

# The Difference Religion Makes

William Scott Green

PERHAPS NO ISSUE so preoccupies the contemporary college campus as does the question of difference. Like the proverbial glossary of the Eskimos' words for snow, the academic lexicon for difference is extensive and nuanced. Whether we use the language of political correctness, multiplicity, diversity, multiculturalism, otherness, identity politics, or the politics of recognition, learning how to make sense of, and to live with, people who—in fundamental ways—are not like us (whoever we are!) has become a central concern of the curriculum, the co-curriculum, and residential life.

The increasing diversity of students and faculty is both a primary cause and result of a major shift in academic self-consciousness, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. The proliferation of new, ideology- and confession-driven fields of study has altered our sense of where and how we teach and learn, and even of the nature of knowledge itself. Perhaps the academy once conceived and presented itself as a center of neutral inquiry and dispassionate cerebral discourse. If so, no longer. American colleges and universities now offer an educational context of concentrated pluralism, in which students, faculty, and administrators encounter and assess divergent and often conflicting theories, methods, experiences, points of view, and intellectual loyalties. The contemporary educated American is marked no less by possession of an erudite and analytical intellect than by the capacities to engage in and negotiate with argued conviction. To be educated is to know how to understand, experience, and respect difference.

Religion has been a bit player in the intellectual drama of the past decade. Rather, the curricular struggles over cultural diversity and inclusiveness have been fought out primarily in the arenas of

William Scott Green is Professor of Religion and Philip S. Bernstein Professor of Judaic Studies, Department of Religion and Classics, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York 14627.

## Like Unto Moses

*The Constituting of an Interruption*

James Nohrberg

Nohrberg examines the texts of "Moses" for their representation of the Israelite literary and scriptural tradition's self-doubt and its revisionary, "deuteronomic" content.

*Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature*

368 pages, cloth \$39.95

Now in paperback!

## Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash

Daniel Boyarin

"While other scholars have noted various aspects of the intertextual hermeneutic at work in midrash, Boyarin's is the most thoroughgoing and incisive framing of these issues." —*The Journal of Religion*

*Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature*

176 pages, paper \$9.95 (also in cloth \$29.95)

## Navajo Sacred Places

Klara Bonsack Kelley and Harris Francis

An engaging blend of anthropological study and firsthand account takes readers into the heart of the Navajo's struggle to protect their sacred places.

264 pages, 20 b&w photos

paper \$12.95 (also in cloth \$29.95)

## The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards

*A Study in Divine Semiotics*

Stephen H. Daniel

"In this challenging work, Daniel draws on the semiotics of Foucault, Kristeva, and Peirce to explore Edwards's typology. . . . elegant and important . . ." —*Library Journal*

*Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion*

224 pages, cloth \$22.95

## Religious Reflections on the Human Body

Edited by Jane Marie Law

"Drawing on a remarkably diverse set of studies discussing the major Western religious traditions (including Islam) and East and South Asian traditions, the book challenges easy theozation of 'the body in religion.'" —Bruce Mannheim, University of Michigan

320 pages, paper \$12.95 (also in cloth \$29.95)



## The World's Parliament of Religions

*The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893*

Richard Hughes Seager

Seager's beautifully fashioned narrative explores this fascinating event in all its complexities and shows it to

be truly a watershed event in the creation of a more pluralistic religious culture in America.

*Religion in North America*

160 pages, 17 b&w photos, cloth \$27.50

## The Young Heidegger

*Rumor of the Hidden King*

John van Buren

"Van Buren presents a clear and cogent argument for the theory that Martin Heidegger's mature thought, epitomized in *Being and Time*, actually was a return to his youthful theory and concerns." —*Library Journal*

*Studies in Continental Thought*

448 pages, cloth \$35.00

## Sixth Cartesian Meditation

*The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method*

Eugen Fink

With notations by Edmund Husserl

Translated by Ronald Bruzina

"... a thorough critique of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology . . . a classic." —J. N. Mohanty

