

# Narrative of a Nice Southern White Girl

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"Deborah loved her home, but she loved her people, too. She was a homemaker, but she was a responsible citizen. She was gentle and womanly, but she hated injustice....May God grant that Christian women of this day be like Deborah of old and march with the people of the Lord against the destructive forces of hate and prejudice and injustice."

---Presbyterian Women, 1957

"The Lord hath more light yet to break forth out of His Holy Word."

---John Robinson, 1620

**W**hen the question of my religious faith comes up I feel a mild panic, guiltily searching my consciousness for that sliver of a thing that might sound "religious." Of course I *must* have religious faith -- I mean *Christian* faith -- because I am nothing if not a child of the church. But not church in the sense of the ecclesial world of my colleagues Teresa and Kathy. It was the Protestant church that produced me-- southern Presbyterianism, to be precise -- and that explains a lot. Like why, when I think of the religion of my childhood I think of Wednesday night suppers and softball games, green bean casseroles and jello, along with choir practice and Sunday school. The church and my family's social life seemed to be the same thing or at least comprised of the same nice white middle-class people.

Friends since childhood, my parents were young white southerners who were raised to "do the right thing." They grew up on the same street in the tiny Arkansas town of Marianna, a community whose population of 4,000 swelled regularly on Saturdays, when the African American laborers from nearby farms came into town to shop. Located near the Tennessee line, Marianna is the county seat of Lee County, said to be the sixth poorest county in the nation. My parents -- or at least my father -- represented "the best and the brightest" of the white constituency in this eastern Arkansas community. The fourth male in his family to attend a prestigious southern men's college named after the first President and a famous confederate general, Washington & Lee, my father was a good student and a boy of conscience.

His father was born to a prosperous scion of this tiny town in Arkansas, the owner of a farm equipment and appliance store on Main Street entitled *William S. McClintock & Sons*. Dad's grandfather owned a respectable amount of land, and one of his sons became mayor of Marianna. All of the family attended the Presbyterian church in town, easily distinguished from the local Baptist and Methodist churches by the occupations of its members -- the town banker, planters, merchants, and a lawyer or two. (The Baptists worked with their hands, as my father put it. Methodists were just "Baptists who could read.") The wives filled the ranks of professional volunteer.

The youngest of six children, my red-haired grandfather partied throughout his five years at W&L, never graduating. Some strong streak of Presbyterian responsibility won out, though, and he went on to manage the family business, take care of an alcoholic brother or two, and discipline two sons, the oldest of whom was my father. According to my school teacher aunt, my father was a free spirit until the age of 7, when he became a serious and

studious boy -- squelched by what I can only guess. I imagine he left it to his closeted gay brother to carry on the underdeveloped family impulse for pleasure.

That Marianna was only thirty-four miles from Elaine, Arkansas, site of the infamous 1919 race riot and massacre, was not something I knew about growing up. I only knew that Marianna was a wonderful place to visit, where we children were treated as very special people. I remember passing the occasional mule pulling a wagon when I visited my grandparents as a child...and black people picking cotton in fields as we drove along U.S. highway # 1 to the big city of Memphis to do our shopping. Years later my cousin Griffin, who grew up in Marianna, became a poverty lawyer and wrote letters to the Marianna Gazette criticizing the racism of his hometown. The white community that had once honored Grif for his Peace Corps service subsequently generated a rumor that he was no longer welcome in town. I just remember the glad welcome my sister and I received when our grandfather took us to get a cherry-coke at the drugstore down the street from his office -- a welcome we got from all the adults of Marianna, when "Mr. Oliver" showed us off.

The noon meal in families like my grandparents' was served on china by an African American maid in uniform, whose presence was summoned by the ring of a silver monogrammed bell rung discretely by my grandmother. Down the street and around the corner, my mother, Sarah Hope, was born to a less well-off family, back in the days when doctors-- her father-- were paid more often with chickens than with cash. Widowed early, her mother raised her with the help of an extended family made up of mother's several older sisters and their husbands. Mother was attractive and popular ...everyone called her "Ara." Midway through his freshman year at Washington and Lee my dad left to volunteer for the air force to fight in World War II. My mother left her small southern college after one year to be his wife when he came back from service in China and worked as a secretary while he finished college on the GI bill. She then supported him in the alien land of New York City while he got his master's in business. The church literature of her day urged Mother to join the corps of women who thought that tending babies and washing dishes could "itself be a high calling from God" as the Presbyterian Women's magazine put it. (PW, May, 1957) And while I will never know her secret thoughts about it, she did move on from her secretarial work to having babies after she and my father came back down south. Starting with me, my two sisters followed over the next five years, and a brother, five years later—the one and only son.

Christianity in these families was regularized and built into the ordinary pattern of life. If you were a child your grandmother was inevitably your Sunday school teacher and--adult or child--you never thought of not going. If you were an adult, the church elders and deacons were your weekday business associates, if not your social friends. There was no religious talk. The piety of Baptists or fundamentalists would have been embarrassing. Any explicit references occurred as blessings and nightly prayers, and this was mostly led by the women of the family. "Miss Liza," as my father's grandmother was called, had her grandsons pray on their knees in the parlor and taught them *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*. Our Presbyterian piety was lean and spare. It developed from Calvinism, Scotch-Irish Calvinism in particular, which rejected revivalism. (When my mother was lured to the altar at a Baptist revival as a young teenager, friends who brought her talked her out of this momentary excess.) Nineteenth century American attempts to mediate Calvinist orthodoxy into something more liberal, like William Ellery Channing's Unitarianism or Horace Bushnell's theology of nurture, never drifted far enough down the Mississippi to reach us. But white southern Presbyterianism did have shape; it was clear and firm. Being religious meant being honest, upright, law-abiding, faithful to one's wife, honest in one's business, and a "man" of integrity.

When asked if his father was a religious man, my father answered that he never saw him do anything he himself wouldn't do.

