

## **Imperial Aspirations, Religious Freedom and Public Education**

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**Abstract:** The question raised by the first amendment guarantees of religious freedom and the right to public education constitutes today's religious problematic. Postcolonial theory, now being explored and utilized in some contemporary theological lines of inquiry, analyzes the hybrid interactions of oppressed and oppressor in imperial situations and reveals ontological and existential differences (not complete, but shared) which have parallels in the history of Christianity as it has moved to consolidate its intellectual, political and financial forces behind a dogmatic and dominative front. This idolatrous and anti-rationalist aspiration splits Christian identity and self-understanding, allowing a deconstruction and concomitant reconstruction yielding a rationalist account of the theist claims which the Christ-encounter entails. This view is considered as the liberal humanist commitment and is found not to be at odds with the preaching and teaching of Jesus' "Kingdom of God" when this kingdom is critically understood in its ancient Galilean setting but is instead formally identified with a theism which is in principle comprehensive and so abstractly understandable. The move to embrace this conviction defends a plurality of religions within the constraints of civil political discourse and avoids the trap of mere liberal tolerance.

### **I. The Modern Religious Problematic**

If the foundation of democracy is public education, and if democracy presupposes the possibility of rational debate then public education is imperiled by the classical formulation of Christianity which has denied the place of reason in the validation of matters of comprehensive convictions. Because the dismantling of public education, as many Christian conservatives demand, implies a self-contradictory argument for a democrat (ie a citizen of a democracy) and because the alternative is also self-defeating, I argue that an appropriate and credible formulation of the Christian faith must be open to rational validation. The implications of this essay are that Christianity must be so understood as to be formulated according to the humanist commitment and that indeed some of Christianity as it is practiced and preached today is dangerous to the foundations and current institution of democracy. I do not take aim here solely at the fundamentalist and conservative Christians, though they do seem to be on the forefront of efforts to eliminate public education. I am instead convinced that a broader critique is necessary and have discovered in the work of some of today's postcolonial theorists, a method in cultural critique which allows Christian theology to see in its own history and culture, patterns of imperialism which deny the impulse behind the central ideological concern of Jesus of Galilee, namely to establish a kingdom of God.

I begin by noting that I became particularly interested in thinking about the hegemonic in theology and in religious practice after September 11, 2001 when we began to hear a great deal

of rhetoric that sounded like the example of General Boykin, who upon his return from Iraq in 2004 began speaking at mainly southern Baptist churches around the United States about the US responsibility to spread freedom around the world. He was quoted in CBS television in September of 2004 asking and answering his question: “Why do they hate us?” he asks, “The answer to that is that we're a Christian nation . . . We are hated because we are a nation of believers. [Our] spiritual enemy will only be defeated if we come against them in the name of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Was he alone in this business? I had a suspicion that though many publicly denounced him, the theological justification for for such xenophobic diatribe lies latent in much Christian thinking, to the extent that even “liberal” Christianity denies the role of reason in religious justification.

## II. Christian Insurrection

General Boykin has had a long history in the United States military. He was a member of the Elite Delta forces and was instrumental in a number of high profile US military operations. Because of his reputation, he was chosen to “reform” the prisons in Iraq, to “Gitmo-ize” them, to quote Sydney Blumenthal. An investigation was launched in response to public criticism over Boykin's statements like the one made on CBS. The conclusion of the “Boykin Report” was simply that he should have cleared his speeches with the Department of Defense. He was also cited for failing to preface his talks at these evangelical meetings with a disclaimer stating that his views, were not necessarily those of the Department of Defense.<sup>2</sup> But nowhere was Boykin criticized for his bigotry, nowhere was his abuse of power denounced. Instead his first amendment rights to free speech were defended and in the process the first amendment's religious freedom clause took another blow.

Boykin's scornful question is not a new one. The psalmist in Psalm 2 begins by asking a similar one: “Why do the nations rage so furiously together?” That his question has the same impulse as Boykin's is not immediately apparent to the Christian theologian and preacher, so

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<sup>1</sup> William G. Boykin, Army Lt. General and U.S. Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence lecturing at southern Baptist and Pentecostal churches in the United States since 9/11/01. Reported on CBS, September 15, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The New York Times*, “Report Urged Action Against General for Speeches” March 4, 2005.

used is she to reading the text from the mindset of the Psalmist, who answers the “Why?” in the negative in the second half of the couplet which forms verse one. “Why do they plot in vain?” he asks, giving the lie, by the use of the word vain, to his imperial frame of mind. Who are these meddling people who rage and plot in vain against the authority and power of the Lord set upon the holy hill of Zion? Verse three implies an answer to the reader attuned to the locations and problems of authority in culture:

Let us break their chains and throw off their fetters. . .

