

Téma: Religionistika versus Apologetika

In the popular press, it sometimes appears as though religious wars continue not only in history and politics but also between the different specializations within the academic study of religion. In his article, "Why Catholics Stay in the Church" in a recent *New York Times Magazine*, for example, Andrew Greeley asserts that they stay because of the stories. This is an interesting argument both for what it claims and for the shock value of the title. Why do the stories upon which this religion reflects and interprets play such an essential role? Here is the way Greeley states the priority of story: "... while institutional authority, doctrinal propositions and ethical norms are components of a religious heritage-and important components-they do not exhaust the heritage. Religion is experience, image and story *before it is anything else and after it is everything else*" (40; emphasis mine).

Anyone who knows a religious tradition must have experienced its enviable strengths. Anyone raised in a religious tradition is likely to be steeped in stories which witness to a wide range of genre and gender differences. Anyone who reads religious scriptures is likely to be aware; of the multiple ways these stories can go. Anyone who reads and hears the stories is also urged by their willing participation in a religious community to appropriate these texts into their present surroundings. These effects of live religious traditions can be vitiated by traditionalism. But traditions at their best allow themselves to be challenged by the contemporary situation and to be corrected when necessary.

The extent to which we may generalize this observation for religions other than Christianity is, of course, a further question. It does seem to be true for Judaism and Islam. Judaism had such good stories that Christianity bound its own stories to theirs very early on, with the result that Christianity has always been twice blessed with respect to written texts. Islam was also intrigued with some of the best stories from the Hebrew bible but it chose to retell the stories with differences instead of adopting them in context. Islam also has its own body of stories [*hadith* and *sunna*] about its founder and the early tradition.

Different traditions emphasize different stories, and unanimity on the issue of the role of stories is lacking within and across traditions. Nor is conflict on these issues of interpretation confined to the present. People have lost their jobs and lives as a result of internal territorial disputes. The death of Stephen (c36 C.E.), as recorded in Acts could be attributed to a dispute on the primacy of ritual over doctrine. The death of Al-Hallaj (922 C.E.) illustrates conflict between mystical experience and moral and doctrinal clarity. Wrestling with the experience of the ultimate inadequacy of reason in theology and philosophy, Blaise Pascal (1623-62) concluded that the god of the philosophers was inferior to the god of the prophets

What, then, are we to make of what will appear to many traditionalists as a proposal to reverse the priority of doctrine, institutional authority, and ethical norms over stories? Not that Greeley limits the meaning of story to texts. For him, the neighborhood parish is also "another story." Even so, the list appears to include primarily those elements which might seem, to despisers of religion, to be the childish elements-stories, rituals, and

images. The issue becomes academic-in the sense of disciplinary-however, when Greeley ratchets his argument up a notch with the following metaphysical claim: "In fact, it is in the poetic, the metaphorical, the experiential dimension of the personality that religion finds both its origins and raw power. Because we are reflective creatures we must also reflect on our religious experiences and stories; it is in the (lifelong) interlude of reflection that propositional religion and religious authority become important, indeed indispensable. But then the religiously mature person returns to the imagery, having criticized it, analyzed it, questioned it, to commit the self once more in sophisticated and reflective maturity to the story" (40).

In other words, human beings tell stories in order to represent their best interpretations. In this view truth is what they know through these interpretations.¹ Not that the stories are guarantors of truth or ethical living-or that the meanings of the stories are protected from abuse. Indeed, every generation must correct interpretations in the light of new exigencies, must imagine the structures that best allow the stories to take root in different soil and in lives different from the lives of those who heard the stories before. Nevertheless, the stories remain the prima facie evidence to be taken up as a solid core of empirical residue for a new generation to be fascinated with, perplexed by, charmed and challenged in turn.

I have introduced a scientific term into this last sentence because, in the past, consideration of the role of stories in religious understanding has often been kept within the confines of language studies, philosophy, theology and literary studies. However, I will argue later that a sea change is needed in the field of religious studies, one that must take place in the nexus of the field of theology, the field of art, literature and religion, and the field of science and religion. I perceive a persistent dichotomization between science and religion that continues to flaw both religious and scientific understanding. My wager is that productive work in this nexus requires not only expertise in the fields taken discretely but also scholarly and teacherly collaboration between and among these presently disparate fields.

Three Fields in the Study of Religion) 1968-1994

My scholarship and teaching has been in three fields in religious studies. The first field, called by various names that I will note below, not surprisingly stemmed from my graduate work and dominated my writing and classroom from 1972-1984. The second field, women and religion, began with my reading and reflection in the 1960s and developed as a complement to the first by writing and further reading. The third field, science and religion, from 1984 through the present, was the result not so much of a departure from the first as of a shift in attention to new questions, not all of which could be answered productively with resources from the fields in which I had been trained.

