

Religion Teacher Update

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THE COUNCIL FOR SPIRITUAL AND ETHICAL EDUCATION

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS OF RELIGIONS AND ETHICS IN MIDDLE AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Passages for Teaching Christianity in the Classroom

Exploring Convent Life in Ron Hansen's *Mariette in Ecstasy*

BY BILL HULSEMAN

Mariette in Ecstasy is a portrait of convent life. Hansen doesn't try to provide a comprehensive history of the religious life or an introduction to sacramental theology. Instead, he brings us into the Convent of Our Lady of Afflictions, the home of the Sisters of the Resurrection in upstate New York at the beginning of the 20th century. We are introduced to the daily life of the convent, from the daily schedule of prayer and work to the liturgical cycle of feast days and days of penance that guides the Catholic year. Most remarkable is Hansen's depiction of the quiet that rests over the life of the community – a quiet that might be attractive to some and unsettling to others. Hansen follows Mariette, a postulant to the religious life, as she enters a life of prayer and work. She is popular among some of her new sisters for her remarkable piety and beauty, and resented by others for the same reasons. Anyone familiar with Christian mysticism might guess that the ecstasy noted in the title foreshadows Mariette's increasingly powerful mystical encounters with her God. Hansen's depiction of Mariette's glorious suffering that manifests as stigmata, the wounds of Christ, is startling and irresistible. The story neither climaxes nor rests on this apparent miracle. Hansen carries us through the investigation into Mariette's wounds, conducted by the resident priest, and explores the delicate balance of extraordinary religious experiences of individuals and the ordinary life of the community.

The book is part of the curriculum for Religion in Film & Literature, in which we explore the ways four religious traditions (Judaism, Islam, Hinduism & Christianity) are depicted in selected pieces. To narrow the focus of the course, the selections revolve around the shaping of identity. For Judaism and Hinduism, we consider the challenges of the postmodern world and how religious identity is refashioned, but for Islam and Christianity we consider stereotypes and their challenges. *Mariette in Ecstasy* is the one novel among a handful of short stories and poems and four films about nuns, the women religious who have devoted themselves to lives of piety, service, and community. These women

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Satan in the Synoptics

BY REGINA A. BALLARD

Satan! The students love to talk about him. Who was he? Is he real? Does the devil really make me do bad things? This elusive character has captivated the human imagination for centuries. It is no wonder that when students begin to study the New Testament, questions immediately begin to arise about this dastardly devil.

In my course on the Hebrew Bible, students have been introduced to Satan in the Book of Job. Puzzled by his role as God's heavenly persecutor in Job, my students have an easier time warming up to the more traditionally demonic role he plays in the New Testament. One of the best commentaries on Satan that I use extensively in my course is *The Birth of Satan, Tracing the Devil's Biblical Roots* by T.J. Wray and Gregory Mobley (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

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Gottlieb is the author of *A Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom* (2003) and *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future* (2006). He is also book review editor for *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism: A Journal of Socialist Ecology* and contributing editor for *Tikkun Magazine*.

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Ballard (continued from p. 1)

Pages 113-125 of Wray and Mobley's book give my New Testament students a solid introduction to the synoptic writers in addition to excellent exegesis on passages dealing with the devil. I have found it extremely helpful to have current scholarship available for this somewhat secondary character. Talking about Satan can be tricky with high school students. Each comes to the academic table with his or her own pre-conceptions of who Satan is. Using *The Birth of Satan* as an additional text has made the teaching of the devil less emotional and more scholarly.