As the first child of Oliver and Sarah Hope, I became part of a family that would follow my father through the south as he continually rose in the ranks of J.C. Penney's, the retail company he went to work for. Fresh out of New York University he started out as a sales clerk and eventually rose to assistant manager and then to manager over a 40-year career. During those years my mother would have been reading herself into the Presbyterian Women's biblical narratives of the good wife/mother rather than Betty Friedan. She taught Sunday school. We went to Sunday school. She volunteered everywhere. We showed up everywhere in the back of the station wagon. From Little Rock, Arkansas to Texas, to Florida, to North Carolina, to Louisiana, moving was our way of life until my father finally settled back in North Carolina when I was in college. In addition to the ubiquitous suburban church, there was a pattern in the dilemmas of this white middle class childhood -- the sadness of leaving friends in the suburban neighborhoods we always lived in and the recurring fear of one more strange school and being "the new girl" again. The worst happened with our final move to a small town where all the kids had been together since elementary school. My earlier successes in Arkansas and Texas and Florida had depended upon the convergence of my peers' idea of popularity with my teachers' preferences for the well-behaved, achieving child like me.

When I hit North Carolina, however, my luck ran out. Although this was the late-60's, the time of protest and love-ins and radical youth consciousness, the high school of my family's last move seemed right out of an earlier decade. In this all-white, pre-integration southern high school the social geography gave place of honor to the cheerleaders and football players. My love of reading and responsible study habits landed me in the valley of the nerds, a socially invisible terrain in a school where a local junior college was the optimum graduation goal. I was disciplined at home by unspoken expectations. Practicing the piano two hours a day seemed the right thing to do, even though it got me no glamour at school. The make-out parties I never got invited to did get a number of the popular girls at school in the family way. Several "went away" for their senior year, coming back baby-free. A few "had to get married," as we put it in those days of strong Bible Belt repression of bodily selves. Exclusion from the popular crowd was painful for me. I counted the minutes until graduation, yearning for college with the hopeful suspicion that there was a place somewhere where my work ethic and love of classical music would not embarrass me.

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Catholic theologian David Tracy distinguishes between the dialectical imagination and the analogical imagination. Although they do not neatly coincide with Protestant and Catholic sensibilities, these descriptions of two religious sensibilities resonate well with the seeming thinness of my Presbyterian faith, as well as what is admittedly an outsider's view of the Catholic imagination as a world redolent with mystery. We Presbyterians are nervous about the world, worried that something in it might compel our attention and lure us into attachments that turn something finite and partial into something infinite and absolute. Yet it is not just a primness that is behind our "decent and in order," it is because we know the deep ravages of sin, that "innate corruption...by which we, immersed in perverse desires and averse to all good, are inclined to all evil" as the *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566) puts it.

It is not that Presbyterians don't believe that God has entered the world in a profound and transformative way. Indeed, we attach God's presence to some worldly things. The Biblical text and the preached Word are the places we insist that we will find God... (Great Grandmother Miss Liza required a Bible passage before morning prayer)... an intelligent God with high standards at that (the Cumberland Presbyterian minister who substituted at

Marianna's church was looked down on for his lesser education.) However, our sacramentalism seems shrunken in comparison to that of the analogical imagination, with its marvelous capacity to perceive similarities with the divine everywhere. We who claim John Calvin as our forefather will speak of "rightly ordered sacraments" but by that, southern white Presbyterians mean grape juice in little metal cups and uniform little white squares that look and taste like they were made out of library paste. The dialectical imagination must rush quickly to negate what it affirms, always on the lookout for self-promotion and false idol making. Calvin's *finitum non capax infinitis* is a deeply felt sensibility. We are timid, perhaps rightly so, about pointing to signs of God's presence.

Have I been cheated by this thin, austere religiousness? True, I can never escape church. I was baptized in that tiny Presbyterian church in Marianna, whose minister lived across the street from my paternal grandparents. McClintocks filled up a third of that church and they simply expected to be officers. Throughout my growing up years we were as quick to find the local white Presbyterian church as we were to locate the nearest Piggly Wiggly as we moved from place to place. Church was virtually a requirement; you never thought of not going. But I am shaped by a religion that would appear to have no culture, no mystery, no habits that continually instantiate me in a world shimmering with the divine. I am formed by a religion that provokes no infusions of the Holy Spirit to move us into the wild ecstasies of tongues. ("We don't do that," as my father said.)

On a visit to Jesus College Chapel at the University of Oxford as an adult, I see how deeply formed I am in this dialectical imagination. Established by Royal Charter in 1571, Jesus College is a stunning monument to the faith practices of ancient believers. As I move into the chapel I am surrounded by the ancient dark wood and intricately carved pews and choir stalls, the huge vertical stained glass windows, their holy pictures burning with color, the elaborately dressed priests beyond me through the chancel arch, their many layered robes discretely signal a sacramental third gender. I have entered another world, a cavernous candle-lit reality where all around me move and gesture and speak their own language. Surely this is what David Tracy means by the sacramentalism of the other religious sensibility -- the things of the world gloriously signal and mediate the presence of the royal and great God the Father.

Yet my initial sense of awe and wonder is rudely interrupted by that annoying iconoclasm that seems like my cultural curse. I am hopelessly a southern white Protestant and sit through the service worrying about the "stuff" that arrests my attention and prohibits worship from serving as a lens onto the world outside. Elegant and glorious as it all is, it stops my consciousness cold and directs it to the past, where people lived and died dramatically in heavy, jeweled costumes. Some residual of a Zwinglian sensibility convinces me that the liturgical finery and ritual performances are icons in the way of God rather than portals to the Divine.

But Tracy insists that neither religious imagination is simply one thing or the other. Just as the manifestation-focused sacramental imaginary has moments of the "not yet," a refusal of total immanence, the stark negativities of ever-vigilant Protestantism always contain some "always-already graced possibility of self-transcendence in the gift and command of agape."<sup>1</sup> Why should a tray of little tin cups be any less a medium of the sacred than an elaborately engraved golden goblet? I suspect that my Protestant shaping might be read as something other than mere negation, especially if I look for the odd combination of desires it sometimes produced.

