Women in Religion

Challenging Bias against Women Academics in Religion

editor Colleen Hartung

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Women in Religion — Volume 2

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COLLEEN D. HARTUNG

In today's world, people access knowledge instantaneously on Internet-connected devices such as laptops, smartphones, and smart televisions. We can ask Siri and Alexa any question imaginable while driving or cooking a meal. The source for this readily accessible information is a changing array of digital, tertiary knowledge-sharing platforms. The day-to-day decisions we make, along with our opinions and views of the world, are shaped by the knowledge we glean from these sources. Bias exists on these digital platforms and matters, especially to underrepresented and oppressed populations, such as women and people of color. This volume attends to bias in knowledge presented and produced about noteworthy women academics important to the study and practice of the world's religious, spiritual, and wisdom traditions. Its biographers seek to create inclusive historical narratives about women who are notable

producers of knowledge but conspicuously absent as biographical subjects across the spectrum of easily accessible tertiary knowledge-sharing platforms.

While biases exist across the digital landscape, this volume is informed specifically by the struggles of Wikipedia editors for the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project. Wikipedia is currently one of the leading tertiary knowledge-sharing platforms on the Internet and serves as a case study for this chapter's critique and constructive consideration of the sourcing and writing conventions that undergird the production of biographical knowledge about women on digital platforms. The heart of the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project, and the inspiration for the Women in Religion series, is a list of women important to the world's religious and wisdom traditions who should be on Wikipedia but are not (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: WikiProject Women in Red/1000 Women in Religion"). The project aims to increase the representation of women on digital platforms like Wikipedia and also includes developing strategic ways of sourcing for and writing about women as a means of overcoming barriers to the publication of biographical materials about women generally.

The criteria for inclusion on the 1000 Women in Religion worklist, in line with Wikipedia guidelines, is the availability of at least two reliable sources indicating the notability of a woman's life and works (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability (People)"). A 2019 analysis shows that well over half of the women on the worklist are identified with professions associated, at least potentially, with academia: university teachers, theologians, biblical scholars, historians, professors, academics, and more (Anderson, Hamlen, Hartung 2019, slide 28). This overrepresentation makes a certain kind of sense. Women in academia should be low-hanging fruit in relation to Wikipedia guidelines. Their work takes place in the public sphere and often involves publication in various types of reliable media: journals, books, and newspapers. Most of their names are readily associated with secondary sources. It is logical to assume that meeting Wikipedia sourcing standards is relatively easy for these types of entries.

However, having two reliable secondary sources associated with a subject's name does not equate to having adequate sources to write a biographical entry that meets established Wikipedia guidelines. Editors for the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project experience the same difficulties with submissions about women in academia as they do other categories of women. There are a variety of challenges. Most of the project's editors are new to Wikipedia editing

and lack experience and skill navigating guidelines for submission. There is also anecdotal evidence that entries by and about women are subject to greater scrutiny (Krämer 2019). Yet, surprisingly, even though women in academia often have numerous sources associated with their names as authors and editors, the biggest problem is still a disheartening lack of secondary sources describing their noteworthy character. The experience of editors working to improve Wikipedia's coverage of women in academia who study, research, and teach about the world's religious and spiritual traditions serve as an illuminating case study. Their struggles inform this consideration of the gender gap in biographical coverage of women on digital platforms generally, which require reliable, verifiable secondary sources as proof of notability.

Part of the problem is gender bias in academia, which is often supported and maintained by traditional structures and norms that govern tenure, including the high value placed on research, writing, and publication. It is true that tenure does not necessarily mean a scholar's work is noteworthy. However, it is undoubtedly a significant step toward the level of achievement that garners the type of public recognition valued by a digital, tertiary platform like Wikipedia. Another part of the problem is bias replicated and extended through the sourcing and writing style guidelines of tertiary platforms, which prefer academic sources and writing practices that convey neutrality. While the first volume in Atla Open Press's Women in Religion series, *Claiming Notability for Women Activists in Religion*, focuses on a critical examination of notability criteria generally and on digital platforms specifically, this second volume focuses on the sourcing and writing conventions that perpetuate bias. It addresses the question of why so many women academics, who are themselves producers of secondary sources, are absent as biographical subjects on digital knowledge platforms. This volume also leans into a constructive question: how does writing biographies about women underrecognized for their contributions to the study of the world's religious and wisdom traditions interrupt bias present in academia and digital knowledge platforms?

In this volume, authors raise up the undervalued but formative voices of women who study religion and wisdom traditions in academia. Their biographies focus our attention on these women of influence marginalized by norms, practices, policies, and guidelines that maintain well-established networks of privilege. Their works challenge the exclusionary assumptions that underlie systemic bias

in the production of secondary and tertiary sources about women. They creatively engage sourcing and related writing conventions that govern academic writing and editing on tertiary digital knowledge platforms, including notability, conflict of interest, neutral point of view, verifiability and reliability, and citational and hyperlinking guidelines. In this chapter, I begin by sketching the contours of gender bias in the procedures and norms that govern academic life. I show how this bias is copied, amplified, and even extended through Wikipedia's editing policies and guidelines. In light of this bias, I consider how the biographers in this volume disrupt the sourcing and writing conventions that support and perpetuate bias as they create more expansive and inclusive biographical narratives.

Publish or Perish: Practices That Exclude in Academia

Women, particularly women from marginalized communities, are still underrepresented in academia. They are approaching parity in lower-ranking academic positions in many countries, but the gender gap widens for senior positions. Catalyst (2020)—a nonprofit organization that does research aimed at advancing women in leadership—reports: "While women in the United States held nearly half (49.7%) of all tenure-track positions in 2018, they held just 39.3% of tenured positions.' The statistics are worse for Asian women, Black women, and Latinas. Multiple sources indicate the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated disparities in academic publishing and employment, threatening to erase hard-won gains made over the last few decades (Bohanon 2020; Shruchkov 2020).

Evidence suggests that the situation for women who teach, research, and write about religion and spirituality is similar to the situation for women in academia generally. A 2019 study of theology and religious studies programs by the British Academy (2019, 3-4) notes that, while women made up 64% of undergraduates in the 2017–18 school year, "they made up only 35% of doctoral students and 37% of academic staff." Professional organizations representing those who study religious and spiritual traditions acknowledge gender bias in the profession. The American Academy of Religion (AAR)—"the largest scholarly society dedicated to the academic study of religion"—

created a Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (SWP) in 1990 to address issues of discrimination and harassment experienced by its members who identified as women (AAR n.d.; Brock and Thistlethwaite 2019, 81). The chair of SWP took a seat on the AAR board, and members wrote "a survival manual for women in religious studies," developed mentoring programs, and implemented sexual harassment policies (Brock and Thistlethwaite 2019, 82). The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL)—"the oldest and largest learned society devoted to the critical investigation of the Bible"—reports in the results of a 2018 survey that 21.55% of respondents identified as female, 68.46% as male, and 0.06% as transgender (SBL n.d.; 2018). In 2019, the SBL Press published a volume edited by Nicole L. Tilford—*Women and the Society of Biblical Literature*—chronicling women's experiences as they navigate their careers in a male-dominated profession.

Both the AAR and the SBL devote time and space to the issue of gender bias on their websites and in their organizational structures. However, neither organization provides basic statistics reporting the employment and tenure status of their members who identify as women. Without hard data about discrimination and research to interpret that data, we are left with over-simplified generalities that explain gender disparity. It is a matter of biology: women take time off to have and raise families. It is a matter of psychology: women are not as competitive as men. It is a matter of spirituality: women are more relationship-oriented and better suited to mentoring. It is a matter of morality: women are more selfless and willing to take on tasks that benefit the institution even at the expense of career advancement.

Within the framework of these generalities, gender gaps can be explained by suggesting that men, unencumbered by these factors and traits, excel in a demanding, competitive academic context. Indeed, men publish more than women. They are also cited more often by their network of peers (Pells 2018). In general, they qualify for tenure more quickly and receive more awards. These are achievements that enhance their stature and notability (Malisch et al. 2020). The institutional narratives that extol their virtues would have us believe that their success is entirely self-made. What tenure committees fail to recognize is that the achievements of men in academia are made possible by biased systems that rely on support from those who are in turn marginalized, particularly women academics.

Academic institutions often disregard the barriers to advancement and tenure for women. Institutional assessments of systemic gender bias in the promotion and tenure process and the production and publication of research are hard to come by. However, some studies show how standard academic research and writing practices support biased social norms and sustain ongoing gender bias in academic settings. A study conducted by Linda Babcock, Maria P. Recalde, Lise Vesterlund, and Laurie Weingart (2017, 715)—"Gender Differences in Accepting and Receiving Requests for Tasks with Low Promotability"—shows that women are asked to perform low-promotability tasks such as "serving on an undergraduate curriculum revision committee" more often than men. These tasks may be institutionally significant and therefore worthy but leave women less time to publish—a primary focus of tenure committees. Kim Mitchell (2017), in "Academic Voice On Feminism, Presence, and Objectivity in Writing," finds that standards for scholarly writing that promote objectivity make the subjective, perspectival writings of feminists, womanists, queer theorists, and others suspect. Furthermore, tenure committees often favor publication in prestigious, peer-reviewed journals as an indicator of influence and success. Other types of publication and modes of knowledge production, which might enhance the tenure prospects of overburdened women professors, are considered less desirable as a measure of success (Heckman and Moktan 2020). Finally, networks of privilege that facilitate academic advancement are largely populated by men who generally support and cite other men more often than their differently identified peers (Pells 2018). Institutions whose tenure and promotion processes ignore these dynamics ensure the privilege of men at the top and often sabotage the chances for public recognition, promotion, and tenure for women and other marginalized persons.

Sourcing and Style Guidelines: Practices that Exclude on Wikipedia

The Enlightenment encyclopedia scheme is based on the idealistic notion that a referenced, unbiased collection of the world's knowledge can be assembled and disseminated for humanity's benefit (Reagle and Koerner 2020). On Wikipedia, this collection is curat-

ed by volunteers called Wikipedians, who have collaboratively developed and are guided by a set of policies and guidelines meant to maintain the accuracy and neutrality of information available on this highly trafficked website. Studies show Wikipedia's reliability rivals the reliability of well-respected encyclopedic projects like the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Cooke 2020). However, much research indicates that Wikipedia guidelines actually result in a biased representation of knowledge. Even though Wikipedia aspires to be a compendium of the sum of all knowledge, its content and contributor gaps indicate a replication of bias that exists across the spectrum of communities marginalized in society at large by sexism, racism, colonialism, and more (Vrana, Sengupta, and Bouterse 2020, 8; Dittus 2018). The relevant example in the context of this volume is the current gender gap on Wikipedia, where only 13% of editors worldwide identify as women, and only 18% of biographical entries are about women (Wikipedia n.d., "Gender Bias on Wikipedia; Hesse 2019). Informed by Enlightenment ideals that underpin the modern encyclopedic project, Wikipedia editors engage in policy creation that supports sourcing and writing style conventions that promote neutrality and an emphasis on notable experts. This includes a preference for peer-reviewed, academic sources authored by academic authorities (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Reliable Sources"). Thus, academic institutional practices that result in the overrepresentation of men at senior levels in academia are reflected and amplified across Wikipedia's policy pages, including its notability, neutral point of view, conflict of interest, reliability and verifiability, and hyperlinking style guidelines. Identifying the underlying assumptions that enable the construction and deployment of these guidelines and considering who is potentially excluded when they are applied provides a necessary critical lens. It allows us to see how women in academia, who have made worthy contributions to the study of the world's religious and wisdom traditions, remain underrepresented on Wikipedia and other digital platforms.

Notability (Academics)

Wikipedia's general notability guidelines judge a subject's notability based on widespread coverage in reliable secondary sources (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability"). However, Wikipedia also has specific notability guidelines for biographies about academics, recog-

nizing the fact that "many scientists, researchers, philosophers, and other scholars . . . are notably influential in the world of ideas without their biographies being the subject of secondary sources" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability (Academics)"). The guidelines for academic notability also indicate that having published works does not make one noteworthy in and of itself. Notability for an academic is judged by the influence and impact of their work, substantiated by reliable sources. These more-specific notability standards enable a Wikipedia editor to pursue an article about an academic who is not well-known and does not necessarily have biographical coverage in reliable secondary sources. Nevertheless, the emphasis on secondary sources remains. The guidelines indicate that "the most typical way" of satisfying the "significant impact" criteria is by the presence of "several extremely highly cited scholarly publications or a substantial number of scholarly publications with significant citation rates" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability (Academics)").

Notability guidelines focus on a quantitative assessment of achievement that mirrors the focus of tenure committees on publication, citation, and traditional measures of achievement like prestigious awards. Women are underrecognized in relation to these measures in academia and published literature and subsequently on digital platforms like Wikipedia. An analysis of limited secondary sources might make a case for an unknown academic's notability, but such analysis is considered primary research. Wikipedia is self-defined as a tertiary knowledge platform, and primary research is not allowed (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Reliable Sources"). The guidelines and the editors that use them assume that if an academic is noteworthy enough to be included on Wikipedia, they will have adequate secondary sources to support an entry. Research shows this is not the case. These guidelines and assumptions exclude women whose work is significant in their local and institutional context, in the broader academic milieu, and in the wider community and culture but is not widely covered by secondary sources. Even if the significance of their work in the cultural contexts they affect can be proven with various types of qualitative sources, such as interviews and oral histories, without adequate secondary sources they will not have an article on Wikipedia.

Neutral point of view

Wikipedia's neutral point of view (NPOV) policy, which is strictly enforced, states that content must present a fair, proportional representation of "all significant views that have been published by reliable sources on a topic." In keeping with Wikipedia's emphasis on secondary sources, views are to be presented "in proportion to the prominence of each viewpoint in the published, reliable sources." The goal is to eliminate editorial bias (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View"). The underlying assumption is that the most valid and reliable methods of knowledge production and conveyance are from points of view that are impartial and that unbiased language neutralizes an author's personal bias.

Feminist researcher Leigh Gruwell (2015, 121) addresses the issue of neutrality in her article "Wikipedia's Politics of Exclusion," stating that "neutrality or unbiasedness is an illusion." She notes that Wikipedia policy pages are not explicit "that there is such a thing as objectivity in a philosophical sense. . . . Rather to be neutral is to describe debates rather than engage in them" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View/FAQ"). Gruwell goes on to note, however, that Wikipedia encourages an encyclopedic style of writing "that is formal, impersonal and dispassionate" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Writing Better Articles"). Gruwell concludes that "even though Wikipedia claims that neutrality and objectivity are not the same thing, its style policy actively discourages any show of embodied positionality" (122). In contrast, feminist and qualitative researchers identify the situated, located nature of all research perspectives. From this position, bias is best handled by a detailed disclosure of embodied perspectives and biases (Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin, and Lydenberg 1999; Spickard, Landres, and McGuire 2002). It is reasonable to assume that women and others informed by these methodologies, who are already busy negotiating their careers in the context of structural bias, might choose not to engage in projects where feminist and other ways of writing are censored. NPOV policies are a good example of writing norms that discourage potential editors who identify with marginalized communities from volunteering their time on platforms like Wikipedia.

Conflict of interest

Conflict of interest (COI) policies enhance public confidence in Wikipedia's neutrality by discouraging autobiographical, promotional, and paid contributions (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Conflict of Interest"). In the case of biographical entries, Wikipedia's COI policies assume that information provided by the subject of an article or associated parties is biased because the author of the edit is too close to the subject matter. This perspective is related to NPOV policies in that it assumes that neutrality is possible and desirable but best achieved at a distance from the subject or topic. It follows that contributions provided by editors who do not know the subject are more likely to be unbiased and disinterested. Bias and editing for self-interest, such as advertising, are the primary concerns of this policy. A feminist approach suggests that an interested perspective is not necessarily a conflict of interest if bias is identified and accounted for. People close to the subject and the subject themselves can provide a needed, embodied point of view on aspects of a subject's noteworthy character.

Wikipedia guidelines and policies apply to all content, but studies show that articles by and about women are more highly scrutinized and therefore more affected by policies like COI. Women academics regularly contact the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project for help because their attempts to correct erroneous information in entries written about them are rejected subject to COI policies. In these cases, incorrect information supported by secondary sources is prioritized over information provided by the article's subject or an interested party like a close friend, student, or employer. Women academics also contact the project because they realize they are as notable as their male colleagues but are not recognized on Wikipedia and find that they cannot address that concern because of COI policies. Wikipedia offers potential remedies such as seeking help from Wikipedians on an entry's "Talk Page." However, this requires a level of expertise—such as knowledge about what a "talk page" is—that most people do not have.

Feminist and qualitative researchers identify the situated, located nature of all research perspectives. Research methodologies informed by these perspectives suggest that perspectival bias is best handled by a detailed disclosure of a particular researcher's embodied perspectives and biases (Michael Bell 2004, 10–11, 18–19). Authors, researchers, and Wikipedia editors who have personal experiences

and relationships with their subjects have access to sources that may be unavailable or difficult to find for an unconnected editor. Who better to edit a fact-based description of the work of a particular Assemblies of God missionary in Africa than a practitioner of the faith who has a relationship with the subject, as long as a disclosure of the relationship is supplied? Nevertheless, as defined by Wikipedia's COI policies, because the editor has a relationship to the subject, this well-informed research is excluded.

Verifiability and Reliability

"The goal of Wikipedia is to become a complete and reliable encyclopedia" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Verifiability"). Wikipedia policies identify that "verifiability is key to becoming a reliable source." Its verifiability and reliability policies are an interrelated part of this goal. Verifiability guidelines require "in-line citations for any material challenged or likely to be challenged and for all quotations". Reliability guidelines state that this material or content should be based on reliable, independent, published sources with a reputation for fact-checking and accuracy. Furthermore, the emphasis on in-text citations is meant to promote a transparent use of sources that allows readers to fact-check or verify for themselves. Reliable sources are published materials with a publication process known for accuracy and an author regarded as an authority on the subject or both (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Reliable Sources"). There is a strong preference for secondary sources over tertiary and primary sources. Primary sources may be used sparingly, but all interpretive claims or analyses about primary sources must reference a secondary source. The reliability of the information on Wikipedia is high because these policies allow for quick deletion of false or unreliable information.

Taken together, Wikipedia's verifiability and reliability guidelines assume that institutional reputation and prestige enhance reliability. The consensus is that sources published by well-respected academic or journalistic institutions are more reliable than biographical information published by lesser-known publishing houses and local news outlets and certainly more reliable than unpublished, first-hand accounts. Editors often decide against contributing content about women covered by local journalistic sources, hard-to-access archival sources, and less common sources such as multimedia

or audio because the reliability of these unconventional sources may be called into question. There is also an assumption, at least in practice, that since text-based and published sources are easier to catalog and categorize, they are therefore easier to verify and, consequently, more reliable and higher quality. In "'Possible Enlightenments': Wikipedia's Encyclopedic Promise and Epistemological Failure," published in *Wikipedia@20*, Matthew Vetter (2020, 9) identifies that such policies promote a preference for print sources that are easy for both editors and readers to verify. However, he suggests that this print-centric bias ends up excluding editors who use "marginalized knowledge making practices" such as oral histories. Oral histories are treated as primary sources on Wikipedia. They are admissible as a reliable citation only if they are published in a fixed form such as print, video, or audio recording.

Hyperlinking style

Hyperlinks and live citations form the structural foundation of Wikipedia's technological platform, which allows for and promotes the linkage of pages within the Wikimedia system and across the World Wide Web (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Manual of Style/Linking"; "Wikipedia: Orphan"). The aim of linking is to quickly connect readers to relevant information that would help someone understand the topic of the entry. The guidelines for how to do hyperlinking are relatively straightforward. A click on the hyperlink tab allows any editor to easily drop a link into the text that will automatically take a reader to a related article internal to the Wikimedia platform or to an external link on the World Wide Web. Kirsten Menger-Anderson (2020, 2), in her article "The Sum of What? On Gender, Visibility, and Wikipedia," explains that "linked citations that appear at the bottom of Wikipedia pages provide both verifiability to the page content and visibility for the sources themselves—potentially a lot of visibility . . . After the University of Washington added links to its digital collections, Wikipedia directed more than 11,000 visitors to their collections over the course of one year."

However, hyperlinking policies assume that relevant information will be cited and linked regardless of gender. They do not take into account that studies show men cite men more often than they cite women, and men dominate the Wikipedia editing space where only 13% of editors identify as women. These gender gaps result in

a structural deficit where entries about women have fewer internal and external links. This structural inequity means that entries about women are less likely to be viewed via hyperlinks than entries about men. It also means that Wikipedia articles are less likely to link to external sources about women. This exclusion matters because visits to biographical entries on Wikipedia and to a subject's work on the World Wide Web result in more citations of their work. Visibility and citations matter for the advancement of careers, especially in academia (Wagner, Graells-Garrido, Garcia, and Menczer 2016, 20).

Taken together, these Wikipedia standards, meant to assure the reliability and accuracy of the information people access millions of times a day, also reproduce the exclusion that makes gender bias a norm in the institutions and systems that govern our society. If we want to address this systemic bias, we need to deal with the biased sourcing and writing conventions and the exclusionary practices that maintain them. Given this context, I present the biographies in this volume with an eye toward how the authors interrupt the biased sourcing habits and discourses that govern biographical submissions on digital, encyclopedic platforms like Wikipedia. How does their work challenge these assumptions and conventions and offer alternatives?

Writing Inclusive Biographies: Disrupting and Extending Sourcing and Writing Conventions

Traditional sourcing and writing practices deployed within the halls of academia and in writing generally create a self-perpetuating cycle that reinforces existing privilege. Success in academia and notability on Wikipedia is measured by how much an academic publishes and how often that work is cited. In this volume, the biographers recognize this self-perpetuating cycle of privilege and bias and the fallacy of the assumptions and practices that reproduce exclusion. They understand that it is not enough to create a secondary, biographical source about a noteworthy academic whose life and works have not received attention by secondary sources or tertiary knowledge platforms. They delve deeper, deploying writing practices that seek to interrupt bias, leaning into a disruptive and strategic use of their sources. They prioritize analyses of their subjects' cultural significance

over quantitative assessments that have the potential to overlook the impact of their subjects' work. They identify their points of view and celebrate their subjects' located, particular perspectives. They work to make their archival and qualitative sources identifiable and accessible to readers for fact-checking. They consider and describe their subjects' embodied experiences as an authentic, and therefore authoritative, verification of truth. Finally, these biographers document their subjects' networks of citational influence. Taken together, this collection of biographies challenges the traditional practices of exclusion in the academy and on tertiary knowledge platforms. These works help to reform and transform the larger historical narrative about women in the academy and the broader cultural context.

Highlighting Cultural Significance

Judgments about the noteworthy character of an academic's life and works, broadly and specifically on Wikipedia, are most often based on quantitative measures. How many awards has the person received? How many books have they published? How often do other authors cite their works? In Wikipedia's case, the definitive quantitative measure is the number of secondary sources covering their life and work (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability (Academics)"). Quantitative measures make judgments by tenure committees and Wikipedia gatekeepers alike less messy and more straightforward. However, while neat and clean, quantitative measures also make it easy to overlook the influence of academics like the women covered in this volume, who may not be publicly acclaimed for their work and its impact but should be. Quantitative metrics do not easily capture the cultural significance of an academic's work for the local, regional, and even global communities they interact with, serve, and vicariously influence.

Biographers in this volume take account of the cultural significance of their subject's life and work by considering and assessing its effect on the people they encounter, write about, and who read their work. They cite published scholarly and media analyses of their subject's past and ongoing influence. When available, they access archival data and local sources. They also extend these assessments with their own analysis informed by personal communications, interviews, and oral histories. Using these methods, they provide a qual-

itative sense of the impact these academics have on their fields and the broader culture.

Wikipedia's notability guidelines state that it is not the number of books, articles, or papers a scholar has written that indicate an academic's notability. Instead, it is the coverage of this work in the media (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability (Academics)"). Kimberly Carter provides this published analysis in her biography about Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes. However, even more appropriately, Carter's analysis focuses on the practical results of Walker-Barnes's work on racial reconciliation. Carter points us away from assessing notability based on a quantitative assessment of secondary sources and toward an assessment based on cultural significance. She does this by documenting the extension of the impact of Walker-Barnes's academic publications through mediums such as her social media presence and her career as a counselor.

The guiding thread in Sheryl Johnson's biography about Rev. Dr. Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng is Ng's philosophical focus on the impact of her teaching and writing on present and future generations. Johnson provides a routine examination of Ng's theological and pedagogical themes and ideas. However, she also highlights how these ideas and methodologies helped identify and challenge White privilege before it was a popular thing to do. Johnson presents a nuanced, cogent analysis of Ng's theoretical perspective while continually returning to the pragmatic impact of her work. Johnson does not use her sources to help readers count publications and awards to measure Ng's noteworthy character. Instead, she creates a counternarrative through analysis that offers a glimpse into the cultural significance of Ng's life and work as it changed attitudes about race and gender, from church basements and college classrooms in Canada to a broader reach of influence across North America.

Dr. Walker-Barnes and Dr. Ng focus their academic careers on righting the injustices inflicted against the communities they serve, study, and write about. The impact of their work reaches beyond the scope of quantitative measures, so their biographers lean into an assessment informed by qualitative interviews supported by reliable secondary sources. This orientation allows us to celebrate the less quantifiable aspects of their subjects' lives as their biographies map a way toward further recognition of cultural significance.

Exposing and Leveraging Point of View

In her article, "Wikipedia's Politics of Exclusion," Leigh Gruewell (2015, 121) identifies that Wikipedia's editing structure "allows many voices to speak at once," which means that all Wikipedia articles are written over time by multiple, diverse authors. She suggests that, in theory, this should create a platform that privileges multiplicity and resists "the notion of a single hegemonic truth." Nevertheless, Wikipedia guidelines enforce strict adherence to a neutral perspective and the avoidance of conflicts of interests. These policies ultimately minimize the cacophony and support increasingly untenable Enlightenment claims about universality and the possibility of a disinterested, neutral perspective. In this way, the idea of neutrality works as it has across the centuries to support the marginalization of non-dominant, conflicting points of view.

Wikipedia's policies encourage editors to describe rather than engage in debates on controversial topics such as feminism, racism, and colonialism with neutral language that expunges the language of critique (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Neutral Point of View"). Postmodern and feminist theory points out the located, partial, and embodied nature of all knowledge production. From this perspective, authority is not derived from claims about neutrality and the possibility of a universal perspective. Instead, it is derived from embodied experience. The biographers in this volume claim embodied experience as a reliable source that informs the production of knowledge. They identify and celebrate the located, perspectival character of their subjects' academic scholarship and their own biographical works.

Jonathon Eder, Programs Manager for the Mary Baker Eddy Library, writes the biography for Mary Burt Messer, a noteworthy Christian Scientist who worked as an academic in the emerging field of sociology. The Mary Baker Eddy Library is a rich repository of information about Christian Science and those associated with it. Eder's professional affiliation with the library gives him access to information that also leads him to other archival sources. He puts his access and experience to work in assembling the research documents necessary to give a full sense of the life and works of Mary Burt Messer and her importance to academia and Christian Science. Conflict of interest policies, taken strictly, might make his expertise suspect given his association with the Mary Baker Eddy Library and

its focus on promoting information about the history of Christian Science and its adherents. However, from a feminist and postmodern viewpoint that recognizes the value of embodied knowledge, it is Eder's expertise, life experience, and interested passion that make him particularly well-suited to elevate her life and works. Using knowledge gained from job-related experiences, professional connections, or even personal associations as a positive lens, a conflict of interest that is acknowledged and taken into account becomes valuable expertise.