Those who plot to gain their liberation do so against the imperial authority of God's chosen people inhabiting God's promised land. The nations who rage are none other than the heathens (KJV) who seek liberation from political oppression. These are those, who in the world view of the psalmist, garner the derisive laughter of none other than almighty God in the next verse.

In this essay, I argue that the questions raised by the first amendment guarantees of religious freedom and the right to public education, constitute a problematic for Christians for two reasons – both of which have their origins in the imperial aspirations of the religion. First, the problematic exists because of an understanding of religion which, in order to accept the pluralism of the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, must fail in its aim to form religious adherents and, second, of an understanding of public education which, in order to raise “good democratic citizens” requires an unconstitutional teaching of comprehensive claims in the classroom. One reason this has become such a difficult and poorly attended issue is that the question of authority in the Christian religion has been poorly attended. Recently, postcolonial theorists have urged us to think about power and power's locations in culture in far more ambivalent terms than we are used to. There is no easy separation of the entanglement of cultures in their mutual but unequal encounter with colonial authority. Instead colonial assertion of civility becomes a kind of “sly civility” in which the identity and authority of the other is read by accommodation through a

“construction of a symbolic majority where the have-nots identify themselves from the position of the haves.”<sup>3</sup>

Hannah Arendt has observed that violence is instrumental and hence requires only the manufacture of justification. Power, on the other hand, requires legitimation, and legitimation requires religion.<sup>4</sup> Legitimation is made possible, in other words by that background of meaning which provides for the valuation of certain experiences of the use of power in the world as not only legitimate, but sacred, or divinely ordained.

Postcolonial thought contributes to the Christian theological enterprise by showing that legitimating alternatives to imperial models of culture requires careful discrimination of the locations and dislocations of power. Because power is actually influence, and because influence in the Christian conception of God has tended toward absolute influence, the use of power in Christian thought has been about the production of a dominant discourse. However, the postcolonialists have been adamant to point out, the production of a dominant discourse is always also a “production of alternative or antagonistic images, side-by-side and in competition with each other.” In a provocative and helpful phrase, Homi Bhabha calls this a metonymic encounter of traditions such that in the struggle for dominance, contradictory traditions spring up within the colonized cultures and what is desired in freedom is finally disavowed in a misplaced freedom.<sup>5</sup>

Metonymy refers to that process of reification where divergent meanings become, in a kind of collusion between competing cultural systems, a mutually agreeable legitimation for application of colonial power. The process, says Bhabha “reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that the other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority.”<sup>6</sup> In the cultural struggle for dominance contradictory traditions evolve and “elicit between them, in an uncanny doubling, undecidability.”<sup>7</sup> Insofar as “undecidability” implies a choice for unclear options, implied in the postcolonial analysis of the locations of

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<sup>3</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Press, 1994), 43.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted in Catharine Keller, *God and Power* (Minneapolis, MN:Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2005), 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-3. Here Bhabha refers to a “metonymy of antagonism.” Later, he refers to it as a “metonymy of place,” see Bhabha, 128. In both cases the thing substituted in the process of metonymy functions in an antagonistic way against the place of its origin, its culture.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

traditions and their crawl toward legitimation of powers of dominance, is a teleology begging to be properly understood. Because human activity “arises,” as philosopher A. N. Whitehead so nicely put it, “as an effect facing its past and ends as a cause facing its future,”<sup>8</sup> we can say that humans are bound to choose their future in such a way that adds to or detracts from the community of agents of which they are a part, and as such have moral aims. postcolonial analysis begs for a theological counterpart in its recognition of the confusion and the collusion of colonial traditions and their aims.