*Studies in Continental Thought*

352 pages, cloth \$35.00

At bookstores or from

**INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Bloomington, IN 47404

Orders: 1-800-842-6796

gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and national origin, and principally in the fields of history, sociology, and literature. In some instances religion has been deliberately excluded from the enterprise. For example, biblical texts<sup>1</sup> have been derided as part of the established canon that needs to be overturned. Some campuses have tagged Judaism—whose classic writings remain substantially unrepresented and underrepresented in college curricula, particularly in the American south and midwest—as part of the majority's culture and banished it from the multicultural agenda. Christianity, of course, has taken its own set of multicultural hits, both without and within the study of religion. Moreover, when curriculum committees, governmental agencies, and foundations do include religion in discussions about diversity, they tend to lump religion with other forms of difference—race, gender, ethnicity, etc.—as if all were species of the same genus. But surely being a Buddhist, being gay, and being African-American constitute fundamentally dissimilar ways in which human beings identify and understand themselves in, and are identified and understood by, American society. As K. Anthony Appiah observes, these “collective social identities matter to their bearers and to others in different ways. Religion, for example, unlike all the others, entails attachments to creeds or commitment to practices” (150). Far from enhancing religion, these catalogues of difference can obscure, and even deny, religion's distinctive traits.

The relative absence of religion and the study of religion from America's recent debates about difference is ironic but hardly unprecedented. For reasons too familiar to need rehearsal here, religion remains a highly charged and awkward subject in American public discourse and in American education. Though there are signs of change, religion's quest for legitimacy and recognition in American higher education has always seemed something of a struggle, and many scholars and fields treat religion as the humanities' country cousin. The judgment of the historian R. Laurence Moore that “no centrally important component of American life is more regularly neglected in synthetic accounts of American history than religion” (9) could be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to other fields as well. But why curse the darkness yet again? Rather, let us ask, What would religion and its study contribute to America's

<sup>1</sup> Despite occasional protestations to the contrary from the AAR's leadership, biblical studies is a highly visible and numerically very significant component of the study of religion.

multicultural debate, the so-called “culture wars?” Three points of particular relevance immediately suggest themselves. First, religion shapes American pluralism in distinctive ways. Second, the study of religion illustrates the kind of education we think we need now. Third, religion, particularly western religion, has been our primary school for difference. Let us take these up in turn.

## RELIGION AND AMERICAN PLURALISM

The American doctrine of freedom of religion grounds and in many ways justifies American pluralism—the very national trait that generates the demographic, intellectual, and curricular developments described above. The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees three basic American freedoms: religion, speech, and the press. Americans often overlook the conjunction of the three in same amendment. Just as free speech and a free press distinctively shape and define American politics, society, and culture, so too does freedom of religion. By naming religion and marking it off for special consideration, the Constitution embeds the notion of religion in American culture. Because of the First Amendment, religion is a native category for Americans, a basic, culturally significant classification that we routinely and intuitively use to make sense of the world and explain what is happening to us. That there is religion and that religion matters are axioms of American life.

The presence of religion on the First Amendment's list extends freedom to communities as well as to individuals. Because the category of religion includes both individual conscience—the freedom to believe—and collective behavior—the freedom (within some limits) to live those beliefs—religious liberty implies the freedom, and perhaps the right, of communities to work to survive. Whatever its initial intent (which may have been limited to Protestant denominations) the First Amendment's restriction of government control over religion places difference—both individual and collective—at the heart of the nation's character. In a fundamental respect, America's initial conversation about difference should be—must be—a discourse about religion.

The First Amendment guarantees that America will have more than one religion and affirms that religion is a legitimate, legally protected form of difference in American society. Americans are supposed to differ from one another religiously. Indeed, it is no

what a  
a convers-  
about wh  
share is  
Common

exaggeration to suggest that our national ability not merely to abide but to sanction difference—to affirm difference as a social benefit—derives from our constitutional commitment to religious freedom. To be sure, America's diversity of population—its status as an immigrant nation—precedes the Constitution. But the First Amendment shapes a distinctive American attitude towards diversity by depicting difference as a cultural good, as something to be appreciated, defended, and preserved. In the form of religious difference, pluralism—particularly on questions of value—characterizes our national life. In America, whatever else religion is about, it is about the freedom to be different.