Take the intense attraction of the localized presence of God in your heart ---

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I was intensely religious in college... religious in a way that fit no church to which I had ever gone. Although I was (guiltily) reluctant to share the “Four Spiritual Laws” of the evangelical campus organization with strangers, I could boast of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It all started when I became friends with Ross Strudwick at a small women’s college in the south. A small, blond, charismatic personality, Ross dressed like a hippy in the middle of flower child times. I say “dressed like a hippy,” because we were not really part of the infamous 70’s campus revolutions, not part of the burgeoning civil rights movement, or anti-Vietnam demonstrations or emergent women’s movement. We called ourselves “Jesus freaks.” Ross made Christian faith sound like an adventure, a love affair with Jesus; for me it was my politically ignorant version of “rebellion” in the 1970’s. We hitch-hiked as often as we could from our women’s campus to the large university an hour or so away, not to participate in the student movement at UNC-Chapel Hill, but to hang out with the college Campus Crusade for Christ staff, to attend Bible studies, and learn about Bill Bright’s plan to Christianize the world by the end of the century. As for our continued safety on the Interstate as we blithely got into cars regardless of who was driving, we attributed that to Jesus looking out for us. And our habitual first stop at a coffee-house on Franklin Street in the heart of Chapel Hill got us the nickname of the “God-squad” with a few of the regulars. When I finally transferred to the university after two years at my women’s college it was largely because of the lure of intense religion along with my attraction to one of the single male Crusade staff.

Put my Protestant iconoclasm together with a southern white fear of sexuality/women’s bodies and that may account for highly developed powers of self-doubt and self-regulation that accompanied my good study habits. Such a combination would lead – *did* lead a nice young woman to contain her sexual desire in a persistent search for the exact shape of the faithful obedient life. Foucault must have had girls like me in mind when he wrote about the disciplining of the docile subject, except he needed to put the Watcher God in the place of the Panopticon. A peculiar mix of culture and Christianity can also shed light on these sensibilities. Reason, Luther would remind us, is a whore. Virginity, said the southern Presbyterian church, is the most prized possession a young (white) girl has. Did I know all this somewhere deep down when I followed in my mother’s footsteps? Did I flinch at all when I bought the culturally linked message that the best college graduation gift a girl of my class can hope for is a big wedding?

But these descriptions are only half right. If sexual repression follows the logic of the dialectical imagination, compensatory pleasure is not far behind. “In your heart” is, after all, *somewhere*...sacramental in small spaces. And a move from the pleasant protected culture of the church world I *had* known to a faith boasting Godly invasion of one’s inner self was, in some sense, an enhanced participation in the divine life. The joy and intensity of such Christian groups can sometimes outstrip the controlling moralism of a community whose goal is to get you to go from dorm room to dorm room saving souls. And outstrip that evangelism plan it did...at least for me. The desire for God/sexuality next took me away from the restricting world of conservative Christianity. However it did not take me away from my traditions, the class-shaped and southern forms of community and family, the religious of responsibility and discipline. The expected happy ending that has this repressed, middle class girl throwing off the constraints of heterosexual white religious society for something urban and funky and free is not where this story goes. The passion and joy that does flow in this life took its next form as critical intellectual curiosity, a critical curiosity that will try to have it both ways. And although the way I tell the story up to this point expresses my Protestant

reluctance to claim divine presence in its narration, the resources of the next academic chapters can perhaps redeem that limiting hermeneutical habit.

### *Disciplinary Reflections*

How to re-read critically the formation of this white southern feminine religiosity? How to understand the nagging sense of its thinness and honor the resources and possibilities within it? Is it really thin? Or is such a reading itself in need of redemption along with the disciplinary formation that would support such a judgment? There are two directions for such an inquiry, directions that will suggest a conflict in my discipline, Christian theology. A first explanation would point to the resonances of what I have called my “thin” religion with a form of American civil religion.<sup>2</sup> Civil religion names that “religious something” that clings to “Americanness” but is not reducible to churches, mosques or synagogues--a national religion without the official *accoutrements* of a religion. It is variously interpreted as religious nationalism, a prophetic piety of and yet transcending the nation, and a faith in democratic values. The version of civil religion that is most like what I have inherited is the result of a tight interweaving of a civic piety nurtured in the South in the 1950's - 70's with the residuals of Puritanism and Revivalism. This “Protestant civic piety,” as historians call it, is a persistent Protestant-colored ethos in the nation that overlaps nicely with faith in democratic values. It would seem to explain a lot about my subject position and its place in the larger social formation.

First, the curbing of emotional excess and its redirection into hard work in my narrative would seem to reflect the work ethic of civic piety and its resulting gendered financial success.<sup>3</sup> The pragmatism (“deeds not creeds”) and Protestant moralism of civil religion’s piety, to take two other features, are evident in my family’s penchant for “doing the right thing” with minimal religious talk and the proper dash of guilt. (Why did my grandfather and my grandmother tutor lower income African American children when they were in their 60’s, when they had reacted to *Brown v. Board of education* with dismay? The answer was that “the haves” were supposed to help the “have-nots.” You feel guilty if you don’t --especially after Civil Rights legislation. “It’s the Christian thing to do,” observes my father.)

But what is more striking about this dialectical piety--or “Whitebread Protestantism” as it has less elegantly been called--is precisely my sense of its thinness. This sense of thinness can be taken as a neutral self-understanding or, rather, my sense that I am “nowhere” in particular. Such self-understandings are more often suggestive of an implicit universality. A story about not being religious may be a story about not recognizing the determinacy of one’s religiousness. And what is “not seen” is hidden from view because of its position in the larger social formation. The capacity of my religiousness to be invisible would be due precisely to its occupation of the center, the center of power, that is. Portending to be the ethos of nowhere and therefore of everywhere, this civic piety is in fact the faith of the European American. Part, then, of my sense of not having religion is due to my occupation of that center -- or at least the race/class part of me that occupies that center. Perhaps my Presbyterian religiousness seems to pale in comparison to my colleagues Teresa and Kathy’s Roman Catholicism, Bill’s African American Protestantism or Muz’s stories of Almasola because it is akin to whiteness -- empty and powerful, the descriptor of those of us who do not have to notice their specificity. My sense of thinness, then, may be related to Charles Long’s account of a form of U.S. religion that “permits European Americans to hide from themselves, to deny in themselves the inner experience of conquest and suppression.”<sup>4</sup>

There is a nasty but true judgment to be made about this religiousness, and it requires more than the polite exercise of iconoclasm Protestant theologians are used to wielding toward all of the obvious idolatries. This religiousness has been class-defined, color-blind in the worst sense, and has reproduced gender subordination (complementarity at best) and heteronormativity. It may be that this is all my Protestant imagination is and, wielded properly, iconoclasm should put it out of its misery. However, to say that this dialectical imagination is only the reproduction of class, race, gender and sexual privilege is not a totalizing judgment I can make myself. That is, I cannot make it without cutting all the ground out from under myself.