One of the most famous battles of good versus evil in the New Testament is Jesus' Temptation, found in the synoptic gospels: Mk: 1:12-13; Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13. Wray and Mobley's treatment of this pericope enables the students to intelligently discuss and debate the role of Satan in the gospels. Some questions that have helped my students formulate their position are:

- How is the Satan portrayed in the Synoptic gospels different from the Satan in the Book of Job?
- Why does the character of Satan appear right after the temptation stories and at the very beginning of Jesus' public life?
- Why does Mark give us so little information on the specifics of the temptations?
- How is Jesus able to show his power over Satan?
- What anti-Jesus groups could Satan represent?
- What happens to Satan at the end of the pericope? Is it the same in all three stories?
- How does the way in which Jesus deals with the temptations help to enlighten the question of free will and evil?

I have given the role of Satan more stage time in my courses over the last few years. Although it can be a delicate subject with possible distressing conversations, I have found that lively debates in class and serious thought are given to the character of Satan. For better or worse, he is embedded in the imagination of all of us. From the Garden (is he really there?), to Job, to the New Testament, Dante and Milton, Satan is a fascinating topic worth studying from an academic viewpoint, not only as a religious scare tactic.

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Sources for Early Christian History

BY LAURA KRIER

"Accusations Against the Christians," is a third century text written by Minucius Felix, a Christian recounting the charges leveled against Christians from the non-Christian perspective. I use the text as excerpted in JoAnn Shelton's *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

The text is short - about a page - and could be read in class as easily as assigned for homework. It argues that Christians are "illiterates from the very dregs of society..." who "join together" at suspicious "nocturnal assemblies" that entail initiation through the ritual murder of an infant (whose blood is then consumed) and wild parties at which "in the shameless darkness they are indiscriminately wrapped in shocking embraces." Christians are also derided as cowardly and sacrilegious for avoiding Roman temples and state religious festivals.

Unsurprisingly, this is a text that tends to grab students' attention. Blunt as the charges are, it often takes some discussion before the full weight of the accusations sink in. Once students realize that Minucius Felix really *is* talking about cannibalism and ritual incest, students raise the natural question: why in the world would Christians be accused of this? An initial reaction is often that the charges are trumped up, which is both obviously true and worth restating so no one thinks Christians *were* eating babies. The discussion gets much more interesting, however, if you ask students why each *specific* charge might have been leveled.

This is where it becomes useful to read "Accusations" alongside a second text. Early Christian sources that talk about calling other Christians "brother" and "sister," meeting in houses for agape ("love") feasts, and eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ shed new light on the accusations. I find 1 Thessalonians, accounts of early house churches, and Christian apologists effective foils for "Accusations." Shelton includes "A Christian's Reply to the Accusations" - selections from Tertullian's *Apology* - as the next document in her book.

I find "Accusations" useful on several levels. It allows students to explore the reception that developing Christianity received in the late antique world and think about what public opinion of Christians might have been

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(intentionally distorted or not). It also allows them to discuss the political persecution of Christians on the grounds that they were political dissidents for refusing to sacrifice to the Roman Emperor (among other things), which serves as crucial context for the early New Testament sources and a discussion of the early Christian church. Finally, it makes such familiar practices as communion newly striking; useful perspective for the rest of the unit.

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Hulseman (continued from p. 1)

have been presented in every way imaginable – from the stereotypically fierce, ruler-wielding tyrant, who is readily available as a wind-up toy at Urban Outfitters, to Ingrid Bergman's Sister Mary Benedict, the school principal caught between traditionalism and compassion whose friendly rivalry endears in "The Bells of St. Mary's." There is also Audrey Hepburn's mission-driven Sister Luke, who struggles with humility and the harsh piety of communal life, and the zany, but doo-wop talented sisters who follow Whoopi Goldberg's musical direction as Sister Mary Clarence, a fake nun hiding from the mob. Unlike the films we screen, Hansen's novel neither glamorizes nor reduces convent life. He brings us to the personalities of the women who live together with all their passions and shortcomings, their faith and their doubts, and significantly for the story, illustrates the challenges that communal life present.

I also recommend seeing one or more films about nuns. We watch "The Bells of St. Mary's," "The Nun's Story," "The Magdalene Sisters," and "Dead Man Walking." Each provides a distinctly different portrait of convent life, and putting the novel in conversation with any of these films would provoke an interesting conversation about how to effectively depict religious life.