### RELIGION AND EDUCATION

These factors help to explain why the study of religion is particularly well-suited to the kind of education we think we need now. Education is society's primary mode of socialization and acculturation. It is where Americans acquire not only necessary information and skills, but also a basic sense of American culture and its endemic pluralistic structure and values. Higher education has a share in this responsibility and a stake in this mission. College learning, therefore, cannot be incongruous to the culture to which it prepares students to contribute; it must aim to equip them for the real circumstances they will encounter. To provide the foundation for work and life in an increasingly diverse and divided society, college study must educate about difference and for tolerance. Because of the First Amendment's doctrine of religious freedom, America has engaged in a two-hundred-year experiment in tolerating difference, an exercise in pluralism that has succeeded more often than it has failed. To appreciate how American pluralism works in particular requires understanding the place of religion in American culture and society. But understanding religion's privilege in America depends on knowing what is at stake in religion itself.

Scholars of religion often explain the educational pertinence of our field by claiming that the study of religion is inherently cross-cultural and comparative. The claim is accurate in principle since the goal of the field is to explain the general category "religion" (as linguistics tries to explain "language"), and the general category cannot be understood through one religion alone. But cross-cultural comparison is practiced in only some sectors of the study of

religion, and then in very specific ways. Most of us spend most of our careers achieving expertise in one religion, and even people who study two do not consistently or necessarily do so comparatively. Moreover, cross-cultural comparison is carried out in other disciplines as well, particularly anthropology, history, and comparative literature. Rather than cross-cultural comparison, what gives the study of religion particular educational relevance just now is the way religion anchors difference in conviction.

Increasingly in the humanities and social sciences, accepted modes of analysis and interpretation are being joined and often challenged by what we might call experiential foundationalism. Fields of study have emerged that are grounded in the experience of a group or community in the world. Typically, the group's experience is one of disregard by the larger culture. That experience is refined, abstracted, and developed into a set of questions, perspectives, and lenses that are applied to any and all other topics and phenomena and expose them in fresh and interesting ways. The sociologist Todd Gitlin explains:

Each [group] felt it had a distinct world to win—first by establishing that its group had been suppressed and silenced; then by exhuming buried work and exploring forms of resistance; and, finally, by trying to rethink society, literature, and history from the respective vantages of the silenced, asking what the group and, indeed, the entire world would look like if those hitherto excluded were now included. (315)

This can be called experiential foundationalism because the core experience on which the field builds is epistemologically unassailable. We can interrogate, for example, claims made by women or African-Americans, or Jews for and about their experience in the world, but we cannot deny the experience. These new fields of learning begin in conviction and develop into argument. Experiential foundationalism may have found fresh expression in the rest of the humanities and social sciences during the past decade, but it is nothing new in the study of religion. Indeed, the appeal and persistence of religions lie partially, if not principally, in their conviction of the fundamental correctness of their vision of reality, which both shapes and is generated by their adherents' experience in the world. Religions are compelling because of their affirmations of certitude and truth, because of their refusal to compromise on basic convictions, and because of the extent of their claims on the human person. Unlike other aspects of culture—politics or philos-

ophy, for example—religion tends to extend its reach, to be comprehensive in scope. In nearly all societies, the cultural construction we call religion exhibits enormous range of expression. For instance, religion attacks all the senses—not only in speech and writing, but also in art, music, and dance, in smell and taste, in ethics, sexuality, and intellect. Most religions have cosmologies and eschatologies, theories of nature, birth, gender, marriage, suffering and death. Few political systems, social ideologies, or philosophies have such a reach or exhibit religion's capacity to make definitive demands on the total human being. As Moore puts it, "Religion, even conceived as a very earth-bound cultural construction, yields a different sort of allegiance than most other things, whatever the close analogues" (9).