So I look for another possibility. I said earlier that there are at least two analytical directions here, and the first is to see the embeddedness of my faith narrative in materiality, a task I have just begun. Socially locating this piety helps open to view its dissembling, its gaps and occlusions and renders it fair game for functional analyses. Southern white Presbyterianism's concern for the less advantaged is real and persistent, but this benevolence often comes with assumptions of Anglo-American superiority, sometimes conscious, sometimes not. Its austerity and spareness is no more about material ostentation than it is about emotional excess, but it is about accumulation and rarely includes voluntary poverty. Recognizing the way discourse "speaks me" and power-inflected material realities produce my subject position is vital. This way of reading my piety is a hedge against naïve individualist notions of agency and meaning.

But only to identify the social dynamics of power and repression operative in a religious piety, *only* to trust in some kind of ideology criticism, is to foolishly squander resources for courage and change. A feminist sensibility itself should warn me away from such a self-denigrating impulse, but there are theological issues at stake as well. To put it a bit differently, only to do critique is to reduce what may be "singular" about a life-world to categories that are inadequate to it, as subalternist Dipesh Chakrabarty would say.<sup>5</sup> Even as they would be wrong to suggest that singularity/irreducibility must be gotten by insulating the stuff of faith from criticism, theologians are right to resist the notion that so-called "secular" categories are adequate to or *the same as* the discernments produced in a faith world.

So where to go with this "yes, but.." position? --yes this faith needs exposure of its every element to critical scrutiny, but faith is not, thereby, *simply* mystification. A way forward may be possible with Chakrabarty's help, for his concern is with a relatively similar situation in relating Marxist theory to a very different faith-world than mine. His appeal to singularity occurs in the context of his challenge to commensurating models of translation in the work of Subaltern Studies, models that are employed by Marxist historians such as himself. Speaking about representation of the subaltern's world, he argues, "Writing about the presence of gods and spirits in the secular language of history or sociology would...be like an act of translating into a universal language what belongs to a field of differences."<sup>6</sup> A "universal, homogenizing middle term" has been thought necessary by critical thinking to render the "times of the gods" into something intelligible to the academic world, he goes on, namely, the secular construction of temporality—the time of (secular) history, with its empty chronology and all-encompassing grasp.<sup>7</sup> With this commensurating category, the world of the subaltern is translated into the categorical world of the Marxist academic, but at a cost. While Chakrabarty's is not a call to abandon secular historical time, it does constitute a challenge to replace the dominant model that *translates* one discursive world into another with an alternative that can allow for the *disruption* of each. I cannot, it would seem, simply translate my Protestant faith-world into the terms of sociologically privileged civil religion.

Let me draw a theological parallel to Chakrabarty's example of commensuration.<sup>8</sup> First, a word about my discipline, Christian theology. Theology has gone from being the Queen of the sciences in a pre-modern Western world where its sense as transformative *habitus* was to be enhanced by its sense as *scientia*, or a disciplinary pursuit, to a form of knowledge long-dethroned from secure public status.<sup>9</sup> It continues to be thought of as a kind of participatory reflection—*habitus*-- done out of and upon a particular religious tradition, but that participatory character is now suspect as uncritical “confessionalism.” Significant effects of the Kantian assault on metaphysics were not only the delegitimizing of any theological account of the cosmos, but also the undermining by historical, scientific and other modern “critical” knowledges of the legitimacy of religious epistemologies that were warranted by appeals to supernatural revelation. Notions of revelation have, among other things, provided ways to mark the “special” or privileged character of the knowledge of faith and access to its authorities.

When it emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, modern theology had the task of taking these critical knowledges seriously and attempting to adapt theological reflection to their terms, thereby challenging the protective function of revelation, or so the story goes.<sup>10</sup> Somewhat like the role of the subaltern scholar, this kind of theologian attempted to make sense of Christian faith with the categories of secular scholarship.<sup>11</sup> However, the result was as much a *challenge* to the faith as it was *constructive reinterpretation*. Important reconstructions of faith came out of these investigations (such as the notion of a charismatic leader to make sense of claims that Jesus was God, recognition of a “religious dimension” to human experience of the world as an alternative to orthodoxy, or of symbolic mediations of truth for authoritative texts discovered to be problematic when taken literally). Major challenges emerged as well. Developing disciplines of historical study applied to Christianity and its authoritative texts gradually dissolved the boundaries between the world of early Christianity and the contiguous realities of other religions. Framing devices such as “salvation history” that attempted to mark off the special God-directed human events from an ostensible “outside” became more and more unusable as scholars recognized the inextricably interrelated character of all events.<sup>12</sup> As time went on academic enhancement of the contextual to include the effects of power and interest on knowledge brought home the nontransparency of theologically inflected accounts of history. And with the incursion of such critical standards, forms of access to religious knowledge that were based on dichotomies between worldly experience and something else (revelation) became increasingly suspect.

It is the tradition of liberal or modern theology made more sophisticated by contemporary theories that is at work in the social reading of my faith narrative. The first framing of my piety makes sense of it by connecting Protestant religiosity to contemporary social influences, including residual religious traditions and the realities of class. However, from a perspective like Chakrabarty's the liberal theologian who would rest content with this contextualizing account risks doing to Christian believers just what the subaltern historian does to the subaltern, that is, assigning that sacred history to the secular “godless, continuous...empty and homogeneous” time where “events happen in time but time is not affected by them”—a distortion of much of what Christians believe.<sup>13</sup> Again, as crucial as it is to recognize the implication of faith in the messiness of history, *only* to do this as I continue to complain, risks invalidating a second, constructive framing of my piety.

Fearing just such an outcome, a theological movement known as “postliberal” theology has emerged for the purpose of resisting the commensurating dynamics of this modern theology. Of course, a number of Christian voices continually protest the lure of secular culture, the Christian Right being the most well known. However, I have in mind here a

theological conversation that defines itself specifically against liberal theology's epistemic interests. Postliberals worry over this liberal desire to render the language and concepts of theology into terms that are intelligible to the "general culture." Designed to resist what they see as the commensurating dynamics of modern critical thinking (identified as "liberal"), a number of theological proposals for the distinctiveness of Christian identity understand the danger of secular culture not to be its supposedly flagrant immorality or atheism, but the seductive attraction of its categorical worlds. Categories from disciplines like sociology or existentialist philosophy tempt the theologian, as suggested in my examples, because they make sense of the world and moral behavior in it and free her from inadequate forms of pre-critical thinking.<sup>14</sup> Yet by doing so, claim these theologians, the distinctive identity--we might say the "singularity"--of Christian faith is distorted.