Another point of entry into the novel is to focus on the mystical experience or the stigmata, the wounds received by the title character. A class could easily compile online resources that introduce the mystical experience from a variety of perspectives – from different traditions as well as from skeptical and fanatical points of view. I would recommend reading some of the more famous texts of Christian mystics that describe their experiences, such as Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis of Assisi or Julian of Norwich. For a more com-

parative approach, one could easily integrate the writings of Rumi, Hafiz, Nammalvar, or Mirabai.

For my class's purposes, the novel serves not only as a poignant meditation on different modes of spirituality, but also as a valuable depiction of the religious life. In particular, it is a remarkable depiction of the potential – and limitations – of Catholic spirituality. Hansen doesn't provide a comprehensive history of the tradition or an effective theological introduction; nor is there any exploration of primary Christian texts or documents. Instead, I hope that students begin to understand the realities of the religious life – in particularly the sensuality and the ambiguity. While it is not a primary text, explorations into the religious life (and here, in particular, the mystical experience) open students to the authority of experience and the notion of ongoing revelation that challenge and transform religious institutions and traditions.

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About Religion Teacher Update

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Learning from Ishmael

BY TED DESMAISONS

“But I’m not a telepathic gorilla—how am I supposed to write like one?”

--9th grader, pondering a section assessment in Humanities 1

Daniel Quinn’s *Ishmael* is a provocative book, an often life-changing one. I remember the first time I read it, I felt as if I had been lifted out of a smog that I had been breathing my whole life. I had come to see that pollution as normal, for I hadn’t known anything different. Through Quinn’s clever use of analogy and Socratic dialogue between Ishmael and the novel’s protagonist Everyman, I came to see that not only was the smog—in this case, our “Taker” culture’s life-choking assumptions of human superiority—poisonous, but also that it was not inevitable. As an adult reader, I came to understand that we all live by myths; we all enact the stories we tell so as to make them come true. If we believe humans are the last chapter in God’s creation story, we will live so as to make that a reality. Changing the story we live by can change the world we live in.

Time and time again in class, I have seen freshman eyes light up with similar insight when reading *Ishmael*. Quinn walks his narrator through a painstaking, sometimes overly repetitive, logical development in a “Worldview Shift for Dummies” way. At the same time, of course, he’s leading my students. Soon, they, too, come to question the voice of “Mother Culture” in their ear, beginning to see the ways in which their own worldviews are constructed by stories too. It’s not that the stories are false, necessarily—though they may be. It’s that they are stories, and not assumable facts.

Quinn’s philosophy lends itself nicely to simply in-class or homework exercise. When the narrator describes an overwhelming sense that his culture has been lying to him, we explore in what ways students suspect they might be being lied to. When Ishmael offers up the “Taker Thunderbolt” analogy, comparing ‘modern’ civilization to a non-functional flying machine in free-fall, we detail the structure of an extended analogy. When the narrator is presented with the opportunity to press a button that would take him back to earlier “Leaver” societies, we ask what we would do with

such a chance. Throughout each exercise, students come to think more logically, more insightfully, and more critically about their relation to their own cultures.

Ultimately, the final assessment for our Freshman Humanities work with *Ishmael* calls many of my students into new places. I ask them to write a valedictory speech from the perspective of Ishmael, the main character in Quinn’s novel about worldview, mythology, and appropriate response to today’s ecological crisis. Yes, Ishmael’s a telepathic gorilla. But, as the students begin to realize how much they’ve learned, he’s also got much to say.

