley, Jr., from pacifism to anticommunism, from the Korean War to the struggles of Jews and African Americans in the United States, Ellwood paints a portrait of a country reeling in 1950 from the trauma of World War II and the horror of the Holocaust, at once optimistic in light of the promises of technology and its accouterments and riddled with angst and alienation.

Ellwood takes as his goal not only explication of religion in America in 1950, but also of political, economic, intellectual, theological and ideological developments of that year and those that immediately preceded and followed it. At once expansive and brief, the work takes readers on a journey through the major developments and events of the middle of the twentieth century.

Ellwood concludes that American religious pluralism prevented wholesale adoption of an ideology of anti-communism in the 1950s, and paved the way instead for the dissent and iconoclasm of the 1960s. Sociologists will likely be disappointed by the absence of the kind of theoretical framework which served to integrate Ellwood's earlier analyses of the 1950s and 1960s, and by the repetition, in *1950: Crossroads of American Religious Life*, of some of the information included in his earlier work on the 1950s. Still, Ellwood's most recent work provides a detailed, compelling examination of the events, ideas, individuals, and institutions that shaped the American experience at mid-twentieth century.

Laura Vance, Georgia Southwestern State University

Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism. By James K. Campbell. Interpact Press, 1997. 165 pages. $29.95 paper.

In the aftermath of the Waco tragedy in 1993, several new religious movement scholars have hung out their shingles as advisors to American security services on the subject of religious movements and violence. Others have written on the subject and, in the October 2000 issue of *Nova Religio*, the book reviews featured two such texts, Catherine Wessinger's *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate,* and Mark Jurgensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind Of God: The Global Rise of Violence.* Jurgensmeyer's work is particularly notable in this context as, like Thomas Robbins and a very few others, he brings to his work a considerable grounding in the academic literature of terrorism and political violence. In fact, much of the relevant literature in recent years has been the product of political scientists such as David C. Rapoport and Michael Barkun. James K. Campbell's *Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism* adds an important, and heretofore missing, dimension to the literature of religious violence; that of an intelligence and national security professional.

James Campbell is a naval intelligence officer whose biography reads as a compact history of America's post-Vietnam conflicts. As a decorated Naval Special Operations officer, Campbell was involved in American operations during the Iran-Iraq War. He took part in Desert Storm, the ironically-named Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, and "numerous other operations throughout Southwest Asia and Africa."

With this background, Campbell brings a perspective to *Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism* that allows this text to be read on several levels. It is on the one hand an academic exercise which tests competing theories of political violence for their efficacy in assessing the risks inherent in particular religiously motivated groups or movements opting for terrorist violence utilizing weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Read in another way, the text's case studies provide some insights into the way religiously motivated actors are perceived in the intelligence community—a way of looking at the subject of religious violence from which academics could benefit as they seek to better understand the interaction of volatile religious communities with the American state. On both these levels, *Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism* is highly recommended.

Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism opens with a discussion of what the author calls "post-modern terrorism." While scholars suffering from post-modernism discourse fatigue might wish that Campbell had selected a different term, the concept is important in its recognition of the fact that, in the post-Cold War world, significant changes have taken place in both international and domestic terrorism. From an international perspective, the end of the Cold War resulted in the sudden disappearance of the most reliable sources of funding, sanctuary and logis-

tical support for European and, to a lesser extent, Middle Eastern and South Asian terrorists who must now finance many of their own activities. The most successful of these free enterprise networks is that of Osama bin Laden, who could afford to operate on a pay-as-you-go basis. Less successful examples abound, however, such as the hapless cell of Belgian-based Algerian Islamists who sought to finance their operations through the novel tactic of stealing car stereos and selling them on the streets in front of neighborhood mosques, or the group of Lebanese Hezbollah operatives in the United States whose contributions to the cause were financed from the sale of smuggled cigarettes.

But the concept of the post-modern terrorist goes farther. In Campbell's conception, the signature of post-modern terrorists is a marked reluctance to "sign" their work. That is, whereas terrorist acts before were eagerly claimed by groups seeking both to publicize their cause and to intimidate their opponents, the post-modern terrorist simply acts. This anonymity complicates the problems of retaliation by aggrieved state actors, and it adds to a generalized climate of insecurity. Most important in terms of WMD, the post-modern terrorist acts with far fewer constraints than did the terrorist formations of the Cold War era. Largely freed from the direct control of states, terrorists are able to act in a more reckless manner, knowing that neither they nor their state patrons could be targeted for retaliation. Moreover, the post-modern terrorist well reflects the decline of political ideology in the contemporary world, where religious fervor—millenarian and messianic fantasies and chiliastic dreams--has largely supplanted the tedious business of conceptualizing alternative political systems.