Carolyn Bratnober organizes her biography around the disruptive character of Traci C. West's theology. West's scholarship critiques exclusionary narratives that marginalize the voices of womanist theologians and others. Born of her embodied experience of oppression, West's scholarship challenges the very possibility of a neutral, universal point of view. Far from neutral, West identifies her work as engaged activism. Bratnober structures this biography around the revelatory and prophetic character of West's work, which is informed by her personal experience as a woman of color. Bratnober allows us to see how West's located point of view enables her scholarly and liberative written testimony. By organizing her biography in this way, Bratnober's chapter functions as a kind of engaged activism itself that points out the damage done to women of color and others, perpetuated by universalizing claims about the possibility and necessity of a neutral point of view.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo's biography about Paula Robinson Kane Arai highlights the importance of claiming one's identity and cultural location, spiritually and academically, as a source of insight for theological reflection. Tsomo's biography enumerates the cost for women in general, and Dr. Aria in particular, when they challenge research norms that assume a universal perspective. Aria's choice of ethnographic methodologies that foregrounded the perspective of her subjects and highlighted her own located subjectivity almost derailed her career in her early years. However, Tsomo also identifies the benefits of this challenge in terms of insight. Arai's research approach, which she calls "affective empathy," created a window into the lives of women monastics and laywomen in Japan. Her groundbreaking methodology allowed her to expand the scope of Zen studies to include the lives of women, which, to that point, had been ignored.

Rosalind Hinton explicitly identifies her perspectives and motivations as a central part of her work. With her passion and biases exposed, her biography about Stephanie Y. Mitchem functions as a chal-

lenge to perspectives that insist a universal, neutral, disinterested point of view creates superior scholarship. Hinton's particularized engagement enriches her biographical writing. She uses the pronoun "I" freely instead of the more commonly used sentence constructions that make knowledge claims appear disembodied and universal. We understand by this that her writing is informed by personal experience. She claims her particular point of view and allows us to see how her embodied perspective serves as motivation and a resource. Through her writing, we experience the impact of Mitchem's work on her thoughts and actions. In this way, Hinton creates an engaging, informative, and perhaps even transformational portrayal of the extraordinary life and work of her subject.

The biographers in this volume celebrate the necessarily located, and therefore particular, nature of their subjects' contributions and of the sources they use as biographers to support their notability claims. They also expose and leverage their own located situations and motivations. In these ways, they do the vital work of complexifying our understanding of the located, perspectival contributions of women like the academics covered in this volume.

Detailed Documentation and Enhanced Accessibility

We live in a time when knowledge consumers routinely question the reliability and verifiability of sources. "Fake news" is a frequent refrain leveled at information outlets from *InfoWars* to the *New York Times*. Diligent vetting of dubious sources and fact-checking publications once above question are now routine. Amid this general distrust of knowledge sources, Wikipedia remains one of the most accessed digital knowledge platforms (Alexa 2021). This popularity is largely due to Wikipedia's reliability and verifiability guidelines, which emphasize the requirement for multiple written sources and frequent citations for all entries. This makes it easy for readers to fact-check and verify the information for themselves (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Verifiability"; "Wikipedia: Reliable Sources"). Wikipedia guidelines have a stated preference for sources backed by prestigious institutions known for their internal verification procedures. However, while institutional prestige and print-centric systems that enable fact-checking enhance our confidence in the veracity of the facts, there are unintended, negative consequences.

Matthew A. Vetter (2020), in his article "Possible Enlightenments: Wikipedia's Encyclopedic Promise and Epistemological Failure," shows us how print-centric, prestige-oriented bias also works to exclude the use of sources authored by those who do not speak, write, and document their knowledge in ways that conform with Wikipedia guidelines. Oral and indigenous histories, local knowledge published by small newspapers and publishers, audio interviews, graphic, photographic, and artistic representations, and more are marginalized because these sources lack prestige or are not easily categorized and cataloged within a print-centric system. The same set of standards apply within the world of academic publishing and career advancement. An academic's career depends on the production of written knowledge sources that conform to specific standards. For an academic, publication in prestigious print journals, books, and news media serves to verify significance and success.

However, it is also true that we live in a culture that increasingly values authenticity as an indicator of truthfulness. The concept of authenticity has its roots in Greek philosophy and the idea of being true to oneself (Bishop 2013). Information consumers often judge an author's authenticity, considering whether or not the author is transparent about the influence of their embodied experience. In such cases, their work is judged to be authentic and granted authority based on a consideration of the author's embodied representation of the knowledge they have gathered throughout their life.

Janice Poss tells us that the remarkable life and work of Sr. Mary Milligan is not well known outside her local cohort of friends, family, and colleagues. Lacking a large number of traditional secondary sources, Poss sources her biography using Milligan's memoir, religious archives, local news sources, and interviews. These sources are considered relatively unreliable in comparison to traditional secondary sources published by notable publishing outlets. However, Poss collects and carefully documents her sources in a way that makes them identifiable, accessible, and part of a coherent argument for the noteworthiness of her subject's character and work. In this way, the reliability of these sources is enhanced as Poss shifts Milligan's life and work out from the margins so we can recognize her significance. Traditional secondary sources are essential, and Poss's biography would be poorer without them. However, local, archival, and oral sources bolster her limited secondary sources and give Milligan's biography a sense of authenticity and truthfulness.

Deborah Fulthorp's biography about Dr. Carolyn Tennant also gives us an intimate, real-life glimpse into the noteworthy character of her subject. It provides a grounded, bodied sense of Tennant's importance to the revival of women's ministry in the Assemblies of God (AG) Church in the late 20th century and to the refocusing of AG higher education institutions toward a concern for local social justice issues. Fulthorp's use of interviews and archives is central to her biographical work. Her painstaking work of documentation shows us that oral and archival sources are high quality and can be made accessible. Fulthorp's research expands not only the number but the range of verifiable sources available to document the noteworthy work of women like Dr. Tennant.

The biographers in this volume identify and celebrate the multiple types of knowledge sources produced both by their subjects and about them. They work to meticulously document these varied sources and their locations in order to enhance accessibility and verifiability. In doing so, they stretch the boundaries and capacity of accepted knowledge categorization and retrieval systems. They also lean into the concept of authenticity as a characteristic of truth and reliability, providing access to a subject's personal life experience as a source for knowledge. They recognize that it is this attention to life experience that gives their work authority and enhanced reliability.

Citing Networks of Influence

Women academics know that biased citation practices have consequences. They affect tenure, promotion, salaries, awards, and the visibility of their work. This begs the question of why a person who identifies as a woman academic should care about her presence on Wikipedia where these citation practices are reproduced (Menger-Anderson 2020). A 2010 study conducted by Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg finds that 85% of college students use Wikipedia as a research tool. More than half of these students indicated their use of Wikipedia as a source for linked citations. Wikimedia statistics indicate that there are over 20 billion page views per month (Wikimedia Statistics, 2021). In her article, "The Sum of What? On Gender, Visibility, and Wikipedia," Kirsten Menger-Anderson (2020, 2-3) notes that "readers of the English Wikipedia click on an external link once for every 147 page views." Given 20 billion page views per month, that amounts to more than 136 million clicks on a Wikipedia

hyperlink per month. Menger-Anderson notes that clicks on hyperlink citations convert to additional independent citations for the cited author. Biased citation practices on Wikipedia matter for the same reasons they matter within academia generally. Reduced citational visibility for women in academia and on Wikipedia reinforces and extends the consequences for careers and understanding of women's contributions to knowledge about the world's religious and wisdom traditions.

In her biography about Isabel Apawo Phiri, Mary Hamlen notes that our understanding of Africa, including its peoples, cultures, and religions, is negatively affected by racist, colonial perspectives. This bias extends to the marginalization of African women's voices in academic discourses about religion, including feminist conversations. Hamlen uses her sources to situate and make a case for the importance of Phiri's work in developing feminist discourse on the continent of Africa. She locates Phiri's beginnings as an African theologian in a patriarchal, colonial context by citing her early association with male mentors. However, she goes on to identify her influential association with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a feminist African theologian known and respected in Western theological circles. Hamlen provides sources that document Phiri's role, along with Oduyoye, as a founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Hamlen creates a citational record of Phiri's significant published work, including her collaborative work on several edited volumes. In this citational record, Hamlen includes the work of other women in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. This detailed citational record gives us a clear sense of the ongoing, noteworthy influence of Phiri's life as an academic activist. Hamlen also importantly takes the time and space to bring other women of influence in Phiri's circle into the citational record.

Agustina Luvis Núñez's biographer, Juliany González Nieves, details the theoretical location of Luvis Núñez's work at the intersection of mujerista, feminist, Latin American, and womanist theologies. Through her biography, she creates a citational record of the influences that lead to Luvis Núñez's distinctive, Caribbean, theological contribution. The importance of documenting these sources and the impact of Luvis Núñez's work cannot be overstated. It substantiates the case for her notability as the inaugural figure for a fresh and essential theological perspective. Like Hamlen, Nieves cites sources that record the activist organizations influenced by Luvis Núñez's

work, providing another vital record of her noteworthy character and work.

The authors in this volume deploy citation practices that work to amend the biased citational record. They conduct and cite research that situates their subjects' work within a citational context that claims space for their subjects in the historical development of knowledge. These biographers first cite sources that indicate how their subjects extend their precursors' work and influence the work of those who follow them. Second, they make a practice of using and naming the sources of women in their works, creating independent citations that enhance the citational records of other women. In this volume, the biographers do the extra work needed to break conventional habits to reach for easily accessible sources—most often authored by men—that characterize the research of both men and women. In this way, they create a richer, less biased record that lifts up women's accomplishments in academia.

Conclusion

The biographers in this volume raise up the voices of women who have been marginalized in academia and discounted on digital platforms like Wikipedia because they do not meet traditional publication and sourcing standards. They write their subjects into the historical record by gathering extensive and varied source material for the correction and extension of narratives that have, to this point, excluded a host of noteworthy women. They disrupt quantitative approaches that count the number of published sources about a subject as a measure of significance by producing biographies that expound and celebrate their subjects' cultural significance. They expose the located perspectival nature of all knowledge production by identifying the way their subjects, their sources, and their own life experiences authorize and authenticate the knowledge they produce. An institution does not grant veracity. Instead, truth is grounded in an honest portrayal of a scholar's limited, located point of view.

These biographers lean into detailed documentation of their varied sources. They work to catalog and find or create accessible storage for their qualitative interviews, personal communications, and oral histories. This allows readers to fact-check the narratives they produce and, importantly, use their sources for further research. Fi-

nally, the biographers in this volume attend to their task as documentarians who meticulously cite the sources that give their subjects traditional credibility. They also graciously extend this credibility through their documented use of sources authored by other women.

In sum, the biographers in this volume understand the importance of reliable, verifiable sources for creating historical narratives generally, but specifically for narratives about marginalized women who have been excluded from histories about the production of knowledge in the academy. They also understand that standards and guidelines, as they are typically designed and deployed in academic settings and digital knowledge platforms like Wikipedia, are biased. Each of these biographers carefully attends to requirements for reliable, verifiable sources and the importance of veracity and reader fact-checking in ways that also interrupt exclusionary practices and narratives that have done so much harm.

These biographies about women in religion will not be enough to address gender bias in academia, on Wikipedia, or on any other digital knowledge platform. However, biographies like the ones in this volume, which model disruptive practices concerning the use of sources and the inclusion of marginalized women's voices, do map a way forward.

I want to end by saying something about my appreciation for Atla Open Press's choice of the *Chicago Manual of Style* author-date system for citations. Working with these papers as an editor has helped me see how this citation method actually lifts the names of women cited in these pages from the footnotes into the actual body of the work. It facilitates a genuine shift in the written narrative and historical record for which I am profoundly grateful. Thank you to the librarians who offered suggestions and helped to create verifiable ways of storing qualitative research, giving readers a chance to read and verify for themselves. Thank you to the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Women's Caucus for creating an accessible, archival space to store biographers' research as a way of increasing accessibility to these sources. And a profound thank you to the subjects of these biographies who made themselves available for interviews, personal communications, and oral histories. Your lives are a testament to the disruptive character of a life and career well lived.

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CHAPTER 1

Carolyn Tennant

Prophet and Mystic at the Helm of Pentecostal Education: A Ballast in the Current of Change

DEBORAH FULTHORP

Within the history of Pentecostal education, a handful of under-recognized women spoke and acted prophetically in ways that significantly informed the trajectory of academics in religious institutions. These women's prophetic words and actions retain their transformational power even today and continue to steer Pentecostal religious movements with distinctive theologies that support equal opportunities for leadership among men and women. One such woman, Dr. Carolyn Tennant, navigated the tides of academic leadership at a time when women's voices were under-represented. She worked at North Central University (NCU) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, from 1983 until 2013, as an administrator, professor, and noted leader, culminating in her role as Vice President for Academic Affairs (North Central University n.d.).

Paving the way for female leadership within the Assemblies of God (AG), Tennant was one of the founding ministers of the Network for Women Ministers in the Assemblies of God, serving on its National Task Force from 1998–2011. She continues at NCU as professor emerita and functions in crucial positions across Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God, ministering both stateside and internationally. Tennant is known as a scholar of Celtic Christianity. She integrates much of her research on its language, stories, and symbolism into her work. Her writings and publications span various fields of study but focus on the Holy Spirit's work in the Church at large. Her recent publication, co-authored with Joseph S. Girdler, *Keys to the Apostolic and Prophetic: Embracing the Authentic—Avoiding the Bizarre* (2019), answers key theological problems Pentecostals and Charismatics face within the milieu of these Christian movements. Together, the authors define the biblical role of apostles and prophets. Their inclusive definitions promote more egalitarian ministry roles that are often neglected, misunderstood, or even abused within Pentecostal institutions both academically and congregationally.

Daniel Castelo (2017, 37) defines Pentecostals as modern-day mystics who engage a praxis of the Spirit that mysteriously renews the mind and heart to move beyond intellect toward action. Tennant, as such, is a modern-day Pentecostal "mystic." In her work as an academic and more, she embraces the Holy Spirit's movement toward holistic transformation as the fruit of ongoing communion with God. Through her prophetic voice, she releases others to do the same.

An Anchor of Faith

Carolyn Tennant was born on June 19, 1947, in Janesville, Wisconsin, to a strict home where her father of Swiss descent, Ralph Jenny, thrived as a successful businessman. Her mother, Beverly, who had German roots, served as a schoolteacher. Though her birth and upbringing seemed commonplace, Carolyn grew up with a strong work ethic passed along from her hardworking parents. The early influence of her parents, coupled with her own deep hunger for God, enabled her to rise above the barriers of gender stereotypes that were a challenge for women in the 1950s and 60s (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020).

Although Carolyn's family attended a mainline Methodist church, this did little to satiate her hunger for spiritual things. However, a trip to the Billy Graham Crusade in Chicago hosted by the church youth group drew her attention to the Christian faith in a way her local church did not. In particular, she was moved by the confessional call at the end of the program. Instead of allowing the youth to engage in the call to go up front and make a firm decision to follow Christ, the chaperones quickly "hustled [the youth] back on to the bus at the end of the service." Even so, this event, with its question of making a decision for Christ, had a long-term impact on Tennant. The call stayed with her through her teenage years, and she continually "harbor[ed] the thought of God."

It was her love for writing and bent toward the field of journalism that finally provided the chance for young Carolyn's faith to take root on its own in an unlikely time and place. Handpicked as one of two exceptional high school students in her state for a five-week summer camp on the campus of Northwestern University hosted by the Medill School of Journalism in Chicago, she found a solitary place at a small chapel and committed her life to God. While other student campers gathered elsewhere for a dance, she resolutely chose to pursue her hunger for spiritual things instead of typical teenage interests. This experience signaled a shift and became a focal point that guided her on her educational path.

Education

Tennant completed a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Colorado in Boulder in 1969 (North Central University n.d.). She notes that, after that, higher educational pursuits just seemed to drop in her lap.

> After I received my BA in English Education (with a minor in Latin—after 4 years of high school Latin), I started working as an English teacher in a middle school and opportunities came for me to go on for a master's degree. I started just taking a couple of graduate-level classes that were paid for by the school district, and after I took the limit (when no more would be transferred in toward a degree), I thought, "Well, I might as well apply for the master's and have these classes count toward something." I then received a Colorado teachers' schol-

> arship for a full ride to finish that degree. Honestly, my master's degree was almost accidental. (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020)

By the time Tennant received a master's degree, her work with Adams County School District No. 12 in Northglenn, Colorado, moved her into administration in their district offices. She oversaw state- and nationally funded programs for the district and designed and implemented teacher training. She received honors for running one of the top ten nationally validated Title I programs in the United States. Her expertise was valued, and she was called upon by multiple school districts and other institutions for her expertise. At the time, she had no intention of pursuing a doctorate, but one of her professors from Colorado University repeatedly suggested she apply. She finally prayed about it, put out a "farfetched fleece" asking God to "make it so I don't have to turn in any money to apply." Unbeknownst to her, her professor worked out the application fee. When she asked him, "What? No application fee? Why not?" He replied, "None of your business!"

Tennant's doctoral work was in educational administration, and her research focused on the utilization of proper classroom pedagogy with gifted children. She developed an original model which incorporated and expanded the "Guilford Structure of the Intellect Model" developed in 1961, as well as Bloom's "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Cognitive Domain" (Reichart 1980). Further, her dissertation on "Thinking Skills and Gifted and Talented Children" refines a methodological approach to cognitive development that she uses constantly to this day in her counseling, mentoring, preaching, and teaching. Using the approach, she developed her ability to ask questions that led students and others into higher levels of thinking. Tennant focused on guiding students "how to think, instead of what to think" (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020). She attributes her doctorate to God's direction and foreknowledge. After receiving a PhD in education administration and supervision at the University of Colorado Boulder, outside school districts continued to pursue her expertise in education and cognitive learning. As a result, she resigned from her position with Adams County School District and opened her own business called the Institute for Cognitive Development.

Pioneering the Paths

Tennant is considered by many to be a pioneer for women within the Assemblies of God. She worked in positions of leadership at a time when women were rarely granted the opportunity to lead. As a single young person, she was discouraged when she asked her youth pastor about what women could do to serve in the church. He advised her that women mainly serve in volunteer capacities. She knew she was a leader, so this response influenced her to see herself serving in a "secular role" instead of leading in church ministries. Nevertheless, life experiences and other supportive people in her life would lead her back to service as a leader in the church.

Tennant's husband, Ray, encouraged her to "become everything God intended" her to be (Tennant, LaHaye, and Benvenuti 2002, 19). After Ray was healed of a brain tumor—an extraordinary experience they both defined as a miraculous, supernatural healing—they began attending an Assemblies of God church. In her new church, led by the Spirit, she experienced the hand of God calling her to delve into scriptures about women in ministry. Through these woman-centered scriptures, Tennant felt that God sealed into her heart a call into Christian ministry as a woman. She left her active consulting business in education to accept a ministry position with the Assemblies of God church along with her husband. Tennant and her husband were called early on in their ministry to pour their lives into young people. They made a decision to forgo having biological children but instead mentored countless spiritual children around the globe, who call them mom and dad. Their active leadership in church ministry opened a door for NCU to call her regarding a vacant position as dean of student life. In 1998, she became the first female vice president to serve in an Assemblies of God institution of higher education (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020).

Turning the Ship Around

In three different vice president positions at North Central University, located in the heart of urban Minneapolis, Tennant took the helm and brought much-needed change to an institution challenged by the forces of urbanization and globalization. The rapid shift in

demographics within cities, including Minneapolis, forced private academic institutions to build walls or construct bridges into their communities. As to the state of academic institutions at that time, she wrote,

> Even though schools may be in the heart of an urban context, they can be largely unaware of and remain blissfully untouched by the world around them. The glass bubble can provide an effective shelter. Students can trip over drunks on their way to class and only be irritated or full of pity. Either way, the end result can be the same. No action. What we all have to do is wake up to the real world around us NOW and decide what that means to our own comfortable world. It takes a stretch, a change, both personally and corporately. (Quoted in Villafañe et al. 2002, 76–7)

Many educational institutions were forced to decide whether or not to continue to cater to the privileged, suburban demographic represented by White middle-class America. The alternative was to contextualize their programs and reach out in service to the diverse communities that made up their local neighborhood. Tennant knew early on the importance of their institution's location in the city center of Minneapolis. According to Tennant, this allowed them "to shift into a more urban focus, provide training for various urban leaders and other Christian schools, and develop our own urban ministries major" (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020). Her leadership encouraged institutional transformation and pushed the university toward a contextualized curriculum. In her position as vice president of academic affairs, she led a team of department leaders that forged out a year-long overhaul of the academic majors offered to students, reflecting this emphasis on urban ministries (Villafañe et al. 2002, 74). This also provided a more focused opportunity for women and people from minoritized communities to take majors that reflected their own backgrounds and life experiences.

Tennant also oversaw the transformational process required to reorient the university's suburban faculty. She developed training programs to draw them out of their comfort zones and bring them face to face with their urban location. She describes one in-service day when she loaded up the bus with faculty and "drove around the neighborhood for an hour observing the changing people, shops, housing, and religious services." Many faculty held back tears, and others let go as they were forced to grapple with the changes and re-

alities of their neighborhood. Soon after this tour, the faculty quickly set to work instituting curriculum changes (Villafañe et al. 2002, 74). A former NCU colleague, Dr. Amy Anderson (pers. comm., May 10, 2020), attributed the development of a shared vision and unity of purpose to their time at faculty retreats which Tennant planned and led.

NCU's current dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Desireé Libengood, believes Tennant laid the institution's foundation for its current focus on diversity and equity. Tennant's programming and passion engaged faculty and staff with the reality of their urban context. She developed an urban curriculum through a half-million-dollar grant she obtained from Pew Charitable Trust. Entitled "City Gate," this program provided classes that taught students how to become active for good in the Twin Cities and other large US cities. With the grant, Tennant also conducted training for numerous urban workers and for other educational institutions across the country who wanted to develop their own urban curriculum. According to Libengood's research among institutions in the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, diversity and equity are hallmarks of award-winning institutions (Libengood, pers. comm., January 16, 2021). Engagement with their urban surroundings provides mission, vision, and purpose to students, staff, faculty, and administration in the institution. "The ethos of being an urban institution is why, quite frankly, a lot of us are there—because we are an urban-serving Christian organization. It matters to us—being in the city and part of the city. And that is her influence: to say we are going to stay here" (Libengood, pers. comm.).

Tennant's work challenged old methodologies within education and paved the way for new growth. She believed, "As we listen to our constituency groups tell us what their true needs are, it can change our learning sets. We have to find out what people want to know. We must then do the hard work of finding ways to empower them to handle the nitty-gritty problems of their world such as economic disparity, social injustice, and the political system" (Villafañe et al. 2002, 74). Though penned by Tennant in 2002, these words still inform the work and focus of NCU in the contemporary milieu of 2020. Tennant's influence remains a potent force at the institutional level (Braithwaite, pers. comm., December 19, 2020). For example, in the summer of 2020, following through on Tennant's call to contextual education and service, NCU stood poised and ready to meet the challenges of the Minneapolis riots following the brutal killing of George Floyd by police. NCU not only offered their chapel as a place to host

a memorial and the funeral services for George Floyd but created a scholarship for racial minorities under George Floyd's name. In fact, current President Scott Hagan challenged every university president within the United States to "establish their own George Floyd Memorial Scholarship Fund" (Nietzel 2020).

Prophetic Moorings

In 2019, Carolyn Tennant partnered with one of her doctoral students—Kenneth Girdler—to publish a book entitled *Keys to the Apostolic and Prophetic: Embracing the Authentic—Avoiding the Bizarre*. Within Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, the terms "prophetic" and "apostolic" are used and abused abundantly. Movements such as the New Apostolic Reformation movement appropriate and misrepresent traditional-biblical views of these terms in order to create hierarchical structures with borderline cult-like followings and authoritarian figureheads. As this teaching and other off-shoots of "prophetic movements" cropped up, it became clear that academic attention to this proverbial elephant in the room was lacking. Tennant once again broke new ground. With Girdler, she conducted research that provided an anchor for Pentecostal movements in their stand against various dangerous and detrimental "prophetic" trends. These falsely aligned prophetic trends lead to issues ranging from church leadership abuses to failed presidential predictions and conspiracy theories. True to form, she boldly engaged the subject with careful research. The book opens with a clarion call for readers to reframe the terms apostolic and prophetic in a way that combines both Christian voice and action.

> Now is the time to refresh and actuate both the apostolic and prophetic. So much calls for Christian voice and action: increased population with millions who do not know Christ; escalating crime, strife, immorality, and injustice; unbridled egotism, spiteful opinionation, and lack of love; growing fear and godlessness; shrinking church attendance and flagging commitment to spiritual things. Such are our challenges. (Girdler and Tennant 2019)

Overall, the book is a call for others to return to the biblical principles of the prophetic calling grounded in a person's integrity or

"fruit." Humility and service flow out of the life of a person following a prophetic calling. A person's character, life, and rhetoric in private and public spaces matter. Prophetic calling and apostolicity, voice and action, are needed to address injustices within and outside the church. "Indeed, anointed apostles will not be sexist, play favoritism, cater to the rich or neglect the poor, be racist or intolerant, show cultural disdain, or participate in any factors that create unfairness or injustice" (Girdler and Tennant 2019).

Key characteristics outlined in the book speak to the function of these two biblical but often misunderstood leadership roles in the Church, especially those in Pentecostal circles. Those in apostolic roles are considered innovators, "finding new ways to forge hard ground" (Girdler and Tennant 2019). People leading apostolic initiatives actively pioneer the hard places with boldness, tenacity, vision, and much sacrifice. Some of the prophetic traits overlap for leaders, like boldness, tenacity, and sacrifice. The main attributions that distinguish leadership of a prophetic nature come with lucid, forthright, and truth-telling communication. This type of communication can take on multiple forms, such as storytelling, preaching, writing, publishing, or any creative way of communicating transformational truths from the heart of God. Ultimately, the mark of a true apostolic and prophetic leader in the Church results in a transformation of others instead of narcissistic aggrandizement of self (Girdler and Tennant 2019).

Tennant's prophetic call and gifted actions happened early on in her faith walk. She uncovered her calling into ministry as a woman by allowing scripture to "read her'' as she read through it. After she pored over the passage of 1 Corinthians 14, where Paul writes about the gift of prophecy and speaking in tongues, she heard God asking her if she desired the spiritual gifts. She was challenged toward a desire "that she might prophesy." Although she affirmed a desire for spiritual gifts, she lacked knowledge about prophecy or what it meant. At the time, sound teachings about prophecy and people functioning with prophetic giftings rarely occurred in her Pentecostal circles. Again she sensed God leading her to read through the Bible and research all the places where the terminology concerning "prophets'' or "prophecy" occurred. Secondly, she felt the same calling to study more in depth about all the prophets mentioned in the Bible. This experience marked her life and ministry and enabled her to use biblically-based, Spirit-led prophetic insight into situations to affect change. Over thirty years later, she intuitively speaks prophet-

ically and leads apostolically, as defined in her writings. She possesses many characteristics that define a prophet in her book: tenacity, boldness, sacrifice, discernment, and humility. She clearly calls others to a transformed life (Tennant 2020).

A Coracle with No Oars

With an "unparalleled" ability to mentor and guide students, her "Socratic" method of engaging learners also incorporates unforgettable examples of Celtic spirituality mixed with Pentecostal revivalism (Libengood, pers. comm., January 19, 2021). A Celtic and Revivalist scholar, Tennant created a spiritual development tool for students through the Celi Dé Seminar. This Celtic Honors seminar, equal to a graduate-level course, combined Celtic studies with Celtic Christian spirituality. Within the course description, author Stephen Lawhead's historical fiction work is used for literary analysis, historical review, critical thinking, and theological application (Tennant 2011, 1). "In the Celi Dé Seminar, students study works of Celtic fantasy while also exploring Celtic faith, which inevitably fosters their spiritual development" (Libengood 2011). Tennant uses imagery from her knowledge of the ancient Celtic Church. In her work, the narrative of the coracle with no oars speaks for itself.

The Celtic monks were by no means opposed to adventure, and they liked to build larger coracles that would hold more people and set out into the ocean. This would be adventurous by itself, but additionally the coracles were rudderless and often the monks would take no oars or paddles. They hoisted their sails and caught the winds and the currents, believing that God would take them where they were supposed to go to share the gospel (Tennant 2016).