Some astutely question Quinn’s theological history in the sections of *Ishmael* where he considers who might have written the creation stories of Genesis. I don’t know enough to know whether Quinn is right or wrong; I do know he’s a bit quick in his dismissal of years and years of scholarship that, in his opinion, has simply missed an obvious piece. Regardless, the section provokes fascinating and instructive conversation. Some also lament that *Ishmael* does a better job outlining the problems we face than in suggesting solutions. Here, the critics are also correct. That said, seeing a problem clearly increases the likely success of any solution to that problem. Getting lifted out of the smog—to see that there actually is such a thing as smog—is an important step to clearing the air.

“If we believe humans are the last chapter in God’s creation story, we will live so as to make that a reality. Changing the story we live by can change the world we live in.”

And that’s true whether you’re a telepathic gorilla or a limited-to-speech 9th grader.

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“Fight the Power!”: The Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5: 1-20)

BY DAVID MOSELEY

In one of the early scenes in last year's *The Simpsons* movie, Grandpa is having some sort of prophetic seizure in the aisle of Reverend Lovejoy's church. Perplexed, Homer frantically thumbs through a copy of the Bible and shouts out in exasperation: "There are no answers in here!"

One of the popular misconceptions that students bring to the Bible, encouraged by much of the facile posturing concerning religious issues in contemporary culture, is the quaint idea that these holy texts are like a series of answers to Frequently Asked Questions that accompany a daunting instruction manual or a complicated form to be filled out. We should be so lucky!

Presuppositions and prejudices about what kind of book the Bible is parallel similar assumptions about Jesus. In addition to battling the cartoon caricature of Jesus that is an inevitable foil to a proper engagement with the figure behind the faith, teachers of Christianity in high school must also confront the paradox of students that are either too familiar with the stories of Jesus, or, in an increasingly unchurched and pluralistic culture, students that are completely unfamiliar with the Jesus of the Gospels.

In truth, the Bible rarely contains a series of straightforward answers to direct questions. In the Gospels, the frequently disorientating form of parables preferred by Jesus as a teaching tool maps on to the dense, typological, allusive narrative techniques employed by the Gospel writers themselves, blending Hebraic history and tradition with stark contemporary upheavals within the early Church. Teachers of Christian Scriptures are able to embrace the prospect of introducing students to what Swiss theologian Karl Barth called "the strange new world within the Bible," kindling a proper appreciation of how the New Testament texts were written for, and understood by, their first audience.

An ideal text for illustrating these sorts of a challenge is the story of the Gerasene Demoniac in Mark 5:1-20. This very outlandish and disorientating narrative portrays Jesus crossing into Gentile territory across the Sea of Galilee (calming a storm on the voyage over), and exorcising a madman full of a "legion" of devils. (The demoniac must have the most unappetizing personality imaginable – he lives in a cemetery, likes to howl and scream, practices escapology, and bruises himself with stones.). To top it all off, Jesus then redirects the banished demons into a herd of pigs that immediately drown themselves in the nearby lake.

To get things going, I share with my students about

my experiences growing up in a charismatic Pentecostal church where exorcisms were regular occurrences during worship services. I also share with them about a recent spooky and unsettling experience I had at a seminar given by the man who claims to be the leading exorcist in the world, Bob Larson (see <http://www.boblarson.org>), and show them a clip of him in action. This is a useful way of drawing the students away from the titillating Hollywood fantasy of horror movies to a more serious consideration of exactly what the demonic is supposed to represent.

“One of the popular misconceptions that students bring to the Bible... is the quaint idea that these holy texts are like a series of answers to Frequently Asked Questions...”

At this point, we are now ready to start exploring the deeper issues in the text:

- Is Apocalyptic imagery in the Gospels of the battle between the supernatural forces of good and evil real or symbolic?
- Is mental illness or physiological disease sufficient explanations for demonic possession in the Gospels?
- Why so many images of pollution and contamination (graves, pigs, Gentile territory)?

What is really intriguing about this text is the military and political dimension to the story. It's not difficult today to appreciate the context of the Gospels—the idea of a strategic foreign military occupation in a land bursting with religious sectarianism and in the grips of a violent insurgency is strikingly familiar to us all.