### III. Postcolonial Resurrection

Borrowing from Adolf Harnack, religion is here understood to constitute a form of culture in which the participants act in accord with a standard of value which is contained in the meaning and purpose of life as they see it. Because all human activities involve a choice for alternatives, thinking, rational human beings, “ must act according to the standard of values which is contained in the meaning and purpose of life as they see it. So acting they produce institutions of human culture. . . . Historical knowledge is therefore not merely a knowledge of past events as such, but it is an unavoidable exercise of cultural responsibility.”<sup>9</sup> Appropriating the postcolonial theorists' insight into cultures' cross purposes might serve to clarify the problematic which remains before us. I take Harnack's definition of religion to mean that we may distinguish between a “valid comprehensive self-understanding,” and the metaphysical claim about reality, because to act in accord with a standard of value which expresses the “meaning and purpose of life” is at least to imply that the character of human authenticity includes a relation to the character of reality as such.

A valid comprehensive self-understanding means that the awareness of one's self in the world in distinction from others is such that proper relations to the world are not self-contradictory. Every human activity is constituted by some understanding of the differentiation between self and world and as such all human activity consists of moral choices. Because it is

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<sup>8</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1993), 249

<sup>9</sup> As quoted by Wilhelm Pauck, “The Significance of Adolf von Harnack's Interpretation of Church History,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* (New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1958), 33.

the case that human activity may not always be explicitly directed by the moral self it is useful to employ the distinction between implicit and explicit self-understanding within all human activity. By implicit self-understandings, I mean human self-understandings that are not part of our explicit conscious attention but without which our explicit states could not be as they are.<sup>10</sup>

When we allow this distinction, a self-understanding and a comprehensive self-understanding constitute the same thing but with different levels of awareness. This means that a valid comprehensive self-understanding is one that is implicitly or explicitly asserted in the choice for moral activity which is not contradicted by the character of reality as such. All human activity implies choice and our choices are always moral choices “because every particular self-understanding includes . . . a comprehensive self-understanding”<sup>11</sup> as an application of the principle that the particular implies the general.

Because no moral claim can be validated by appeal to contingencies, or history, the religious question is a question of rational order.

The appeal to history is the appeal to the summits of attainment beyond any immediate clarity in our own individual existence. It is an appeal to authority. The appeal to reason is the appeal to that ultimate judge, universal and yet individual to each, to which all authority must bow. History has authority so far, and exactly so far as it admits of some measure of rational interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

Whitehead notes in his discussion about the need for religious reform that circumvention of this process, or conversation which is not conversation, but mere assertion, is not only destructive to religion's ultimate aims, but “treasonous to civilization” itself.<sup>13</sup> The theological point of concern in this essay lies in the claim that a valid self-understanding may be authorized by appeal to the revelation of God through the representation of Jesus Christ in such a way not “treasonous to civilization.” This claim can be stated as a claim to religious freedom witnessed on one level (secular) by a commitment to democracy and on another level (religious) to the right

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<sup>10</sup> Franklin Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom* (Albany, New York: New York University Press, 1995), 17. I am indebted to Gamwell for much of the argument that follows on the nature of religion, though, of course, the any difficulties in attempting to describe the relation between religion on colonial culture are mine.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>12</sup> Whitehead, 207-8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

of religious adherents to worship freely. This freedom, is a subset of religious freedom in general because the question of the validity of freedom as can only be validated by the freedom entailed in our comprehensive self-understandings the validity of which is entailed by our humanly asking the question in the first place.

Some may object that freedom and the obligation to be moral stand at opposite corners of the debate and cannot be valid conversation partners. However, because the pursuit of moral choice cannot be considered apart from the the question of the content of the moral, this objection is ultimately irrational. Because “no human is rationally required to choose anything at all unless a contrary choice is contrary to reason, and a contrary choice is never contrary to reason if reason does not require that one be moral,”<sup>14</sup> freedom is rationally required to allow that conversation of purposes for moral action.

Such is the argument in brief which suggests, against the commonly held view, that religious convictions can be rational and that the failure to understand religious freedom as consistent with a religious, democratic plurality is consistent with a non-rational account of religion.