These and other ancient Celtic analogies, coupled with biblical texts, resonate within the hearts of Pentecostal and Charismatic students who embrace the idea of living a life guided by the wind of the Holy Spirit. Within her studies and lectures, she further integrates Celtic art, music, and history, their philosophical view of a holistic world, and combines Celtic monasticism with Pentecostal experience (Tennant 2011).

Christopher Fletcher, a former student at NCU, a filmmaker, and an associate professor at State College of Florida, recounted that Tennant's Celi Dé Seminar was the single biggest influence on his own

spiritual life. His life was indelibly influenced by Tennant's classes and the integration of Celtic spirituality in her English courses. "By listening to the Holy Spirit, there is the ability to either learn more about what is true from other Christian traditions or even maybe pre-Christian contact [people. These people also] had a connection to God that Christians could learn from and that God was active and working in the world outside of the things that we're [Christians] normally aware of" (Fletcher, pers. comm., April 9, 2021). Tennant's influence and the correlations between Celtic spirituality and students' Pentecostal experiences also helped her to forge deep interpersonal connections with and among her students. She formed strong bonds with her students, such as Fletcher, who asked Tennant to officiate his wedding ceremony in 2010.

Ceremonial Honors and Launching Lasting Legacies

In 2007, in the silver anniversary year of her tenure at NCU, Tennant was awarded the Distinguished Educator Award from the Alliance for Assemblies of God Higher Education (Fletcher 2007). The Alliance honored her for her innovative integration of English literature, ancient Celtic Church history, a cognitive style of teaching, and emphasis on spiritual growth that unequivocally engaged her students.

Although the work she did for the institution was recognized with several honors and distinctions, the indelible work she did among her students left a lasting legacy. Affectionately known as "Dr. T" among students, she intentionally took students through a process of guided questions to aid in discovering their God-given talents and abilities (Libengood 2011, 22–3). She maintains a remarkable ability to connect with students. "A brief survey of Dr. Tennant's career with North Central shows her to be most definitely a teacher of excellence in every sense of the word. She can get students to think before they know what hit them. She is a teacher's teacher" (Fletcher 2007). The courses Fletcher took from Tennant broadened his critical thinking skills, influenced his spirituality, and placed him on a trajectory toward teaching as well.

According to former student and protégé Dr. Desirée Libengood, her first class with Dr. Tennant changed the trajectory of her life. With her skillful and uncanny ability to ask students questions, Tennant wrote, "Why aren't you an English major?" on the bottom of the

first paper Libengood completed for the class. Tennant called out an ability to write, which Libengood failed to see within herself. Libengood sensed the spirit in Tennant's prophetic voice pushing her to pursue writing. She changed from a major in nursing to an English major. In 2011, only ten years later, Libengood took over Tennant's position as a full-time English faculty member after Tennant's retirment. Currently, Libengood serves as associate vice president of academic affairs (Libengood, pers. comm., January 16, 2021).

The Winds of Revival

Considering herself a student of "Revival," Tennant strongly believes a genuine Church revival produces lasting change. Within the Pentecostal movement, revivals inspire experiential spiritual renewal. For Pentecostals, the spiritual experiences tend to be speaking in foreign tongues as occurred in the biblical account of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and exuberance in worship, among other things. Much of the contemporary Pentecostal-like revivals do very little to affect any transformation or activity outside of the four walls of a church building. Tennant addresses the problem in her doctoral class entitled "The Role of Church Revivals in Individual Transformation and Societal Change" (Tennant 2021, 1). This class and others taught at AG institutions such as Assemblies of God Theological Seminary look at historical revivals that brought cultural, gender, and societal change and then seek to learn from them. In turn, participants should be able to lead revivals to effect change in their own contexts.

A former doctoral student, Kristi Lemley (2020), attributes Carolyn Tennant with being one of the key people who helped her foster a love for revivals and a stronger love for God. Lemley felt the Lord directing her to ask Tennant if she could assist her in her ministry travels. Offering to assist Carolyn Tennant, Lemley learned much about herself and others. Lemley stated, "I will never forget the comment she made to me on our first trip, which was to Virginia. She said, 'Kristi, you need to step up into the mantle on your life. I can see it just over your shoulders. Step up'" (Lemley, pers. comm., January 24, 2021). By using the term "mantle," Lemley knew she spoke of the prophetic call on her life. Lemley, an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God, completed her doctoral project, which she recently published, and stepped into the role as the first non-pastor and female

sectional presbyter of the Illinois Network South Region Metro North section of the Assemblies of God.

Pentecostals aspire to experience personal spiritual renewal but many times neglect to understand Church history. On a podcast Lemley hosts called "Living in the Light with Dr. Kristi Lemley," she asked Tennant to share what the Holy Spirit might be speaking to those in the church. Tennant imparted a powerful and poignant message. "I think that we are at a moment in history that is absolutely critical and that God is going to do some new and fresh things. If we want to be a part of that . . . we have to prepare ourselves to be open to new things—to do things that maybe we aren't comfortable with right now. . . . Whatever God is saying, just do it!" (Lemley 2020).

Counterbalancing Structures for Women in Ministry

Within the early formation of the Assemblies of God, women held a pivotal role in church ministry. In 1935, women received ordination rites, but, by the 1980s, the number of women in church leadership roles waned and dropped from 15% in 1977 to 13.8% in 1987 (Assemblies of God 2020). The numbers of credentialed ministers continued growing, but the percentages of women dropped significantly and without fanfare.

Tennant moved forward with ordination when women's influence was at an all-time low. She, however, attributes her licensing in 1982 and ordination in 1985 with opening the door for her opportunities at NCU. When he hired her, the president of NCU, Dr. Don Argue, told her, "You were the most qualified person for this job, and that is why we hired you. But I want you to know that I am very happy that you happen to be a woman because I was hoping to have a woman on my team" (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020). God used her to begin a counterbalancing process for more women to receive ministry credentials.

Her work at NCU, bolstered by her high qualifications, credentialing, and sense of calling, opened doors and forged the way for other Assemblies of God women. She pioneered multiple "firsts" for gender equity within the AG. She was the first woman to preach at a district council, the first woman in a vice presidential role within Assemblies of God institutions for higher education, the first woman on the national task force committee working toward a contextualized cur-

riculum within Assemblies of God institutions for higher education, and she was on the first national task force for credentialed women in ministry (*Report to the Executive Presbytery*, 2005, Executive Files Collection).

Tennant began her intentional work to support women with a calling to ministry as pastors and educators by partnering with her colleague, Dr. Deborah Gill, a Greek professor, to start a "Woman of the Cloth" fellowship group among credentialed women at NCU. Gill then suggested it move out to their ministry network in Minnesota because it supported a higher number of credentialed women. The response was overwhelming and supportive. This initiative took root at the same time AG Superintendent Thomas Trask commissioned Tennant for a task force to change the decreasing percentages of women in ministry. This task force, which initiated the start of the credentialed women's network under the leadership of Dr. Beth Grant, changed the downward trajectory and increased the number of credentialed women within the Assemblies of God (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020).

In 1978, only 15% of ordained pastors serving in AG churches and institutions were women. In 1998, the percentage rose to 15.8%. For twenty years, percentages went up and down, incrementally, in small numbers. From the start of 1999 to 2019, the number of credentialed women increased by 10.6%. Currently, 26.4% of credentialed ministers in the Assemblies of God are women (Assemblies of God 2020). Tennant expressed, "The number of credentialed women was going down, and he [Superintendent Thomas Trask] did not want this to happen, so he commissioned the task force (led by Dr. Beth Grant) to try to change this. It was fun to be on that task force and work and dream and watch the numbers go back up" (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020).

Often, Tennant was the only woman in a room in her capacity as a leader within the Assemblies of God. Nevertheless, she remained "determined to live a robust life in the Spirit no matter what [was] happening around [her]." After being made to feel "invisible" in a preaching event where the pastor conducting the service failed to incorporate her properly even though she was the main speaker, she felt hurt. Experiencing the disparity between how men and women were treated first-hand within a denomination that claimed credentialed women were equally qualified and competent temporarily shocked her. Angry and hurt, she took her pain to God in prayer and received a valuable lesson.

> When I had it all out, I felt like the Lord asked me a definite question: Are you called? I remember saying that it was sort of an unfair question. Yes, of course, He and I had just worked that all out, and my application for ministerial credentialing was in. Then I felt like He said, "Well, this will happen again, but you never have to be hurt by it again." I realized that I could spend a lot of hours every time I was slighted or offended working through all the feelings, but, eventually, I would need to get to the place where I forgave and forgot it and moved on. I would just waste a lot of time stewing over things when I could be using that time productively to advance the Kingdom of God. I didn't have control over how people treated me, but I did have control over how I handled it. So, I decided that no matter what happened in the future, I would not ever take offense and let it wound me. I was sure in my call from God and His acceptance of me, and that was all that really mattered. (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020)

She learned early in her ministry not to let how others treated her stop the calling on her life and even found advocates among the men and women she worked with closely. As time continued, her biggest advocates came from district and national leadership among the Assemblies of God. Still today, after preaching at various events, such as ministry conferences, retreats, or seminars, she receives overwhelming support through e-mails and various forms of communication from men and women seeking her counsel and advice. This support gives her considerable hope for the future of the Assemblies of God in matters of women serving in all areas of leadership (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020).

Though she shies away from using labels such as prophet or mystic to keep away misunderstandings, with a clear calling from God, a lifestyle of constant communion, and prayer, she moves with a prophetic voice.

> I also believe that I can have ongoing communication and communion with God, and so I think of myself as being open to praying without ceasing. I feel that generally, when God speaks to me, I know His voice, and I desire to be obedient to Him and His Word. This grounding, therefore, leads to my saying and doing things, which I sense are within God's plan and are used by His grace and love to minister to others, bringing healing and help, guidance, and support. I think if I were to label myself as a mystic, I would always preface it with "Pente-

> costal." I am a "Pentecostal mystic" who is very open to moving in the Spirit. (Tennant, pers. comm., August 28, 2020)

This clarity, intellect, and lifestyle make her iconic among Pentecostals in academia and for those she mentors. Former student Libengood believes, "There's a little piece of Carolyn in so many women leaders in the AG today. Because she just has spent her time pouring into so many people who now reach across the nation and the globe and women who maybe would have stepped away or would have given up. . . . She writes and speaks into issues, and I think that helps as well" (pers. comm., January 26, 2021).

In a chapter she wrote about St. Patrick the missionary, she concludes, "the face of Christian history would have been different if it were not for the impact of Celtic missions work" (Tennant 2006, 88). This is very true of Carolyn Tennant's impact on credentialed women's place within the Pentecostal movement, particularly the Assemblies of God. This is also true for her impact on the framework for how Pentecostal institutions within higher education operate today. Her work and ministry transformed and impacted these institutions and those in the ranks of credentialed women. Because she navigated the tides of academic leadership when women were vastly underrepresented in the Assemblies of God, her work and prophetic voice were and continue to be a ballast needed in the currents of change.

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CHAPTER 2

Mary Burt Messer

Christian Science Healer as Sociologist and Scholar

JONATHON EDER

Mary Burt Messer (1881–1960) was a social worker; activist for women's suffrage and women's rights; professor of sociology; writer of books on sociology, politics, and religion; Christian Science healer; and poet. While her vocational breadth suggests viewing Messer as a renaissance woman, the driving force for Messer's life was reform on a deeper spiritual level. Messer argued for a unifying vision between her spiritual convictions and her political and social outlooks, but their integration did not come about easily in her professional endeavors. Instead, they often existed in tension. Her story invites us to ask how the evolution of religious consciousness combines with academic and political pursuits. In the context of Messer's accomplished life and works, we can consider what place the voice of the spiritual healer has in academia and the broader milieu of sociological and political commentary in the press.

As a woman who came of age at the beginning of the twentieth century, her involvement with feminist causes and the advancement of feminist thought reflects and forecasts the call for women to achieve not only equal rights with men in a man's world but, as well, a reformation of the world according to women's values and understanding.

The Advance of Woman

> The most transcendent values are inevitably linked with the social aspects of the age in which they appear, as for example when vestiges of woman's social eminence are correlated with hints as to the spiritual importance and priority of the feminine idea. (Messer 1928, 348–9)

In her most critically acclaimed work, *The Family in the Making: A Historical Sketch*, published in 1928, Messer narrated a wide sweep of history through a comprehensive study of the family from the time of primitive societies and early civilizations to the current day. Her analysis probed studies and writings on the earliest-known human communities, which pointed to women exercising governance in mother-centered societies. She also considered evidence from the ancient civilizations of Babylon and Egypt, where "we find a body of laws, customs and attitudes which exalt the status of women" (Messer 1928, 47). Based on this groundwork, Messer applied a feminist lens to explore how male domination or patriarchy ascended to displace matriarchial influence. She claimed that the rise of patriarchy compromised the place of women and diminished a woman's capacity to ensure her personal well-being and to contribute to the larger society's overall well-being. For Messer, the anthropological message was clear. Women had served as leaders in societies in the past. There was nothing inherent to womanhood to indicate any natural or necessary inheritance of subservience or marginalized status in relation to men. To the contrary, notwithstanding centuries of suppression and adaptation to male codes and authority, Messer identified within women the inherent qualities, intuition, and insight needed to rescue humanity from the pressures of familial, community, social, and political breakdown in modernity. In particular, her investigations examined the rise of divorce in the United States. In Messer's view, the conditions of marriage all too often reflected

those of a "feudal institution" (*New York Times* 1924). Thus divorce presented a rational option for liberation from this type of social oppression. She also observed other indicators pointing to the potential emergence of a regenerated spiritual vision for modern society. For Messer, this transformative spirituality challenged existing norms, bringing about a more valid and salutary social contract between the sexes, individuals, and cultures.

For Messer, the writings and teachings of Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Christian Science religion, promised the advanced spirituality she described in her book. Messer's adoption of Christian Science came out of her background in social work, as a campaigner for suffrage and women's rights, and as a sociologist focusing on questions of the modern family. Her decision to become a Christian Science practitioner placed healing as the central proposition for addressing individual ills and those of the body politic. For Messer, combining the consciousness of the spiritual healer with that of the sociological and political thinker did not prove to be easy or comfortable, especially in her professional life.

Life Purpose: Born in an Accomplished and Trailblazing Family

In examining the trajectory of Mary Burt Messer's life and career, the influence of her family background bears consideration. Messer remained close with relatives throughout her life and placed great value on her heritage. Although Messer never married and experienced motherhood, the subject of the family played a central role in her life and scholarship. Her teaching in the arena of sociology focused on issues pertaining to the family. Her most influential work in this field was titled *The Family in the Making: An Historic Sketch*, which served as a reflection on women's history and the predicate for a feminist call to action for societal advancement. Messer's undertakings in feminist activism, academia, scholarly writing, and in her spiritual practice were inclined towards pathbreaking. As a contributor to the world of ideas and religion, her work met alternatively with favor and rejection. However, she remained faithful to a vision in which radical spirituality had meaning and application in every-

Image 1: Mary Burt Messer as a young woman, n.d. (Box 8, Merlin Stonehouse papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California).

day social and political matters. In this respect, one finds precedent in previous generations of her family.

On Messer's maternal side, her ancestry hearkened back to the Puritan Separatist Elder William Brewster, the de facto lay spiritual leader of the early Pilgrim settlers in the Plymouth Colony (Hall 2019, 198, 203). A capacity for geographical, intellectual, and spiritual pioneering continued down the generations, perhaps most notably with her maternal grandfather, John Wesley North. North was a storied

figure in the development of the American West and a champion of progressive causes, including abolition, temperance, and women's rights. In his book *John Wesley North and the Reform Frontier*, Merlin Stonehouse (1965) charted the extraordinary expanse of North's life from that of a lay preacher and seminarian in upstate New York in his youth to that of a man of enterprise and civic leadership in Minnesota, Nevada, California, and Tennessee. In his 1966 review of Stonehouse's book, Professor Robert Johannsen offered this portrayal of Messer's grandfather:

> North's record was fantastic. In Minnesota, during the decade before statehood, he practiced law, founded the University of Minnesota, promoted immigration, helped to organize the Republican party, developed two townsites, and pushed railroad development. Appointed surveyor general of Nevada Territory by Lincoln, he practiced law, developed a townsite, built a sawmill and a stamping mill, and held a judgeship on that turbulent mining frontier. In both Minnesota and Nevada he helped to ease the transition from territory to state as a member of their respective constitutional conventions. With the end of the Civil War, he moved to Knoxville, where he sought to bring industrial development and northern investment to eastern Tennessee, and, four years later, he led a colony to California. On California deserts, he developed townsites and irrigation works, laying the foundation for a lasting and prosperous economy in the process. (Johanssen 1966, 1076)

Messer's mother, Emma Messer (1852–1938), wrote a three-part series about the experience of growing up with her father, John Wesley North. Published in the California literary magazine *The Overland Monthly*, "Memoirs of a Frontier Childhood" chronicled five years in her young life, bracketed within the story of Abraham Lincoln's ascent to the presidency and his later assassination. The final installment concluded with her coming to a more mature consciousness in the wake of the galvanic repercussions of the president's assassination. "A band of crepe about my arm, grave and reverent, I walked in the sad little procession to the village church," she wrote of her participation in a day of mourning for the president and nation. Reflecting on the experience, she concluded that she "had come to see and feel and a little, perhaps, to understand something of that larger, broader world which had begun to be her own" (E. Messer 1924, 478). While this is her mother's story, it echoed a pattern of familial

concern and engagement with broader social and political issues—a mantle that Messer embraced from early on in her life.

Messer's upbringing in Washington, DC, introduced her firsthand to key political and cultural figures and movements. Messer's father, Edmund Clarence Messer (1842–1919), was a highly regarded painter and arts administrator in Washington, DC. An obituary noted that he was "one of Washington's leading artists and pioneer in the art movements in the Capital for the past 37 years," listing positions that he held as including those of principal of the Art Students League and principal of the Corcoran School of Art (*American Art News* 1919, 4). Frederick Douglass was a neighbor and family friend of the Messers. In a letter to her aunt, Messer remembered Douglass's influence on her: "On my tenth birthday . . . he gave me a photograph of himself bearing the inscription 'with the regard, respect and esteem of Frederick Douglass.' There was something here that I deeply liked, an attitude toward womankind only explainable when I grew up into 'votes for women,' in my later years" (Messer to Aunt Mary, June 7, 1950, Holt-Messer Family Papers).

For Messer, the political and moral activism of her family, its artistic and literary pursuits, and its enterprise in government, law, and higher education provided her with a familiarity and sense of life purpose in negotiating and exploring professional and academic opportunities. Equally, they endowed her with an independent voice—one that met with commendation early in her academic career and which would struggle to find its place in later phases of her life as a writer and thinker. Still, the spirituality that undergirded Messer's feminism and her approach to political and social questions stood apart from the maverick exploits of her father and grandfather. While she carried their independent vision and will, she was entering into new territory as a woman, which would bring its own opportunity for expressing a new voice and vision on questions of culture, politics, and the family, and its own challenges in applying a spiritual perspective in these spheres.

Suffragist Reformer with the National Woman's Party

Mary Burt Messer's background in the political atmosphere of Washington, DC, coupled with her convictions about the need for social change and the advancement of women's rights and leadership, led

to her involvement with feminist political organizations. This involvement proved to be an important step in Messer's development as an organizer and advocate and in her understanding of the bridge between political and spiritual advancement. In Messer's view, the achievement of women's enfranchisement signaled only a beginning of liberation from masculine authority. Even with the achievement of the right to vote, there would still be a need for radical regeneration and development of women's ways of knowing and leading in order to address societal needs. Messer's commitment to women's political movements was ongoing, reemerging as a primary focus at various junctures throughout her life.

Messer attended Vassar College from 1901–02 as a special student. Subsequently, she followed a path popular among progressively-minded collegiate women from schools like Vassar, Smith, Swarthmore, and Wellesley to work as part of the settlement movement among America's urban poor (Rousmaniere 1970, 46).[1] Messer's developing social conscience spurred her political activism for suffrage or "votes for women." While Messer's work in the suffrage movement started in New York City, her political contribution to bringing about the legislative victory for the Nineteenth Amendment came about most visibly after her move to Wisconsin, where she took the position of instructor of sociology at the Stout Institute in Menomonie (now the University of Wisconsin-Stout).

Located in Dunn County, in the western part of the state, Stout was a newly emerging institution with a curriculum that emphasized practical "training in industrial and related lines of educational effort" (UW-Stout History). Messer came to Stout at the request of the institution's first president, Lorenzo Harvey Dow (Messer 1928, viii), beginning her seven years at the institution in 1916. Her arrival coincided with radical demographic changes that affected the student body due to male enlistment to serve in World War I. As a result, the campus was almost entirely female during a portion of Messer's time there. Messer was also part of the faculty that ushered Stout from a two-year institution to one offering a four-year program in "the areas of household and industrial arts, [which] resulted in the introduction of course work in history, sociology, and several other liberal arts areas" (UW-Stout History).

On January 12, 1917, Messer and other women from Stout formed the Dunn County Suffrage Party (University of Wisconsin-Stout 2015). Messer quickly advanced in suffrage politics in Wisconsin, becoming active in the National Woman's Party (NWP). Alice Paul and Lucy

Burns had formed the NWP in 1916 to organize added political pressure to achieve an amendment to the United States Constitution that would provide a federal guarantee for women's full voting enfranchisement. Messer became a vice-chairman of the Wisconsin NWP and chairman of the state's 10th District, working under Chairman Mrs. Frank Putnam. In this same year, Messer formally applied for and was granted membership in the Christian Science church. Of note, member records indicate that Helen Paul, Alice Paul's younger sister, joined the Christian Science Church in November 1916, shortly before Messer's admission into the church. Helen Paul had "enthusiastically joined suffrage activities after Alice became involved with the Pankhursts in England and later rose to leadership in the American suffrage community" (Zahniser 2015). Messer was not alone in suffrage and women's rights circles in finding inspiration and direction in Mary Baker Eddy's spiritual writings and teachings. In an oral history from late in her career, Alice Paul made numerous references to the contributions of Christian Scientists to her women's rights organizations and initiatives (Paul 1976).

The National Woman's Party took a strong interest in the state branches where the effort to bring about congressional support and ratification for the Nineteenth Amendment was most keen. In Wisconsin, the powerful brewery industry amassed against suffrage, seeing the movement as allied with causes, like temperance and prohibition, that posed a dangerous threat to the wellbeing and profits of the beer makers (Catt and Shuler 2020, 334). Newspaper accounts on suffrage activities in Wisconsin frequently noted Messer's involvement as an organizer and presider over suffrage meetings. In 1918, Alice Paul and the NWP leadership reached out to Messer to organize speaking engagements in Wisconsin for Lillian Ascough, a leading suffragist and chair of the Connecticut NWP. "I feel greatly concerned about the success of her meetings since I am convinced if they are small and lacking in enthusiasm, the effect will be bad rather than good," wrote the national secretary. "It seems to me very necessary that we should show great interest in suffrage at this time and an insistent demand for the immediate passage of the amendment" (NWP Records, Mabel Vernon to Mary Burt Messer, May 3, 1918, Reel 60–1, 1–14 May 1918). Despite having reservations about Ascough's visit, Messer agreed to manage the event, which, according to Ascough, came off as a great success. In a letter to Mabel Vernon, secretary of the NWP, Ascough wrote, "Have had a wonderful time here with Miss Messer, have stayed with her in her little bungalow,

she is a most brilliant person, and a great asset. As I told you before there is a lot of good Woman's Party material in this state, and we are beginning to get it" (NWP Records, Lillian Ascough to Mabel Vernon, May 17–20, 1918, Reel 61, 15–31 May 1918).

Messer's dedication to the NWP remained strong throughout the period leading up to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. In March 1919, she hosted events in Wisconsin for the "Prison Special"—a train chartered by the NWP that brought suffragists who had been imprisoned for their political protests to speak in areas of the country that were seen as particularly vital to the passage of legislation securing women's voting rights (NWP Records, newspaper clippings, Prison Special Tour, Reel 91–6, 1889–1936). In the years that followed the amendment's ratification, Messer became chair of the Wisconsin Teachers' Council of the National Woman's Party (Dunn County News 1923). Here, she turned her attention to labor issues as an advocate and speaker for equal pay for women teachers. While Messer was an outspoken advocate and speaker on women's issues within the political sphere in this period, spiritual concerns would increasingly inform her work and her approach to teaching and scholarship.

The Modern Family and the Call for a New Spiritual Idealism

After retiring from the Corcoran School in Washington, DC, Edmund Messer and his wife, Emma, lived with their daughter in Menomonie, Wisconsin. The following year, Edmund died. Mother and daughter would stay close and continue to live together in the ensuing years. In 1923, Messer and her mother moved to Berkeley, California, where Messer took a position as an instructor at the University of California, Berkeley, Extension. Accounts indicate that her courses were extremely popular. A 1924 profile on Messer in *The Christian Science Monitor* explored her innovations as a teacher on issues relating to the family and modern womanhood. The piece began, "That the 'new woman,' liberated from social, civic and political inhibitions, is destined to effect as notable a change in the conventional standards of the family as in those of politics and government, is the predicate upon which Miss Mary Burt Messer is successfully founding her new

Photograph by Boyé

Miss Mary Burt Messer

Ideals of the Home, a College Course

San Francisco, Calif.
Special Correspondence

high and exalted purpose, and charity work is today more apt to be palli-

Image 2: Mary Burt Messer, *Christian Science Monitor*, April 3, 1924.

course on family life in the University of California." The article went on to note that Dr. Richardson, the director of the extension division at the University of California, had responded to "student interest . . . so pronounced" that he had "placed every facility at the command of Miss Messer" (*Christian Science Monitor* 1924, 8). The profile not only connected Messer's approach to the study of sociology with spiritual questions but also signaled what would be her lifetime conviction to a new religious vision for modernity, based on the emergence and influence of a new kind of womanhood: "Should we not note the decline of mere sentimentality, a new relation between that most misunderstood of all words 'love' and religion," Messer asserted. "The setting of principle above impulse, an alertness to higher influences current in the world today and a fearlessness in the establishment of ideals that represent an advance beyond tradition—are not these vital in the social transformation going on in the family." She then outlined how this perspective applied to her teaching:

> In my course I make bold to touch upon love as defined in the Old Testament and in the New, and I submit that already there is evident the beginnings of a more spiritual tone of comradery between men and women built on understanding and not illusion, honesty not deceit, love not infatuation. . . . The new woman, freed from her old provincialism and restricted outlook, is working in ways unseen and if my course has any merit over the ordinary sociological treatment of the family, it is in my sincere effort to chronicle and elucidate these changes. (*Christian Science Monitor* 1924, 8)

Of particular interest and focus in Messer's teaching and writing were her insights and observations on divorce, a practice that had been steadily growing in the United States and which was significantly outpacing its application and presence in other Western nations. The question of how to respond to this change in the family garnered Messer attention both in the mainstream press and through religious organizations. *The New York Times* addressed the subject and Messer's research in a piece titled "Science and Society Take Up Divorce Evil." It noted that "the investigation into the causes leading up to the disintegration of the American family are to be conducted for the University of California by Miss Mary Burt Messer, a sociologic investigator of Washington and New York, with a teaching experience from the University of Wisconsin." The article provided ample coverage of Messer's ideas on the subject, including the following quote:

> There is a universal call for a restatement of the aims and ideals of the home and for a widening of the horizon in the handling and consideration of the question of marriage. The home, as it now exists, is a feudal institution, in most cases, that has survived right up to date. It is narrow and insufficient to the needs of the modern woman. While sensationalism, hysteria, and light-mindedness generally play no small part in our divorce chaos, it is equally true that, in many instances, divorce is the only means of escape from the feudal hangovers and tyranny of the home as it has been brought down through the centuries. . .
>
> One thing stands out clearly in modern marriage. It has lost to a very large extent the religious authority which served to cement it together in the past. That loss calls for a substitute and the substitute must be idealism. If marriage will no longer be looked upon as a divinely ordained institution, neither must it be reduced to the basis of sheer partnership that can be dissolved with no more thought than a commercial partnership is dissolved. There is nothing so bleak as a home without a spiritual regard for each other on the part of the parties contracting it. (*New York Times* 1924, 16)

For Father Paul L. Blakely, the chief editorial writer of *America*, a weekly review published by the Jesuits, the issue of divorce was of deep concern, and Messer's thoughts on the subject deserved scrutiny. He wrote, "It is regrettably true that for a very large proportion of our people, marriage, even when celebrated in a church, has no religious significance. It is also true that for those who are dead to all religion, some substitute must be found. Miss Messer finds it in 'idealism.' But what is the 'ideal'?" (Blakely 1924, 73).