- We note all the military vocabulary Mark uses in Greek – “legion” (v.9); “send them out” [deploy] (v.11); “herd” [cohort] of pigs (v.12); “dismissed them” [a military command] and “rushed down” [charged] (v.13).

- Then we read through the accounts in Josephus of the Galilean rebels who drowned nobles who collaborated with the Romans in the Sea of Galilee (Antiquities of the Jews, XIV.xv.10); and, just prior to the time when the Gospel of Mark was written, the “Gerasa Incident” when the Roman General Vespasian sent almost a legion of cav-

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ally and infantry to massacre “a thousand young men” and plunder their way through the very same region as part of the suppression of the Jewish Revolt (The Jewish War, IV.ix.1).

By this point, it is clear to the students that the basic story of Jesus’ exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac has been transformed by the addition of many other layers of contemporary political allusion and early Christian community autobiography which reiterate the themes of suffering and violent persecution that haunt Jesus (and presumably Mark’s community as well) throughout the Gospel.

But finally, the story also resonates with the strong theme of apocalyptic anticipation in Mark — the revealing of mysteries hidden from the uninitiated. This story can be interpreted as a sort of wish-fulfillment on the part of Mark’s community. The demonic “powers” of military domination and persecution are intimidating and strong — but the apocalyptic power of Christ is stronger still. In this story, Jesus subdues the man who cannot be bound (recalling the parable of binding the strong man in Mk 3:27) in order to secure salvation. The image of pigs drowning in the lake would have been a powerful reminder of the destruction of Pharaoh’s armies in the Red Sea (Exodus 14), unleashing similar hopes of emancipation and deliverance. The same point is driven home later in the Gospel when Jesus dies with a loud cry, seemingly forsaken by God — but Mark editorializes in order to wrest victory from the jaws of defeat by pointing to the highly symbolic rending of the temple veil and the counterintuitive confession of the Roman centurion presiding over the execution (Mk 15:33-39). The audacity of hope!

So what does the story of the Gerasene demoniac really mean? There are no simple answers. Is it an apocalyptic conflict, a battle of good versus evil? An allusion to life-and-death contemporary threats, whether in Palestine or Rome? Is this demoniac the ultimate victim of a brutal military occupation, or is his seeming PTSD of an altogether different kind? Or is this some sort of indulgent fantasy in which the heroic Jesus vanquishes the enemies of Israel and/or the church? Peeling away the layers and layers of meaning in this story is always an object-lesson in exploring the strange genre and nature of the Gospel texts, and the disconcerting messages encoded within their narratives.

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Voices of Youth Advocates (www.voya.com) is a “magazine serving those who serve young adults.” The site is purportedly for librarians, counselors, and youth workers who provide services and information to students, through columns, articles, editorials, booklists, reviews. The “booklists” section contains excellent “world religions resource lists for teens.” The lists offer resources on eleven or twelve traditions: a real treasure, and one definitely worth looking at:

<http://www.voya.com/WhatsInVoya/booklists.shtml#booklists>

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Selected Topics 2008

**Teaching the Bhagavad Gita
The Gita and the Upanisads: Common Themes
Reading Jewish Texts in the Classroom
How Jerusalem Became Sacred to Muslims, Jews,
and Christians
Hands-On Buddhism for the Classroom
Reverence for the Earth in the World’s Traditions**

One of the goals of an academic study of the Bible is to introduce students to the art of the exegesis, or how to read out of the text what is really there rather than what students have been told is there or what they would like to find there. Exegesis is a delightfully interdisciplinary exercise, drawing on history, languages, philosophy, literature, culture, theology, and so on. Below are some questions that might be used to spark a class discussion or individual essays on one famous Jesus saying from the gospel of Matthew; my hope is that these questions will also illustrate how just about any other passage might be approached pedagogically.