In such an atmosphere, weapons of mass destruction—nuclear, biological, chemical, and increasingly, cyberwarfare—become not only feasible, but desirable. Thus the challenge for intelligence and national security services: How best to anticipate what had only a few short years ago been considered unthinkable?

Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism looks to two political science models for tools with which to do the work of analysis and estimates. In truth, both systems as predictive instruments are deeply flawed—one perhaps more than another—simply on the basis of their reliance on generating weighted variable indicators which must of necessity be highly subjective in nature. The theories tested in *Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism* are grouped into two primary areas: "structural realist theories of effective demand" and the more subtle "synthetic theory of structural realism and organizational process." While Campbell makes a convincing case for the greater utility of the latter, neither would seem greatly reliable, given the dearth of in-depth information on the internal workings of volatile religious groups—a problem considerably complicated in the United States by legal constraints on gathering intelligence on religious movements.

While the theories are too complex to summarize adequately in a brief review, it can be stated that "structural realist theories of effective demand" center on the juxtaposition of Demand Indicators versus Supply Indicators. For the mathematically minded, the formula suggested is as follows: (Desire for Power) × (Financial Resources × Knowledgeable Membership × Access to Materials) = Effective Demand ~ External Influences (Alliances) (p. 37). A perfect score is 1.0, meaning that a movement scoring 1.0 is a greater risk than any movement scoring >1.0. The "synthetic theory of structural realism and organizational process" is in fact quite similar, save that the theory makes allowances for changing circumstances or what the theory refers to as intervening processes, i.e., alliance relationships with rogue states or other non-state actors, an open political system, weak institutions or security forces, and the like. In both cases, however, the utility of the system is constrained by the subjectivity inherent in assigning numerical values to the variable sets.

Armed with these theoretical models, *Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism* introduces case studies with chapter-length considerations of Aum Shinrikyo, the Jihad Organization (of World Trade Center fame), the radical right-wing group the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord, and as a control variable, the Irish Republican Army. Each case study is based, according to the footnotes, almost entirely on open-source materials, and one may somewhat question some of these sources. Aum Shinrikyo, for example, is based on press reports and David Kaplan and Andrew Marshall's *The Cult at the End of the World*, also a journalistic work. The "Jihad Organization" (so named by journalists rather than adherents) is built almost entirely of press clippings, save for Amir Taheri's *Holy Terror*, which itself reads as a passionate broadside against resurgent Islamist movements that was somewhat surprising coming from a scholar of Taheri's stature. The chapter on the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord utilizes Michael Barkun's excellent history of Christian Identity for historical background, but material on CSA itself is again drawn from news accounts.

The author may be absolved of some criticism for his selection of materials, on the grounds that much of the best work on Aum Shinrikyo and CSA have appeared since *Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism* went to press. For example, Ian Reader's *A Poisonous Cocktail? Aum Shinrikyo's Path to Violence*, and Reader's *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyo* were published in 1996 and 2000 respectively. Kerry Noble's insider account of life in CSA, *Tabernacle of Hate: Why They Bombed Oklahoma City*, appeared in 1998. A definitive work on the "Jihad Organization" has yet to appear, although some excellent interview material and analysis may be found in Jurgensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God*. That there are a number of errors of greater or lesser importance in these chapters may be ascribed largely to the quality of the sources on which the discussions are based.

Not surprisingly, all three groups examined by Campbell do appear to be good candidates for WMD use when analyzed through the lenses of the "structural realist theory of effective demand" and the "synthetic theory of structural realism and organizational process." Aum Shinrikyo, which did manufacture chemical weapons and which did experiment with biological agents, scores .64 on the synthetic theory test, having been docked .2 for lack of sophistication in deploying their weapons and .2 for its dearth of members knowledgeable in WMD technology. Jihad, whose connection to WMD is tenuous at best (they apparently put cyanide in one of their bomb casings, not realizing that the heat from the explosion would destroy the poison), is given a perfect 1.0 score for factors relating to the demands which could produce WMD use, but a woeful .6 for its dearth of members capable of deploying WMD technology.