Insofar as a non-rational account of anything lacks integrity, Christian integrity demands that we both repose and repossess the question that has vexed the mind of the believer ever since there was such a question: “Why do they hate us? Why do they rage against us?” It is not enough to dismiss Boykin’s views as those of a fringe zealot. In point of fact this is the implied view of those who argue against public education remaining a secular institution in the manner laid forth by Dewey, and who argue instead for the teaching of religious answers to life's questions in the classrooms of the publicly funded school.<sup>15</sup>

The impulse to demonize and to disclaim all religious impulses and claims foreign to the mindset of the Christian orthodox shoots through our Christian history like the fear that ripples through a crowded airport terminal upon Homeland Security's announcement that the nation is at

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<sup>14</sup> Gamwell, p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> The purpose of this essay is not to attack fundamentalists. So I here simply remind the reader that the threat to public education which refuses to teach specific answers to religious questions, such as the implied answer in Intelligent Design, namely, an intelligent creator, exists should not be discounted as mere fringe. In fact, I suggest that for those Christians who defend a vision of public education as truly public and free, unless we repose and repossess the question and answer which Christianity asks and answers, we inadvertently, because of the hybrid nature of Christianity, undermine ourselves in the implicit support of structures of dominance.

alert level orange for a terrorist threat. In fact, as Edward Ingebretsen theorizes, and as the title of one of his books, *Maps of Heaven, Maps of Hell*, suggests, religion often tries to map, in real geography, through its particularistic tendencies, imperialistically defended textual and doctrinal territory.<sup>16</sup> It is no coincidence that the English word “terror” derives from the actions taken by people to frighten the outsider from their territory. But empire, in its desire for the uniformity that acquiesces, in the end obliterates that very thing whose acquiescence it seeks. In the fear fueled aftermath of September 11, 2001, the troponym 9/11 dictates the fear-filled religious response. It is not enough to call an end to such demonization for this troponymic cycle lies at the heart of the modern religious problematic: How can a religious adherent accept a plurality of religions when religion is understood to define itself by the answer it provides to the comprehensive question? By definition this answer rules out the secular answer.

After Samuel Huntington, some have called this ramped-up terror awareness an expression of the culture wars raging in the United States since the Reagan administration and its expression of “family values.” Zygmunt Bauman wonders, however, if this is not a dream for a land and a time when narcissism and its twin, terror, were not so brazenly apparent. Bauman, writing well before our second day of infamy, about an ethic of the postmodern community, one so fragmented and bereft of real social relations, walled in by barriers of class and race and cut off by limiting technologies that he calls it a post-communal world, notes that in this world, “Identity sprouts on the graveyard of communities, but flourishes, thanks to the promise of the resurrection of the dead.”<sup>17</sup> His is no flattering comment to those of us who take resurrection seriously. In Bauman's view resurrection speciously offers life where there is none. A community flourishes falsely, without connections, without relations and in fear when the bare notion of the resurrection provides the rationale to go on disconnected, fragmented from the other – a graveyard – where, when all is said and done, the promised land is ours for free, barren of the obligations of responsibility toward the poor and the widowed, the “outcast in your midst.”

Bauman's derogatory use of resurrection functions as a revelation of the monovalent, dogmatic and imperialistic form of what was originally a faith statement. As people who take our

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<sup>16</sup> Edward Ingebretsen, *Maps of Heaven, Maps of Hell: Religious Terror as Memory from the Puritans to Stephen King* (M.E. Sharpe, New York: 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, “Space in a Globalising World,” *Theoria*, (June, 2001), 16-17.

task of living peaceably in the world with other religions, as people who would embrace freedom and the right to pursue answers to the great questions of life, even apart from Jesus and resurrection, we must repose the central Christian question and depose the rule of omnipotence.

To repose Boykin's question and answer it in light of postcolonial theory is to discover that we must somehow repossess it, somehow claim responsibility for its currents moving in our own insistence on the dominative centrality of resurrection in our life of faith and indeed our Christian heritage.<sup>18</sup> On my view, because every relation to God is a transcendental condition of human activity, every decision one makes regarding belief in the necessity of reposing the question is an implied repossession of the question for integrity. In other words, all human activity, to be authentically so, must pursue the divine good without duplicity, and in this case to recognize the undercurrents of a kind of Christian evangelism which does not pursue the good is to face the necessity of reposing it.

Even though the earliest Christians who borrowed the ancient concept of resurrection to speak of their continued interest in the life, words and deeds of Jesus of Galilee understood the concept to represent the freedom of life they continued to find in him, it soon became the *sine qua non* of Christian identity. What was originally a faith statement became, in a process much like the post-colonialists analysis of the splitting and doubling of cultural metonymy, an imperialistically defended dogma. In the assertion of colonial power over the colonized, the colonized threaten the authority of the colonial command because both are in a "process of miscognition where each point of identification is always a partial and double representation of the doubleness of the self."<sup>19</sup>

The history of resurrection is loaded with ambiguity. The naming of that ambiguity enunciates boundaries inexorably established and equally inexorably resisted, narrativized and ontologized. Its enunciative power lies in the meaning derived from and around the 'and' which is always present in this enunciation of splitting. Bhabha calls this little word 'and' "the

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<sup>18</sup> That this is so was brought home to me in a recent discussion on 1 Corinthians 15. In verses 11-15, I suggested that Paul was engaged in a rebuttal and that verse eleven should be read as a rebuke of the (unknown, but implied) Corinthian position that some are preaching that Jesus rose from the dead. This was met with vigorous disapprobation, not of my reading of Paul, but of me personally.