1. This pericope, or passage, appears only in MT. What do you make of that? Since it fails what scholars call “the criterion of multiple attestation,” is it less likely to be an authentic Jesus saying (*logion*)?

2. Some scholars see Jesus as obsessed with the apocalypse, the end of the world as we know it; others disagree. What have you tentatively decided? How does your assessment affect your sense of whether this passage about the Last Judgment should be considered an authentic Jesus saying? Remember that MT, more than the other gospel writers, seems to dwell on judgment and hell.

3. In verse 37, *dikaioi* [“the righteous ones”] is an important term for MT, along with related words like *dikaioisune* [“righteousness”]. MT often associates the “righteous” with doers of torah. That makes sense, since scholars think that MT was a Jewish Christian. So MT may have put words into Jesus’ mouth here. On the other hand, Jesus was also Jewish, of course, so MT could be quoting accurately. The oral tradition is sometimes more reliable than at other times; MT is composed more than half a century after Jesus would have told the story, so it’s a good question. What do you think?

4. MT (or Jesus?) appears to use cultural and literary archetypes to emphasize his dichotomy. E.g., “the righteous ones” are placed on the judge’s right and the others on his left; he also labels those on the right as “sheep” and those on the left as “goats.” One scholar—Sherman Johnson (563)—says that Palestinian sheep are usually white and the goats black, so color imagery may also be involved. Are these literary symbols effective? (By the way, are any of you left-handed? Do you realize that our word “sinister” derives from the Latin word for “left”? How does this make you feel?)

5. For some of the Jewish apocalyptic background, read Daniel 7:9-14. Do you think Jesus is alluding to Daniel, who calls the judge “one like a son of man”? (That is the force of the Hebrew; note that the NRSV with its mandate for political cor-

rectness intentionally mistranslates Dan 7:13 to read “a human being.”)

6. Sometimes in our gospels Jesus seems to use that traditional term “son of man” to refer to himself in the third person, as in “the son of man has nowhere to lay his head” (also cf. MK 2:10 and MK 2:28). What do you think MT (or Jesus) in our passage is implying about the identity of the judge?

7. That was a trick question, and it has to do with your understanding of christology. Who exactly is “the Son of Man” here (or “son of man,” since the Greek lacks our English distinction between capital and lower-case letters)? How can you tell? Note that MT also calls the judge shepherd, king, and lord/Lord. Especially consider the significance of “my Father” in verse 34.

8. Incidentally, that use of “king” is particularly interesting, since Jesus usually reserves the term for God. Every act of translation is inevitably an act of interpretation, so what do you make of the customary capitalization in English translations of “King” in MT 25:34? (However, note that the New American Bible, a Roman Catholic translation, chooses to lower-case “king” here.)

9. There is some question about the genre of our passage. Not all commentators are happy calling this pericope a parable. E.g., M. Eugene Boring (455) prefers “apocalyptic drama,” since to him parables begin with an ordinary, everyday situation and then broaden into a deeper meaning but this passage moves in the opposite direction by beginning with an “other-worldly depiction of the *parousia*” (“appearance,” or Second Coming) and then moving to an everyday application.

10. Finally, the passage raises serious theological questions. John Donahue (8) pointedly asks: “If the passage is a ‘summary of the gospel,’ is there not also a danger of reducing the Good News to ethics, and an ethics which has minimal contacts with other dimensions of NT soteriology and Christology? Whatever happened to justification by grace through faith or the word of the cross?”

“Matthew.” *The Interpreter’s Bible*. Vol. 7. Ed. George A. Buttrick et al. New York: Abingdon P, 1951. 229-625.

“Matthew.” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Vol. 8. Ed. Leander E. Keck et al. Nashville: Abingdon P, 1995. 87-505.

“The ‘Parable’ of the Sheep and Goats: A Challenge to Christian Ethics.” *Theological Studies* 47 (1986):3-31.