For Messer, a practical approach to finding that "ideal" presented itself in the spiritual teachings of Mary Baker Eddy and their application through the study and healing practices of Christian Science. In 1923, Messer undertook class instruction in Christian Science from Frank Gale, a Christian Science teacher and practitioner based in San Francisco. Gale had taken similar instruction in Christian Science from Mary Baker Eddy in 1888 (Gale 2011, 215). The design of class instruction in Christian Science as established by Mary Baker Eddy is to give the student a firm basis for continued study of Christian Science and in the practice of Christian Science healing. In her *Church Manual of the Mother Church: The First Church of Christ, Scientist, Boston*, Eddy (1895, 83) provided this direction for Christian Science teachers: "Teaching Christian Science shall not be a question of

money, but of morals and religion, healing and uplifting the race." As Messer proceeded in her scholarly career, she increasingly and more explicitly applied the concept of "healing and uplifting the race" in her writing and teaching.

Messer's experience in social work, political activism, and university teaching, in conjunction with her independent spiritual inquiry, informed her 1928 publication *The Family in the Making: A Historic Sketch*. In the book's foreword, Dr. Leon J. Richardson, head of the extension school at the University of California, Berkeley, outlined the merging of Messer's activist and academic backgrounds as the basis for her sociological study of the family:

> The author of this book has devoted years to research in the field of the family—its history, its characteristics, its trend, having approached this study through social work carried on in New York City. . . . . As a suffragist, actively participating in state and national campaigns, she gained further insight into the problems and tendencies of woman in contemporary life.
>
> It was from this field that Miss Messer was invited to Wisconsin to undertake a task of academic research in the interests of the family. This task was undertaken under the most favorable conditions and required seven years of labor. During this time she taught her subject as a college course at Stout Institute, and later lectured on it under the auspices of the University of California Extension Division. (Messer 1928, vii–viii)

The book drew serious attention from leaders in the emerging academic field of sociology. Reviewers included Sophonisba Breckinridge, the first female graduate of the University of Chicago School of Law and co-founder of the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration; Manuel Conrad Elmer, who obtained one of the first doctorates in sociology from the University of Chicago and was a founder of the Department of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh; and Ernest Groves, professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, who "taught the world's first college class in marriage in 1925" (*New York Times* 1946, 15).[2] These reviews and others reflected favorably on Messer's contribution in advancing the field. Breckinridge (1929, 319) extolled Messer for taking on the subject of the "break-up of domestication" for modern-day women, noting, "Dr. Messer is not so frightened as some of the modern writ-

ers on the subject." Elmer (1929; 1930, 110–11) highlighted the book's spiritual focus in relation to the influence and potentiality of women. Groves (1928, 1957) commented that, in Messer's work, "discussion goes forward with vigor and portrays the changing family with a skill that makes the subject-matter intensely interesting. It is a book of substance and one that starts thought."

Near the end of *The Family in the Making*, in chapter twenty-four, titled "The Advance of Woman," Messer turned to the life and ideas of Mary Baker Eddy, reflecting her deepening interest in Christian Science healing. For Messer, Eddy's writings and healing work provided the answer to what she saw as Christian patriarchy's evisceration or weakening of Christianity's redemptive healing purpose:

> The masculinization of the Christian Church—so complete as to have lost for centuries any trace of its historic origin—is thus to be accounted for in terms of the political and social dominance of the masculine half of the human race. Historic Christianity thus runs true to type as the religion of a patriarchate; but in so doing it is astonishing to see how it loses the potencies and uniqueness of Christianity itself, which was originally projected into life as a revelation at variance with patriarchal claims, the tendencies of an official priesthood exclusively identified with a régime of men. With this identification vanishes the very general faculty of healing, the doing of the "first works" so miraculous in character that the reputation of the early Christians was rather that of miracle-doers than dogmatic teachers. And this fixed masculine dominance not only prevails in the great Roman church, but penetrates with nearly undiminished force into the heretical movement of the Protestant Reformation. (Messer 1928, 349–50)

In contrast, Messer portrayed Christian Science as offering an immediate path to rediscovering the essence of Christian spirituality as one illuminated by healing. "Christian Science stands forth as a conception of the Christian religion drawn from woman's insight," Messer averred. "The maternal attribute of the divine is thus advanced in connection with the paternal attribute—not as in the poetic overtones of Virgin worship, but with the living potencies of an operative truth, a conception intimately associated with the restoration to Christianity of its lost power of healing" (351–2). Three years after the publication of *The Family in the Making*, Messer embraced the profession of practitioner of Christian Science healing. In 1931, she was formally listed in *The Christian Science Journal* as a Christian Sci-

ence practitioner—a position she maintained until near the time of her death in 1960. Still, her commitment to Christian Science healing would be both a source of inspiration and complication in the pursuit of her other professional interests.[3]

Practicing Christian Science as a Sociological and Political Thinker

As the Christian Science church has no professional clergy, Christian Science practitioners assume some dimensions of pastoral care through their supportive healing work with patients and clients. A Christian Science Publishing Society pamphlet titled *Questions and Answers on Christian Science* explains that "A Christian Science practitioner is a person who gives his full time to the public practice of Christian Science healing. The work is both a ministry and a profession" (1974, 14). For Messer, social, political, and scholarly work was compatible with her Christian Science practice. Her articles on the social and political issues of the day, written from a Christian Science perspective, found a venue for a time in *The Christian Science Monitor*, which understands itself as a secular newspaper, guided by underlying spiritual values. Mary Baker Eddy had founded the paper in 1908 with the stated object "to injure no man, but to bless all mankind" (Eddy 1913, 353). The news organization's website offers this description of its identity and mission: "The Monitor has built a reputation in the journalism world over the past century for the integrity, credibility and fair-mindedness of its reporting. It is produced for anyone who cares about the progress of the human endeavor around the world. . . . For many, that caring has religious roots. For many, it does not. The Monitor has always embraced both audiences" (*Christian Science Monitor* n.d.). Messer intended her writing for both audiences and was disappointed in March of 1943, when the *Monitor* chose to discontinue, after only one installment, what was to have been an extended series by her on spirituality and world events in the paper's editorial section.

On March 1, 1943, during the fever of America's involvement in World War II, Messer's "The World We Have: A Study of Society Today by a Student of Christian Science" was published as the first article of the anticipated twenty-two-part series. A disclaimer at the

front of the piece indicated that it did "not constitute an authorized statement of Christian Science." Still, the first installment, titled "As Man Awakes," was strikingly bold in presenting a religious view of "spiritual society" as an alternative and answer to the strife of world conflict. The following gives a flavor of Messer's voice and ideas in the piece:

> To see the spiritual society as well as the spiritual individual is to realize the Christ. For in the Christ the rays of being converge, the children of God are seen as one. The individual is not lost, he is rather found in this at-one-ment. . . .
>
> Such is the vision of reality which can save the world and give victory to the awakened. It will correct and heal at the same time the unawakened. No one is excluded from the good which it gives forth. But the false concept as such, with the man of its devising, is excluded and defeated. This is the way of healing and redemption for all alike. It is the way of ushering in the perfect order, and overturning every false one. (Messer 1943, 18)

A few months after the series' sudden termination, Messer wrote to the Christian Science Church's board of directors in their role of providing oversight of *The Christian Science Monitor*. In the letter, Messer was forthcoming about what it meant for her to be both a writer and a practitioner of Christian Science healing. While she did not complain about the discontinuation of her series, it represented a watershed moment for her, triggering her communication to the board, whom she addressed as "Friends." The letter's opening paragraph was direct and confessional:

> Whether or not such insight and experience as I have as a writer will be cast into the Christian Science movement or out of it will appear very shortly, since I am at the point of having laid on the altar of the Cause everything you can mention—inheritance, income, reputation, established abilities, a live contact with the public, and so on. This is one of those moments having the quality of end, but also of beginning. It seems a bright one. (Messer to Christian Science Board of Directors, May 13, 1943, Archives of the FCCS)

What Messer went on to propose was not so much a new beginning as a reformulation of the work she had done on the "The World We Have" series in conjunction with ongoing contributions to the paper. She explained:

> The prerequisite to my proposal, as I understand it, would be the publication as a serial or in the form of a dollar book, of my MS., *The World We Have*, offering a basis for the student of the current work I propose. All of this would certainly stimulate the sale of Mrs Eddy's writings and widen the field of Christian Science study.
>
> As to the proposal itself: Next fall after Labor Day I would like to go down to Washington, now the capital of the world, and from there send up every week to the Monitor a carefully wrought out interpretation of a world topic. This could appear regularly on Saturdays (with the approval of the editors!) as a double space but short article in The Wide Horizon corner. This should not guide individual thinking but supply it with needed factors. It might still be called The World We Have.

However, she offered a caveat about her proposed editorial missives, stating that "neither should the references to Christian Science be too frequent," an indication of how she would not "guide individual thinking." The observation reflected Messer's awareness of the need to modify explicit religious and metaphysical commentary in her editorializing. This concern represented something of a turnabout for the paper as, in its introduction to the would-be series, it had noted:

> Readers began to ask that we project and examine the same basic problems of peace and war from a more spiritual viewpoint.
>
> The series of twenty-two articles that opens today is the result. It does not constitute an authorized statement of Christian Science but an analysis of world problems by a student of Christian Science. Thus it is not a doctrinal statement, and we are confident that readers—whether or not they are Christian Scientists—will find its approach lucid, understandable, and inspiring. (Messer 1943, 18)

Evidently, some loss of confidence had occurred immediately after publication of the first installment, as the *Monitor* determined from its legal department that it was under no obligation to continue the series. The answer to its discontinuation lies in understanding how this essentially secular newspaper mediates its place in the world of news gathering and commentary within the construct of the religious organization that supports it.

Mary Baker Eddy had made provisions for the paper to carry one religiously-framed article. Otherwise, the paper followed a regimen in accordance with best practices in the mainstream press. As long-

time *Monitor* editor, Erwin Canham (1958, 53) explained, "Eddy did not believe that the *Monitor* should be just a denominational organ, speaking only to Christian Scientists or prospective converts. The *Monitor* must be a 'real' newspaper. But it could or should carry a regular daily article of explicitly applied Christian Science thinking." Authors of the daily religious article remained anonymous.[4]

The radicalism of Messer's emerging spiritual voice overstepped the bounds of a "real newspaper," even for a news source like *The Christian Science Monitor*, which sees its journalistic mission as helping to advance spiritual ideals. While Messer wanted credit for her expertise and writing on political and social matters, she could not temper a spiritual vision in her approach to topical political and social issues. As a Christian Science practitioner, the Church expected that her primary professional focus was to respond to individual patients' needs. Messer saw that calling as allowing for, if not inspiring, her work as a scholar-healer. In the same letter to the Christian Science Board of Directors noted above, she cited advice she had received early in her career as a book reviewer at the *Evening Star* in Washington, DC. "The editor gave me words of wisdom," she recalled. "He said, 'Find out what you can do that nobody else is doing, your own contribution, and offer it to the public. Everyone has something unique to give'." The discontinued series had promised such an opportunity for Messer.

In a personal letter from several years later, Messer was more open in expressing her feelings about what she had encountered in attempting to fulfill her sense of calling within the channels of the Christian Science Church organization. "It is institutionally confined, in the main, to healing the body," she wrote, "and the one who takes out exactly the same process into the healing of the body politic is in for quite a few batterings" (Messer to Alice Burt Nichols, February 24, 1951, Holt-Messer family papers). Needless to say, her proposal did not come to fruition. After 1943, Messer had a number of pieces published in *The Christian Science Monitor*, all poems.

Notwithstanding the professional setback, Messer's dedication to Christian Science continued to deepen, even as she strove to fulfill her special sense of individual purpose and calling. Messer turned again to work on women's issues through consulting and advocacy activities for both the National Woman's Party and the World Woman's Party, which Alice Paul had founded to advance women's equal rights internationally. In Messer's correspondence with Alice Paul and others in the National Woman's Party and the World Woman's

Party during the 1940s and 1950s, she applied more decidedly religious references and language in discussing her political work. Messer was involved with the National Woman's Party and World Woman's Party in their work with the United Nations in its formative years. She was appointed a National Woman's Party consultant to the San Francisco Conference in 1945, which established the UN. She represented the National Woman's Party at the 1946 UN Assembly, in which she supported efforts that resulted in a resolution for all member nations to give equal rights to women (Mary Baker Eddy Library 2020). At the San Francisco Conference, Messer sent a letter to Paul acknowledging Paul's appointment of her as "a representative of the National Woman's Party," with the added proviso, "so far as that carries, which will be just as far as the design of God demands" (NWP Records, Mary Burt Messer to Alice Paul, May 7, 1945, Box II: 156). She also continued to write, publishing books through the Philosophical Library based in New York City. Through these works, she found a vehicle to expand upon ideas in "The World We Have: A Study of Society Today by a Student of Christian Science," presumably including content from later entries for the series that never made it to publication in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Messer was proud of her publications through the Philosophical Library, a small publisher dedicated to works of serious intellectual merit.[5] Nonetheless, Messer's *East and West, as Face to Face and Side by Side: A Christian Scientist Replies to the Communist Manifesto* (1950), and *The Science of Society: The Identity of Each as Godlike Embracing All* (1959) received much scanter attention than her earlier work *The Family in the Making* (1928). A tiny handful of reviews for *East and West* emerged in journals for specific religious denominations. The *American Catholic Sociological Review* gave a terse summation of the book's thesis, noting, "According to the author, the true solution of our contemporary problems can be found only by applying Mary Baker Eddy's rules for spiritual healing to the body politic" (1950, 268). The *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* was more caustic, dismissing Christian Science engagement with Marxism as "rather a funny idea" (Pittenger 1951, 114).

The Science of Society found little traction as well. In a review that Christian Science and Mary Baker Eddy scholar, Robert Peel, prepared for *The Christian Science Monitor* but which was not published, he gave this account of the book: "The cryptic subtitle of this book—'The Identity of Each as Godlike Embracing All'—indicates something of the difficulty it poses for the average reader. This is nei-

ther sociology nor religion as he is accustomed to think of them" (Peel to Christian Science Board of Directors, February 16, 1959, Archives of the FCCS). Nevertheless, Peel drew from the title in the first book of his three-volume biography on Mary Baker Eddy. In *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Discovery*, Peel cited Messer's references to Thomas Paine and "The Right of Man" as illustrative of a Christian Science perspective on the unity of man" (Peel 1966, n. 42). Peel's appreciation of Messer stemmed both from a personal friendship at a time when they both lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and from her writings in *Family in the Making*. In Peel's *Health and Medicine in the Christian Science Tradition*, published as part of a series on "Health/Medicine and the Faith Traditions," Peel made several references to Messer's work. Peel saw in Messer a capacity to place Eddy's writing within a wider context, noting that, "Today we may be a little closer to the realization of Mary Burt Messer's 1928 conjecture that eventually Christian Science would be seen as 'a contribution to the larger 'science' that must avail itself of every true perception and attribute of mind in its quest for knowledge'" (Peel 1988, 46).

Conclusion

While Messer struggled with increased marginalization of her work in the later years of her career, both within and outside of Christian Science circles, it is worth noting that this marginalization was in contrast to the satisfaction she took in the development of her vision and voice. Like her grandfather, John Wesley North, she thought and acted big. In a letter to Alice Paul, she commented on how she viewed her book *East and West*:

> My publisher is a very fine one, with many of the outstanding international writers. Einstein's new book (the more biographical one) is at the top of the list of "Books of Lasting Value," on the jacket, my coming along toward the bottom. I like this juxtaposition because Einstein sets forth one world from the material standpoint, which has its relation to the one world disclosed to Mrs. Eddy through spiritual perception, and which I treat as root and basis of the one world of political structure being brought to birth. (NWP Records, Messer to Alice Paul, October 9, 1950, World Woman's Party Records, Box II: 281)

Ultimately, the voice that Messer brought to these works was based on her understanding and experience of spiritual healing through Christian Science. As a Christian Scientist and Christian Science practitioner, she knew the applicability of spiritual healing on an individual basis. However, for Messer, this dedication to healing also correlated with her social activism. As she stated in *The Science of Society*, "It is indissolubly connected with its outcome of healing, widely known today in its individual aspect; its vast potential of collective application not yet suspected by the world" (Messer 1959, 3). While it may have seemed "cryptic" or unconventional to infuse a spiritually healing perspective within the academic medium, this is the arena to which Messer's family background, her development as a feminist thinker and activist, her experience as an educator and scholar, and her commitment to Christian Science healing naturally led.

For Messer, it was critically important for Christian Science and the lifework of Mary Baker Eddy to have a place and reforming influence in scholarship. "Here is an astonishing omission from the scholarly standpoint," she asserted about Mary Baker Eddy's thought in *The Science of Society*. "It is not the same thing as doctrine. Here are the directions, they have to do with how to heal and how to act and how to love" (Messer 1959, 65). It is worthwhile noting that Messer attempted to hold herself to this healing standard. Regarding her sometimes-fraught relationship with the administrators of the Christian Science Church, she came to a place of resolution as she noted in a letter to her cousin and friend, Alice Burt Nichols, a few years after her *Monitor* disappointment: "I left with a lovely feeling of fellowship with the Board of Directors in Boston," she wrote of a meeting she had with them before returning to her home in California (Mary Burt Messer to Alice Burt Nichols, October 7, 1948, sic, Holt-Messer family papers).

Whether considered through a Christian Science prism, that of another spiritual orientation, or an academic framework, Messer's story allows us to see how the religious thinker and practitioner can influence the scholarly domain with a spirit of healing. Messer's feminism and academic interests led her into the field of sociology, with a focus on family studies. As an early voice in this domain of academic study, Messer deserves renewed attention, particularly as she engaged with subjects like divorce in classroom and academic settings, in which there was little or no precedent for its airing for contemporary discussion. In her advancement and accomplishments

as a teacher in higher education—what one might call continuing higher education for adults—she is a model of bridging the academic/"real world" divide. Her research and teaching at the Stout Institute and the University of California, Berkeley, Extension, drew from her firsthand knowledge of social work and women's rights activism. At stake for her was a conviction about the importance of revitalized and revolutionized spirituality as essential to social and political progress, especially regarding core human institutions like the family. As Messer grew as a spiritual thinker and healer, she attempted to bridge the spiritual and sociopolitical divide in publishing and journalism. In this respect, she met a strong measure of disappointment and even condescension. Still, Messer's career and approach to scholarship and teaching within the academy have lessons for us today as the discipline of religious studies faces challenges as to where it belongs in the academy. Messer's life shines light from an earlier generation on what it means to be a spiritual activist scholar.

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Notes

1 Rousmaniere (1970, 46) writes that "three-fifths of all settlement residents between 1889 and 1914 were women and, of these, almost nine-tenths had been to college."

2 For more on Breckenridge, Elmer, and Groves, see: Becky Beaupre Gillespie, "'Reclaiming Sophonisba," University of Chicago: Law School. Accessed Nov. 18, 2020. *www.law.uchicago.edu/news/new-book-sophonisba-breckridge-jd-1904-offers-fresh-insights-forgotten-feminist*. See "The Guide to the Manuel Conrad Elmer Papers 1907-1980," University of Chicago Library. Accessed Nov. 18, 2020. *www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.ELMER*. See *National Council of Family Relations (NCFR) History Book*, Ernest Groves: *history.ncfr.org/people/ernestgroves*.

3 Requirements for listing as a Christian Science practitioner in the *Christian Science Journal* include having completed formal instruction in Christian Science from an authorized teacher of Christian Science and a substantiated record of healing. Applicants for listing must provide references from those whom they have successfully treated with the result of a complete healing: with at least two of these healings having specifically addressed physical ills. See *christianscience.secure.force.com/cspapplication*. Accessed January 15, 2020.

4 As of 2009, the *Christian Science Monitor* has begun to include author names for its daily religious article, "A Christian Science Perspective." Articles typically run between 400 and 600 words in length.

5 "The Philosophical Library is one of the oldest and most respected publishers of academic, philosophical, and religious texts still operating today." *Philosophical Library Authors*. Accessed November 20, 2020. *www.philosophicallibrary.com/philosophical-library-authors*.

CHAPTER 3

Isabel Apawo Phiri

Centering the Voices of Women in Africa

MARY C. "POLLY" HAMLEN

Since the establishment of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (known as "the Circle") in 1989, there has been a significant increase in the number of African women scholars contributing to theology, biblical hermeneutics, ethics, and religious studies (Phiri 2005b). Yet their voices continue to be underrepresented in theological education in Africa and globally (Oredein 2020; Nadar and Phiri 2010, 99–100). This paper will highlight the work of one notable member of the Circle—Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri—a scholar-activist and ecumenical leader from Malawi who has dedicated her career to engendering theological education in Africa. She has made significant contributions toward increasing the visibility of African women's perspectives in the academy and the church.

Phiri is deputy general secretary for public witness and diakonia for the World Council of Churches. Previously, she was dean and

Image 1: Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri

head of the School of Religion, Theology, and Classics at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Phiri 2019). She is a founding member of the Circle (Fiedler 2017, 82) and served as the general coordinator for six years (Phiri 2019). As a scholar, her field focuses on the interplay of gender, culture, and religion. She critiques patriarchal models of church leadership and lifts up aspects of African indigenous religious traditions that affirm women's spiritual gifts and leadership. Her work embraces oral traditions as a mode of theology, affirming that African women express religious beliefs and theological reflection through songs, proverbs, and storytelling. Her scholarly work also reveals the complexity and diversity of religious expression in Africa, which is often simplified and homogenized by western scholarship and non-African feminism (Dube 2000, 20). As an activist, Phiri has worked to promote gender justice in the church and to combat gender-based violence. She has responded to the needs of persons affected by HIV and AIDS, produced contextually relevant materials for theological education, and centered justice work as a critical element of Christian faith and witness.

This biography will examine how Phiri's own life experiences as an African woman shaped her career and commitments as a scholar-activist. It will review her contributions to the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, the Centre for Constructive Theology,

and the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa, ecumenical theological education, and the public witness and diakonia of the World Council of Churches. In so doing, this biography will foreground the ways that Phiri has centered African women's voices in her work. Her example offers insights into how scholar-activists can transform institutions by including underrepresented perspectives in their work. It also has implications for the emerging field of digital humanities and the importance of including African women's voices in digital spaces.

Family and Faith

In her writings, Isabel Apawo Phiri situates her personal story within the larger story of the Chewa people (Phiri 2007b). This cultural identity reveals the complexity of national identity in Africa, where European colonialism defined national borders that artificially separated peoples of shared cultural identity. The history of Malawi includes many waves of migration to the region, including the Maravi people, who established a large empire that spanned across current-day Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique (24). As a result, the Chewa people, who are descendants of one of the Maravi clans, live in all three countries. They share a common language and culture and travel among the three countries for social or work engagements. Phiri observes, "When you meet somebody from Zambia, it's like you've met your brother or you've met your sister because we look at ourselves as the same people" (Phiri pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

The Chewa are a matrilineal people. Thus, Phiri's connections to her ancestors can be traced back through her mother, Dorothy Namajengo Kazuwa, and her parents, who lived in central Malawi (Phiri 2020b). Her maternal grandmother, Naphiri Kazuwa, would get up daily at 4 a.m., to pray for her children and grandchildren by name. Phiri recalls learning from her that women pray for their family members (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Her maternal grandfather, Gideon Kazuwa, was an ordained elder and served a church in Lobi, in the Nkhoma Synod, in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), the largest Protestant denomination in Malawi. Isabel was born on November 8, 1957 (Phiri 2020b), in Zambia, where her parents lived briefly. When Isabel was six months old, her parents returned to Malawi and registered Isabel's birth in Lilon-

gwe. A few years later, when she was two, tragedy struck the family. Her biological father died suddenly in a car accident. At the time, Isabel's mother was twenty-four years old and pregnant with her third daughter (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). It was a daunting situation to be a widow with three children, but she could lean on her parents and extended family. According to Phiri, "In a Chewa family, the mother had the privilege, even in marriage, of remaining united with her own kinfolk, and to control, with their kinfolk, the offspring of her marriage" (Phiri 2007b, 36). Dorothy's brother introduced her to a friend, Gershom Migochi, who had been married twice before but had no children. His parents were Reverend Damazeke Malembo, who was a minister in the CCAP, and Janet Nyamwale. Gershom and Dorothy "clicked" and eventually married (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

Gershom raised Dorothy's three daughters as his own, giving them his name; this was an important statement of relationship and commitment. Gershom and Dorothy had two more daughters and a son and raised all six children as one family. Isabel was fourteen before she realized that Gershom was not her biological parent. It was a surprising and unsettling revelation. Ultimately, she decided that it did not change things for her. She recalls thinking, "I will not go around looking for a father because I do have a father, you know, this man, even though he did not give birth to us, he has looked after us very well and has never made me feel that I don't belong. So I just said, okay, that's fine. So we stayed still as a team, and up to now, we have still remained as a unit" (Phiri, pers comm., December 29, 2020).

Dorothy Migochi valued education and worked hard to ensure all her children could attend good schools. She was employed as a nurse and then later as a secretary at the Reserve Bank of Malawi. She used her earnings to pay school fees for the children. Gershom Migochi was a teacher; his salary covered the expenses for food and basic necessities. It was a "working class kind of a home." Phiri recalls that later she realized it was "a basic life" compared to what others may have had in other countries, but she never felt poor. As a child, she was inspired by her parents' professional example, wanting to be a nurse or secretary like her mother, or a teacher, like her father. In the end, she chose to become a teacher (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

Isabel attended a Catholic boarding school, where she focused on Bible studies. She enjoyed school but says, "there was also a spirit of resistance in me towards Catholicism." Isabel attended an Assem-

blies of God church as a young girl, which she enjoyed, but her mother insisted she be baptized as a member of the CCAP. While Isabel's parents themselves were not active church-goers, they still held a strong Presbyterian identity (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Being obedient to her mother's wishes, Isabel was baptized at the Katimba Church in the Blantyre Synod of the CCAP in 1967 (Phiri 2997a, 74). Nevertheless, in 1976, as she was about to begin college, Phiri experienced a spiritual crisis. She struggled with sleeplessness and a lack of enthusiasm for her future. Concerned, her parents sent her to stay with her grandparents in Lobi. Speaking with her grandfather about her spiritual crisis was transformative. He helped her see the difference between knowing facts about Jesus and memorizing Bible verses and having a personal relationship with him. This started her on a deeper spiritual journey, and, two years later, at an evangelical youth conference, she committed her life to Jesus (Phiri personal comm., December 29, 2020).