<sup>19</sup> Bhabha, 138-9.

conjunction of infinite repetition,” because it functions to bring the signifier back around, in a different mode which, in the process, becomes “less the one and double.”

**'And' -- that conjunction of infinite repetition -- that the ambivalence of civil authority circulates as a 'colonial' signifier that is less than one and double. The position of authority is alienated at the point of civil enunciation -- less than liberty . . . And doubles at the point of colonialist address -- just and unjust or the doubling of democracy as vigorous despotism.<sup>20</sup>**

This “conjunction of infinite repetition” functions, in my theological reading of hybrid hermeneutics, to emaciate the fullness of the gospel as the good news to the poor and the outcast by ramping up its word to the powerful in the monovalent God of power and might. The gospel itself through this doubling of the imperial aspiration, mutates into idolatry: it is the postmodern colonial captivity of the Word.

Taking Bhabha's cue I suggest that the 'and' between these representations of resurrection, when it is validly recognized, functions to expose failures and (later) possibilities within the doctrine. For some, Christianity is made less than one when resurrection loses its imperial force and instead becomes a statement of faith among others, such that once could speak also of Jesus as the gate or the window through which one approaches or sees God. For those who see this as a severe reduction, the attempt is made “at the point of colonialist address,” to double its imperial efforts and resurrection becomes a means of vigorous despotism and opposition is crushed by almighty power. The doctrine metonymically becomes the enunciation of the so-called historical events necessary to the claim of Christian faith, diminishing its possibility as the enunciation of freedom. On the insistence of the metonymical understanding of the faith statements implied in resurrection, the question of Christian representation to the world is rooted in the problem of authority and the paradox of crusades for Christian freedom is revealed as the doubling of freedom as domination. “The desire of colonial mimicry – an interdictory desire – may not have an object, but it has strategic objectives which I shall call the

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Bhabha, 139.

metonymy of presence.”<sup>21</sup> This metonymy of presence, translated into Christian theological language becomes a kind of odious evangelism.

To rid Christian thought its long love affair with power would be to re-cognize in the person Jesus, through the witness given of his words and deeds, that which is “ultimately real and [ to see that the] faith in the God that Jesus explicitly authorizes is indeed our authentic possibility as human beings.”<sup>22</sup> It is important to note here that the power which legitimizes in this instance is not an overwhelming power of might, but of influence. What it means to be a person of faith is not wrapped up in the desire of colonial mimicry, but of freedom whose only strategic objective is freedom. And so St. Paul writes of Jesus, “For freedom, Christ has set us free.”<sup>23</sup>

In a rhetorical move decidedly similar to Bhabha’s “metonymy of presence” Jesus named the moral location of his culture of discipleship the kingdom (basileiva)of God catachrestically invoking that other kingdom, the Empire of Rome. There was nothing unfamiliar about the *Imperium Romanum* – for the peasants of the Galilean countryside and seashore, the basileiva of Rome was no good. Jesus re-presents, in his use of the politically loaded term basileiva, the original freedom of God which is vaguely reflected in the desire and the hatred embodied in the stereotyped discourse of the *imperium Romanum*. That which is catachrestically re-presented is the original presentation of love through the valuation of even marginal human existence as of worth.

Postcolonial theory informs the theological enterprise by insisting that we recognize the ambiguities in the idea of doctrine lest the disjunctive “locus of symbolic identification” in the catechrestic naming of the Kingdom of God, becomes monovalently identified with the dominant structures of negotiation,<sup>24</sup> obliterating the freedom for which it stands in its undecidable metonymy of antagonism. In other words, the marginal (who are to take center stage in the Empire of God) are again lost.

Bhabha, writing about cultures not explicitly religious, nevertheless says that “to recognize the stereotype (in my use here, the Empire of Rome in the Empire of God) as an

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>22</sup> Schubert Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 87-88.