Because the study of religion deals with whole worlds, intersecting worlds, and worlds within worlds, the field offers no Archimedean cognitive point and advocates no single analytical perspective. Rather, the study of religion, as the encounter between and among religions, is decentered. There are always at least two standpoints—frequently divergent, often conflicting, occasionally contradictory. In the study of religion, analysis and interpretation are processes of intellectual negotiation, movements from somewhere to somewhere, rather than judgments made from a stable analytical center. The most demanding work of the field is to make sense of consequential ways of living and influential modes of experience that are alien and even threatening to us—particularly in religions we think we know well. The absence of a fixed analysis or normative interpretive focus strengthens the study of religion by forcing our work of understanding to be disciplined and rigorous, based on demonstrable erudition, and accessible to the broadest courts of appeal. To make sense of difference in this way is not relativism, and understanding a religion requires neither assent nor dismissal. But without understanding, no judgment of any religion or its values and practices can have intellectual merit or advance knowledge; it is impressionistic, mere prejudice. In all this, the study of religion exhibits precisely the sort of cultural difference we encounter in society and possesses distinctive resources for the educational issues of the contemporary academy.

If there is a contextual resemblance between religion and the new fields of study, there is a procedural one as well. In precisely the sense that these new fields of learning move from experience to

conviction to argument, they resemble theology. This similarity should encourage us to rethink the place of theology in the study of religion, particularly in secular institutions. Over the past quarter century, the study of religion has developed a strong tendency to identify theology as mere confessionalism and to place theology—as constructive and analytical discourse—out of academic bounds. It now is commonplace for students to complete a college religion major without having read, or sometimes even encountered, such figures as Barth, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, Niebuhr, Rosenzweig, or Heschel. Few religion departments will insist that their majors need a semester's exposure to theological thinking as a basic part of their orientation in the study of religion. The separation of theology from religion diminishes both.

At the very least, theology is the intellectual elaboration of a religion. It is a kind of thinking about a religion that emerges from within a religion. Though it necessarily reflects the "native" viewpoint, theology is more than merely expressive. Rather, it is the attempt to articulate and make explicit what a religious intellectual judges to be basic to and implicit in the way a religion is structured and the way it works. Although theology emerges from within a religion, it necessarily entails both criticism and self-criticism, reflection and self-reflection. Religions cannot see themselves and thus can neither develop nor persist, without theological articulation. All religions, albeit in different forms, have a theological discourse, which is as natural to them as is myth, symbol, or ritual.

Because theology is discursive, it is a species of argument. Indeed, theology can be seen as a religion's argument about its convictions, its application of those convictions to the world beyond itself. Theology, therefore, also is a mode of translation. It looks outward in a way that other components of a religion—ritual, for example—do not. Indeed, it often is through theology that outsiders begin the process of understanding the "inside" of a religion, its structure of sense and sensibility. In a cultural period that sometimes seems ready to abandon the complexities of language for the silent essentialism of the body, theology in an academic context will remind us that religion also—powerfully, basically, and necessarily—is a matter for the mind. Confessionalism is no longer a ground for exclusion from academic discourse. The arguments that will justify ethnic studies or gender studies also will justify theology. If we can have feminism in the classroom, we can have theology there too.

N.B.

## RELIGION AS A MODEL FOR DIFFERENCE

Perhaps the most striking irony in the relative absence of religion from academic multiculturalism is that some of our most persistent mental habits and social praxes for dealing with difference derive from religion. In the West, religion has been one of our principal schools for otherness. One of the most enduring western patterns of conceiving and constructing otherness is exemplified in and perhaps generated by the relationship of Judaism and Christianity. For both historical and theological reasons, Christianity must have a theory (or theories) of its difference from Judaism in order to be Christianity. As a result, Judaism has had to develop a reciprocal theory (or theories) of its difference from Christianity.

There are many ways Judaism and Christianity, as religions and as cultures—and Jews and Christians as individuals—have come to represent and conceive one another. All of these have been a major part of the possibilities for pluralism, and the obstacles to it, that have shaped western culture and western attitudes about difference and otherness. These models of difference have been persistent components of the western social order. In what remains, let us focus on one of these models of difference, a model I call “otherness by exclusion.” This is a model in which otherness is conceived not in terms of mutuality and reciprocity, but in terms of singularity. It is a model in which difference is cast in terms of negation and denial of the other. It is a model that says, “me, not you,” or “us, not them.” In its most extreme form, it says, “For me to live, you must die.”