In 1981, Phiri graduated from Chancellor College with a Bachelor of Education in Religious Studies and History (Phiri, pers. comm. December 29, 2020). She studied with John Parratt, a scholar from England who specialized in Asian and African theology (Parratt 1993, 1995). Phiri particularly loved studying African traditional religions; she recalls that it was eye-opening to realize "that the kinds of things that we do as our culture are also part of our religion" (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Phiri also realized that, as an educator in Malawi, she needed to be familiar with religious traditions beyond her own. She grew up with relatives who practiced other faiths, including Gershom Migochi's uncle, who was an imam (Phiri 2015, 8). "I became very interested in all these religions as somebody who is going to train teachers who are going to teach religion in schools, where there is Islam, African traditional religion and Christianity" (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).[1]

Women were underrepresented in higher education in Malawi, and the university was seeking to hire more women lecturers. After her graduation, Phiri was hired by the Religious Studies Department at Chancellor College on Parratt's recommendation. While serving as a staff associate, she spent a year teaching in a Catholic girls' school to develop her skills. In 1982, she went to Lancaster University in England, where she earned a master's in education, with a focus on religious education and New Testament studies (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Ninian Smart—a pioneer in the field of comparative religion—founded the Theology and Religious Studies De-

partment at Lancaster in 1967. It was the first religion department in a public university in Great Britain. Smart (1996) promoted the academic study of world religions from a secular perspective, rather than a confessional one (Brian Gates, "Ninian Smart", *Guardian*, February 1, 2001). Phiri studied with Smart and other leading New Testament scholars. Her positive experience in Lancaster gave her insight into the importance of secular religious studies at public universities—an issue she later addressed in South Africa (Phiri and Nadar 2011). Phiri notes that many African women theologians have been educated in secular university settings because they offered fewer barriers to women's participation (Phiri, pers. comm., January 5, 2021). African women were often discouraged from pursuing degrees in theological colleges and seminaries. These settings were focused on training ordained ministers, and few African churches allowed women into the ministry (Phiri 2009, 6).

Early Career

After completing her degree, Phiri returned to Malawi to teach in the Theology Department at Chancellor College. She was appointed lecturer in African theology, New Testament studies, and religious education and stayed in this post from 1983 to 1990. She was active in the academic community and sat on several university committees and boards. She was elected secretary for the Theological Society of Malawi from 1984 to 1986. In 1987, she joined the editorial board of the *Journal of Religion in Malawi* and has remained on the board ever since. She also served for five years as the moderator for Bible knowledge for the Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations, becoming chief examiner for Bible knowledge paper 1 in 1989 (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). This was an influential position, as the final secondary school examinations determine if students can attend public or private universities (MANEB, n.d.). All these activities increased Phiri's visibility as a biblical scholar and educator.

While Phiri's professional career was growing, she was also raising a family. During her year in England, Isabel met Maxwell Agabu Phiri, a Pentecostal Christian from Zambia, while attending a conference of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Maxwell had recently completed a diploma in journalism and was in England studying radio broadcast-

ing (UKZN, n.d.). The two representatives became very close, drawn together by their faith, and were married at the Lilongwe Pentecostal Church in Malawi on December 21, 1985 (Phiri 2020b). In 1988, she gave birth to their son, Chisomo. His arrival was the answer to prayers, as Phiri had medical issues that made getting pregnant difficult. Wanting a larger family, the Phiris later adopted two children from relatives: Kuleza (born 1989) and Cynthia (born 1990) (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). The marriage between Isabel and Maxwell has been a mutually supportive one, and she credits her husband for helping to shape her into the person she has become. She says, "We were willing to grow together, support and inspire each other to grow to our fullest potential" (Phiri 2020b, 2). The couple prays regularly and consults each other on major decisions (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). They both pursued academic careers. In an interview with journalist Lucia Cuocci for the Italian radio program *Protestantesimo* on Rai 2, Phiri noted, "For us it's been 'iron sharpening iron' in every area of our lives. . . . Academically we have inspired each other to grow to the extent that we are now both professors" (Phiri 2020b, 2).[2]

In addition to the support of her husband, Phiri was also fortunate to have two important African mentors who helped expand her horizons. One was John Pobee, the distinguished Ghanaian New Testament scholar, educator, and ecumenist. In 1984, Pobee became associate director for Africa for the World Council of Churches' Programme on Theological Education (PTE). The PTE led ecumenical efforts to promote contextually relevant theological education in different regions of the world, a major focus of the WCC's educational work at the time (Pobee 2009, 149). Pobee was an influential figure in shaping the direction of theological education in Africa and was particularly supportive of African women theologians (Phiri 2009, 11). He met Phiri at a WCC-sponsored conference for religious educators in Malawi and invited her to join the PTE as a Youth Commissioner. This opportunity introduced Phiri to global conversations about the purpose and nature of theological education. At first, the language and concepts being discussed were so unfamiliar that she found the experience bewildering and intimidating. She recalls that, at her first meeting with other theological educators at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland, it all seemed so incomprehensible she wanted to quit. Pobee urged her to stay, assuring her that she belonged and would come to feel more comfortable with time. She persevered and came to appreciate the work of the PTE, which

"spoke to her heart." She served for six years as a commissioner, from 1984 to 1990 (Phiri, pers. comm., January 5, 2021) and would remain connected to the WCC in various ways over the years.

John Pobee introduced Phiri to Mercy Amba Oduyoye, another significant influence on her life (Phiri, pers. comm, December 29, 2020). From 1987 to 1993, Oduyoye was the deputy general secretary of the WCC, the first woman from Sub-Saharan Africa to hold such a high-level position in the ecumenical movement (Kanyoro 2002, 18). She was one of the first women in Africa to have an advanced degree in theology and was a pioneering figure in the development of African women's theology. Her books *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (1995) and *Introducing African Women's Theology* (2001) are now classics (Oredein 2020). Her own experience of being marginalized as an African woman in the field of theology led her to found the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Oduyoye 2009). Phiri credits Oduyoye with teaching her "how to be a woman and how to be a Christian and how to be an academic in the African context" (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

Phiri attended the historic convocation in Ghana at which the Circle was launched in 1989. It turned out to be a watershed moment in her life (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Over seventy African women theologians from across the continent and the diaspora gathered in September 1989 at Trinity College in Accra, Ghana, for a week of storytelling, reflection, and organizing (Kanyoro and Oduyoye 1990). Phiri attended as a representative of the WCC's Program on Theological Education (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020) and led one of the plenary sessions (Kanyoro and Oduyoye 1990, 234). Mercy Oduyoye articulated the need for a "two-winged approach" (25), affirming the importance of including African women's perspectives in theological discourse in Africa. These discussions inspired Phiri greatly. She realized that she could be concerned about gender justice and be a faithful Christian at the same time and that these two stances were not in opposition. She had never heard this affirmed before. This experience empowered her to explore gender, culture, and religion in her research and writing (Phiri, pers. comm., January 5, 2021).

In 1990, Phiri began PhD studies at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. She moved with her young son Chisomo and her husband Maxwell, who began a degree program in industrial sociology. She had been offered a Commonwealth scholarship to study at Leeds University, but she was encouraged by John Pobee to stay in Africa

(Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). She received a scholarship from the WCC that made her studies possible. Phiri arrived at a time of great change in the country, as Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the apartheid system was being dismantled. It proved to be a profoundly influential time in her life. Her studies exposed her to new methodologies as she learned "how to use the frameworks of feminist theology, ecumenism, and African theology to resist racism and sexism" (Phiri 2020a, 67). She was supervised by John W. de Gruchy, professor of Christian studies, who taught political theology and was a co-signer of the Kairos document (Kairos Theologians 1986, 54). Phiri also studied with Gabriel Molehe Setiloane, one of the pioneers of African theology. Setiloane's famous poem, "I am an African," is included in the *Handbook on Theological Education in Africa* (Phiri and Werner 2013, v). As Phiri was interested in gender and religion, De Gruchy encouraged her to study with Denise Ackerman, a White feminist theologian who was also completing her PhD at the University of South Africa (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). In Malawi, religion and politics were kept separate, but, in South Africa, the two were in constant dialogue. Phiri embraced this approach.

> I learned that theological reflection goes hand in hand with activism and the importance of taking an intersectionality approach in the fight against social injustice. This means that when a theologian is in the context of struggle for social justice, being prophetic also means being involved in activism. (Phiri 2020a, 67)

In parallel with her studies, Phiri started a local chapter of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Cape Town. Ackerman, the more senior of the two women, went on to lead the group. This was the first of four local chapters of the Circle that Phiri would found (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

Phiri's interest in the intersection of religion, culture, and gender was reflected in her PhD research. She wrote her thesis on "African Women in Religion and Culture: Chewa Women in the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian: A Critical Study from Women's Perspective." She researched ritual practices at rain shrines in the indigenous Chewa tradition and the role women served as spiritual leaders. She then looked at how Christian traditions impacted women in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian and in what ways these improved women's lives or served to marginalize them. An edited version was published in 1997 as *Women, Pres-*

byterianism and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa Women in Central Malawi. It was the first book to be published in Africa that offered a systematic analysis of gender, culture, and religion within an African religious tradition (Phiri 2007b, 6). In 1998, it received honorable mention in the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa, as announced in the *Nation* newspaper (Dr. Illieva, "The Spirit of the Noma Award Thrives," November 22, 1998).

Women's Rights in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian

After earning her PhD in 1992 (University of Cape Town n.d.), Phiri returned to her role as lecturer at Chancellor College in Malawi (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Her return coincided with major political changes within Malawi, as the country transitioned from single-party rule to a multi-party democracy (Ross 2007, 260). These same years also coincided with the World Council of Churches' Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. Globally and regionally, churches organized activities to highlight the needs of women in church and in society (Manzanan et al. 1990; Phiri and Kaunda 2017, 388).

These movements sparked interest in Malawi around women's issues. In November 1994, a group of women church workers from Blantyre Synod, CCAP, decided to speak out publicly about their concerns. These included ordination of women to the diaconate and ministry but also encompassed issues such as violence against women, unequal salaries, lack of involvement of women in the decision making of the church, and marginalization of unmarried women in the church. A petition was developed to be presented to church leaders (Phiri 2007a, 83), and Phiri helped them shape the final document. Due to health reasons, she was not with the women when they marched to present the document to a gathering of synod and presbytery administrators. However, she would have liked to be there in support (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

The all-male church leadership was angered by the women's public march and presentation of the petition, and there was an immediate backlash. Church workers who had participated in the march were suspended. A commission of inquiry was established to investi-

gate the situation, which led to additional reprisals. Women's work in the synod was reorganized to put male clergy in charge (Phiri 2007a, 86). The commission also recommended that Phiri be asked to leave the Blantyre Synod and transfer to the Nkhoma Synod (85).

In response, Phiri wrote a letter challenging the synod leaders' right to dictate where she should hold church membership. She was baptized in the Blantyre Synod and was a member in good standing; they could not require her to leave. She also critiqued the way the commission of inquiry handled the situation, noting that the women's legitimate concerns had not been addressed (91). Through her global connections, Phiri was able to bring international attention to the situation. She sent a copy of her letter to the World Alliance for Reformed Churches (WARC), the global communion for all Reformed churches, of which the CCAP was a part (87). Under pressure, the Blantyre Synod leaders agreed to meetings facilitated by WARC representatives. Phiri notes, "They helped us come together and there was reconciliation. We apologized to each other and then this commission report was withdrawn" (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

The outcome was to move the needle forward on women's participation in the CCAP. When the next election was held for general secretary for the CCAP, women were given the right to vote for the first time. They helped elect a new general secretary, Rev. Dr. Silas Nchozana, who was "gender sensitive, the one who had sided with the women when they marched" (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Phiri sees this as a significant moment in the history of the CCAP, stating, "that was a breakthrough, and it was a breakthrough because we had the international support" (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

Gender-based Violence at Chancellor College

That same year, Phiri also learned about a profoundly upsetting situation on the campus of Chancellor College. As she had in Cape Town, Phiri had created a local chapter of the Circle in Malawi when she returned in 1993 (Fiedler 2017, 77). The group met on the campus and included women outside the field of theology interested in gender studies. At the meetings, students began to share their experience of gender-based violence on campus. As one example of the pervasive

climate of harassment at the time, women students who wanted to enter the library were being subjected to fondling as "admission" to the library (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

Outraged by the situation, Phiri decided to leverage her position as a faculty member to address the issue directly. She was joined by three female faculty colleagues: Linda Semu, a sociologist, Flora Nankhuni, an economist, and Nyovani Madise Chikusa, a statistician (Phiri 2007a, 101). They proposed a research study on gender-based violence on the campus, which the university approved. The research findings revealed there was a widespread problem. Data from the anonymous survey of over 300 women students on campus revealed that 12.6% of the women students reported being raped, and 67% had experienced sexual harassment. It also showed that the students were reluctant to come forward about their experience. Two-thirds of the rape survivors did not report the rape (101–2). Although there were four authors, Phiri was the one who presented the paper, "Violence Against Women in Educational Institutions: The Case of Sexual Harassment and Rape on Chancellor College Campus." She presented on July 19, 1995, at a University conference (101).

The paper was the first of its kind in Malawi, and the findings immediately made national headlines. As the presenter, Phiri was interviewed on the radio the following day (102). Suddenly the university became the focus of national media attention, much of which conflated the actual statistics and reported that 67% of women students had been raped. The reaction on campus was intensely negative. Male lecturers were angry at being accused of sexual violence, and students felt their reputations were being ruined. On campus, students rioted (103). Even some women who had participated in the study, and whose experience had informed the study's findings, participated in the riots. They were angry at the study's public exposure of the situation. Discussing gender-based violence was taboo, and could lead to stigmatization and ostracization for survivors (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

As Phiri was the presenter of the study and had been interviewed on the radio, she became the focal point for the students' rage. While Phiri was still at the conference, a student mob gathered outside the house where she lived, which was on the edge of campus. Phiri's son, nephew, and mother were home at the time. The mob started throwing stones, breaking windows, and destroying the family car (Phiri 2007a, 103). Students threatened to rape Phiri and kill her son and vowed to return with petrol to burn down the house. It was an in-

tensely traumatic experience for Phiri's son. Phiri was notified of the attack while at the conference, which was two hours away. When she arrived home, she urged the university to protect herself and her family. They were housed at a hotel for a night for safety and later moved to a new home (Phiri, pers. comm, December 29, 2020).

For weeks, the students refused to take exams unless Phiri was punished. The college administration blamed Phiri for the disruption and discussed setting up a disciplinary committee. However, Phiri made the case that the four researchers were given permission to conduct the survey, and all correct procedures were followed. She eventually hired a lawyer to protect herself (Phiri 2007a, 113). In the end, due to an infrastructure issue, students were sent home without taking exams (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

Phiri's whole family faced hostility from the community. Chisomo, her son, endured tensions at school and was worried that his mother would be harmed. Deeply concerned about the impact on her son, Phiri began to look for work elsewhere. The head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies was supportive of her throughout the ordeal (Phiri 2007a, 106–8), and the vice-chancellor of the University of Malawi urged her to return when the university reopened in January 1996. She reluctantly agreed. During these turbulent months, she left home early in the morning to conduct field research about women healers in African Indigenous churches. At home, she focused on her writing, not daring to leave the house (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

A change came when, at the end of 1995, the *Nation*—a national newspaper in Malawi—announced their annual "Woman of the Year," chosen by readers of the newspaper. The award was given to Phiri for her work addressing gender-based violence on campus. She notes that this marked a sea-change in attitudes on campus, and hostility ebbed. As a result of the public scrutiny, international donors had pressured the University to address the violence and harassment (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Discussions began in 1996 to establish a Center for Gender Studies, which was launched in 1999 and continues today. According to the website, its mission is to "enhance the understanding of gender issues in Malawi and effect attitudinal and behavioural change, with the view of creating a more open society in which men and women are equal partners, participants and beneficiaries of development" (University of Malawi, n.d.).

When reflecting on this period in her life, Phiri focuses on the positive changes that occurred because of the attention brought to women's issues:

> I felt that, although I went through a difficult time, a traumatic time, there were substantial changes happening in Malawi. Substantial changes that shifted the conversation in the country on gender issues. So for me, when I look at my life and say, what have I achieved the most? It's that one, that the conversation became a national conversation and the church shifted and the university shifted as well. But I still left the country. (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020)

Phiri notes that the three other women who had co-authored the report also left the country. Semu and Nankhuni moved to the USA. Chikusa moved to the United Kingdom (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

In recognition of her situation, the university allowed Phiri to take a sabbatical (Phiri 2007a, 117). She taught as a senior lecturer in African theology at the University of Namibia from May 1996 to August 1997. While there, she started a local chapter of the Circle, composed largely of women from the Lutheran Church (Kanyoro 1997). The sabbatical was good for Phiri, providing her with a time of healing and rest after a traumatic year (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

South Africa

At the end of her sabbatical, Phiri did not return to Malawi. Instead, she moved to South Africa in August 1997 to begin teaching as an associate professor in theological studies at the School of Religion and Culture at the University of Durban Westville, in Durban. This was the beginning of a time of great academic flourishing and growth for her. She would stay in South Africa for the next fifteen years, gaining recognition as a professor and researcher. She started two chapters of the Circle, one in Durban (Fiedler 2017, 72) and another in Pietermaritzburg (75). In 2001, Phiri started teaching at the University of Natal, and, in 2003, she was made a full professor. In 2004, the University of Durban Westville, a predominantly Indian university, merged with Natal University, a predominantly White university, becoming

the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN, n.d.a). The following year, in 2005, Phiri became head of the School of Religion and Theology at the university. She served in this role until 2007, and, in 2012, she became dean (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

One significant aspect of her time in South Africa was her work with the Centre for Constructive Theology (CCT). Launched in 1996, CCT was an initiative of the University of Durban-Westville, "to bridge the gap between formal academic theological enquiries and the practical needs and concerns of the community" (Phiri 2000, 330). The program aimed to meet the needs of underserved communities, particularly rural, poor, Black women who had been multiply oppressed by class, race, and gender under apartheid (Balia 1996, 230). Phiri was the coordinator for the Women in the Church and Society program and also director of the Centre, serving in this role from 1997 to 2012. She was also senior editor for the *Journal of Constructive Theology* from 1997 to 2010. Under her leadership, the journal began to focus on gender and religion; it was renamed the *Journal of Gender Religion and Theology in Africa* in 2014 (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

In her work at CCT, Phiri prioritized the empowerment of women through education, believing that "knowledge is power" (Phiri 2000, 336). One innovative program focused on the educational needs of charismatic leaders in African Initiated Churches (AIC), many of whom are women. CCT established a biblical studies program in the rural areas for AIC leaders, who often do not have formal biblical or theological training. The pastors would study a biblical text in class and then preach on it in their church. They did not need to know how to read or write to participate in the program, which used oral teaching methods and allowed students to take exams by recording their answers verbally. This allowed people to participate who had little schooling—a significant issue in a country with a brutally unequal education system under apartheid (Phiri, pers. comm., January 5, 2021).

As a professor, Phiri also made a significant contribution to the study of religion in South Africa by establishing a gender and religion program at the School of Theology and Religion at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, a project Phiri spearheaded with her colleague Sarojini Nadar. By insisting on religion as the focus, rather than theology, Phiri made space to discuss women's experience in traditional African religions and other under-studied traditions. Furthermore, Phiri understood that gender justice was not only about the experi-

ence of women. This opened space in the program for discussions of masculinity and issues surrounding transgender and non-binary gender identity. It also allowed for the discussion of sexuality (Phiri and Kaunda 2017). Today, the program intentionally includes LGBTQI+ perspectives, a direction that Phiri supports (Gerald West, pers. comm., May 7, 2021).

As a professor, Phiri taught classes on African women's theology, African Instituted Churches, and theology in the African context. At times, it was an "uphill battle" to get new students to see the value in reading African women's theology or discussing topics related to gender. She received pushback from some male students who refused to respect her authority as a professor. She notes, however, that these students were often transformed by their studies. In one case, a student who had been disrespectful to her at orientation came back later to apologize. Other students have sought her advice after graduation. "They go into the field, and they meet the challenges there, and they write back to you and say, 'This is what I'm going through now, please give me advice. How can I handle this issue?' Or 'Please come Monday, I need my students to see somebody like you, to see that there are women out there who are teaching these things'" (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Former students have described her as being very humble, as well as a calm, kind, and supportive mentor (Kaunda 2021a, 4–7). Chammah Kaunda observes that she "always believed that sustainable wellbeing of African theological scholarship and the African continent lies in mentoring and nurturing the next generation" (9).

Phiri also served as theological editor and a member of the advisory committee for the African Bible Commentary Project from 2001 to 2005. Contributors were intentional in writing "in familiar language, using colloquial metaphors, African thought-forms and nuances, and practical applications that fit the African context" (Adeyemo 2006, viii). Phiri wrote the commentary on Ruth, drawing out many themes that connect to African women's experience and including proverbs in the Chewa language to help underscore the story's message (319–24). She also contributed articles on "Polygamy" (429) and "Weddings and Lobola" (799), highlighting both biblical examples and the contemporary situation in Africa. In her article on "Rape" (393), she writes, "Silence encourages rape, and so the church needs to break its silence by preaching constantly against the abuse of women and children." The inclusion of these articles, with their

frank examination on sensitive topics, reveals how Phiri continued to center women's perspectives in her work.

Phiri's appointment in 2005 as head of the School of Religion and Theology, now the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal was a significant milestone. African women were, and continue to be, underrepresented on the faculties of African universities and, even more so, as administrative heads (Doerrer 2015). Phiri broke new ground as a Black African woman leading a school of religion and theology—one of the best in the country—in the post-liberation period of South Africa. Her academic credentials and publishing record were impressive, and her appointment was well-received (West, pers. comm., May 7, 2021). Placing a non-South African at the head of the school was significant as well. As a Malawian, Phiri was seen as an outsider, which was sometimes a disadvantage within the politics of a South African university. However, it also helped her to play a neutral role as the school's head in light of the tense racial history of South African tertiary education (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

Phiri's growth and success as an academic were intimately connected to her active participation in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. As has been noted, Phiri founded a local circle chapter everywhere she lived. The Durban Circle was particularly successful and, at one point, had two hundred members (Fiedler 2017, 72). In these local chapters, women gathered to reflect theologically on their lived experience, select research topics relevant to their context, and empower each other to publish (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). While many of the participants are Christians, the Circle is open to women from all religions (Phiri 2009, 106). Phiri was a mentor to many women, supporting their research and writing efforts and providing opportunities for collaboration. She was also supportive of male scholars who were writing on gender; Gerald West, her colleague from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal recalls her generosity in inviting him to present a paper on transforming masculinity at the Cameroon continental Circle gathering in 2007 (West, pers. comm., May 7, 2021).

Phiri was prolific in her research, writing, and editing efforts. Her field research on *sangomas*, or female traditional healers, is particularly notable. It examines Indigenous women's spiritual practices—a topic not well covered in religious studies (Phiri 2005a; Phiri and Nadar 2009). She was sensitive to the fact that, in Western scholarship, many traditional practices, like spiritual healing, have been viewed as "primitive" and practitioners treated as objects. In her research, conducted with Sarojini Nadar and others, Phiri used collaborative and participatory methods. In one study, Phiri and Nadar invited healers to share proverbs and songs related to marriage and sexuality and analyzed how these oral traditions function as a model for knowledge production (Phiri and Nadar 2009). The study is a good example of how Phiri's research choices were informed by her participation in the Circle and its approach to theology.

In addition, Phiri has made notable contributions as an editor. With Sarojini Nadar, she edited a series of essays in honor of Mercy Oduyoye, entitled *African Women, Religion and Health* (2006). This volume was awarded the 2006 University of KwaZulu Natal book prize for an edited book and the 2007 Catholic Press Association award for a book on gender (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). As co-chairs of the Circle's Commission on Women's History and Biographies, Sarojini Nadar and Phiri also co-edited, with Devarakshanam Betty Govinden, a book entitled *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women in Africa* (2002). *Her-Stories* was intended to "complement African church history" (4) and to "revise and retell our stories from women's perspectives" (6). The editors observe that such storytelling has an impact on the whole community. "We believe telling our stories shifts women from being observers and victims into participants and actors. The growing community of writers expands into a community of readers. When other sisters read our stories, they, in turn, are gathered in the winnowing process. They are inspired to look at their own lives and evaluate their own experiences and, hopefully, tell their stories" (7). The telling of the stories is not always easy, as they include painful moments of suffering or exclusion. But the stories also affirm African women's strength, wisdom, and courage.

Phiri also made a tremendous contribution to the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians through her leadership as the general coordinator from 2002 to 2007. In this role, she took on responsibilities for organizing the Circle at the continental level. She leveraged institutional support through the Center for Constructive Theology and directed field research on topics related to the Circle's

priorities. Donors who knew her work at CCT offered financial support. A newsletter was published highlighting regional activities, and Phiri visited the national circles to encourage their work and make connections between regions (Phiri, pers. comm., January 5, 2021). Under her skillful management, the Circle was highly productive, publishing more books than in any other period (West, pers. comm., May 7, 2021).

At the same time, the Circle selected HIV and AIDS as its five-year research focus (Phiri 2010). Biblical scholar Musa Dube (2002) was the most prominent Circle leader in this effort (Browning 2012, 136; Njoroge 2012, 132). Phiri contributed four liturgies to a resource that Dube (2003) edited, entitled *Africa Praying: A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy* (e.g., "Hope: Do Not Fear; Only Believe," 110–15), published by the WCC. She also represented the Circle in the annual meetings of the WCC's Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa from 2002 to 2009 (Phiri, pers. comm., February 4, 2021). Phiri challenged churches to re-examine theological frameworks that considered the illness to be punishment for sin. In "HIV/AIDS: An African Theological Response in Mission," Phiri writes, "The way forward for all the theologies of Africa is to unite and take the current context of HIV/AIDS into theological reflection. . . . What is required from the church, the body of Christ, is commitment to fight against the spread of the disease with all available resources. Presenting a God of compassion rather than a God of wrath is central when dealing with the infected and affected" (2010, 226). The work by Circle theologians in this period was tremendously influential in mainstreaming discussions on HIV and AIDS in theological education and churches. It made a significant contribution to changing attitudes towards people affected and infected by HIV (Nadar and Phiri 2012). Phiri's writing on HIV and AIDS also addressed related issues such as human sexuality, violence against women, and the importance of mutual, respectful relationships between husbands and wives (Fiedler 2021, 38). Her writings have promoted women's health and wellbeing as central theological concerns (Kaunda 2021b, 23, 234).

However, the emphasis on writing and publishing, which Phiri embraced, also sparked controversy within the wider Circle. At the 2007 continental gathering in Cameroon, critics said that the Circle had become dominated by elites—those who taught in universities and had advanced degrees. There was a call to make the Circle more accessible to women outside of the academy. There was dissension

about the goals of the Circle in the coming years and the best way forward. Phiri recalls that she and other older Circle members left the meeting feeling wounded. After stepping down from the role of general coordinator, Phiri withdrew for a time from Circle activities, although she remained involved at the local level. She acknowledges that there wasn't a very effective transfer of leadership between herself and the new general coordinator, Fulata Lusungu Moyo. Moyo, who was also from Malawi, was working as the women's coordinator for the WCC at the time (Fiedler 2017, 44). In retrospect, Phiri can see how the withdrawal of senior members of the Circle left the new coordinator without their support in the daunting task of managing a continental network. Lack of institutional support presented challenges, as did lack of funding when expected support from the WCC did not materialize and donors fell off. Yet regional chapters continued to meet. In 2018, Musa Dube became the new general coordinator and is working to bring new vitality to the Continental Circle. The new focus for theological reflection is climate justice (Phiri, pers. comm, January 5, 2021).

Ecumenical Theological Education

Phiri's contributions to ecumenical discussions of theological education are also significant. As mentioned above, she served a six-year term as a commissioner for the Programme on Theological Education, which concluded in 1990. Phiri later served on the advisory board for the Bossey Ecumenical Institute from 2004 to 2005 and was the moderator of the WCC's Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation from 2006 to 2009 (Phiri, pers. comm., February 4, 2021). Today, she is part of the Pan-African Women's Ecumenical Empowerment Network (PAWEEN), launched in 2015. Coordinated by the Ecumenical Theological Education program, PAWEEN was created to be "a platform of academic study, spiritual reflection and action for women of African descent in all regions of the world" (Phiri 2019). In all these settings, Phiri continues to advocate for transformative theological education that contributes to the well-being of the whole people of God.