THE FIRST FIELD: ALR

Since the time of its formal inclusion in the university curriculum in the 1950s, the field has been known by several different names. For example, when I began my graduate study at the University of Chicago in the late '60s, the field was called "Theology and Literature." ... In other words, theology and literature was originally conceived not as a sub-field but rather as an interdisciplinary field-one, it was presumed, that would be "mastered" by one scholar who took twice as long to train (in literary studies and in theology) as one who studied in either of the two fields taken alone. The first graduates of the Chicago program wrote dissertations that were interpretations of particular texts or of the corpus of particular authors. This fact may reflect the relative stability of the field of theology at the time. That is, the questions (other than those for clarification) which

drove these inquiries were more likely to pertain to literature than to theological understandings. Within one year of my arrival at the university, in 1969, the name of the field was changed from "Theology and Literature" to "Religion and Literature," reflecting a growing interest in the bridge between literature and the history of religions—a sense that the link between literature and Christian theology needed to be widened. My Master's degree was therefore in Theology and Literature and my doctorate (three years later) in Religion and Literature with the difference appearing primarily in the topics of dissertations done within the field: mine, I was told, was the first to be done on a theoretical topic. The further widening of the field in the next few years to include other than literary texts brought about another new name for the entire field: the American Academy of Religion reconstituted the field as "Arts, Literature, and Religion" to represent the diversification of what there was to be interpreted

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From its beginnings, Arts, Literature, and Religion considered itself accountable to the methodological considerations of both literary / artistic criticism and theology. In its earliest days, however, the object of ALR was sometimes identified with that of apologetics. We now recognize that if appropriation is taken as the sole or even the major purpose, a distorted view of the task of the discipline can result: the task of ALR can begin to be thought of as superimposing explicitly religious meanings onto the meaning of texts and works of art. Did such distortions occur? Notwithstanding the probability that some examples of distortion could be found, the field was actually founded precisely to prevent too easy a transfer of meaning from doctrinal theology to literature and the arts. Moreover, if one closes one's eyes to issues of appropriation altogether, one foregoes the investigation of a vast amount of literature and art in which explicitly religious questions are at work. Regardless, modern literature increasingly was recognized as presenting a more complicated relationship with religious meaning than had been thought possible in the past. Today appropriation of texts and iconographic materials is recognized to be one of several important issues of interpretation.

THE SECOND FIELD: WOMEN AND RELIGION

I have drawn upon and developed ideas in the field of women and religion simultaneously with my work in the first and third fields. Many of the first questions in the second field came out of a liberal concern with equality. Val Saiving's groundbreaking essay, "The Human Situation:

A Feminine Viewpoint" set the stage for a second resurgence of the question of gender equality. The first, a half century before, was Elizabeth Cady Stanton's collaborative project: *The Women's Bible* (1895-98). The basic question then was "Is the Bible itself sexist or did the translation insert sexism into the original texts?" Today it is widely accepted that both the original texts and their translations are likely to reflect gender bias. But the liberalist concern with equality of representation has been replaced by a more interesting and complex question—that of how elements designated as "feminine" are valued in relation to associated elements designated as "masculine." The point of this kind of inquiry is to recognize the positive and negative valences of typically female and male designations. The task goes beyond recognition to call into question and to "transvaluate" the valences so that they do not determine the status of or possibilities for persons of either gender. This question of valuation does not replace the question of equality so much as displace it temporarily: the wager is that equality will be achieved more effectively in the long run.

The question of valuation has been supplanted in turn by a third issue—that of personal gender identity in the light of both of the previous questions.² This issue can best be located at the site of personal choices newly informed by one's awareness of the historical inequality of the sexes and of the contemporary challenge to transform values traditionally associated with

each. The public dimension of the third issue emerges as questions of strategy equivalent to questions of genre. What this third issue reveals is a need to correlate questions about gender with questions about genre (or strategy). In *Genre Choices; Gender Questions*) I suggest ways of formulating and ordering these questions: (1) Which genres (literary strategies) are typically read by or intended for the respective genders? (2) How do genres "redistribute" traditional characteristics defined by gender? (3) How do genres assist in the appreciation and acquisition of modes of speech and action inscribed in gender differences in a given culture at a particular time? There is ample evidence that the correlation of genre and gender makes possible a new method of inquiry. Once one is alert to the facets of both gender and genre it is possible to distinguish among inquiries according to the degree to which they are over genred and over gendered or under genred and under gendered.