This model of otherness is a standard component of biblical, rabbinic, and patristic writings, and it has been a foundation stone—some might say a stumbling block—in religious exchanges between Jews and Christians since the first century. Some forms of the idea of Israel as the chosen people can be said to illustrate the model, and the doctrine of supersession, which holds that Christianity has replaced Judaism—and has done so necessarily—can be said to do so as well. This depiction of difference has become a basic part of western consciousness, so much so that many of us have adjusted to it, absorbed it, and can hear it without flinching. The price of our accommodation to the model of otherness by exclusion—in a wide variety of historical and contemporary contexts—hardly requires spelling out. As the novelist David Grossman writes, in a somewhat different context, “We are social creatures . . . , and even when we are alone we create internal rela-

tionships with different parts of ourselves. And when we accustom ourselves to relations like those between master and slave, that division is stamped within us as well. It suddenly becomes a possible mold for our relations with our friends” (40).

How does the study of religion help us grasp both the origin and persistence of this model in Judaism and Christianity? Equally (perhaps more) important, how should we handle teaching it in a classroom setting? The model of otherness by exclusion as it is manifest historically in the encounter of Judaism and Christianity is one of the most painful and intractable elements of the Jewish-Christian encounter, and educational conversations about it are therefore especially important. Cognition and affect go hand in hand; how students feel about what they study influences the way, and whether, they will learn it. How we teach students to think publicly and speak publicly about this material is an important matter.

To help us gain a sense of the persistence and contemporaneity of the model of otherness by exclusion, consider a recent book by James D.G. Dunn entitled, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*. Dunn’s book is a fine example of the genre of scholarship that attempts to understand Christianity against and within its second Temple Jewish context. At the conclusion of his work, Dunn writes that his “lasting impression of this study must be the enduring Jewish character of Christianity” (258). One paragraph later he concludes:

One thought in particular has returned to me again and again during my work in preparing these chapters: *Christianity began as a movement of renewal breaking through the boundaries first within and then round the Judaism of the first century.* At its historic heart Christianity is protest against any and every attempt to claim that God is our God and not yours. Against any and every tendency to designate others as “sinners,” as beyond the pale of God’s saving grace, or to insist that for sinners to receive forgiveness they must become righteous, that is “righteous” as we count “righteousness.” Against any and every attempt to mark off some of God’s people as more holy than others, as exclusive channels of divine grace over others. At its heart it is a protest against every attempt to pigeon-hole and institutionalize the grace of God, to limit that grace in its expression to the safe confines that human minds can cope with and human capacities organize. At its heart is an openness to the unexpectedness of divine grace, to the new thing which God may

wish to do, even when it breaks through and leaves behind the familiar paths and forms. At its heart is the conviction that God revealed himself most fully not just in human word but in human person, not just in rational or even inspired propositions but in the human relationships which can never be confined within words and formulae alone.

And it is this character of Christianity which is encapsulated and canonized within our NT writings, and which gives them their distinctive character within the wider "canon" of Jewish and Christian normative texts. (259)

This long conclusion to a book written to celebrate the Jewish character of Christianity shows just how difficult the model of otherness by exclusion is to shake. Despite Dunn's obvious sympathy for Judaism, and a desire to build historical and intellectual bridges between them, his language of opposition, boundary-breaking, protest, and negation show how powerful the model of otherness by exclusion is, and how it can draw even the best of intentions into its wake.