One primary focus of the WCC's work in theological education has been encouraging the development of contextual theological education, "liberating theological education from any captivity of cer-

tain social milieus, cultural one-sidedness and spiritual blindness to religious values existing in certain indigenous traditions" (WCC 2008, 390). Recently, Phiri undertook two major projects related to contextual education with Dietrich Werner, program executive for ecumenical theological education. The first was the *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa* (2013). This textbook includes an impressive array of articles written primarily by African scholars. Phiri advocated for printing it in Africa to ensure the handbook was affordable and could be widely distributed to academic institutions (West, pers. comm., May 7, 2021). Similarly, Phiri and Werner were the two senior editors for the *Anthology of African Christianity*, which addresses the need for a comprehensive resource to provide an "accurate introduction on the current shape of African Christianity and the role of its different forms and trends for social and political development on the continent" (Phiri et al. 2016, xxxviii). Phiri's participation in these two projects reflects her desire to see that theological institutions in Africa have contextually relevant content, written by African scholars, to prepare students to engage effectively in the world (Phiri 2016, 10).

Public Witness and Diakonia

In 2012, after a time of discernment, Phiri accepted the position of associate general secretary for public witness and diakonia for the World Council of Churches and moved to Switzerland (WCC News, "Isabel Apawo Phiri Joins WCC as New Associate General Secretary," August 17, 2012, *www.oikoumene.org/news*). In January 2017, she became deputy general secretary, the first African woman since Mercy Oduyoye to hold this senior title at the WCC (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Public Witness and Diakonia is one of three main program areas for the WCC and encompasses initiatives that respond to the needs of people in the world. Phiri describes diakonia as "the churches' embodiment of God's reign to come, with its promise of life, justice, and peace and God's preferential option for the poor as theological and ethical criteria for the way forward" (Phiri 2019, 482–3). The larger framework for her work is the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (Phiri 2020a, 62), a theme set at the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan, South Korea, in 2013 (WCC Central Committee, "An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," July 8, 2014, *www.oikoumene.*

org/resources/documents). Initiatives she oversees include: the Ecumenical United Nations Office, Ecumenical Water Network, Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy, Food for Life Campaign, and the WCC-Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance. Her mandate includes peace-building, health and healing, human rights, economic justice, sustainability, climate justice, and anti-racism efforts (WCC n.d.a.).

Phiri's work with the WCC can be seen as an extension of her work within the church and the academy, where she also fostered deep connections between faith and social justice. Her background as a scholar helps to ground her work in biblical and theological reflection and is consistent with the WCC's emphasis on theology as an underpinning of its public witness. However, for Phiri, reflection is not enough; faith requires action. "Being an ecumenical church requires of us to share together our spirituality and to act together. It is these two which make the presence of Jesus Christ visible among us and in our witness in the world credible" (Phiri 2015, 5).

Leading the public witness and diakonia efforts for a global fellowship of 350-member churches is no easy task. Phiri approaches her ecumenical work with the same inclusive and collaborative approach she had as an academic and member of the Circle. She believes in the transformational power of personal narrative and sees listening as essential to public witness and diakonia (Phiri 2020a, 71). Increasingly, the issues dividing the WCC member churches are less about denominational issues and more about "divisions within churches over exclusion and discrimination on the basis of race, caste, gender, HIV and AIDS, and sexual orientation" (Phiri 2015, 10). Having herself experienced marginalization, she feels called to be in solidarity with others in the church who are seeking full inclusion, including LGBTQI+ members (Phiri, pers. comm., January 5, 2021). She also feels that the work for justice and peace should be inclusive of people from other faiths. "The church is called to raise its prophetic voice to advocate for people suffering from inequality irrespective of their religious affiliation, race or caste, class . . . [A]ll are children of God deserving of being reached with God's love" (Phiri 2015).

One area that is difficult to discuss in ecumenical and interfaith settings is the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Phiri experienced firsthand the tensions between the WCC and the Israeli government over the WCC's Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Israel and Palestine (EAPPI). Established in 2002, EAPPI sends international delegations to accompany Palestinians in the occupied territories to offer "a protective presence" and witness "their daily

struggles and hopes" (WCC n.d.b.). The EAPPI program and the WCC have been criticized for being partisan in the conflict and unfairly critical of Israel (Adam Beckett, "EAPPI is Not Anti-Semitic, WCC Insists," *Church Times*, February 15, 2019). In December 2016, Phiri was denied entry to Israel when traveling to Jerusalem to meet with leaders of the EAPPI program, which she oversees. She was part of a delegation of four representatives from the WCC, including Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, the general secretary. None of the other leaders were stopped while entering the country. Arriving separately, Phiri was detained, questioned by immigration and security personnel, and then sent back to Geneva (Ilan Lior, "In First, Israel Denies Entry to Religious Official Citing Support for BDS Movement," *Haaretz*, December 6, 2016).

Initially, Phiri was told she was being refused entry for immigration reasons. Later, Israeli officials described her as an activist for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, known as BDS. They cited this as the reason she was deported, making Phiri the first person to be denied entry to Israel for being a BDS supporter (Peter Beaumont, "Israel Refuses Visa to Theologian over Boycott and Divestment Activism," *Guardian*, December 6, 2016). BDS is an international movement, initiated by Palestinians, that encourages the use of economic measures to put pressure on Israel. Supporters see it as a non-violent movement for justice, and critics consider it to be antisemitic (David M. Halbfinger, Michael Wines, and Steven Erlanger, "Is B.D.S. Anti-Semitic? A Closer Look at the Boycott Israel Campaign," July 27, 2019, *New York Times*, *www.nytimes.com*). Phiri was surprised to see herself described as a BDS activist in the press and noted that she was never asked directly about the BDS movement in questioning. As a staff member, she speaks on behalf of the WCC, not as an individual (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). When asked, she explained the WCC policy on Israel-Palestine (WCC 2017) to officials. She also explained she does not oversee the daily running of the EAPPI program (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). The WCC hired a lawyer to contest the denial. After two years of legal challenges, a judge ruled in Phiri's favor (*WCC News*, "Court Orders Reversal on Israeli Ban of WCC Deputy General Secretary," October 18, 2018, *www.oikoumene.org*). The Israeli government said she would be allowed to return to Israel on the condition that she agrees to sign a paper saying she would not meet with any supporters of BDS on future trips. WCC lawyers advised against signing such a declaration, as it would require her to know everyone's political views on BDS at every meet-

ing. She declined to sign the required form and has not been able to visit Israel since 2016. Phiri is pragmatic about the outcome, recognizing that other staff can continue the work in the region, and she has many other partners to visit (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). Nevertheless, the incident highlights the challenges of leading justice work for the WCC, which represents so many constituencies and involves complex relationships internally and externally.

In 2018, Phiri traveled to Kingston, Jamaica, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. In an interview afterward, Phiri noted that much has changed as a result of the Decade. Four of the WCC presidents are women, as well as the moderator of the central committee, Dr. Agnes Abuom, who is from Kenya. Yet, there is also "global backlash against the forward strides that have been made in recent decades on issues of gender justice in the church and the world" (Phiri 2018). Phiri believes that gender justice is essential work for the ecumenical movement, and she continues to highlight the ways this interrelates with other urgent issues. In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe, women were disproportionately affected yet were severely under-represented in news coverage. "Churches and ecumenical organisations have a role to play" in addressing this problem, says Phiri, "by promoting and supporting women's leadership and calling on media to stop perpetuating gender stereotypes and the marginalization of women especially in vulnerable populations" (*WCC News*, "Gender Justice in Media Coverage: Are We Making Progress?" March 8, 2021, *www.oikoumene.org/news*). Her leadership on these matters helps keep gender justice centered in all aspects of the WCC's public witness and diakonia.

Return to Malawi

In 2022, after the next WCC Assembly, Isabel Apawo Phiri will retire and return to Malawi, where she hopes to live on a farm. She is looking forward to reuniting with her husband. When she first moved to Geneva, Maxwell came with her on sabbatical leave but eventually returned to South Africa (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020). He currently teaches business administration at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN, n.d.b). Being separated has not been easy, although Phiri's work takes her to Africa regularly, and

Maxwell travels often to Geneva. Phiri also looks forward to being close to her children and her first grandchild—Chisomo's daughter, Eliana Isabella Thandeka—who was born in 2015 (Phiri, pers. comm., December 29, 2020).

Phiri is well-respected in Malawi and will be welcomed home with pride. When she visits the continent, she makes it a point to visit theological schools to meet with students. She knows she is a role model as an African woman who holds a senior leadership role in the church. She finds it encouraging to hear students say that they have read her books or those of other African women theologians (Phiri, pers. comm., January 5, 2021). A new generation of African women is coming of age, ready to take their own first steps toward leadership roles in the church and society. As they do, they will have Phiri's example to follow.

Conclusion

In reviewing Phiri's work, one sees her longstanding commitment to listen to the voices of women in Africa, particularly those who are not a part of the academy, and to offer theological education that meets them where they are. Speaking of her work at the Center for Constructive Theology, Phiri writes, "One of the methodologies used is telling the story of one's own experience or those of other women whom we know, and who have given us permission to share their experience in order to empower other women" (Phiri 2000, 331). She recognizes song, parable, and storytelling as valid mediums for theological discourse. She asserts the right of African women to write about their experiences, to create theological discourses, and to have a seat at the table in the academy and church. She rejects those academic discourses which treat African women as objects to be discussed at a distance. She advocates for theological education that is contextually appropriate and sensitive to the real-world settings in which women and men live. She urges churches to be faithful to the witness of Christ by living an engaged life, connecting theological concerns with the hard work of addressing inequity and social injustice.

Phiri's work highlights the continuing need to examine theological education to see how it can be more receptive to the varieties of lived experience of Christians around the globe. Her work points

the way to a sensitive and respectful engagement with women who are not in the academy but who represent the majority of faithful practitioners of Christianity. Furthermore, she challenges theological educators and scholars of religion to be receptive to the continuing importance of engendering theological discourse. As Angelique Walker-Smith and Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué (2020, 407) have noted, "the pioneering generation of Pan-African female ecumenists has particular stories to tell, propitious for supporting emerging theologians of today in their search for a meaningful place in the fellowship of churches." They also note that today's context for theological education "calls also for a deepened reflection on how theological education is undertaken, and not only on what theological education seeks to transmit" (410). They argue that "The decisive quality in theological education will consist in an adequate form of relating to different, contextually framed layers of history in theology, and how to make sense of these in the face of multifaceted interrogations, situations, and attitudes in and outside the churches and theological institutions" (410).

Phiri's work provides an essential contribution to this discourse. Her life story and contributions are important to the history of theological education in Africa and should inform reflections on that history. Her work also holds lessons for all those seeking to reflect deeply on how we undertake contextual theological education and how this work connects to justice issues. In the conclusion to a volume of essays published in Phiri's honor, Chammah J. Kaunda and Julius M. Gathogo note that her work is grounded in "a theology that has a broad spectrum that sees the wellbeing of the Other as a critical component of being a theologian in postcolonial Africa. This 'Other' may mean a neighbor, the other gender, the ecumenical other, the racial-ethnic divide, the international divides, diverse cultures, and so on" (205). It is this concern for the wellbeing of all that motivates Phiri's work as a scholar-activist.

Finally, Phiri's tireless efforts to engender theological education suggest ways that we might advocate for greater knowledge equity in the digital age. This should include expanding access to African women's theological writings in open source platforms and digital repositories and digital sites like Wikipedia. As Musa Dube (2000, 20) notes in her work *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Western imperialism embedded in theological and religious studies has created "unequal geographies, unequal races, unequal distribution of power, and silencing of women." Decolonizing theological education

requires confronting the ways African women have been marginalized by Western scholarship, either treated as curious objects to be studied with condescension or simply overlooked completely. A lack of engagement with African women's perspectives in the academy becomes amplified in the emerging field of digital humanities when content about African women theologians is missing from digital repositories or sites like Wikipedia and Wikidata. The history of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and the contribution of many of its leading members, including Isabel Apawo Phiri, merit greater attention in these spaces. There is much more work to be done to address the content gaps that obscure African women's voices and to bring equity to digital spaces. Yet this work is essential for the 21st century and beyond.

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Notes

1 The Malawi government census report of 2018 shows that the total population of Malawi is 17,563,749. About 77.3% of the population identifies as Christian, 13.8% as Muslim, and 1.8% practice African traditional religions, 5.6% other faiths, and 2.1% no religion (Malawi 2019, 18).

2 This quotation and certain personal details included in this paper come from Isabel Apawo Phiri's responses to questions posed by Lucia Cuocci, which are not included in the video available online. The transcript of her responses was provided to the author by Phiri on December 29, 2020.

CHAPTER 4

Stephanie Y. Mitchem

R/evolutionary Acts

> *For the privileged, liberation is indeed seen as oppression.*
>
> – Mitchem (2019, 168)

ROSALIND HINTON

Every now and then, I take a phrase and let it circle in my head for months as a needed guide or a centering mantra, animating my disposition, thoughts, and actions. My current phrase, "For the privileged, liberation is indeed seen as oppression," comes from Dr. Stephanie Y. Mitchem's most recent book, *Race, Religion, and Politics: Toward Human Rights in the United States* (2019, 168). At the beginning of her book, Mitchem calls it a platitude, but, by the end, this expression stands as a proverb in African American theological parlance; to be studied, passed down to children, and lived by in daily life. This is how Mitchem's writing often leaves me. Her writing circles in my head for months and gives me new insights about my own privilege and place in the world. Her writings enable new understandings of American life and the deeply interconnected world around us. She reframes African American life and overturns old

tropes, revealing new truths about our history along the way. The above proverb, circling in my head after reading her book, is one reason why I chose to make Mitchem the subject of this essay. I often have to live into the texts and contexts that she explores in her books. Her work also resonates for me because she is very clear that her anti-racist and justice-oriented work is tied to her personal story. Mitchem, born in the North before segregation legally ended, shows how personal story shapes a life but does not predetermine it. Mitchem's work demonstrates that there are many stories in the ethos of a time and culture that we can borrow from, utilize, and transform to make a life of meaning for ourselves and others.

Dr. Mitchem earned an undergraduate degree in interdisciplinary studies and was the first woman graduate from Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit in 1985. She earned a Master in Theological Arts degree from St. John's Provincial Seminary in Plymouth, Michigan in 1989, and her doctorate in philosophy from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, in 1998. Mitchem is currently a full professor at the University of South Carolina, where she has a joint appointment in the Women and Gender Program and the Department of Religious Studies. She served as chairperson of the Religious Studies Department from 2008 to 2014. With the university threatening to abandon religious studies as a field, Mitchem led religious studies faculty in a strategic planning process that moved the department from a denominational and proselytizing Christian mission characteristic of early-twentieth-century Southern White universities to a multidisciplinary department. Under her guidance, the department incorporated cross-cultural perspectives and critical analysis of people's lives in light of the sacred with an emphasis on the analysis of complex social issues. In addition, she was the director of the African American Studies Program from July 2008 to July 2010. She is currently the undergraduate coordinator in the Women and Gender Program. Before teaching at the University of South Carolina, she was an associate professor at the University of Detroit Mercy, teaching there from 1993 to 2005. At Detroit Mercy, she founded the African American Studies Program, was Director of the Women's Studies Program, and Chairperson of the Religious Studies Department. Mitchem's approach to scholarly research is at the intersection of African American feminist and womanist theology, anthropology, history, and post-colonial thought. As of this writing, she is the author of four books, one edited volume, and numerous articles. She is a sought-after panelist, keynote speaker, and guest lecturer, most recently on the subjects of

"Democracy Now" and "Anti-Racist Teaching" at the American Academy of Religion, "Race Religion and Spiritual Resistance" at Northern Arizona University, and "Religion and Public Life" at Rice University (Mitchem, pers. comm, March 31, 2020). She has been on the editorial board of the peer-reviewed journal *CrossCurrents* since 2001, where she edited ten of their quarterly publications. She was named president of the Association of Religion and Intellectual Life (APRIL, formerly ARIL) in 2020 (S. Brent Rodriguez, pers.comm., April 20, 2021). She was editor of the September 2006 volume of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religions*. In 1999, she was named an ARIL Coolidge Fellow and a Lilly Foundation teaching consultation participant. In 2002, she was given the Wise Woman Award from the National Association of Women in Catholic Higher Education (Mitchem, pers. comm., March 31, 2021).

Reading back through Mitchem's impressive curriculum vitae makes her route to the academy appear well marked and inevitable. However, I am reminded of the remarks of a colleague that women's careers are seldom planned and often interrupted (B. Willinger, pers. comm., nd). Women, especially women of color, often have a circuitous path to success. No step forward was a guaranteed foothold on a ladder of success so thoroughly shaped by White expectations. In her book *African American Women Tapping Power and Spiritual Healing*, Mitchem (2004a, viii) states:

> Thirty years ago I was homeless. Twenty years ago I was an unemployed single African American mother. Fifteen years ago, I was beginning a master's program earning the grand sum of $14,000 a year. Each of these moments of my life story carried sets of stereotypes that also indicated my social value in the United States. Today my life experiences form an important personal basis for this study of African American women's spirituality and healing."

Early Life

Mitchem was born in 1950 in Cook County Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, to Barbara Jean Crews Mitchem and Thomas Theodore Mitchem. She is the oldest of three children, with two younger brothers Thomas (deceased) and Timothy (Mitchem, pers. comm., January 15, 2021).

She moved with her family to Detroit at an early age, where she attended St. Theresa Catholic grade school and Mackenzie public high school. Mitchem's early life was tightly controlled by her mother—a Detroit police officer who, with extended family members, raised her children in the ethos and politics of respectability. As Mitchem states,

> An elderly Aunt practically vibrated with rage, "Ladies wear gloves to church." This incident could have happened to any adolescent girl in the United States in the early 1960s, but for me, a Black girl-child, the implications were tied to my family's history of leaving Southern lands, separating from "lower" classes, and demonstrating that we were now part of the "better Negroes. (Mitchem 2004a, 73)

Mitchem points out that she was born before legal segregation had ended. "I remember my parents were fearful of Martin Luther King, Jr., portraying him as a threat to the progress they had made. There was turmoil through the 60s that only heightened after Civil Rights Laws were passed" (Mitchem 2021). In addition, her mother's dashed expectations, trauma, and marriage to an alcoholic she would later divorce caused her to keep her daughter Stephanie very close to home and to monitor her behavior in terms of respectability. Mitchem reflected, "through 12th grade [I] was really tied to the dysfunction in my family home. . . . I left my mother's home completely ignorant of life." Her Catholic grade school did not have extracurricular activities such as music, band, or theater, and when she snuck out for Girl Scouts or volunteer work, her mother stopped her when she found out. The Catholic grade school gave her a good foundation in academics, which meant she was advanced in her public high school, but, when she was asked to be in the Honor Society, her mother would not allow it because there were extra meetings. Her mother kicked her out of the house at 16, and she went to live with her father.

> I moved in with my father, and then I ended up coming back because my father's life was . . . He was still an active drunk at that point, and it was just totally chaotic. She [her mother] pushed me out at 17. . . . I had wanted to go to Oberlin, and again, my mother had said, "No, you can't go to Oberlin, it's too far away."

Mitchem went instead to Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan—called Ypsissippie in the Black community—at her mother's insistence and majored in pre-med, also at her mother's insistence (Mitchem, oral history interview with author, April 6, 2020).

The arts, literature, and dance—not science and math—fed Mitchem's soul, so she began to take her life into her own hands. During one college break, she recalled going home with an Angela Davis afro, after which her mother did not speak to her for two years. Undeterred, she started taking classes that she enjoyed. Mitchem's mother had a dance background and put her daughter in classical ballet classes when she was young. Mitchem built on this background and pursued dance classes at Eastern Michigan. She said, "Dance was one of the things that helped me to get together, especially African dance. And so when I was in college, I actually worked with another young woman, and we had a community dance program . . . one of the jobs I had was with the YWCA" (oral history interview with author, April 6, 2020).

Eventually, Mitchem switched her major at Eastern Michigan to education. However, her early years working in the community rather than going to pre-med classes like her mother wanted caught up with her. She described it as both flunking out and dropping out. "I was so dispirited, depressed at the school, I stopped attending classes. So not actively leaving. Passively getting kicked out" (Mitchem, pers. comm., November 22, 2020). Reflecting on this chaotic period, Mitchem identified the formative influence on her later career in academia. Her classes in education gave her an advantage over many academics who had no systematic teacher training. This background helped her to organize, think about, and plan her teaching and prepared her to deal with classroom interactions complicated by issues of race. For example, while student teaching, she witnessed the detrimental effects of institutional assumptions that permanently labeled Black students as problems even after a first infraction. She dealt with this in a practical way by saying to her Black students, "'. . . if you mess up in this room, I will not send you to detention, whatever it was called. I will call your mama.' And then they were fine." Looking back, she could see that her struggle and the messy, practical solutions to issues of race and identity that helped her make her way through the chaos influenced both her teaching and theoretical worldview in academia (Mitchem, pers. comm., November 22, 2020).

Eventually, Mitchem made her way to Detroit to pursue other options. The city of Detroit, like a living, breathing friend, would also become a significant part of Mitchem's formation. Mitchem commented,

> I never had a real sense of connection with Detroit as Detroit until I left Detroit and then I came back . . . I got into . . . all the things that had been denied me. And I'm not being funny when I say things that have been denied me. . . . It was a whole different scene. Motown was there so it had an edge of glamour in the Black community that you could get into which I did. You were with glamorous people. You were around Eddie Kendricks or you know any of the Temptations, and you would date some of these guys. It was that kind of thing. (Mitchem, oral history interview with author, April 6, 2020)

Mitchem describes her experience of Detroit in the early 1970s as "living a split screen." She was working as a drug counselor and becoming a community organizer by day and mixing with the glamourous of Detroit by night.

Straddling borders, she became adept at making connections.

> I was, for all intents and purposes, someone who knew a lot of people in town and could help people connect with each other, in a sense, a power broker. I was working with activist Black people based in unions. Detroit was a union town. Everybody knew that they had rights. Everybody knew that if you don't get what you want that you fight for it.

Mitchem explained that her roots in Detroit meant that she did not see oppressive situations as limiting. "It meant I had to learn how to work around it, or through it or under it, or over it in some kind of way. . . . I often joke about being institutionalized. And by that I mean I've gotten a lot of information about how to make systems work, which makes me annoying" (Mitchem, oral history interview with author, April 13, 2020).

Mitchem moved briefly to New York and had a disastrous and short-lived marriage, returning to Detroit early in 1980 with a newborn baby girl. Barbara H. Lowe was born in New York on December 28, 1979 (Mitchem, oral history interview with author, April 13, 2020). Her mother would not have an unmarried mother in her house, so Mitchem moved in with Aunt Maggie Mitchem, whom Mitchem called "the mother of her heart," and with whom she spent many summers as a child. During this period, and with a child in tow, Mitchem secured her undergraduate degree at Sacred Heart Seminary in 1985 while working within the Catholic Diocese of Detroit as a mediator in parish conflicts. She eventually went to work in student affairs at the University of Detroit Mercy.

After obtaining her master's degree at St. John's Provincial Seminary in 1989, Mitchem moved from administration to teaching in the Religious Studies Department at the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM). One of her significant contributions at UDM included realigning the disparate African American courses to allow inner-city students the opportunity to take a concentration in African American studies. While working at UDM, she also decided to enter a doctoral program. As a single mother in the Detroit area, Mitchem was leaning toward pursuing her doctorate at Wayne State University, which houses a rich archive of Black oral histories she would later use in her research. However, her colleague Jane Schaberg, a feminist biblical scholar, noticed Mitchem carrying around Delores Williams' book *Sisters in the Wilderness*—a seminal book of womanist biblical scholarship published in 1993. Schaberg offered to put Mitchem in touch with Williams. Mitchem remembers being amazed that she was on a phone conversation with Delores Williams, saying, "[It] wasn't that she had any great answers, but that she was living with the same questions." It was a simple exchange with Williams that confirmed her desire to study womanist theology. "I said, I'm tired of having to explain myself." Williams replied, "Honey, so am I." Mitchem says it was Williams' "openness to that reality that helped me to say, 'Okay, I'll go to Northwestern and Garrett and pursue the doctorate there.'" Mitchem continues:

> Despite my history of having been involved in Catholic institutions, I wasn't interested in doing Catholic theology. That was not my interest. I wanted to explore what was happening with Black women and I didn't know what that meant. So I needed Garrett Northwestern to help me frame that discussion. And so I ended up saying that I wanted to talk about African American Women's spirituality, because that's religion neutral. Um, but, but also to tie it in with embodiment. I don't think the word embodiment was hot then, but you know what I mean. I had wonderful [dissertation] resources in Detroit, with the Black Women's Health Project. (Mitchem, oral history interview with author, April 13, 2020)

Womanist Theology

It is hard to convey the excitement that womanist theology generated in the mid-1990s among many of us in the academy. In her book *Deeper Shades*, Stacey Floyd-Thomas (2006, 1) describes womanist constructions as a revolutionary, paradigmatic shift away from the hierarchical and conquering individualism produced by White theologians, dead and living. Turning René Descartes' (1596–1650) famous statement on the foundations of knowledge on its head, Floyd-Thomas characterizes the shift by the African proverb "I am because we are."

My personal interest in womanist theologies took shape in my own history of growing up in the deep South. As an Alabama girl growing up under the specter of George Wallace, I was compelled to steep myself in womanist writings. For me, it was not about restorative justice—a concept not yet born—but about survival. Womanist theologies made demands on me and helped me more fully enter and examine my own worldviews.

In the 1990s, womanism was the most intellectually challenging research around. In 1990, at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) annual meeting, scholars of every ilk fought their way into the overflowing rooms holding womanist sessions. The presentations and discussion in these sessions were heated, and speakers were fanning themselves and each other as they shared searing critiques of White feminists, the Black Church, the Western Canon, and the domination of White culture. Womanists were critics from within the Black Church. Many of these women were among the first women ministers in their denominations. It was an honor to be present at these sessions and to be in the presence of intellectual giants such as Katie Geneva Cannon, Delores S. Williams, and Jacquelyn Grant—the women who crafted womanist theology as an intellectual field in the 1980s as students at Union Seminary (Grant 2020). Other early womanists, such as sociologist Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, found their way to womanist thought because "I had data in search of a method" (Grant 2020). Renita J. Weems was the first African American woman to gain a doctorate in Hebrew Bible. Shawn Copeland and Diana Hayes were Catholic systematic theologians deploying womanist methodologies. Marcia J. Riggs wrote the groundbreaking "Awake, Arise, Act: A Womanist Call for Black Liberation" in 1994, the same

year as Kelly Brown Douglas wrote her groundbreaking work, "The Black Christ." The writing and intellectual achievements of these women were and are prolific.

Mitchem, who graduated from Northwestern in 1998, cannot really be considered a second-generation womanist. Womanist scholar Emilie Townes (2003, 159) attributes the beginning of the use of the "term womanist in religious disciplines" to ethicist Katie Cannon, in her 1985 article "The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness," only thirteen years before Mitchem's graduation. By the time of Mitchem's graduation from Northwestern in 1998, we see this first wave of womanists fanning out across the academy in religious studies departments as well as denominational seminaries. In Northwestern-Garret's multidisciplinary doctoral program, Mitchem focused on feminist and womanist theology with Drs. Rosemary Ruether and Toinette Eugene at Garrett Methodist Seminary. She also worked with anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo and historian Josef Barton at Northwestern University (Mitchem, oral history interview with author, April 13, 2020).

Mitchem graduated the same year and with a similar background as another womanist theologian, Linda E. Thomas, who finished with a degree in cultural and social anthropology from American University. Both women pursued a framework and methodology that included the voices and perspectives of present-day women. In her 1998 article, "Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm," Thomas (1998, 5) argues for the inclusion of ethnography in womanist theology, saying, "I urge that we examine further our procedural tools of analysis. We must view books written about poor black women as secondary sources and employ anthropological techniques to collect stories and publish ethnographies of women who are still alive." Mitchem validates this approach, saying that anthropology gave her tools to interview African American women because "so much had yet to be written that wasn't based on the past." Mitchem added that, as late as 1994, the so-called "experts" on African Americans were Southern White men. Harkening Zora Neal Hurston, Mitchem said, "Anthropology gave me a structure and a set of tools to overcome biological race theories. . . . There was no real watermelon gene or Black acting gene in my body. . . . I didn't want to write about African Americans as tragic victims of systems they can't control . . . waiting around until a white person rescues them" (Mitchem, oral history interview with author, April 13, 2020).