The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord, meanwhile, qualifies for analysis on the basis of a drum of cyanide which the group had in their possession when they were arrested. The author mistakenly states that CSA manufactured the material. In fact, CSA had in its ranks two superior gunsmiths, but (fortunately) no one capable of manufacturing much of anything more complex than gunpowder. The poison was apparently obtained from the late Robert Miles, a Michigan-based Klan figure. What to do with the stuff seems to have been one of the great unresolved debates at CSA. Federal authorities and the various watchdog groups hold that it was intended to poison the water supply of an unnamed city, while internally the most creative suggestion seems to have been to use it to coat bullets as a kind of revolutionary calling card to give the CSA more movement panache. In any case, the cyanide went unused, but the group is nonetheless given a perfect 1.0 for demand-side indicators and is docked only .3 for lacking members capable of using WMD technology.

All three cases, however, illustrate the difficulty of using analytical models without sufficient reliable data upon which to base mathematical estimations within complex variable sets. The risk of this approach from an academic perspective is minor indeed. For intelligence agencies, on the other hand, the costs of error can be infinitely greater.

Finally, the Irish Republican Army—a movement for whom religion is more a marker of ethnic and national identity than a motivating force—demonstrates the importance of religious motivation in the context of post-modern terrorism by posting an anemic .005 in demand-side indicators, but oddly, a perfect 1.0 in supply-side indicators, suggesting that the IRA has access to WMD technology and has within its ranks persons knowledgeable in WMD technology.

In sum, no scholar interested in the subject of religious terrorism, or in the interface of security services and academe, should fail to read *Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism.*

Jeffrey Kaplan, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh

Gnostic Return in Modernity. By Cyril O'Regan. State University of New York Press, 2001. x + 311 pages. $23.95 paper.

Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme's Haunted Narrative. By Cyril O'Regan. State University of New York Press, 2002. x + 300 pages. $20.95 paper.

These two volumes open a series of eight in which O'Regan argues the thesis, first advanced in detail by Ferdinand Christian Baur in the nineteenth century, that ancient gnostic themes and ideas are fairly pervasive throughout a variety of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers and movements. Volumes three through eight of the series are projected to focus on the discourses of English and German Romanticism, Hegel (about whom O'Regan has already written: *The Heterodox Hegel*, SUNY, 1994), Schelling, nineteenth-century anti-Gnostic thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Coleridge, twentieth-century theologians such as Paul Tillich, T. J. J. Altizer and Jürgen Moltmann, and twentieth-century anti-gnostic polemicists such as Hans Urs von Balthasar and Eberhard Jüngel. Volumes one and two, however, lay out the basic thesis, and proceed to test it vis-à-vis the German speculative mystic, Jacob Boehme.

New Religious Movements scholars will benefit from O'Regan's work in two primary ways. First, students of gnosticism will gain perspective on ancient gnosis that will enable further assessment of claims regarding contemporary expressions of gnostic return. O'Regan supplements and deepens Baur's analysis by examining the narrative structure of Nag Hammadi texts (Ptolemy Valentinian system, *The Gospel of Truth*, and the *Tripartite Tractate*) against the orthodox polemics of Irenaeus. The result is what is most valuable in *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, namely, the generation of both a narrative grammar and a taxonomic structure of ancient Valentinian gnosis from these materials. This addresses the important methodological issues regarding contemporary gnostic genealogies. O'Regan's scholarship is erudite and his conclusions nuanced and sophisticated on this point: any argument for gnostic return needs to be able to account for both continuity and discontinuity with ancient gnosis, as well as to document the superior explanatory power of gnosticism over other competing discourses or narratives.

The historical, methodological, and theoretical gains made in *Gnostic Return in Modernity* are put to work in assessing the pansophistic vision of Boehme in *Gnostic Apocalypse*. O'Regan argues the case for gnostic return by an in-depth comparative and narrative analysis of ancient Valentinianism and Boehme's discourse. But he also recognizes that the complexity of Boehme's vision requires an account not only of the post-Reformation Spiritualist tradition, Paracelsian alchemy, and Eckhartian mysticism that informs Boehme's context, but also the Neoplatonic, apocalyptic, and Kabbalistic elements that are included in Boehme's

grand narrative. New Religious Movements scholars will here appreciate the subtle moves made by O'Regan to unravel these threads and locate their contribution to Boehme's overall vision, even as normative questions regarding narrative primacy are not side-stepped. In short, O'Regan accomplishes the kind of historical and genealogical analysis which can deepen NRM scholarship precisely by providing a model for locating the "old" in the many "new" religious movements we study.