How should teachers of religion in a liberal arts setting treat the model of otherness by exclusion in a college course? It is important to affirm at the outset that we have an intellectual and pedagogical responsibility not to condemn this model, nor to dismiss it, nor to apologize for it. If religion really is at the heart of American pluralism, then it is in the study of religion in particular that the stark barriers of irreconcilable difference must be confronted. Students—whose public education has largely avoided the study of religion altogether—usually prefer to focus on the agreements between religions than on disputes. But our task as teachers in the study of religion must be to work with our students to understand why, as the model appears in scripture and other ancient Jewish and Christian writings, it was, and remains, compelling to so many. We need to work to understand why this way of thinking was and is both rationally powerful and emotionally appealing to the people who adopted it, without offering moral judgments on it, at least initially. That is easier said than done.

One classroom approach to making sense of otherness by exclusion is to focus on the interplay between the categories of religion and politics, between the constancies of culture and the vagaries of power, to pay attention to the context of the origination of the model (as the texts portray it) and the context of its application. Specifically, we can ask what happens when a model of difference

that emerges in a setting of powerlessness is applied in a context of power.

A survey of the literature of early Judaism and Christianity suggests that the Persian period—and its contexts of exile, imperialism, and colonialism—is pivotal for understanding basic patterns of thought and action in the model of otherness by exclusion. Although it is commonplace—and correct—to identify the Persian period with the transformation of Israelite religion into Judaism, we often fail to appreciate—though we often acknowledge—the depth and persistence of a colonial situation and the way it has shaped some of the foundational texts of Western culture. As scholarship has come to identify them, Judaism and Christianity are religions invented and developed by Jews in contexts of political weakness, if not outright powerlessness. With the exception of the brief period of the Maccabees, the Land of Israel was colonized continuously from 587/6 BCE through the production of the Palestinian Talmud. This means that the literature of what became Jewish religion—Scripture and rabbinic literature—were produced, and made sense, in a context in which Jews had circumscribed and limited control over their own destiny and significant portions of their lives.

Though it may have predecessors, the model of otherness by exclusion emerges with clarity in the Persian period, the period of Judaism's founding. The consensus of biblical scholarship is that the Babylonian exile, which began with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 587/6 BCE and forced the upper echelons of Israelite society to migrate from the Land of Israel to Babylon, was a period of decisive transition in which the exiles' social organization, type of leadership, and religious practice underwent significant change. Daniel L. Smith suggests that the exile was a traumatic experience—exilic literature is preoccupied with the theme of suffering—and that the Israelites had to resist or face cultural death. They had three options for resistance: military, political, and cultural. Counseled by their prophets, particularly Jeremiah, the exiles chose to resist culturally but forge useful political relations with the ruling powers. They built strong cultural boundaries between themselves and their non-Israelite neighbors and transformed elements of their pre-exilic heritage into symbols of their identity. In this period, the Sabbath, intermarriage, and purity rules loom large. Smith lucidly explains this dynamic with reference to laws of ritual purity:

It was not the *formulation* of laws of purity that represented the most creative response to Exile by the priestly writer, for . . . many of these laws . . . rest on older traditions. It was rather the *elaboration* of these laws to emphasize the transfer of pollution and the association of holiness with separation. While the post-exilic community reflected the results of these concerns, the most logical Sitz im Leben for their primary function was the Exile itself. The presence of these ritual elaborations of the meaning of separation lends . . . weight to our thesis that the Exile represented a threat to the Jewish minority. In sum what we see in the development of purity law is a creative, Priestly mechanism of social survival and maintenance. To dismiss this creativity as "legalism" is to forget, or ignore, the sociopolitical circumstances in which it was formulated. Majority cultures rarely understand, much less appreciate, the actions of minorities to preserve and maintain identity. (149)

The identification of separation with holiness has self-evident and far-reaching consequences for our model. As Smith notes, the strategy of survival devised by the exiles was successful—the Bible is proof of its effectiveness—and it assumes and responds to a circumstance of nearly total political powerlessness. The Israelites' strategy makes resistance to oppression internal rather than external and tries to make the ruling powers work to the advantage of the internal culture.

The next chapter in Israel's history shows what happens when a context shifts. In 538 BCE, nearly a half century after the exile began, the Persian emperor Cyrus, who had conquered Babylon the year before, issued an edict allowing the Jews to return to their native land to rebuild their destroyed Temple. Under a sequence of leaders—Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, and Ezra—and as clients of the Persian emperor, some Jews returned home, to a land in which most of them had never lived, and they imported the religion of separation and holiness they so brilliantly crafted for an exile of powerlessness.