To correct for this kind of liberal apologetics, postliberal theologies are concerned with the distinctiveness of Christian identity, a distinctiveness defined by treating Christian faith as a language-world with its own intratextual (or internal) integrity.<sup>15</sup> Figuring acquisition of Christian faith as akin to learning a language allows theology to posit an ordering grammar that can police the categories of secularity when they threaten to trespass overmuch. Postliberal Hans Frei, for example, protests the use of historical-critical disciplines in biblical scholarship because they destroy the unity of the canonical text and effectively sunder the pre-Enlightenment continuity between the story of a God-filled universe found in scripture and the world inhabited by the reader. The resulting shift in biblical interpretation, Frei says, accommodates the material of scripture to the terms of contemporary meaningfulness.<sup>16</sup> To replace this shift he argues for a "plain sense" reading of the text which finds a narratively ordered world that cannot be broken down into its pre-textual and disparate fragments. With a semantic lexicon mainly culled from the bible, postliberal theological grammar rules that this scriptural narrative of Jesus as the Christ is to "absorb the world" so as to overpower extraneous categories. This would prevent a "universal middle term" like sociology from turning the Jesus of faith into "just" a charismatic figure, or psychology from turning the desire for heaven into a projection of death denial. In certain respects, then, postliberal theological concerns mirror Chakrabarty's that the subaltern's worship of machines should not simply be translated into an "insurance policy against accidents and contingencies."<sup>17</sup>

However, along with his passion to see the subaltern be the subject of her own history, Chakrabarty has equal concern that the subaltern not reside completely outside of secular worlds of discourse. Thus, as important as it is to ask what this translation overrides, simply to protect this nonmodern discourse is like asking the subaltern to live only in her enchanted world--to narrate *and navigate* each and every terrain ("modern bureaucracies and other instruments of governmentality") on terms that cut off access to significant human resources.<sup>18</sup> Such a posture would be like asking the Christian to ignore the blurred boundaries between something called "Christian" and the co-constituting social environs, to refuse the language of "rights" because it is extraneous to the narrative world of Jesus, or to renounce the way the secular women's movements have been essential to the winning of my ordination.<sup>19</sup>

The parallel question for me is whether the singularity of my religious identity requires that I give up that first framing of my piety. Do I want to make disappear the entanglement of racist patterns of my life with Christian faith or discount the function of Protestant piety to underwrite unacknowledged power? Because that is what will happen if I define protection of the singularity of Christian faith in the terms of confinement to its language world as the postliberal view would have it. Rejection of the liberal model of translation must not entail rejection of liberal theology's recognition that other knowledges matter to the life of faith.

Indeed, it is just the genius of liberal theology to insist that other knowledges offer indisputable wisdom and richness to the world of faith.<sup>20</sup>

An obvious first correction is to refuse the idea that a device such as a distinctive language-world can possibly define the distinctiveness of faith. Defining normative Christianness apart from the tangle and mess of a *somewhere* duplicates what is basically the illusion of claiming to transcend culture. (Such theology may now only risk irrelevance. However at one time it contributed to the justification of colonial empire and is still functioning problematically in postcolonial contexts.) Any “somewhere” will entail the intersection of Christian faith with a variety of other language worlds—an inevitable hybridization of all language.<sup>21</sup> My own story shows there is no such thing as a “nowhere” language world. So however we define the irreducibility of this faith-world, it cannot be with a particular language-world. If it is not a disciplined language-world that will do it, what will?

While the adequate answer to such a question is far more complex than can be taken up here (because more than one question is at stake), at least part of it involves how to imagine the intersection between different discursive forms, one that avoids the unhappy choices of either rendering a faith through a “model of a higher overarching language” as Chakrabarty describes the role of modern critical knowledge, or rendering it only in its own terms, on the other.<sup>22</sup> In fact an alternative is just what Chakrabarty offers, (as Muz helpfully begins to explore). In the place of these two unhappy models of translation and non-interaction (or unilateral causality, as the “text absorbs the world” image implies), his look at nonmodern terms of exchange between discourses suggests another reading strategy—not one that simply refuses the search for universalizing categories, but that finds a way to see the limitations of one’s own frame and to receive something from the other.

To get at what is basically another mode of discursive intersection, the Derridian notion of the trace proves useful as a strategy of reading that can open to view the division/contradiction inhabiting any discourse. A trace is a site in discourse where contradictions of some sort of potential disruptions can be located.<sup>23</sup> A trace in Marxist secular historical readings of the subaltern occurs with a tension located in the commodity—-a tension between Marx’s categories of abstract labor and real labor. Abstract labor is a commensurating category, says Chakrabarty, because real labor is heterogeneous. Abstract labor renders homogeneous what are in fact very different kinds of work and workers. The force of the tension is always to remind that one is covering up or containing the complexities of labor, frequently to the detriment of the worker’s well being. By calling it a trace, Chakrabarty points to the function of the tension to highlight the inability of the commodity to completely control and contain this contradiction. With such a reading, the “outside” and, therefore, difference, becomes internal to the commodity and always defers its completion or closure.