<sup>23</sup> Galatians 4:27, (NRSV)

<sup>24</sup> Bhabha, 265.

ambivalent mode of knowledge and power demands a theoretical and political response that challenges deterministic modes of conceiving of the relationship between discourse and politics.” I suggest that we reclaim an analytic of ambivalence in Christian theology in order to free ourselves of our deterministic, power wielding classical doctrines which leave us at a loss in the face of the democratic responsibility of the rational assessment of moral claims. To our detriment and the continued marginalization of the many unlike us, the preponderance of Christian tradition has denied the secularist need to ground moral claims through rational assessment.

To claim an analytic of ambivalence for Christian theology requires that we rid ourselves of classical Christian theology’s love affair with omnipotence, which doctrine, no matter how we qualify it with the word mystery, denies human freedom and leaves determinism in its wake.

Because any Christian theology must meet standards of adequacy with regard to the normative biblical witness and must also be credible, that is must be philosophically non-suspect, to resolve the modern religious problematic, must be to answer the question of religious pluralism. It is my contention that classical theology’s insistence that the later criterion is suspect, that the Christian faith cannot be redeemed by argument, creates a cultural displacement such that the “basilea of God shadowboxes with the Roman Empire” as theologian Catherine Keller puts it, outperforming the Romans in might and as “ruthless as any Caesar.”<sup>25</sup> This insistence on God’s omnipotence disavows the other and the democratic conviction is denied its basis in the sovereignty of the people.

### III. Conclusion

Because a democratic constitution must be “authorized by we the people,” the challenge can be stated: can religious claims be rationally assessed? “Absent a positive answer, Christian faith cannot endorse government by the people.”<sup>26</sup> Classical Christian theology, disavowing the humanistic commitment and claiming instead priority of revelation is finally self-refuting. The

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<sup>25</sup> Keller, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Franklin Gramwell, *Politics as a Christian Vocation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 48-55. I am indebted to Gamwell in my understanding of the relation between religion and democracy. Whether he would concur with my conclusions is another matter. All confusions in thinking through the modern religious problematic are mine.

argument here is that no moral claim can be validated on historically specific grounds, which revelation is.

[H]istorically specific conditions could be sufficient conditions of validity only if no positive comprehensive conviction is valid, and the denial of all such convictions cannot itself be defended on historically specific grounds. If one argues, [for example,] that historically specific ideas of modern democratic culture are sufficient to validate that slavery is wrong, this argument could be successful only if there is no comprehensive condition of all valid moral claims. Since the denial of all religious or comprehensive convictions cannot itself be validated by appeal to specific conditions of modern democracy, neither can the claim that slavery is wrong.<sup>27</sup>

The humanistic commitment, which this paper expresses, is not that which is typically spoken of in Christian conversation about the priority of religious freedom. However the constitutional proscription of establishment, since at least the 1957 Supreme Court case *Everson v. United States*, has been under constant attack by the religious position which I suggest needs to be repositioned. One apparent consequence of the denial of the humanist position by Christians in a democracy is that the public debate over matters of the good is stifled.

Given that the Constitution prescribes public debate over matters of the good, and that imperial struggles interdict such free debate and define what just actions look like, then the ethics of citizenship require adherence to this prescription and the political community fails to legitimate the belief of those for whom ultimate terms of choice are not open to discourse and to legitimation. Thus the sovereignty of such religious believers over their understanding of the constitution is denied. But just this denial can be avoided by Christians who so understand that the comprehensive question and their particular answers to it, are part of the public debate.

To conclude, democracy means government that people adopt and maintain with their rational consent. This means that political equality unites people by way of argument. As such, all moral and religious standards may be contested, provided only that truth is not, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, “disarmed of her natural weapon, free argument and debate.”<sup>28</sup> The postcolonial analysis of the locations and dislocations of power apply to the religious question inasmuch as the problematic in our society today swirls around the issue of authority or power.

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<sup>27</sup> Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom*, 139.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Jefferson. “Virginia Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom.” 1779.

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In the denial of the humanist position, the “colonialist demand for narrative carries with it its threatening reversal.”<sup>29</sup> It is against this reversal we are required, as citizens of a democracy, to remain vigilant. It is sadly, just this reversal which is being played out in our public school system by Christians unable to accept that their children should learn from authorities other than certain Christian ones.

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<sup>29</sup> Bhabha, 143.