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Overcoming Religious Illiteracy

A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education

© 2007 by Diane L. Moore

Palgrave, 227 pages

I did not realize how we needed Diane Moore's *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy* until I spent time with it. Moore is an independent school colleague—for years she has taught in the religion department at Phillips Andover Academy—though she works primarily with public school teachers through her direction of the Program in Religion and Secondary Education at Harvard Divinity School. Moore's message is for all teachers, however. It is a message we need to grapple with if we are—I abhor the term, but in this case not the idea—to take the study of religion “to the next level.”

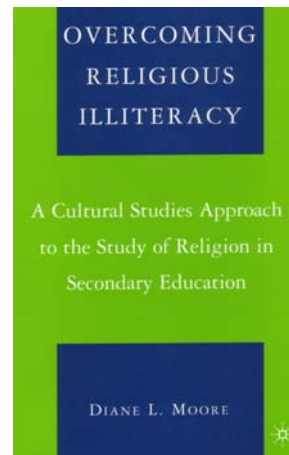
Do not open *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy* in search of factoids. Moore leaves that task to other authors. She is more concerned with our approach than with our database. And therein lies her book's importance. Our goal as teachers of the world's traditions should not be one limited to transmitting facts (the K's of Sikhism, the Pillars of Islam, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path) plus encouraging understanding—important though this is. Professional educators should want more, and our “more” should include thinking through goals and the best means of attaining them.

Moore pushes us to be aware not only of what we teach, but of how we teach it. When I worked in a Catholic school, for example, the teaching done by my religion colleagues was decidedly sectarian: other traditions were accessed through the lens of Roman Catholicism. It was, I believe, a conscious decision (and such a choice may be acceptable to Moore, provided it is a conscious decision and the institution is transparent about it). Moore makes clear distinctions between inclusive sectarianism (“we're Catholics looking at them as objectively as we can, though we know we are in the right camp”) and exclusive sectarianism (we're Catholics looking at them and trying to understand why in the world they are not”). And then there is unintentional sectarianism, as when teachers are unknowingly hampered by a combination of inadequate preparation and materials or a milieu that, despite good intentions, make it difficult to avoid the bias of a particular lens—as when our lists of classics of world literature neglect works by the likes of Tu Fu, Rumi, Kalidasa or Tagore.

Those of us who opt for a nonsectarian approach, if we can avoid the Protestant Christian hegemony in our culture, still need to make choices, which Moore helps us under-

stand. Will our approach be literary? historical? phenomenological? All have their positive points, but the religion teacher unaware of methodological frameworks and the advantages and disadvantages of one approach relative to another runs the risk of teaching aspects of traditions without allowing his or her students access to all the richness the field has to offer even in the introductory religion classroom.

Moore's preference is a “cultural studies” approach that, given how deeply embedded religion is in all dimen-



sions of human experience, “requires multiple lenses through which to understand.” She wants her teacher-colleagues to be thinkers, to “challenge the legitimacy of the assumption that human experience can be studied accurately through discrete disciplinary lenses” (p. 79) and, presumably, to teach their students to do likewise. Moreover, a cultural studies approach requires that teachers be aware of their own biases

and those inherent in the school and wider society; not that these biases are either wrong or bad, but rather that the educational experience is so much richer when we can teach a subject, a context, and the skill to recognize both contexts in subjects, and subjects in contexts. Even the fact of “whether (and if so *how*) one teaches *about* religion has ideological implications. A cultural studies approach recognizes this and requires that these implications be transparent and defensible” (p. 82, italics ours).

My comments here are unfortunately dryer than the text upon which they are based. Moore's ideas are clear and her proposals straightforward. She offers a number of examples and an occasional “case study,” as well as suggestions regarding how the teaching of religion can, and should, be incorporated into other subject areas. *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*—especially if we are able to bring its ideas to a wider audience—would benefit both us and our students. And it would add a deeper level of professionalism to an endeavor that most of us love.

David Streight