THIRD FIELD: SCIENCE AND RELIGION

I credit my opportunity to work in the field of science and religion to my institution's maintenance of a strong interdisciplinary program and to one colleague in particular with whom I have done bidisciplinary writing as well as teaching. Historically, the most important recent changes in the field of science can be said to have taken place after World War II when new technology employing detectors sensitive to radiation beyond visible light gave us new eyes in the development of new kinds of instrumentation.

These developments made it possible to see the Universe differently. The Universe appeared to be violent, for instance, instead of passive. In a similar way planet Earth was found to be more violent. In the science of plate tectonics, Earth scientists observed chunks of Earth colliding, building up mountains, and disappearing in subduction zones. Processes formerly thought by geologists to be more predictable because they were thought to be caused by water were now understood to be dynamic. In other words, what had been discovered after World War II were new observational aspects of both Earth and Universe. The change also involved the applications of the second law of thermodynamics: we know that when things run alot, they also run down alot. That realization contributed to the understanding of ecological crisis, of the diminishing supply of natural resources, and of limits to growth

A shift in focus from Earth to Universe has raised old questions-such as that of the future of the human species-in a new context. How do new scientific technologies, e.g., the possibility of constructing colonies in space or of mapping the genes of the human body, challenge us to refigure the aspirations of the human species? The shift also changes the scale of some other traditional questions. This shift from Earth to Universe radically alters the sense of "ongoing" revelation in the three "religions of the book." To what extent may certain concepts, such as that of "covenant" and "Islam," need to be reinterpreted in the new scientific context? What aspects of the question of Christology are affected by the new cosmology in which Universe is the context rather than planet Earth?³ How are the claims of ecological theology both supported and modified by the new scientific emphasis on the Universe as distinct from planet Earth?

Can the field of religion afford not to have an awareness of science as resource for theological inquiry? On the one hand, who else will respond to the confidence-perhaps overconfidence-of the new cosmologists that allows them to claim that ultimately there will be a scientific explanation for everything? Stephen Hawking, along with other cosmologists, has a vision of complete knowledge about the universe-a vision which excludes religious understanding as having no relevance for future states of affairs

Can the problem of metaphysical naivete be addressed without trust built from frequent conversations and familiarity with one another's fields? Making more room for the relatively small but long-lived discipline of religion and science within the academy promises to

contribute in both directions. Ultimately, we need to affirm both the importance of science's being informed by other disciplines, such as that of philosophical theology, and the importance of religious studies being informed by science. If confidence in the work of the intellect is to endure, we need mutually to inform and to contextualize that which otherwise, we know from the history of thought, will come to dominate and forget its limits.

Furthermore, the ambition which drives these new cosmologies suggests that work in the dialogical fields, such as that of religion and science, can best be carried out collaboratively rather than by one scholar attempting to merge perspectives that are remarkably divergent in many ways. Indeed, I don't think we can do it without being in dialogue. This is especially true since it is as hard to talk to cosmologists in their current state of self-confidence as it was earlier to talk with religious scholars in their earlier states of certitude.

We will also need new theoretical strategies for such collaboration. When fields are relatively close together, contiguities and similarities prevail in the extension of what is known

Bringing it All Together: Issues of Genre in Theological/ Religious and Secularist Studies

Most critical thinkers think that they recognize the difference between a fundamentalist position on the meaning of a scriptural text and a scholarly position or a secularist position. Critical scholars and secularists alike are likely to reject literal interpretations that jeopardize human rights and lives. These scholars could be expected to decry, for example, the laws that permit genocide in Bosnia as well as the threats on the life of the Islamic feminist, Taslima Nasrin, who was reported-falsely, she claimed-to have urged that a passage of the Quran be revised.

But although the secularist and the religious scholar may appear to be in agreement in their opposition to fundamentalism, their treatments of generic differences are widely divergent. Secularists tend to have a narrower capacity for differentiating among and interpreting adequately multiple genres. Often when secularist scholars begin to change their attitudes toward religion, they simultaneously begin to be curious about genres in which they previously had no interest

The use of the genre "argument" by religious scholars may also profit from closer study. Some theologians overestimate the sufficiency of the genre argument; some religious scholars use argument ahistorically to belittle arguments typical for other than their own favorite periods. Both foster habits of mind that too often become ideologies. Triumphant thought in the guise of scholarship hinders, rather than furthers, progress in the field of Religious Studies. The field must become more aware of its own lack of neutrality in its own investigations and more tolerant of diversity within the genre "theology"; theology needs to become more flexible in its use of the genre "argument." Above all, theological and religious scholars could use a rigorous critique of their own use of classical logic. Logic is a grand editing program. It helps the thinker to select among those conundrums in thought that have been found to be worth holding in one's heart and mind and those which are best sacrificed to the clean sweep of a new broom-what Yeats called consignment to the "scrap heap of spent concepts." Logic assists in the process, but does not provide grounds for the selection.