Mitchem builds upon and contributes to the rich womanist dialogues that evolve with the times. Characteristic of Mitchem's oeuvre is its attention to historical contextualization and thick descriptions from anthropology combined with ethnographic interviews. Her intersectional approach tackles women's sexuality, misogyny, and homophobia in the Black Church and in the larger White world. She addresses systemic causes of poverty and racism. She sees value in African American communities that are often dismissed by White and Black scholars and presents imaginative and alternative ways of understanding Black life. She challenges oppressive institutions, systems, and concepts that limit African American lives. She shares her experiences of how to navigate White institutions and a White world. "I guess, [I'm] stubborn or determined depending on your definition. So traversing a white world didn't mean . . . Well, I've learned to work in it, but I didn't have to be it" (Mitchem, oral history interview with author, April 20, 2020).

On Being Catholic

Mitchem was raised within the Black Catholic communities of Detroit, often reckoning with people's astonishment that there are Black Catholics in the US. From childhood through her seminary education, on to teaching at the University of Detroit Mercy, like members of Black Catholic communities in Baltimore and New Orleans, she has experienced Catholicism as a culture and a way of life as well as a religion. She has, therefore, drawn inspiration from this Catholic upbringing, though not in a way that most Catholic bishops today would admire.

> I think the greatest influence on my own religious, spiritual formation was Catholic spirituality, the bells and smells. It shaped my understanding, my sense of connection to earth, my sense of connection to spirit, my sense of connection. That actually, at this point in my life, has led me to African traditional religion. But obviously that's a long journey. . . . At that time that sense of ritual, I didn't realize, it really did help that aspect of my formation. (Mitchem, oral history interview with author, April 6, 2020)

Her Catholic church experiences have led her to a more sacramental and embodied understanding of divinity as deeply relational and rooted in humanity. The term "Black Catholic" is another term not easily placed on Mitchem, despite her long career and education in Catholic institutions. Mitchem says, "Because I never wanted to go the minister route. I'm not, I am not Christian. I grew up Catholic, but by the time I was at Northwestern, I was just, I was trying to find a way to get out of the Catholic [way of being]" (Mitchem, oral history interview with author, April 20, 2020).

Over a lifetime, Mitchem's interactions with the Catholic Church made her a witness to enough systemic and institutional oppression that it could warrant an additional chapter in her book, *Race, Religion and Politics*. Many of her experiences could be classified as "anti-racism racism"—a term coined by Ronald Hall, whom Mitchem (2019, 92) quotes: "Anti-racism racism is a pointed but logical construct able to withstand the scrutiny of scientific investigation. . . . Anti-racist racism manifests as the need to dominate by anti-racist rhetoric in whatever venture being considered." As a child in a Catholic grade school, she recalls,

> While the nuns were well meaning, I can look back and realize how much racism we encountered. We didn't have a name for it when we were kids, but it was there that sense of disconnect, that sense of, "She said what?" Like a nun walking in the classroom, saying, "Oh, I'm very happy. I've never taught you people before." (Oral history interview with author, April 06, 2020).

In Mitchem's master's program at St. John's Provincial Seminary, she asked a White woman professor, "'Why aren't [we] talking about any Black women's writings?' And the response I got was something to the effect of 'Black women just don't write anything.'" Mitchem writes about a similar, or perhaps the same, incident in an early article, "No Longer Nailed to the Floor,"

> During master's level studies, I had begun to research African American religious thought on my own as it was not part of the approved curriculum. I included some of that unauthorized material for one assignment and the professor for whose class I was writing, harshly critiqued both the paper and me personally. The work was not scholarly and was of poor quality. Wasn't it unoriginal, just a compilation of several other papers I had written for other classes? Perhaps the writ-

> ing was not even mine? In my view, the paper represented the most honest, creative work I had ever done. I had begun to make some connection within the thought and lives of African Americans and spirituality. I had begun, in other words, to step outside the status quo. Such stepping was not allowed; I was vulnerable. The instructor's critique, as part of a cultural binding I could not recognize at that time, immobilized me, nailed me to the floor. (Mitchem 2003, 67)

This and other acts of erasure committed Mitchem to mining the experiences of African American women saying, "So, after that degree . . . I decided that I would only read Black women's writings and was introduced to this whole other world, which is why when I was going for my doctorate, I wanted to focus on womanist theology" (oral history interview with author, April 20, 2020).

At one point, Mitchem explored an education at Catholic University in Washington, DC. "And I called there and was basically told 'you want to do womanist stuff? Oh No! You do that on your own free time. We do real theology here.'" Mitchem said, "Thank you. Goodbye." Mitchem said it was probably a good idea that she gave up the Catholic route to a PhD. Around this time, she also had a conversation with Black Catholic and womanist theologian Shawn Copeland, who had studied systematic theology at Boston College. "Oh, I remember, I had a conversation with Shawn Copeland . . . I wanted to know about her experience in Boston . . . At first, she just started laughing." Mitchem, reflecting on her own experiences, said,

> That type of rejection of ideas outside of Canonical Literature and research has made me more open to graduate students. I am so excited for these people who are thinking their way through. And I know that there are other people in the Women and Gender Studies Program [at the University of South Carolina] who try to shut them down. And that makes me crazy. Don't shut these people down. Let them explore. This is how we go forward. This is how research develops. This is how we expand as human beings. (Oral history interview with author, April 13, 2020)

Mitchem could easily embrace the title "womanist" and "Catholic" because of her background and training. However, she resists external labels and moves into teacher mode as she explores labels in relation to the contexts, geographies, and disciplines within which she finds herself,

> I am conscious of myself as a feminist until I run into some of those white feminists who only understand feminism in terms of biological sex, so if you're not talking about women as women, then you can't be a feminist. Black feminism enters into intersectionality where its race, class, and gender. Womanism moves in that space but even expands it to talk about areas Black feminists often don't want to, which is African American and African women's spirituality and its impact. There are many Black Feminists who only want to call themselves Black feminists or feminists. So when I go to the African continent, they don't use womanist, they use Feminist. When I talk to historians, for the most part, they don't use womanist, they use Black Feminist. Younger students who are Black found FEMME and are adding the queer factor a lot more intentionally, moving beyond feminism. (Oral history interview with author, April 13, 2020)

Mitchem is a pragmatist, using what she has gained over the years to work with many types of communities. She says, "Yeah, I know that's where it comes down so it's really practical. It's pragmatic, it's like okay . . . But the underlying belief system is still there" (oral history interview with author, April 13, 2020).

On Teaching

Dr. Mitchem's experiences within the Catholic Church and other predominantly White institutions have directly impacted her teaching. Dr. Mitchem writes and teaches with her students' questions on her mind. She understands teaching and learning—as one of her mentors and role models, Grace Lee Boggs from Detroit, said—"as r/evolutionary acts." Mitchem engages graduate and undergraduate students at the University of South Carolina, [Columbia] in "the radical art of thinking" and nurtures students who have original ideas that have been rejected or deemed inappropriate (Mitchem, pers. comm., April 1, 2020). In an invited lecture with Villanova University faculty, Mitchem (2021) commented on her teaching philosophy, which is deeply connected to her own story,

> I aim to encourage students to question, followed by a pursuit of answers; I aim to promote students to act with justice; I aim to enter honest conversations with students, my act of co-learning; I aim to

> promote scholarship that is solid, forward- and backward-looking in order to achieve the groundbreaking; I aim to encourage networking and community but not ideology and not tribalism; I aim to foster enjoyment in the tasks of scholarship.

Mitchem added, "That's it. In the process I've also learned to trust myself and my skill as a teacher. And I do not shy away from difficult discussions."

Mitchem recently became the undergraduate coordinator of the Women and Gender Studies Program because "I have been alarmed at how the program is whitening up, so white girls find a home in Women and Gender Studies, Black girls do not." Mitchem is most disappointed in women who call themselves feminists yet have unrecognized patriarchal and racial scripts. "I'm seeing a lot of scholars who call themselves feminists not even being aware of how they are scripting out discussions of race" (oral history interview with author, April 20, 2020).

Mitchem claims that one teaching technique she adapted from Dr. Rosemary Ruether was to push herself to teach from new materials all the time. Unlike some professors teaching their dissertations after thirty years, Ruether kept on top of the literature reviews and incorporated the latest publications into her coursework. Curiosity and mutual exploration with students are central to Mitchem's constructive pedagogy.

Books and Essays

Mitchem understands African American communities as her priority. She mines the everyday life of African American women for the ways these women empower and heal themselves, resist oppression, and hold their communities together against a White American society that does not value their full humanity. As she states in *Introducing Womanist Theology*, "Womanist theology is based on the complex realities of Black women's lives. Womanist scholars recognize and name the imagination and initiative that African American women have utilized in developing sophisticated religious responses to their lives" (2002, 3). As a womanist and prolific writer, Mitchem is passionately committed to using an intersectional race, class, and gender analytical lens that allows her to surface the embedded the-

ologies and embodied meaning systems in Black women's everyday lives. However, this mining of Black women's lives comes at a price. In an early article, "No Longer Nailed to the Floor," Mitchem reflects,

> As I discovered womanist thought, I encountered teachers who encouraged me to speak in my own voice. When I began writing in earnest, these teachers challenged me to write only from the honesty of my own experiences. Reaching back for the level of creativity that two seminaries had worked to immobilize brought on a level of anxiety and fear that surprised me. I thought, as the illusion of "freedom" invited, that I had achieved a level of immunity from brainwashing. But putting words on paper, aiming to speak the words of Black women brought on pain . . . My experience is not unique. The professional world is one of the places that finds multiple ways to nail the feet of people of color, and women in particular, to the canonical Western-culture floor. (Mitchem 2003, 67)

Part of Mitchem's own journey as an academic is to put pen to paper and name Black women's pain and show how Black communities transform pain into personal and communal power that defies erasure. She states, "Black women are not born strong, but become so through our lives" (2003, 70). Black women know where the boundaries are laid by the status quo and choose to cross these boundaries despite the pain that it will cause. They do this for the self and for the larger community. Mitchem notes that Black women often answer the question of how they achieved success in spite of the pain by saying, "I prayed." Using anthropological methods and an intersectional lens, Mitchem maps this journey identifying a "spiritual and intuitive dimension" to claiming power when women of color move outside the boundaries of the status quo where there are few roadmaps and fewer mentors.

In her second book, *African American Women Tapping Power and Spiritual Wellness* (2004a). Mitchem explores the varied and extended relationships that help African Americans survive and even thrive—the auntie, the granny, the midwife—who strengthen African American communities. The book is grounded in her experiences of resilience that were enabled by the grace of extended family and intentionally created support networks. As Mitchem (pers. comm., March 31, 2021) states, "The book was inspired by Aunt Maggie and friendships and the good people I have met in my life that provided guidance and support and humor and recipes. For instance, my little

dog stays with a neighbor who lives down the street when I am out of town, and she came down tonight to see how he was." In *Tapping Power*, Mitchem finds that it is not always the grand gesture but the small acts of kindness that build communities of resistance and hope.

Health and healing are particular concerns of Mitchem's. She devotes two books, *Tapping Power* (2004a) and *African American Folk Healing* (2007a), to this topic. She also has an edited volume on this topic with Dr. Emily Townes—*Faith, Health, and Healing among African Americans* (2008)—and numerous articles with this focus. In *African American Folk Healing*, Mitchem historically contextualizes and reframes the denigrating and dismissive ideas of the dominant culture surrounding African American cures, dialect, conjuring, and healing. She traces the deeply relational and often unselfconscious healing practices within various African American communities from slavery through the 20th century. Body, soul, spirit, personal and communal relationships combine and factor into wellness and sickness. Healers and self-healers balance individual and social energies to bring communities and individuals into relationships of well-being. She insists that health is a limited concept of Western medicine and points out the many disjunctions between Western and African American understandings of medicine and healing. African American women often practice, pass down, and conjure up other, more holistic, psychic, and social forms of resistance and well-being.

Mitchem addresses the popularity and impact of prosperity churches on Black communities, the Black church, and Black theologies in *Name It and Claim It: Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church*. She states that there is not just one type of prosperity church. Rather, there are basic tenets lived out in multiple ways that undergird the idea of prosperity. First, prosperity churches espouse a benevolent and generous God that desires believers' socio-economic prosperity. Second, "members hold to positive confession," stressing the idea that they can "name it and claim it." Tithes and unwavering belief in God are part of this confessional faith and "doubts prevent blessings." Finally, designer clothing and conspicuous consumption become symbols through which God is understood (Mitchem 2007b, 69–70).

One of Mitchem's notable, scholarly contributions in this area is her differentiation between three types of prosperity churches that she finds in Black communities. There are the prosperity gospels derived from within African American communities preached by leaders such as Sweet Daddy Grace, Father Divine, Marcus Garvey, and even civil rights leader James Forman, who penned *The Black Mani-*

festo. These leaders and preachers espouse an inventive and exciting Black cultural response to racism and poverty. There are 20th-century Black prosperity megachurches such as Creflo Dollar in Georgia that flow from White "Word of Faith'' preachers Kenneth Hagen and Kenneth Copeland. Mitchem suggests these theologies of prosperity are firmly wedded to a view of America's world dominance and to capitalism that is exclusively and unapologetically patriarchal (71). The third category is Unity- and Religious Science-rooted churches that emphasize the "mind's power to control the perception of a situation" (88). Mitchem sees the appeal of these churches in their "belief in possibilities beyond the seeming limits of the moment" (102). Mitchem adds credibility to her writing by using ethnographic interviews with church-goers. In this way, she attempts to respectfully capture the appeal of these churches. One woman she quotes, named Sakoura, reminded her that many African American beliefs that have been labeled as White-derived were originally appropriated by White culture from African, Asian, and Native beliefs and practices (Mitchem 2007b, 69–102).

In a review of Mitchem's book, Sandra Barnes (2012, 52) notes that Mitchem "describes the existential wounds that years of segregation and institutionalized racism have had on blacks, as well as the resulting 'spirituality of longing' for personal fulfillment, equality, social justice, and societal acceptance." Reviewer Carol Troupe (2009, 125) states, "The work Mitchem has done is accessible and, I think, valuable. She has taken care not to simply disparage prosperity churches without first exploring them and considering their value from the perspective of their congregations." As in all her works, Mitchem uses an intersectional lens to explore prosperity churches' impact on race, gender, and social justice. Her critique is that many of these churches reinscribe rather than illuminate the more complex social and economic causes of injustice, often do not deal with racism, and do not benefit all church-goers when it comes to gender roles and sexual orientation (Mitchem, 2007b).

According to Robin Fretwell Wilson's (2020, 181) review, Mitchem's book, *Race, Religion, and Politics: Toward Human Rights in the United States*, "chronicles the slow march of hate across American history long before white nationalist groups became increasingly brazen and dangerous." Written after Donald Trump took office in 2016, Mitchem explains how "concepts of race, like kudzu, [an invasive Southern vine] have invaded the religion and politics of a growing nation's consciousness" (Mitchem 2019, 2). In this volume,

Mitchem introduces the intersectionality of race, religion, and politics as a methodology and analytical lens to be placed alongside other womanist and Black feminist concepts that focus on the intersectionality of race, class, and gender as formulated by Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres in *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* (2003) or by Anglea Davis in her seminal work *Woman Race and Class* (1983). Using her own intersectional framework, Mitchem demonstrates how race, religion, and politics intertwine, justify, and reinforce the reality of systemic racism in the US and across the world.

Returning to the beginning of this biography, I note how this example of Mitchem's work allows us to see just how it is that liberation looks like oppression to the privileged even as it also illuminates a path forward where liberation might be restorative for all. Her expert analysis leaves no doubt that systemic racism is part of our founding myth and is reinforced by religious and political institutions throughout US history. I use the word "myth" to refer to our deepest stories that propel every word and deed, every law and institution, and every cultural, political, and economic exchange. However, Mitchem's work in *Race, Religion, and Politics: Toward Human Rights in the United States* does not leave us hopeless in the face of this realization. She calls for an introduction of human rights from below, at the neighbor-to-neighbor level, as a form of restorative justice, healing, and community building that interrupts the founding myths that support and sustain racism in the US. Mitchem asserts that restorative justice frees all Americans because we are all captive to these founding systems of oppression. Part of the genius of this book is the many examples of how systems of oppression and acts of liberation are embodied in experiences of everyday life. There are no simple answers, absolute demons, or perfect saints. Instead, there are questions that open us up to other possibilities. This book allows us to see just how it is that liberation looks like oppression to the privileged. We have only seen glimpses of alternative ways of living that are driven by human rights from below. In our vision of the nation, we have yet to even partially embrace communities of color as full citizens or even as fully human (Mitchem 2019).

Mitchem continues to refine her conceptual framework and broaden her reach into global contexts. This move is not a new phenomenon. Katie Cannon and Jacquelyn Grant were in Ghana at the formation of the Circle of Concerned African Theologians in 1989 (Grant 1989). Mercy Oduyoye, one of the founders of the Circle, has

nurtured common cause with womanists throughout the Circle's history. Anthropologist Linda E. Thomas makes South Africa a context for her research in *Under the Canopy* (2007). Traci C. West's most recent book—*Solidarity and Defiant Spirituality: Africana Lessons on Religion Racism and Ending Gender Violence*—looks to the African continent for resources in healing gender violence (2019). Mitchem reflects on the deep-seated need in the world to adopt what she calls human rights from below.

> I am still committed to the issue of racial justice . . . and justice for women and gender justice. But I moved it all to a place where I think in terms of human rights, which I think incorporates everything I've ever done. Whether it's community work, African American studies, women and gender studies, religious studies, ethics, all of that kind of balls up together for me in an understanding of human rights and this idea of personhood: Who is defined as a person and how are they defined as a person. And I see this being reenacted now [during the pandemic] as people are saying, "Well, we should just go back to work." Well, the people who are on the front lines of all of this, are people of color and they're the ones who are dying most and it's almost like an unspoken in my head. This kind of, "Hey they don't count." (Oral history interview with author, April 20, 2020)

Mitchem's current research context is Nigeria, with a focus on transnational decolonial thought and human rights. This research builds upon connections she is making in Nigeria through the Ile Aresa Diaspora to Africa Cultural Exchange for the Arts and Sciences (Mitchem, pers.comm., March 31, 2021). In speaking of Africa and the Americas, scholars have historically struggled with balancing relevant unifying themes with the particularities of a specific context. Mitchem's nuanced writing style and research methods, including her focus on ethnography and the particular lives of Black women, provide a way to address this difficulty. Furthermore, Mitchem is interested in joining post-colonial dialogues and global frameworks that "may (currently) exclude black American women and men." Including US Black women into these postcolonial conversations will, she believes, "create an opening to re-encounter the global reach of colonization" (Mitchem 2016, 61).

Does Liberation Feel Like Oppression?

Dr. Mitchem's scholarship will exist far beyond her own time as a respectful model of inquiry and dialogue and as a form of truth-telling about the history and legacy of racism in our nation. Her work recovers the stories and restores the dignity of African American women, not just for themselves, but as "a way out of no way" for all of us. Her work also marks the history of a moment in time—a style and way of writing that will be built upon by later scholars. Her teaching and mentoring inspired a new generation of scholars and encouraged those students who felt they had nothing to offer to carry on with productive and creative lives. Mitchem's skill at making systems work to her benefit and the benefit of other marginalized people has made those systems of White privilege more inclusive for all. This success is another manifestation of a womanist applying personal pain to community action, answering the question, "how do you work for justice?" (Mitchem, 2001, 90)

Dr. Mitchem has invested her time, energy, and career into the task of recording and celebrating the alternative epistemologies, theological methodologies, healing practices, and ways of being in the world of Black women and their communities. Informed by her use of ethnographic methodologies, including oral histories, she has worked passionately to critique dominant paradigms that support oppression. Using these qualitative methodologies, she has helped her students and readers to see the benefit of other paradigms and ways of seeing operative in the lives of Black women and the communities in which they live. Where are we on the scale of examining our own paradigms and locations of privilege? Does liberation feel like oppression?

Postscript: Author's Reflections On Oral History

When I look back at my own dissertation, which was substantiated with ethnographic research methods in the 1990s, I was frustrated by the lack of resources available about African American communities. I went to a librarian in Crystal Springs, MS, to ask about African American churches in the area (Hinton 2001). I was told there weren't any from before the 20th century. A Black librarian pulled me over and told me about a Black Church founded before the Civil War that was still in existence. The only way to get information about this community was through interviews with the oldest living members, who were descendants of the founders. I later discovered that, during Jim Crow, Black neighborhoods across the South remained unincorporated and were not part of the nearest White town—in this case, Crystal Springs, MS. The purpose of this was to deny resources, public services, voting rights, and true US citizenship to African American communities. These communities were intentionally erased on official maps but still live on in African American family stories. Information can be gleaned about these communities from the ever-important census records. If you want to know the history of these Black communities, which are often centered around the founding of Black churches, you find the home of the person where church bulletins and church minutes are gathered and stored. If you are lucky, church history was written up and saved by one of the elders of the community, usually a woman. No White "public library" ever bothered to collect these types of papers or record these histories. More is available in urban environments, especially where there is a historically Black college or a research center focused on Black history. However, if you want to tap the collective memories of elders, creating oral histories is an important methodology that provides information beyond what is recorded in the limited, available records.

Oral histories are a powerful way to document what I would call "living history," especially for communities that are marginalized and have been erased and immobilized by history's winners. When William Barr, attorney general under President Trump, was asked about his legacy, he replied confidently, "History is told by the winners" (Barr 2020). Oral history is a methodology that resists this type of impoverished and imperial record. It does not necessarily aggrandize the winners. Rather, it offers fuller, more communal accounts of how lives are lived and how pain is transformed into collective

action that can heal even the creators and guardians of oppressive systems of power. Histories from below show how communities are organized beyond the winners' understanding. These narratives explain how marginalized communities partake in the march of history and offer alternative ways of organizing power. Only by including these histories can we rewrite the conquering narratives of American Christian exceptionalism.

The pandemic of 2020–21 expanded virtual technologies along with the ability to record oral histories over the Internet. These technologies generate poor but manageable transcripts. At the beginning of the pandemic, one of the nicest things that I gave myself was a call to a colleague, Dr. Mitchem, who lives on the other side of the country. We had three long conversations about her life. In this process, I learned that oral histories freely offered are valuable to the teller as well as the interviewer. They offer poignant affirmations of decisions, help unpack unexamined trauma, and help us reflect and make meaning and connections out of often disparate events. For these interviews, I followed the guidelines of the Oral History Association (OHA, n.d). I also collaborated with Mitchem on the article—not in its writing but in her approval that it honestly reflected her understandings and life story. This type of oral history is not adversarial, overly critical, or a type of journalism, but a type of co-construction.

Importantly, publishing oral histories like this one about Dr. Mitchem turns these traditional primary sources into valid secondary sources for future researchers. I did not feel it was my place to compose material with the critical eye of someone writing a dissertation. Thankfully, someone else can do that. But these materials do become a critical resource and context for Mitchem's oeuvre and intellectual thought. This essay does not exhaust the oral histories that I gathered from Mitchem. The oral histories and transcripts will exist for others to review. African American women's intellectual thought is still not as central to the narrative of the nation or to American religious thought as it should be. Our current world is organized around narratives that glorify acquisition, conquest, and even citizenship as the privilege and legal right of White people. I am reminded of an alternative possibility, paraphrased here, that writer Gloria Naylor (pers. comm., 1990) left with me in a lucky conversation. "What if, instead of investing in men and machines to go to the moon, we had invested in understanding the physics, healing remedies, intellect, and experiences of Black grannies . . . What would we know about ourselves and our world?"

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CHAPTER 5

Traci C. West

Disruptive Activism, Ministry, and Scholarship

CAROLYN BRATNOBER

"Disruptive" is a fitting word to describe the activism, ministry, and scholarship of Rev. Dr. Traci C. West. The author of several prominent theology texts, including *Disruptive Christian Ethics*, West is known for her distinctive incorporation of personal narratives from individual women into her analyses of the dimensions of race, gender, and sexuality in the dynamics of intimate violence. Her feminist theological analysis of these issues has a prophetic character that prioritizes justice-making in the real world. This biography will explore Prof. West's ministerial and academic accomplishments and trace her trajectory towards becoming the noted scholar-activist she is today. Dr. West's work attends to the essential feminist question of the tension between the particular and the universal. Her work explores and celebrates the importance of individual lives, intersecting identities, and women's subjectivity. This biography celebrates her

noteworthy contributions with an exploration of what it means to place the experience of one woman—one Black, queer woman—at the foundation of one's analysis.

Early Life

Traci West's mother—Paula F. West—was a central figure in her early years, influencing young Traci through her political engagement and intellectual inclinations. Paula was raised in Harlem by aunts who brought her to Abyssinian Baptist Church. There, her deep faith and spirituality were formed at a young age in the atmosphere of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.'s desegregation activism. Before Traci was born in 1959, Paula moved to Stamford, Connecticut, where she married Traci's father. The family began attending First United Methodist Church in Stamford; thus, Traci was poised to become a lifelong Methodist from infancy in a household with deep Methodist and Baptist roots.

In a series of videoconference conversations with the author in June of 2020, Traci West recalled several childhood memories, including attending church services twice on Sundays and savoring private devotional moments with her mother in their backyard. Energetic and bookish, Traci's mother worked several jobs, including one as an assistant in a school where she advocated on behalf of children of color. After church, her mother led study groups, reading Black power books with friends (West, pers. comm., June 24, 2020). West reflects that her mother's leadership and intellectualism helped her "to understand how formal higher education degrees do not always produce intellectuals, and how people without formal higher education degrees . . . should be recognized for the ways in which they are intellectuals." Yet Traci's mother also felt strongly that her children should receive an excellent education and put them through private school. In this environment, Traci became imbued with a deep sense of justice-work rooted in study. The youngest in the house among her artistic and high-achieving elder siblings, she felt a need to distinguish herself academically.

As a high school student at New Canaan Country School in Connecticut during the 1960s, Traci's classmates were predominantly White and affluent. She collaborated with other Black students to raise awareness about issues of racism and became known as a vocal advocate for justice among her classmates. She recalls her early in-

terest in activism, partly informed by the growing Civil Rights Movement, which she witnessed daily in the news as a child. She shared that, "Every single evening, we watched the news. It was mandatory. We didn't talk at the dinner table until we had watched the evening news." She was strongly influenced by social justice as a central aspect of Christian clerical leadership and felt called to a career in the United Methodist Church. Early on, she identified herself as playing a care-taking role in her family, even though she was the youngest, comforting relatives during times of grief. By the time she graduated high school, she had begun actively taking steps towards ordination.

Key Career Influences

As an undergraduate majoring in religious studies at Yale in the late 1970s, Traci West continued to develop her skills in social-justice organizing. Her freshman year, she served as the Black Student Alliance's representative to the newly-formed Grievance Board for Student Complaints of Sexual Harassment. This board was created in the wake of the lawsuit brought against Yale by Ronni Alexander and others in Alexander v. Yale, the first instance of Title IX to support charges of sexual harassment against an educational institution (National Organization of Women 2007). In her position on the board, West helped create the first policies and procedures around sexual harassment at Yale University.

As a junior, West was quoted in a 1979 *New York Times* article marking ten years since women were first admitted to Yale. She argued that, although women had long been admitted, they were far from being accepted or free from sexism there (Robertson 1979). West recalls college as a time of early exploration with her gender and sexuality and a period of politicization. In the *New York Times* article, she is pictured wearing a tie. She explored the works of lesbian feminists with her classmates, and she fondly recalls times when her women's groups invited influential figures such as Audre Lorde and Angela Davis to speak on campus. West was an energetic college activist, and her activism did not go unnoticed. West recalled that, at her graduation ceremony, university President Dr. A. Bartlett Giamatti stood shaking hands with the graduates and their parents. When he reached for her mother's hand, he leaned over and whis-

pered genially, "Your daughter has been a pain in my ass for four years" (West, pers. comm., June 24, 2020).