At the same time, however, scholars should be warned along two fronts. First, engaging O'Regan will not be easy. Readers will need to persevere through the distinctive nomenclature, neologisms, and technical jargon (acknowledged by the author). The more historically oriented will be richly rewarded and even inspired by O'Regan's dogged pursuit of a genealogical project. Yet other scholars will also be able to appreciate the multi-disciplinary approach—cutting across religious studies, philosophy, literary theory and literary criticism, and theology—at work here.

Second, O'Regan is a theologian (who began at Yale, and is currently at Notre Dame), and he is up front about the theological motivations driving this project, viz., a) to expose the return of ancient gnosis among the undercurrents of modernity, and b) to reappropriate the plausibility of the Christian narrative grammar in our late-modern or even postmodern situation. Thus Boehme's narrative is "haunted" not only in the sense that it makes present ancient Valentinianism without ever naming or identifying its gnostic sources, but also in the sense that our recognition of this presence demands the appropriate response of exorcism. With regard to (a), be sure that O'Regan is methodologically sophisticated, normatively tenacious in the face of multiple contrasting narratives, and programmatically meticulous in analysis of these many-stranded discourses. My own theological instincts, however, make me suspicious that the biblical and dogmatic "orthodoxy" behind (b) are insufficient if left as assumptions to accomplish exorcism. Arguably, these assumptions require their own genealogical excavation, which, according to the forecast of this series, will not be forthcoming from O'Regan anytime soon.

Amos Yong, Bethel College

From Mission to Madness: Last Son of the Mormon Prophet. By Valeen Tippetts Avery. University of Illinois Press, 1998. 357 pages. $49.95 cloth, $19.95 paper.

This biography of David Hyrum Smith, the youngest son of Joseph Smith, fills a void in the historiography of nineteenth-century Mormonism. Smith, a painter, poet, and singer as well as important religious figure, carried a heavy burden: son of the founder of the Mormon faith but born after his father's murder, brother of the president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (RLDS), greatly

influenced by the views of his mother, and considered by many to be the most talented and charismatic of the Smith brothers, he was always in someone else's shadow and lived a tragic life.

This book is devoted to introducing this truly exceptional and multifaceted figure to the public, providing the most detailed study of him ever published. The author investigates Smith's life with magnifying glass in hand, sharing with the reader accounts of even minor events in his life. Focusing on his character as a Renaissance man, Avery weaves into the text Smith's poetry, sections from his letters, and many of his paintings, in order to communicate an authentic, complete, and truthful picture of him.

However, due to Avery's efforts, this book is not merely a biography: it is also the story of the Smith family, of the split and initial relations between the two major Mormon churches (RLDS and LDS), of their development in the early years, and of the American social and cultural milieu in which all this took place. The author presents events, people, groups, beliefs, and convictions to the reader without overly analyzing, evaluating, or judging them. In doing so, she manages to maintain objectivity in capturing the strengths and weaknesses of each, an approach which may in itself be considered a strength or weakness of the book, depending on the position and expectations of the reader.

I would recommend that people with an interest in religious history, Mormonism, or biography read this book for its unique subject matter, depth of information, and lack of personal bias which I found so valuable.

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Historical Dictionary of the Shakers. By Holley Gene Duffield. Scarecrow Press, 2000. 219 pages. $55 cloth.

Readers of Holley Duffield's *Historical Dictionary of the Shakers* will come away with an erroneous view of a sect which the author claims has remained in a "moribund state for about 150 years" (p. xxii). Although an encyclopedic dictionary of Shaker history would be a valuable asset to religious studies, Duffield's work should be used only with great caution: inaccurate and incomplete entries abound in this dictionary, which as a whole reveals a superficial reading of Shaker history.