I would agree that the strength of argument lies in its successful use of logic to uncover contradiction, to prioritize differences, and to mediate opposing positions. But the genre of argument best occurs after the fact. Argument presumes that something moving and important has already been expressed. In this sense, argument is more distanced from

originating experience than many other genres although all are abstracted to some degree from lived experience. In another sense, of course, every story and poem has its own argument.

Originally I thought of the discipline of religion and literature as an addition to philosophical theology which has tended, according to Michael Buckley,⁴ from the seventeenth century until recently, to prefer models patterned after those used in empirical proof (models which today even in science are in decline). Today I see ALR as an essential complement to other disciplines, one which shares equal space and engages in their mutual correction and enrichment. Situated at the juncture of several different approaches to interpretation, it provides a means for and a model of attending to facets of texts—such as genre and gender differences that otherwise would be lost, subsumed into, less discriminating interests, or explained away.

When interpretations go unchallenged in stable times, the genres of texts may appear to be transparent. Who has not confused or been confused by irony, assuming all the while that "getting it" was the resolution to the confusion? Swift's modest proposal regarding the beggary of Irish children turns out to be repulsively immodest, but we laugh nervously because the genre of satire prompts us to be not serious. Jokes, puzzles, koans all tease the limits of thought. Knowing the genre is a part of the skill of "making sense" of the text.

But in times of crisis, the interpretation of texts may be called into question, and to arrive at a new interpretation, the reader may have to try to interpret a text in the light of more than one genre—may indeed even have to invent new genres. To adopt a different or a new genre is to dramatize a new horizon of possibility. Indeed, what can be understood often depends on the availability of genre to the reader. It is sometimes tempting to think iconoclastically about particular genres which have been troublesome or have gone out of vogue. Since the seventeenth century, the resurrection texts of the Christian testament are no longer adequately understood only as miracle narratives a loss which perhaps many secularists and religious scholars alike would celebrate. Nevertheless, we now know from the history of art,⁵ this same preference resulted in the disappearance of Christ as magician (miracle-working images) in European sculpture: because they were not interpreted, they were not "seen," with the result that many of them deteriorated beyond repair.

If scholars of religion err by overlooking the configurational aspects of the basic texts of the traditions they study, they will overlook one major advantage they have over most scholars of secularity, i.e., those who ignore or oppose particular religions *qua* religious. Secularity glamorizes the enlightenment pretense of being able to ignore instances of such traditional genres as myth, by relegating them to the category of the "false." For its own reasons, secularity tends to curb the multiple effects of genre and to privilege a relatively small set of genres: for example, political addresses, irony, and satire. It also tends to identify gender issues exclusively with liberal politics and in so doing, to obscure or suppress some of the most interesting and often cunning aspects of gender—its capacity for singular as well as different relationships, its complicity with having and not having power, its ability to see the self as an other while it must assume the other as a kind of self. ...

Conclusion

The editor of this journal has asked, What would it mean to make progress in the field of religious studies? Let me try a brief response in the light of the foregoing considerations.

The naive view thinks of progress in a linear mode. Moreover, that mode is overly opportunistic; it flourishes mostly by discrediting previous insights and by ignoring the ambiguity of its best achievements: its own hubris is hidden from itself. While there is no guaranteed strategy for overcoming this naive view, one might expect that collaboration in teaching and

writing between scholars from different disciplines, instead of and in addition to their mastery of a single field, might go some distance in addressing the difficulty. This strategy is particularly true for the fields of science and religion because each is suspicious lest the other gain epistemological primacy.

If collaborative work can in fact be supported, we will see many changes in our ordinary ways of doing scholarship. It may no longer be-if it ever was-sufficient to know a text just a little better without any reference to what's happening on Earth and in the universe.

Then again, surely the universe of past and future holds surprises-surprises for which we will need both old and new stories to enable us to understand.

1. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

2. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," in *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, Edited by Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara Gelpi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

3. Jack Hitt, "Would You Baptize an Extraterrestrial?" *New York Times Magazine* (May 29, 1994): 36-39.

4. Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

5. Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).