Chakrabarty’s employment of the trace in the case of the discourse of Subaltern Studies then allows him to correct his previous superseding of the subaltern’s enchanted world. Now he reads “real” in real labor such that it can refer to an *enchanted* social as well as an *anthropological* social. The trace or contradiction in this sense points to “something that straddles a border zone of temporality, something that conforms to the temporal code within which ‘capital’ comes into being while violating that code at the same time, something we are able to see only because we can think/theorize capital, but something that also always reminds us that other temporalities, other forms of worlding, coexist and are possible.” He wants, analogously, something like the capacity to think with the categories of liberal theology while at the same time disrupting its borrowed categories’ capacity to exhaustively resituate (and thereby reduce) the discourse of faith in historical studies or sociology, for example.<sup>24</sup>

To see how this notion of trace can be useful for a reading of my theological dilemmas I return to some compelling features of the Christian religion alluded to in my narrative and then to Bill's critique--a tension between endless criticism and being grounded. First, there is that about lived faith that solicits, indeed, requires that ideology critique be done. The prohibition of false gods, of idols, is an ever-expanding disruptive force. *Ecclesia semper reformanda*. Iconoclasm at its best is the prophetic application of critical questions to everything, from the maleness of divine symbols to the conditions of membership (gender, race, heterosexuality) and the possibility that even notions of calling and forgiveness (or mercy and justice) can be employed to reinforce the status quo. Implicit in this iconoclasm is the fact that domestication of any trajectory of meaning is an inevitability. It comes with finitude and it is a sign of the basically tragic character of life.<sup>25</sup> On this point I agree with Bill. "Differences are always being consumed, always being flattened" as he puts it. Indeed, one might say that knowledge itself is reductive. And this requires discontent with the self-proclaimed permanence of any formulation. Not only might it be flattened difference, that flattening enacts hegemonies of self-interest. Thus one might say that the ideology critique that comes out of the traditions of Christianity intersects with, or concurs with and learns from the call for ideology critique generated by a host of other non-religious critical theories.

Yet what solicits ideology critique in this piety is not simply an intellectual principle that mandates a hermeneutic of suspicion. What solicits is not only, although it is also this, a recognition of fallibility. What solicits this critique is a lure-- a lure that cannot be reduced to the impulse to criticize.<sup>26</sup> Let me say this another way. The formation of subjects is complex -- a coming to be, a wanting and reaching, an enactment of fragility, a negotiating of conflicting desires, a being-overridden as often as a seeming to direct, an unceasing longing for good of some sort. The hermeneuticians of suspicion -- Marx, Freud, Nietzsche -- knew this well. If religion is a mode of controlling these desires, of dangerously repressing them, it is *also* a source of the extension and enhancement of desire.<sup>27</sup> Thus there is another way to read the piety --not to deny its pernicious social functioning, but to recognize that it is sometimes accompanied by a generosity for the world, an outpouring of love for the finite goodness of created things. And the believer--I--claim that it is God, the transcendent, that is the condition of this generosity, the ground of its excess. And whatever else the God-referent may be, this dimension constitutes God as lure.

What might be singular (non-reducible) about this faith would come from attention to this claim made by adherents of faith that, even as it is the "worldly" that matters, it is not the worldly that sustains.<sup>28</sup> What is interesting about such a claim is when the "not-worldly" referent of the believer is seen to found radical engagement with the world, rather than escape from it or denial of its complexity. (Or, rather, when the God referent is *accompanied by* such engagement, since I do not want to evoke the language of explanatory causes.) All this is to say that such a claim could be and should be part of a nonreductive description, as Bill would probably agree.

However, Chakrabarty's way of thinking about singularity requires more than a thick enough description. It requires more than the "outsider's" concurrence that a good description must include recognition that the believer--me, the subaltern, whoever--claims that the divine is the condition of her practices. Chakrabarty's category requires not only that the "outsider" categorial world have purchase on the world of the believer, but also that the outsider allow her categories to be potentially altered by the worldview of this other that is the person of faith. (I do not see where Bill's explanatory categories have room for this.) Of course this is *not* the claim that what is singular about Christian faith is that it contains some

convictions, principles, traditions or practices that combine belief in a transcendent God with love of neighbor. Not only would that not be unique to Christianity, it is not what Chakrabarty is after. (To claim particular ideas or practices as what is irreducible would simply be historicist.) The question instead is how to recognize a trace that can help us think about the nonreducibility of discourses such as faith, enabling me to produce a more complex reading of my faith narrative.

A trace or contradiction in the discursive world of Protestant faith occurs in the complex that I have just described—a tension between any claim that one is founded, sustained and enhanced by a relation to the divine and the compulsion to resist absolutizing historical and particular forms of life. This tension occurs, of course, because any claim of being founded is itself mediated by languages and traditions and practices, precisely those historical and particular forms that we are tempted to make into absolutes. The function of reading a trace in this tension can be seen in what emerges from liberal theology, which requires that we read into the impulse to iconoclasm an intertextual relation to the various critical modalities of feminist theory, critical race theory, and so on as well as refusals of any worship (or absolutizing) of mundane realities.<sup>29</sup> Thus reading iconoclasm-as-a-trace allows for multiple theories that open up the human propensities to occlude, distort, and otherwise corrupt human relations. At the same time we attend to the other dimension of the trace in the faith-world, which is the solicitation of this impulse in faith. And that dimension turns into a question about the source of energy for ideology critique.

My analogy is this. While Chakrabarty rereads the tension in Marxist categories of abstract labor and real labor by enhancing the category of the real to include worlds populated by gods, he is insisting that the world of the Marxist be altered by the world of the subaltern. My offering from the faith-world would be to find the analogous tension in critical theories between the force to expose/explain and the source of courage to do so. What is it that compels or solicits the passion to critique and to sustain engagement through the difficulties and tragic ambiguities of “the revolution”? “What,” as Foucault says, “can give the people of the anti-Gulag the courage to stand up and die in order to be able to utter a word or a poem.”<sup>30</sup> Is the critical theory of the day enough? Or, as in my Protestant dialectical faith, can it not bear the weight of long-term sustenance? The gap or contradiction in some such critical theories might be construed as an underdeveloped naming of such lures. While I am not suggesting that there is something specifically “Christian” which might be a learning for these non-religious critical postures, might it be that the interchange between discourses of faith and of critical theories could sometimes open up what Chakrabarty calls the “heterogeneities and incommensurabilities inscribed in (the critical theories) core”? I am suggesting that what might be worth considering by the “outsider” in this case is the correlation of a claim of being founded by the divine to an enhanced courage for the world.

Could such faith-sustained activism serve as a disruptive trace in the world of progressive so-called “secular” critical theory? Could it serve as a trace in on-the-ground participatory democracy, and the larger networks of justice-oriented groups in global politics? Has it not been the case that even as religious faith has often denied its political nature, liberative activism has also been sustained by a belief in a redemptive God of justice, a God who is always there making a way out of no-way, sustaining commitments to the outcast? The best way to resist so-called secular reduction of a faith-world, then, is more of this lived testimony. It is more courage for the world. It is more recognition of that surplus entailed in faith, where there is always more to do, always another challenge and another chance, always failure and always forgiveness. The best counter to the reductionism of the secular may be the witness of those who always feel the lure to do justice one more time.