Following a chronological introduction, the dictionary entries include Shaker villages, terminology, administrative positions, and noted members of the sectarian group. In the latter category, it is ironic that in a female-founded faith that espoused gender equality, less than one-third of the entries (28 percent) are of Shaker women, and of those, one-third date from the last 40 years, leaving but 20 entries for women from the first 180 years of Shakerism. In the entries of well-known male authors and leaders, there are few surprises, though there are many errors of

omission and of fact. Numerous entries lack birth and death dates, information easily found in the *index nominem* at the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Library, on Western Reserve Historical Society microfilm, and in Shaker records. Lesser-known Shakers are absent; their presence would deepen the utility of this work as well as paint a more comprehensive picture of Shakerism. Examples might include Seth Babbitt whose mental illness led to a courtroom debate on the Shakers' treatment of its members; Angell Mathewson whose reminiscences of his eighteenth-century experiences among the Shakers provides one of the most colorful views of the early days of Lucy Wright's leadership; artists Hannah Cahoon and Polly Ann Reed; Joseph Brackett, composer of the well-known song, "Simple Gifts"; chair-maker Lillian Barlow; or Caleb Dyer, a gifted leader and victim of murder. Entries for industries (such as silk-making), material goods (poplar ware) and publications (such as *The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*) are also lacking. There are no entries for non-Shakers, thus neglecting the numerous relationships—economic, social, cultural, and religious—between the Shakers and the world: Franklin Pierce, who defended the New Hampshire Shakers against a massive legislative assault; early scholars and collectors William Cathcart, and, Edward and Faith Andrews; or authors Margaret Deland, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Catherine Sedgwick are but a few of the many possibilities.

The appendices repeat the author's monolithic view of Shakerism. Duffield's selections from the Millennial Laws emphasize gender relations, neglecting the many other areas of Shaker concern and thus reducing Shakerism to its practice of celibacy. A covenant from Hancock is reprinted without contextual or historical discussion of that document, replicating this work's omission of the role of flexibility, adaptation, and change in the evolution of religions. In his introduction, Duffield asserts that so much has been written about the Shakers he wonders if "anything about the Society remains to be said" (p. xxiv). There is plenty to be said, and the source of such discourse is found in a deeper understanding of the complexity of Shakerism than is afforded by this well-meaning but wanting dictionary.

Elizabeth A. De Wolfe, University of New England

After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s. By Robert Wuthnow. University of California Press, 1998. 286 pages. $35 cloth, $17.95 paper.

Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion. By Wade Clark Roof. Princeton University Press, 1999. 367 pages. $25.95 cloth, $16.95 paper.

In their new studies of religion among American "baby boomers," sociologists Wade Clark Roof and Robert Wuthnow extend their earlier

books on this topic, engage each other in dialogue, and establish what will probably be the framework of debate on the subject for some time to come. Wuthnow adds to his earlier proposal of a recent shift in American public "religion" (*The Restructuring of American Religion*, 1988) the argument that Americans' personal "spirituality" underwent an equally momentous transformation during the latter Twentieth Century. Roof, who labeled American Baby Boomers *A Generation of Seekers* in 1993, now goes on to develop a new model by which to explore what he calls the Boomers' "reflexive spirituality" and the nation's "spiritual quest culture."

Wuthnow develops Roof's suggestion that Americans born since World War II are "seekers" exploring a "marketplace" of spiritual options into a model whereby a "spirituality of seeking" has increasingly displaced an older "spirituality of dwelling" in the United States over the past half century. Roof, meanwhile, integrates and builds on Wuthnow's model of a fundamental reorientation of American religious life from such older institutional moorings as congregation, family, and community to individual choice-makers themselves. Both join Michael F. Brown (*The Channeling Zone*, 1997) in rooting recent American spiritual expressions in the anxieties that broad social and cultural changes have generated since the 1960s. Wuthnow and Roof agree that faith and participation in organized religion have been undercut in recent decades, and interest in personal spiritual expression heightened and shaped, by the same forces: demise of small-town life, rising divorce rates, more widespread postsecondary education, various social justice movements, increasing religious diversity, the growing appeal of non-Western religions, a growing acceptance of diverse lifestyles and worldviews, heightened social and geographic mobility, consumerism, and the postmodern (or, as Roof would prefer, "advanced modern") personalization of truth. Both authors insist that American spirituality regrouped rather than retreated in the latter twentieth century, placing them among the many scholars who argue that American religion remains vital despite increasing "secularization."