But now the context has changed, both for them and their religion. First, the cast of characters has changed. The ideology of protection and cultural maintenance that was developed to protect them from real aliens is now applied to their cousins, so to speak, Israelites not taken into exile, who do not share their experience of exile and deprivation, people who, like the returning children of exile, claim to be Israel too. Second, their political situation has changed. They have more power than they did in exile. More power, but not real power. The returning exiles, as well as those

left behind, the people of the Land, are still colonized, still dependent on the Persians. In effect there are now two different Israels, each claiming to be the one Israel, and each dependent on the colonial power to legitimate the group's status. The Persians apparently practiced "ethnic collectivization," and membership in "ethnically distinct groups" may have determined possession of land and property (Hoglund). This establishes the setting for the internal application of the model of otherness by exclusion. The following passage from Ezra 4:1-3, whatever the historicity of its specifics, illustrates beautifully:

When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the heads of the families and said to them, "Let us join you in the building, for like you we seek your God, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here. But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of families in Israel said to them, "The house which we are building for our God is no concern of yours. We alone will build it, as his majesty Cyrus king of Persia commanded us."<sup>2</sup>

All the elements of the model of otherness by exclusion are here, including the colonial backdrop. The returnees alone will build God's temple, which they do with the imprimatur of the pagan king. Indeed, the passage suggests a direct connection between legitimacy in the Lord's house and the emperor's support (Blenkinsopp: 39-40; Carroll: 576). Here is otherness by exclusion. It is a response to imperial domination, to uncertain legitimacy, to lack of power, and it is aimed internally, not externally, at, or against, others who claim to be Israel, people who claim to be like "us." This model served to shape intragroup relations within Jewish society under imperial rule. In the early centuries of Judaism and Christianity within a context of political weakness—or perceived weakness—when Jews disagreed with one another on matters of religion, the result tended to be mutual exclusion rather than negotiation.

This model is evident in the response of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the defiled priests of the Jerusalem Temple, and in the utterly gratuitous scorn the Gospel of Matthew heaps on its hated "scribes

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of the translation of this verse, see Blenkinsopp: 45.

and Pharisees." We also encounter it in Tosefta Hullin 2: 20-21, in a savage rabbinic condemnation of the so-called *minim*, a term translated as "sectarians," which many take to be Christians:

The sacrifice of a *min* is idolatry. Their bread is the bread of a Samaritan, and their wine is deemed the wine of idolatry, and their produce is deemed wholly untithed, and their books are deemed magical books, and their children are *mamzerim* (illegitimate). People should not sell anything to them or buy anything from them. And they should not take wives from them nor give children in marriage to them. And they should not teach their sons a craft. And they should not seek either financial or medical assistance from them.

Whether or not the *minim* were Christians is less important than the fact that rabbinic literature describes them as wearing phylacteries, offering sacrifices, and reading and writing Torah (Green). Early rabbis, like the returned exiles, had to prove their legitimacy, now to Roman imperial power, and drew sharp, exclusionary boundaries around those resembled them too closely.

In exile, the religion of holiness and separation protected the Jews from becoming culturally similar to those who were different. At home, in the Land of Israel, the same religion allowed them to declare themselves different from those who were culturally similar.

Since, after the return, the pattern of otherness by exclusion was a primary mode of intra-Jewish conflict, it hardly can surprise us that it characterizes much of early Christian discourse as well, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew, but also in Paul, Hebrews, and other New Testament writings. Christianity, after all, was a kind of Judaism. The pattern is applied with special vigor in the writings of early Church fathers, particularly Melito of Sardis, who accuses the Jews of deicide, and John Chrysostom. In these two cases in particular, the heat of the polemic is a function of too much political weakness and too much similarity. In Sardis, where Melito wrote, the Jews were politically powerful, the owners of a massive urban synagogue, and members of the town council. Melito was a figure, so far as we can tell, of no import at all. Perhaps his very inconsequence inflamed his rhetoric. Likewise Chrysostom. His sermons reached a feverish and unhealthy pitch largely because he feared the influence of the synagogue on his congregants. To be sure, once the Roman Empire became Christian, the words of Matthew, Melito, and Chrysostom acquired a

power their authors perhaps never intended, with ugly consequences for the Jews.