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There are several implications of this strategy of reading for my own narrative. First, it suggests that a liberal theological approach insisting upon an expanded critical interrogation of my narrative with other knowledges is absolutely right, and even in a certain sense theological. It is theological insofar as the function of such criticisms needs to be for the enhancement of the capacity to render the world a place for the flourishing of all. The critical impulse must be continually rethought in relation to its adequacy to human perniciousness, a rethinking that always threatens to be a totalizing negative evaluation of the religious tradition. When the various contexts of agency relevant to my subject position are widened, for example, from the effects of American civil religion to those of postcolonial (or neocolonial) structural forces, these signs of redemption in my own life may border on the trivial.

However, the other piece of the tension in the trace pulls away from this threatened reduction to sheer criticism--what seems singular about it is that the source of this courage, God in this particular tradition, is taken to be the wellspring of radical engagement, a source that always exceeds whatever formulations are exposed as oppressive. Thus it is imperative to take seriously what in the discursive configuration of my "traditions" enhances my capacity for courage for a wider world and attend to the lure that solicits me--whatever form that may take. So, for example, there is clearly painful gender/race and class containment in an early call to arms of my Presbyterian foremothers as they imagined the domestic as a site for prophetic action--"Only a housewife,....but with power to change the world!" However, this complex of religious and cultural rhetorics did also entail the small redemptions of the everyday--a legacy making my mother and a host of other such middle class white housewives into ceaseless volunteers, attaining agency even as they did not always claim it.<sup>31</sup>

Or, take the perpetual "no" to worldly things in the dialectical tradition--it does not only have a deforming effect on subjects; the male-dominated Protestant ethos of negation has simultaneous side effects that can be tracked in liberative ways. For this negation was and is quite often combined with the hard-working and "responsible citizen" kind of religious faith where one did not talk about God or Jesus but instead was a consistent "helper of the unfortunate" as the natural expression of church-going, a kind of *noblesse oblige* that sometimes changed the helper. Taken together with this social responsibility, Presbyterian negation is not only a source of discomfort with lush iconography, per my reaction to the ritual splendor of Jesus College. It is also a hermeneutic for the world and one's position within it. Through this hermeneutic the iconoclastic impulse can be continually recalibrated to the most radical readings of the effects of human agency on the larger human community. And corrections of patronizing construals of the other can naturally emerge as discernment of a connection between the destiny of the larger human community--the "least of these"--and my own, advancing capacities to redefine the "Other" and receive from the other.

Needed expansions of world-engagement happened for me with the linkages of intellectual freedoms with my inherited hothouse faith. As a Campus Crusader, the mission to witness to Jesus was totally separate from social justice issues. Yet with the destabilizing of associations between biblical discourse and divine presence, multiple rich imaginings of redemptive presence began to emerge for me. The markers of human pain and suffering become the important messages of/from the sacred. A continual rereading of this social hermeneutic happens in some elements of the larger church, from the grappling with racialization beginning with the Civil Rights era, to redefinitions of social realities around gender and sexuality and class.

A second implication of Chakrabarty's reading strategy is that ways to define the theological task must expand. The choices are not liberal *accommodation*--since everything always

is accommodated--vs. a postliberal *fix* on identity--since nothing is ever fixed. Chakrabarty's alternative suggests recognition of an interchange between discursive worlds in which *change* and *identity* can go together, but are marked by a *reciprocity* that is both gift and risk. Sometimes my tradition can offer alterations of particular cultural habits, but sometimes it needs to receive from its others. The passions of my college years -- the eros in my life—for example, need to be reread such that southern Presbyterianism is corrected by feminist and queer discourses on the goodness of the aesthetic and desire, such that my fantasy of the sexual and the pleasure of my music can be read as enhancements of world. The risk of this reciprocity is further suggested by the fragility of boundaries for what gets identified as the lure that is “God” and the inevitability of change. For the lure that solicits me may sometimes bear the name “God”; once it was “Jesus Christ my lord and savior;” now it is typically impersonal imageries of possibility—“a horizon for human becoming” in Grace Jantzen’s language.

This alternative strategy of reading seems to go well with Tracy’s observation that the dialectical and sacramental imaginations refuse a simplistic contrast. There is, we remember, a “no-saying” in sacramentalism and an “always already graced possibility of self-transcendence in the gift and command of agape” in the dialectical. In the terms of my Reformed heritage, the other side of the incapacity of the finite to contain the infinite is the Calvinist notion that the infinite occupies the worldly and makes it capable ...*Deus capax humanitas*.<sup>32</sup> Both theological sensibilities point me to the ordinary as the place of divine presence. However, Chakrabarty’s notion of trace has offered an important strategy for making something constructive out of these theological gestures, bringing together the sense of the divine with the critical impulse. Because there are no protected “religious” language worlds, the search for traces in my own narrative yields more solicitations of the divine than would first appear and finds them in ordinary practices and languages.

I am, then, rereading my faith narrative by way of this disciplinary excursion and concluding that idol smashing is not for nothing. The Protestant timidity about pointing to signs of redemption needs readjustment--and must be able to maintain a tension. There is a shape for such signs, and it is the widening of a circle of care, a testimony to the power of the gracious divine. However, as always hybridized with the available cultural languages and habits, the traceability of that power will continue to remain elusive. A project that compels, but an ongoing and open project.

Given that, the thinness of my religious faith may be about more than simply being privileged, about not recognizing the determinacy of my religiousness, however true that may also be. The gift of Chakrabarty’s hermeneutic of trace to my theological discursive world is the possibility of honoring the redemptive impulses that are in this necessarily hybrid religious formation--which leads me to reinterpret what needs correcting. My sense of its thinness may in fact come from expecting a separate thing that is, in and of itself, “religiousness.” The divine is not a discrete discourse or place, it is a dimension of everything. Not everything as it currently is, but the redemption of the everyday, and, if not redemption, then at least the discovery of its excess of being, its possibility. If tragedy is inevitably co-constitutive of redemption, then the locating and enhancing of possibilities is still work with considerable integrity. And part of the unfinished business of a white middle class gendered Protestant tradition that might do this work should, minimally, be the continual expansion of an imagination that says both/and to the secular and spiritual, to the ordinary and extraordinary.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroads Press, 1986), 434.