But at the heart of the exchange between Roof and Wuthnow is a disagreement about the implications of American spiritual individualism. For Wuthnow, individual seeking has encouraged a "spirituality lite" characterized by dabbling rather than depth, and hope for the future of American religion and society rests in a new "spirituality of practice" that avoids extreme solipsism by embedding the subjective self in wider transcendent realities and committing the individual to community involvement. Roof, however, rejects the suggestion by Wuthnow and Robert N. Bellah (*Habits of the Heart*, 1985) that individualism has expanded at the expense of social commitment. Instead, encouraged by sociologist Robert Jay Lifton (*The Protean Self*, 1993), he celebrates the dynamism and resilience of American religion, its ongoing responsiveness to new realities, its creation of new institutional forms, its continual remaking of tradition, and its blending of centrifugal and centripetal

impulses as the "protean" and "expansive self" seeks grounding as well as openness. Interviews he conducted after publishing *A Generation of Seekers* assure him that Boomers' seeking produces "authentic inner life," new and stronger religious commitments, new forms of community, and a "spiritual maturity" that moves them beyond self-fulfillment and self-absorption. He is especially hopeful about the "small group movement," whose ability to produce meaningful spiritual transformation he defends against Wuthnow's critical *Sharing the Journey* (1994).

Roof also challenges the conservative-versus-liberal and orthodox-versus-progressive models of public American religion proposed in Wuthnow's *The Restructuring of American Religion* and, a few years later, in James Davison Hunter's *Culture Wars* (1991). Wuthnow, addressing private "spirituality" in *After Heaven*, leaves his earlier model largely untouched, but Roof's focus on the "lived religion" of the "ordinary" people he interviewed convinced him that the much-discussed "culture war" has been manufactured by intellectuals and marketed by the media. Roof proposes instead a five-fold categorization: dogmatists and traditionalists, born-again Christians, mainstream believers, metaphysical believers and spiritual seekers, and secularists. Only the first and last groups, small minorities both, are engaged in anything like "warfare;" the rest, Roof suggests, echoing Daniel Bell and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., are forming a new, unifying, and culturally dynamic "religious middle" as the American quest culture produces an end of ideology and a new and vital centrism. Baby Boomers appear to be approaching a cultural consensus based on pragmatism, respect for inner feelings, love and mutuality, and concern for children and the environment.

Whether the future will bear out Wuthnow's concerns or Roof's hopes remains to be seen, and the applicability of their models to the American religious present and past are still open questions, as well. Both recognize seeking or questing as perennial features of American religious life, but historians will have to decide whether they are correct to suggest that these themes have been more salient since the mid-twentieth century than previously. Whether Wuthnow's dwelling-seeking dichotomy or Roof's grounding-questing dynamic is the more accurate and useful model of religion in the United States is a question requiring attention from social scientists of all kinds. Neither author addresses non-Protestants, non-Catholics, and non-Jews, raising questions about the applicability of their models across the entirety of the American religious landscape. And readers of this journal will want to know more about whether and how these models can illuminate the nature and development of alternative and emergent religions. We are indebted to Roof and Wuthnow for offering roadmaps for potentially fruitful future research.

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Peculiar Prophets: A Biographical Dictionary of New Religions. By James R. Lewis. Paragon House, 1999. 400 pages. $19.95 paper.

This reference volume is built of 343 brief biographical sketches of religious leaders from the late-sixteenth to the twentieth century. The author's stated intention is to focus on "the founders and other important leaders of groups normally regarded as outside the pale of the American religious mainstream." This is a biographical dictionary of the lives of post-Reformation religious innovators.

Such a book invites comparison with Gordon Melton's 1986 *Biographical Dictionary of American Cult and Sect Leaders.* There is some overlap in coverage between the two books but they also differ in important ways. First, Melton's book is more than a decade older and includes only 213 sketches. Melton covers only dead religious leaders whereas Lewis includes both the living and the dead. So, for example, the reader will find Moon and Asahara in the Lewis volume but not in the Melton book. Although Lewis cites more bibliographical sources, they are all unhelpfully lumped into one alphabetical reference list at the end of the book. Melton, more sensibly, includes the sources for each biographical entry immediately following that entry, allowing the interested reader both to check the sources and to delve more deeply into the subject. Finally, the Lewis volume lacks an index allowing cross-referencing of religious movement names with leaders' names, and it lacks any classificatory appendices. Both are extremely useful features of the Melton volume.

Lewis has gathered a great deal of useful information into one place. I imagine that most scholars studying new religious movements will want to own a copy of this book because there is no equivalent work available in hard copy (although similar material can be found in various places on the Internet) and because the author includes facts about religious innovators who are still living. However, once beyond dates of birth and death (which are generally accurate), the material cannot be fully trusted because the scholarship is not meticulous.