All these examples suggest that in the study of Jewish-Christian relations the similarities between the two religions are more consequential than the differences. As Jonathan Smith has recently written:

The issue of difference as a mode of both culturally encoding and decoding, of maintaining and relativizing internal as well as external distinctions, raises . . . the observation that, rather than the remote "other" being perceived as problematic and/or dangerous, it is the proximate "other," the near neighbor, who is most troublesome. That is to say, while difference or "otherness" may be perceived as being LIKE-US or NOT-LIKE-US, it becomes most problematic when it is TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US or when it claims to BE-US. It is here that the urgency of theories of the "other" emerges, called forth not so much by a requirement to place difference, but rather by an effort to situate ourselves. This, then, is not a matter of the "far," but preeminently of the "near." The deepest intellectual issues are not based upon perceptions of alterity, but, rather, of similarity, at times, even, of identity. (13) of Page 1

To proximity—whether cultural or geographic—we must also add the variable of political power, the power of self-control, for the model of "otherness by exclusion" began in weakness and ended in unequal power relations. This model has been so successful that its patterns of perception and discourse of exclusion have persisted even when the circumstances of origination changed drastically. We know that power and proximity are two key variables in explaining the pattern. We must now search for the rest, and the study of religion will guide us on our way.

## EPILOGUE

Pluralism is not simply a matter of the acceptance of mere difference. It is the tolerance of irreconcilable difference. What makes pluralism plural is the brute fact that, in the end, we are not going to change one another very much. American culture long ago renounced the possibility that irreconcilable differences would lead to social and political divorce. The study of religion can be a powerful contributor to achieving the pluralistic society the Constitution mandates. American democratic pluralism requires a public that can respect difference. But, we cannot respect what we cannot



understand, and more important, we destroy our common bonds as Americans if we judge one another without understanding. And invariably we do judge one another. Respect for difference does not come naturally; it has to be taught and it has to be learned. Genuine tolerance is not only an acquired skill, it is also an acquired taste. Religion is at the core of American pluralism and grounds a rich American heritage of toleration. It therefore stands to reason that the study of religion can be—and should be—basic to an American education.<sup>3</sup>

## REFERENCES

- Appiah, K. Anthony  
1994 "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," in Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 149-163.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph  
1991 "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah." In *Second Temple Studies: 1. The Persian Period*, 22-53. Ed. by Philip R. Davies. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Carroll, Robert P.  
1993 "Israel, History of (Post Monarchic Period)." In *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. III, 567-576. New York: Doubleday.
- Dunn, James D.G.  
1991 *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International.
- Gitlin, Todd  
1995 "The Rise of Identity Politics." In *Higher Education Under Fire*. Ed. by Michael Berube and Cary Nelson. London and New York: Routledge.

- Green, W.S.  
1985 "Otherness Within: Towards a Theory of Difference in Rabbinic Judaism." In *To See Ourselves as Others See Us* 49-70. Ed. by J. Neusner. Chico: Scholars Press.
- Grossman, David  
1988 *The Yellow Wind*. New York: Delta
- Hoglund, Kenneth  
1991 "The Achaemenid Context." In *Second Temple Studies: 1. The Persian Period*, 54-72. Ed. by Philip R. Davies. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Moore, R. Laurence  
1994 *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Daniel L.  
1989 *The Religion of the Landless*. Bloomington: Meyer-Stone Books.
- Jonathan Z. Smith  
1992 "Differential Equations: On Constructing the 'Other'," The University Lecture in Religion, Arizona State University.

<sup>3</sup>My gratitude goes to Douglas R. Brooks, Th. Emil Homerin, Ray L. Hart, and Charles Winquist for help and stimulation.