<sup>2</sup> Although not the first to study civil religion, Robert Bellah is credited with giving this phenomenon a name that generated renewed contemporary discussion. For a good introduction see Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> For a more complicated interpretation of the function of the Protestant ethic that ties it with capitalism and the production of ethnicity, see Rey Chow, *Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. See Charles H. Long, “Civil Rights – Civil Religion: Visible People and Invisible Religion” in *op.cit.*, pp.211-221.

<sup>5</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Time of History and the Times of Gods” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe, David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> For a longer account of the difference between ‘secular temporality’ and medieval sacred time see Benedict Anderson’s *The Imagined Community of the Nation: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> A serious flaw with my discipline is its propensity to mirror the white Protestantism of my subject position in its historic role in sustaining the no-longer-completely-invisible dominant. Much of my discipline continues to be done from an ostensible nowhere as if continuing to be the center. With the exception of liberation theologies that by definition are marked by their privileging of the marginalized, many Christian theologies eschew modifiers and present themselves as the normative center to which the contextual thicknesses of race/gender/class/sexuality may be added later.

<sup>9</sup> For accounts of the history of theology, see G.R. Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology: The Beginnings of Theology as an Academic Discipline* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); and Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> The historical precedent for what is now identified as the characterizing feature of liberal theology, this practice of writing for “the cultured despisers” of religion, is Friedrich Schleiermacher. The point was to appeal to these despisers by showing how religious faith was not at odds with new knowledges.

<sup>11</sup> A good example of what are countless books on this is Van A. Harvey’s *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, new edition, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> The gradual character of this recognition can be seen in the outworking of historicizing processes on Christian scripture and the doctrinal traditions throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even with Ernst Troeltsch’s clear articulation of the unrepeatability, contextual character of every piece of Christianity and the 20<sup>th</sup> century turn to social history and the recognition of ideological forces in the tradition, the process is still incomplete. See Edward Farley’s account of the House of Authority for a description of assumptions that still impede this historicizing. *Ecclesial Reflection: An Anatomy of Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 3-168.

<sup>13</sup> Chakrabarty, “Time of History, Time of the Gods,” 36.

<sup>14</sup> Ironically enough, however, the placelessness that characterizes these projects has great resonance with what political theorist John Rawls called the “original position.” This political device for generating unbiased normative rules for including everyone – justice as fairness -- assumes that the way to be just is to develop norms that assume no specific advantage or disadvantage in society. Its occupants bracket all specificity about their location in the social order. However the original position turns out to be drafted on the model of the dominant subject, one that does not need major alterations in the distribution of extant resources John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). So say numerous feminist political theorists -- Susan Moller Okin, Seyla Benhabib, among others.

<sup>15</sup> George A. Lindbeck is one of the first articulators of this position, which has a variety of forms. See his *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

<sup>17</sup> Chakrabarty, “Time of History, Time of the Gods,” 40.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>19</sup> I would not dispute that the eucharist could be a key hermeneutical tool for a Christian response to human suffering. My problem is with the failure to provide other criteria that might go with appeal to the eucharist such that it may be expected to have certain kinds of effects in order to be compelling. As I read the usage by postliberals, it is typically sufficient to simply reproduce the “language game” of Christianity.

<sup>20</sup> Post-Schleiermacher 20<sup>th</sup> century liberals, or revisionist modernists as they are called, include such figures as Schubert Ogden, David Tracy, Gordon Kaufman, and Edward Farley. Concern for so-called other knowledges is articulated in different terms by all. For example, Tracy speaks of the crucial role of publics in the generation of theology, from the recognition of the different publics that are relevant to the criteria appropriate to each.

<sup>21</sup> See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Press, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Chakrabarty, “Time of History, Time of the Gods,” 39. My colleagues also remind me that there is considerable artificiality in continuing to assume different somehow cohesive language worlds, as I do here.

<sup>23</sup> The term is also used by Levinas.

<sup>24</sup> Chakrabarty continues, “In this sense, subaltern histories do not refer to a resistance prior and exterior to the narrative space created by capital; they can’t therefore be defined without reference to the category capital. Subaltern Studies, as I think of it, can only situate itself theoretically at the juncture where we give up neither Marx nor ‘difference’ for...the resistance it speaks of is something that can happen only *within* the time horizon of capital and yet has to be thought of as something that disrupts the unity of that time. Unconcealing the tension between real and abstract labor ensures that capital/commodity has heterogeneities and incommensurabilities inscribed in its core.” *ibid.*, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Human life is tragic not simply because of suffering, but because “sufferings of various sorts are necessary conditions of creativity, affection, the experience of beauty, etc.” Limit and frustration are constitutive of desires and their “fulfillment.” See Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 29.

<sup>26</sup> Having allowed for ideology critique, I am obviously not saying this lure is always and everywhere what accounts for what I would call the divine solicitation. I am saying this is what is also (sometimes) there. This is also the only kind of response I can think of to Feuerbach.

<sup>27</sup> Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Toward a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> There are many versions of this as a claim made by adherents, from the paradox of which the apostle Paul speaks when he says, “I... not I, but Christ within me” to the various confessional forms that ascribe negative agency to the self in the act of giving glory to God. This simultaneous denial and according of agency is not a demeaning of the self, but comes with an enhancement of agency for engaging the world, which entails a modified self.

<sup>29</sup> For these are the linkages that inevitably happen when signs necessarily function by “reference to another element which is not simply present” as Derrida says, an inevitability of hybridity, to put it another way. Derrida says “No element can function as a sign without reference to another element which is not simply present. This interweaving results in each element...being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system...Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only everywhere, differences and traces of traces.”

<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon, et. al. (NY: Pantheon Books, 1977), 136.

<sup>31</sup> See my account of Presbyterian women in “Decently and in Order: Discourses of Self- and World-Transformation,” *Changing the Subject: Women’s Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 183-238.

<sup>32</sup> It is useful to widen this Calvinist vocabulary, perhaps along the lines of Grace Jantzen’s thought: God is a “horizon for human becoming” ; or better the divine is “the field of creativity, fertility, production, an always uncertain & preempted field...the field or domain of what is new, what has not existed before, a mode of transcendence.” Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. Jantzen’s constructive discourse is invoked by the symbolic of natality, Her main theme, “becoming divine” is not playing God, she points out. It is simply reversing the hierarchy of patriarchal Christianity.