Methodologically, Lewis gathered this material in a credulous and uncritical way. He compounded this error by sending drafts of the sketches to the leaders themselves or their disciples "for corrections and/or updated information." This has led to some overly sanitized, occasionally whitewashed, sketches, particularly of living or recently deceased leaders. The book thus reads more like *Butler's Lives of the Saints* than a dictionary of some of the most complex and controversial figures in modern culture. For example, the essay on David Berg, the second-longest entry in the book, doesn't even mention the controversy over sexual relations between adults and children in Berg's teachings and practice. The Asahara piece reflects Lewis's famously idiosyncratic view that Asahara's involvement in the Tokyo subway killings is merely an unproven suspicion. The entry on Yogi Bhajan makes it sound

as if he is universally accepted by Sikh leaders in India as the leader of the American Sikhs. One learns nothing about the role of salad bars in local politics by reading the Rajneesh entry. And further examples of this sort can be cited.

In his brief introduction, Lewis says nothing about criteria for inclusion. These criteria are difficult to infer and seem almost haphazard. Why include Shirley MacLaine but not Marshall Applewhite? By what standard are we given information about Henry Harrison Brown but none about either Joseph Smith or Brigham Young? Why, in a book about religious leaders, do we have entries devoted to non-activist authors like William James and Carlos Castaneda while important contemporary religious innovators like Dorothy Day, Steve Gaskin, Jimmy Roberts, and Oscar Ichazo are left out?

Despite these concerns, I find this book a valuable reference and I keep it close at hand when I am working. It brings together material that is otherwise hard to locate. Where else, for example, can you find a biographical sketch of Michael Itkin, an important but unsung pioneer of the gay Old Catholic movement? In his introductory chapter, Lewis hints at possible future revisions of this dictionary. I would urge him to consider a major revision of this unique reference source sometime in the next few years.

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Give Me That Online Religion. By Brenda E. Brasher. Jossey-Bass, 2001. 203 pages. $24.95.

This is not, as the title might suggest, yet another guide to Internet resources on religion and religious studies. Rather, Brenda Brasher has constructed a lengthy essay which explores, often in a necessarily tentative and speculative manner, the various ways in which the Internet is shaping human religious belief, experience, and practice. Brasher's work is grounded in a recognition that the Internet is having a profound impact on all aspects of culture—even the interior spaces where religion dwells—and that the nature of this impact will prove to be of such monumental proportions that certain aspects of human life will be radically and permanently altered. While the theme of the book is weighty, it is appropriately enough written in the spirit of cyber-culture: clever, witty, humorous, and without a trace of pedantry.

Brasher examines a wide range of fascinating examples illustrating the diverse ways that the Internet is being used as a medium of religious expression. Virtual pilgrimages, cyber-space shrines, and online mystical experiences that blur the line between virtual and actual reality are described in detail, employing a scholarly restraint that refrains from assigning a label to what some are likely to designate as utterly bizarre.

On a somewhat more abstract level, Brasher delves into some of the theoretical questions that arise from the emergence of online religion: Can an online experience truly be religious? In what sense does "cyberspace" have ontological status? How will our use of these new technologies—the computer and the Internet—influence the evolution of online religions, and what will be their content?

While Brasher's conjecture about the future of online religion and its impact on human culture and the psyche is interesting, an equally appealing aspect of her work can be found in the many examples of how the Internet is being used as a medium of religious expression and experience. To those unfamiliar with this phenomenon, Brasher's book is an eye-opening glimpse at one of the directions in which religion may evolve in the twenty-first century.

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RELIGION AND
AMERICAN CULTURE

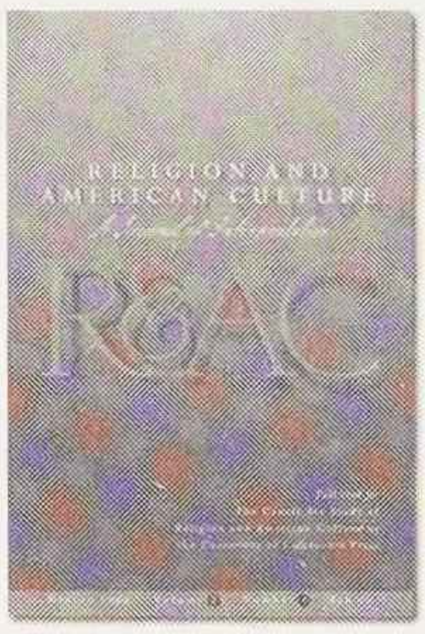
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