Following her graduation from Yale in 1981, West enrolled in seminary. She graduated from the Pacific School of Religion in 1984, studying to become a parish minister in the United Methodist Church. West recalls her journey towards ordination and being called to her first church in 1984 in her book *Disruptive Christian Ethics* (2006, 246). Her journey was not without setbacks; West was met with resistance from communities considering her appointment because of her race and gender. When she received her first pastoral assignment at the Bloomfield United Methodist Church in Connecticut, the church initially responded that they "did not want" a Black pastor (West, pers. comm., June 24, 2020). They said they had previously had a pastor who was Black, and they wanted someone older and more experienced.[1] West challenged their initial response and advocated for herself with the bishops, cabinet, and superintendents who saw to her assignment. Ultimately, her superiors supported her assignment to the church. In reflecting on the experience for this biography, she indicated that she "learned a lot." It was overall a positive time in her life. Some who initially rejected her because she was a woman and Black eventually became some of her biggest supporters.

During her early career at Bloomfield United Methodist Church, West reengaged with her call towards activism—a decision that brought both notoriety for her commitment to justice and conflict with her church community. In her second year as minister, she was involved in a nonviolent direct action in the anti-apartheid movement, intentionally blocking the South African embassy entrance in New York City, where she was arrested. She is beaming in a photograph that appeared in the *Bloomfield Journal* that day, showing her wearing her clerical collar. She told the reporter, "My congregation is very caring and very much against racism," indicating her confidence in the growing support of her community (Jones 1985).

In the late 1980s, she left her pastorate in Bloomfield to take a position with the Christian Conference of Connecticut (Chriscon) as a staff associate and leader of programming for Criscon's newly-formed Center for Peace and Justice Ministries (Renner 1988). In this position, she vocally opposed the ecumenical organization's "institutionalized racism and sexism" in a memorandum to the conference's executive leaders. At that point, West and her fellow staff associate Jean Peacock were asked to resign (Renner 1988). Many individuals, particularly women associated with the conference, were outraged. Barbara

DeBaptist, president of Impact—one of the justice-focused organizations affiliated with Chriscon—was quoted in a local newspaper: "All of them [the conference board] need to have their hands slapped . . . You got a white male organization talking the good talk and talking God's word and not living the word" (Renner 1988).

In the aftermath of her experience with Chriscon, West sought new ways to integrate her ministerial calling and her commitment to justice-seeking. In the late 1980s, she shifted towards the academic arena, becoming a campus minister to students at Hartford College for Women, the Greater Hartford Community College, and the University of Hartford. Eventually, she was named director of the Greater Hartford Campus Ministry (Neyer 1991). West ran prayer and support groups, raised funds for students, spoke in ethics classes, and set up special programs. In a 1991 profile in the *Hartford Courant*, one of the students West counseled said that she kept students "on the right track when they discuss[ed] issues such as parental control, sexism or racism" and encouraged them in their political activism (Neyer 1991). West was vocally passionate about, in her words, "working through education to infuse the values of justice into society" (Taylor 1991). To that end, she began pursuing her academic interest in ethics.

Through her campus ministry, West encountered many students who had faced sexual abuse in the past. She was startled by the extent of abuse reported by students of all ages and economic backgrounds at all three of the schools where she worked. She was particularly struck by the case of one Black female student who had been assaulted by a male family member at a young age. The student's pastor had told her to just forgive her assailant. The student sat completely silent for their entire first counseling session. West knew she held a position of power as this student's counselor, not unlike that young woman's pastor. It took a great deal of time and effort for West to navigate this dynamic and cultivate enough rapport to counsel the student. West recalls desperately seeking resources to support her work but finding little in the published literature:

> The resources are so completely siloed. Psychological resources don't mention anything about issues of race and racism; the Christian resources don't mention anything about race and racism, and nothing about the deep emotional kinds of trauma inflicted is mentioned in the sociology; and the sociological analyses and legal analyses and psych analyses are completely separate. And this Black woman's ex-

> perience is not existing, in all these separated places. (West, pers. comm., June 2020)

This desperate need for resources was a major catalyst for West's interest in how ministers can and should respond to experiences of sexual assault for Black women in particular. It informed her decision to pursue her ministry as an academic. She applied to the PhD program at Union Theological Seminary, knowing that there would be strong support for her identity as a Black feminist. West characterized this period preceding her arrival at Union as "a golden moment for Black women students" (pers. comm., June 24, 2020). Indeed, West arrived at Union to begin her doctoral studies in 1991 amidst a swelling interest in womanist theology, just a few years after a cohort that included Katie Cannon, Jacqueline Grant, and Linda Thomas—trailblazers in the field of womanist theology. West's principal advisor at Union was Beverly Harrison, a groundbreaking Christian social ethicist considered the "mother" of feminist ethics. In addition to West, she mentored a generation of prominent feminist, womanist, and mujerista ethicists (Snarr, 71). In 1993, while West was a doctoral candidate, Union Professor Delores Williams would publish the groundbreaking foundational text in womanist theological scholarship, *Sisters in the Wilderness*. That same year, leading womanist ethicist Emilie Townes, current dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School, published her Union doctoral dissertation, *A Troubling in My Soul* (1993). It was in this heady and fertile academic atmosphere that West began to hone her scholarly voice. With Prof. Williams on her dissertation committee, West received her PhD from Union in 1995 (West 1995). Her dissertation, titled "Deconstructing Violation: A Moral Interrogation of the Psycho-social and Spiritual Consequences of Violence against Afro-American Women," would become her first major book, *Wounds of the Spirit*.

Academic Works

Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics

West's major books, including her doctoral dissertation published in 1999 as *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics*, focus on the project of addressing Black women's experiences

with intimate violence from a theological perspective that explores its racial and gender dimensions. In *Wounds of the Spirit*, West develops a resistance ethic meant to draw attention to intimate and societal violence. Through this work, she addresses the harmful structures that perpetuate assaults on Black women's lives. She coins the term "victim-survivor" for her subjects on the very first page of *Wounds of the Spirit*, hyphenated to address the twain aspects of their relation to intimate violence. Victim-survivors are neither solely passive nor solely triumphant, but a combination of both. This hybridized neologism, used throughout the book, is perhaps one of West's most significant and most well-known contributions to feminist scholarship. Régine Michelle Jean-Charles (2014, 41) notes that West's term "victim-survivor" has been taken up in both theological scholarship and the wider non-academic lexicon. A search using the Google Ngram word-frequency charting tool shows that the term's appearance in print has notably skyrocketed since the book's publication in 1999. In this inaugural book, West also establishes her methodological focus on individual narratives, primary sources, and interviews. She writes, "the 'truth' of social reality can best be approached from personal reflections by individuals as well as insights from systemic social analysis" (West 1999, 4). With her analysis firmly grounded in individual women's particular narratives, West's feminist framework draws strength from and empowers her subjects and their lived experiences.

The book's first two chapters poignantly lay out testimony from historical slave narratives, as well as interviews with anonymous modern and contemporary victim-survivors. Alongside these narratives, one might expect to find statistics on instances of sexual assault to illustrate its prevalence.[2] Instead, West expounds on the myriad reasons statistical evidence is hard to come by. There are compelling reasons women may not disclose assault, such as self-blame, invisibilization and shame, harmful theological frameworks, and socioeconomic struggles (55–6). West seeks to demystify and combat each of these by identifying and deconstructing their racialized and gendered dimensions. She calls for "a nuanced, feminist, and antiracist understanding of how and why particular cultural norms reproduce the women's trauma" (91). Ultimately, her objective is to "give theoretical precedence to women's right to have lives free from the torment of intimate violence and how to expose the cultural obstructions which deny that right" (110).

In *Wounds of the Spirit*, West bridges the interdisciplinary gaps she first recognized in her campus ministry around the lack of clinical resources available to counsel young Black victim-survivors. She critiques White woman-centered frameworks that obscure and invisibilize the particularities of violence against Black women, represented by the work of Susan Brownmiller (93–5) and Catherine MacKinnon (115–16). Her interdisciplinary analysis draws from theoretical resources within sociology, history, law, gender studies, and Christian social ethics. West calls for the development of community resources and heightened church responses to social and intimate violence, invoking the womanist frameworks of Delores Williams. She builds to a holistic "ethic of resisting violence against women" that identifies resistance strategies both in church communities and civil society (192–5). She closes with a quote from one of her interview subjects vowing her commitment "to live and to resist this world's oppression" (207). Notably, in keeping with the value she places on her subjects' voices, West literally gives her interview subjects the last word in all her major books.

Wounds of the Spirit was well-received, and its legacy has held sway in recent decades. Michele Dumont (2003, 229–30), writing in *Hypatia*, called the book "intense," "ambitious," and "impressive," praising the complexity of West's treatment of difficult subjects and her ability to navigate subtle dynamics, such as praising the contributions of some White feminists while critiquing their distortions and inadequacies. Shondrah Nash (2006, 252–3) called *Wounds of the Spirit* an "intense read" in the journal *Feminist Teacher* but praised the breadth and nuance of West's poignant and "microscopic" analytical critiques. *Wounds of the Spirit* has been cited over two hundred times in published scholarly literature, including references in major feminist works like Sara Ahmed's *Cultural Politics of Emotion* and Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Sexual Politics* and *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism and Feminism* (Google Scholar 2020). In 1999—the year *Wounds of the Spirit* was published—Dr. West joined the faculty at Drew University Theological School, where she remains Professor of Christian Ethics and African American Studies to this day.

Pedagogy

Dr. West is also well respected for her pedagogical expertise. At Drew, she has received numerous teaching awards, notably the Teacher of the Year Award (2003), the Scholar-Teacher of the Year Award (twice: 2002 & 2014), and the Excellence in Teaching Award from the Graduate Division of Religion Student Association (twice: 2012 & 2020). Her many awards are enumerated on her professional website (West, n.d.). Her doctoral advisees at Drew have included Rev. Dr. Cari Jackson, Prof. Leah Thomas, and ethicist and artistic creative Dr. Elyse Ambrose. Each of them recognizes West's kindness and generosity in her mentorship, as well as her doggedly persistent motivation and fastidious attention to their academic rigor. "Get it done" are the words Dr. Ambrose most clearly associates with her period of dissertation-writing under West's mentorship; they stuck with her, she recalls, because:

> They reflect the urgency of this vocation as a Christian social ethicist, and in my particular case, as a Black queer ethicist. At the same time, they were words of assurance that I could, in fact, get the work done, and setting my will and intentions toward that end is what was needed. They also spoke to the rigor that Dr. West brings to her work and that she expects from her students, a rigor that does rest, but does not dally, because lives are frequently at stake. This may sound like an overstatement, but when thinking about violence against women, queer lives, sexism and heterosexism in the church—the statement is true. (Ambrose, pers. comm., August 2020)

West has also contributed actively in the arena of scholarly literature as a prolific author for, and a member of, the editorial boards of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, the *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, the T&T Clark *Studies in Social Ethics, Ethnography and Theology*, and the New Room Books editorial board of the United Methodist Publishing House.

Black Feminism and Womanism

West has been a leading figure in ongoing discussions in academic circles about the intellectual differences and links between Black feminism and womanism. At the American Academy of Religion An-

nual Meeting in 2006, West spoke on a panel led by Monica Coleman addressing the question, "Must I Be Womanist?" in response to a call to examine this relationship in the professional lives of Black women in theological scholarship (Coleman et al. 2006). The central issue: while many scholars use Alice Walker's original description of a *womanist* as a "Black feminist or feminist of color" (Walker 1983), some 21st-century scholars oppose labeling all Black feminists as womanists. Many acknowledge that this dated definition of womanism does not fully encompass the methodological framework that many Black feminists—and even some self-described womanists—seek to promote today. Yet, Coleman (et al. 2006, 93) posited that identifying with womanism has become an "academic job market necessity." This phenomenon is most visible in seminaries and divinity schools—spaces where there is often an assumption of womanist theological positioning for Black female professors. As well, some would say there has been a commodification of the term "womanism" in publishing and academia. Coleman laid out the issue, asserting that womanism is like "a house with not enough furniture" for her and her colleagues' multiple belongings. She insists the term pays insufficient attention to gays and lesbians and lacks the strong political and advocacy associations ascribed to Black feminism (86).

In response, West emphasized the practical urgency of liberative thought, arguing that scholars should not spend too much labor on the dichotomy between womanism and Black feminism. She asserted that such a dichotomy was, in her words, "bogus" (Coleman et al. 2006, 29). In contrast to Coleman's assertion that womanism lacks a political edge, West argued that political edginess is not found in arguments about who is and is not a womanist. Instead, it lies in scholarship that combats discrimination, violence, and homophobia. "It is not the nature of a study but the choices the author makes about which questions to explore that create 'edginess' with regard to political issues that are present in the material" (132). That same year, West published her second major monograph, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (2006), which indeed took on a profoundly political, ethical project within theology.

Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter

In her second major book, West broadened her scope beyond intimate violence to explore anti-violence resistance itself. She notes that she

drew on "a range of dissimilar sources, perspectives, and methods for addressing moral problems in our society and creating strategies that can help bring about radical social change" (West 2006, xi). West begins and ends *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* with individual women's narratives as she did in *Wounds of the Spirit*. The book opens with an intimate profile of a woman who applies for welfare, is assigned to a workfare program, is sexually harassed on the job, refuses her supervisor's advances, and, in retaliation, is verbally abused and called a "lesbian." In response to her complaints, the city invalidates her experience and does nothing to shield her from the abuse, saying she is not a city employee and therefore has no legal right to protection (xiii–xiv).

In laying this woman's story at the foundation of the book, West calls for an approach to ethics grounded in women of color's lived experiences. In this methodology, there is a fluid dialogue between theory and practice and between the particular and the universal. "Some social ethicists," West writes, "emphasize concrete practices because theory seems tedious and irrelevant. Others emphasize theory because concrete practices seem too idiosyncratic and transitory. I contend, however, that both theory and practice, and a fluid conversation between them, are most fruitful for conceiving Christian social ethics" (xvii). West critiques universal claims about "man" and the "will to power" made by Reinhold Niebuhr—a towering figure in Christian social ethics at Union, her alma mater. She suggests that Niebuhr demonstrated a paternalistic ignorance of the conditions experienced by Black people and the working poor in nearby Harlem (9–24). The Harlem of the 1930s and 40s was where West's mother resided and attended Abyssinian Baptist Church. In West's critical treatment of Niebuhr, one can infer both analytical insight and an appropriate degree of personal rapprochement.

For West, it is necessary on both a scholarly and a political level to consider universalizing ethical concepts in light of individual lived experience. Centering each point of analysis on the lived experiences of individual Black women is essential in the liberative goals of her work. West's insistence on this point is one of the most uniquely disruptive qualities of her work and one of the most profoundly revolutionary. She aligns herself with the interruptive fundamentals of feminist theory that hold that no universal precept or ethical standpoint can be explained or developed without analyzing its impact and examining it within the context of an actual, living person's life. The ultimate goal of theorizing, for West, is the mitigation of the

harm and violence experienced by that particular woman within the social frameworks being analyzed.

West's complex logic and prophetic voice are most evident in her development of theoretical resources for addressing racialized, sexist violence. West builds up an extensive overview of the experience of those women whom she terms victim-survivors of intimate violence, tracing the spiritual constructions of guilt alongside an analysis of patriarchal Christian teachings (60–83). West moves through a comprehensive socioeconomic analysis, with an overview of social scientists' approaches to intimate violence, taking issue with scholars who prioritize either the dimension of race or sexism without sufficiently addressing the nuances of both. West calls for a methodology that "simultaneously attends to racial realities in its method and directly seeks the empowerment of Black women in its goals":

> [T]o merely locate a Blackwoman-authored analytical discussion that focuses upon Black women victim-survivors must not be mistakenly seen as a sufficient goal . . . The objective to be reckoned with here is how to give theoretical precedence to women's right to have lives free from the torment of intimate violence and how to expose the cultural obstructions which deny that right. (109–10)

West outlines what she calls an "ethic of resistance" in opposing violence on the personal, political, and spiritual levels in an effort toward a "broad-based movement for social change" (160). *Disruptive Christian Ethics* has become an influential text and a source of inspiration in both scholarship and activism. In 2016, West's resistance strategies were highlighted in *Sojourners*' "A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence." This compendium of activist voices, including Howard Thurman and Dorothee Sölle, highlighted those who "wrestle[d] with what it means to live out the biblical call to justice amid the complexities of ever-changing political, social, and moral situations" (Cramer 2015).

LGBTQ Ethics & Advocacy

By far, the bulk of West's writing has focused on addressing the entwined race and gender dimensions of intimate violence. However, a significant subset of her scholar-activist authorship has concerned the treatment of gays and lesbians in Christian denominations, es-

pecially the United Methodist Church. West's chapter in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, edited by Anthony Pinn and Dwight Hopkins (2004), is an early example, in which she called for an end to heterosexist shaming culture and a welcoming attitude towards gay and lesbian clergy. This, she writes, is part of "an open and affirming church sexual ethic eschewing the notion of shameful, closeted, secret sexual orientations" (31–50). She has been an outspoken advocate for LGBTQ Christians in civic, political activism and the United Methodist Church's ongoing denominational discourse over marriage equality and the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy (Hahn 2019). Leaders of the United Methodist Church have struggled to find common ground in bitter debates about homosexuality, marriage, and the ordination of openly gay clergy for years (Zauzmer n.d.). Openly queer and affirming LGBTQ allies within the United Methodist Church have faced numerous challenges to their spiritual well-being and livelihoods. It takes courage like Dr. West's to rise up and assert oneself in public debate.

Queer readers who encounter West's work are drawn to her prophetic LGBTQ-affirming voice. West has self-identified as bisexual for numerous years, though she is relatively private about her personal life (West, pers. comm., June 24, 2020). Her husband, the late Prof. Jerry Watts, who died in 2015, holds a place of honor in the acknowledgments in each of her major books—he was both an intellectual life partner and a huge supporter of her work (West 2006, x). Jerry passed away while West was completing her third and most recent monograph (West, pers. comm., June 24, 2020).

Solidarity and Defiant Spirituality

West's most recent and far-reaching book addressing violence against women of color, *Solidarity and Defiant Spirituality: Africana Lessons on Religion, Racism, and Ending Gender Violence* (2019), is the sweeping culmination of years of international research. It adopts a transnational approach, exploring the social and cultural forces that perpetuate colorism and violence against women and girls globally and offers cultural, spiritual resources for opposing those violent forces. Her research is based mainly on interviews with activists and scholars in Ghana, Brazil, and South Africa. There is a collusion, West writes, "between anti-Black racism and misogynistic violence" across cultures (45). She calls for an awakening drawn

from women's experiences across an array of settings. The book is also part travelogue and is perhaps West's most introspective work; it contains by far the most "I" statements of all her books. Using her personal perspective, West narrates her thought processes in varied places and moments, from crowded transit depots to her hospitalization for dehydration. In one instance, she muses on her tendencies toward skepticism at local remedies and customs. In this anecdote, she challenges her own biases and expounds upon the need for greater cross-cultural communication and interreligious understanding in anti-violence work (66–7). The academic study of religion in the US negotiates the fine lines between religion, mythology, spirituality, medicine, science, custom, and tradition. This area of academic study and research has a complicated and often troubling past. Approaches like West's methodology, where scholars narrate their personal struggle with their own biases and convictions, is a step forward in the academy's gradual progress with a global reckoning.

While still relatively new, *Solidarity and Defiant Spirituality* has been well-received by mainstream activists as well as academics. One review in the *Christian Century* (2019, 43) called the book "eye-opening, heartbreaking, and prophetic." Most notable is West's introduction of the term "defiant spirituality" in the title and throughout the book. Initially, she uses it to refer to Black lesbian activists in South Africa, confronting religious leaders about their silence concerning rape and violence directed against women and gender-nonconforming people. She subsequently applies this term broadly throughout the book to explore "spiritually resourceful communal practices" of resistance (194).

Recognition & Recent Activism

West has consistently paired her scholarship with engaged activism and a defiant spirituality. As a celebrated scholar-activist, West is committed to bringing about social change through concrete action. She has been notably recognized for her achievements within the United Methodist Church (UMC). The UMC New York Annual Conference Methodist Federation for Social Action awarded West the Gwen and C. Dale White Social Justice Award in recognition of her outspoken protests on behalf of LGBTQ equality (Reconciling Ministries Network 2013). At the American Academy of Religion Annual Meet-

ing in 2015, West received the inaugural Walter Wink Scholar-Activist Award, established by Auburn Seminary to honor "God's troublemakers"—those "courageous individuals who dedicate their lives to advocating for justice and peace in our world" (Auburn Seminary 2015). When she received the award, West gave a speech in which she proclaimed that "scholarship needs activism, and activism needs scholarship," elaborating:

> Scholarship needs activism because it's an opportunity to recognize and name the politics of knowledge production—the politics of intellectual commitment. There are certain kinds of values and intellectual commitments evident in scholarly texts and scholarly performance. There are certain kinds of politics that are operative. Activism is a way of highlighting, naming, and confronting those commitments. Activism needs scholarly inquiry to broaden—to bring a focus on how acts are conceptualized so to deepen understanding of the historical and moral understanding that informs the movement's vision and way of conceptualizing who and what it is. (Drew Today 2015)

Her activism even extends to the realm of mainstream media culture; West made a brief appearance in a major documentary entitled *NO! The Rape Documentary*, directed by Aishah Shahidah Simmons in 2006, about sexual violence in Black communities. In the film, she is seated, speaking to an interviewer off-camera about the invisibilization of rape in churches. She compares the experience of women who are silenced to being "sacrificed" for the sake of the spiritual community. The film premiered at the Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles in 2006, and the film's website (*notherapedocumentary.org*) features a testimonial from Alice Walker herself, asserting that "If the Black community in the Americas and in the world would heal itself, it must complete the work this film [*NO!*] begins."

With her numerous books and articles in publication, awards, and a film appearance, Dr. West has achieved preeminent status as a theological scholar-activist. She continues to teach at Drew Theological School (remotely via web conferencing, during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, for the time in which this biography has been researched and composed). The unique entwining of her activism, ministry, and academic work is a testament to her commitment to furthering knowledge and seeking justice. From her early years as a student activist to her career as a trailblazer, mentor, and scholar, her focus on uplifting the lives of those real-life individuals impact-

ed by violence transcends the often all-too-theoretical tendencies of the academic profession. In her complex and subtle analysis, West has contributed to disrupting the norms of ministry and scholarship through a uniquely hybridized professional practice centered on Black women's stories and through her tenaciously defiant activism. One hopes she continues doing so for years to come.

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Notes

1 West also wrote about this incident in *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), see especially p. 246.

2 In the quarter century since the publication of *Wounds of the Spirit*, newfound evidence and recognition of the overwhelming pervasiveness of sexual assault lends credence to the premise. According to research published by the Centers for Disease Control in 2017, approximately one in three women in the US has experienced contact sexual violence in their lifetime (including rape, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact), and nearly one in four has experienced severe physical intimate partner violence. See "The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS)," National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) 2010. *https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datasources/nisvs/summaryreports.html*.

CHAPTER 6

Chanequa Walker-Barnes

21st-century Womanist Advocate

KIMBERLY CARTER

Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes is an African American scholar, preacher, and psychologist currently serving as associate professor of practical theology at Mercer University. She is newly appointed as professor of practical theology and pastoral care at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, starting the fall semester of 2021 (Mercer University 2021; Columbia Theological Seminary 2021). She has a BA in psychology and African American/African studies from Emory University (1994), an MS and PhD in clinical child/family psychology from the University of Miami (1996; 2000), and an MDiv from Duke University (2007). Her mission is to liberate women of African and African American descent by using her educational training and ministerial insight to uncover systems that disproportionately harm African American women. Dr. Walker-Barnes has authored several books, including *I Bring the Voices of*

Image 1: Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes

My People: A Womanist Vision for Racial Reconciliation (2019). Her focus on bringing awareness and solutions to racial inequalities makes her work crucial in racial and social justice work. Dr. Walker-Barnes is a prophetic voice paving the way for healing in the African American community in the twenty-first century (Mercer University: McAfee School of Theology n.d.; Walker-Barnes n.d.).

Beginnings

Walker-Barnes is two generations removed from sharecropping in both her maternal and paternal families. Like most modern-day African American professionals, her kinfolk come from humble and marginalized beginnings in the deep South. She attributes her strong work ethic to the example of her parents' and grandparents' tenacity and hard work. Her mother, Laquitta, worked several white-collar jobs over the course of her career and retired as a financial aid administrator at a community college. Her father, Wali, had a career as a bricklayer. Their commitment influenced her own work ethic (Walker-Barnes, pers. comm., July 7, 2020).

Hearing stories of the not-too-distant Jim Crow segregated past, however, is a contributing factor that led her to her path of becoming a modern-day social justice activist. "Both of my grandfathers grew up on sharecropping farms; both of them escaped. My paternal grandfather escaped with his father when he was seven years old". Walker-Barnes shared, "they literally had to run away and move out of the state. When her grandfather was only seven years old, he moved with his father from South Carolina to Florida to flee racism and sharecropping. And this happened in the early 1900s" (Walker-Barnes, pers. comm., July 7, 2020).

Walker-Barnes's father, Wali Sharif, converted to Islam when she was a small child. Her witness of her father's conversion experience caused her to grapple with profound and intense existential questions around good and evil, what is permissible according to God, and other deeply philosophical questions. Further, her father's authentic embodiment of sincerely held religious convictions spoke a sermon of its own. These events influenced Walker-Barnes's pursuit of advanced degrees and academic engagement, leading her to question the Christian church's deeply held practices and beliefs. These experiences led to questions such as, "Do these practices help to liberate us? Do they help us to live into the values of peace, justice, kindness, love, or not?" (Walker-Barnes, pers. comm., July 7, 2020).

Walker-Barnes concluded that "quite frankly we have a lot of things in Christianity that do not help us in that regard." As a response to this dissonance, she blended her understanding of psychology with her knowledge of Christian theology to draw conclusions and critiques of the modern church. Most of these critiques centered on her own experiences as an African American Black woman and in her understanding of the experiences of those she has pastored and helped through clinical psychology work. Together, her unique childhood experiences, education, and professional expertise have formed her into a powerful advocate and activist.

During an interview with *Her Story Speaks* podcast, hosted by Andrea Miller on September 24, 2020, Walker-Barnes (2020) shared aspects of her childhood that shaped her present-day work and interests. Walker-Barnes grew up in a family that talked extensively about racism. So much so that she assumed it was customary for everyone's family to talk openly about racism and the desperate need for change. She also witnessed family members that were activists in the fight against racial injustice. As well, she attended a historic African American church steeped in racial justice traditions. Her

childhood church often spoke about social justice issues related to race, but not as it related to gender. What her church did well helped form her into someone aware that her life had to matter for her people. Through her church, she learned that being a Christian meant serving the poor and the marginalized in her community. However, women in ministry were not something that she saw as an example.

Journey

Walker-Barnes's educational trajectory was unique since she did not intentionally set out to obtain a Master of Divinity degree and pursue a career in theology. Nevertheless, she does not regret her circuitous path because it shaped who she is today. "My first career and my career plan were in clinical psychology; I was not thinking about seminary at all. If anything, I thought I was going to do a PhD in clinical psychology and then possibly [go] . . . for a second doctor in African American studies, since it [African American studies] had actually been a part of my training at one point." However, there were times when she wished that she had pursued her Master of Divinity degree before obtaining a PhD. "But I think that would have put me on a different trajectory, right. So, I would tell myself to be open to the journey, and not to be attached to any particular title or position, and always be open to change." Her advice to her younger self would be to enjoy the journey. Another piece of practical advice that Walker-Barnes would tell her younger self "is to learn how to prioritize myself, over my allegiance to institutions, learn how to put myself first" (Walker-Barnes, pers. comm., July 7, 2020).

During her interview with Andrea Miller, Walker-Barnes (2020) indicates that her active career in clinical psychology began when she engaged in post-doctorate work. Her interest in psychology centered around the study of racial disparity and behavioral health, especially in adolescents. Eventually, her focus shifted to the plight of mothers. During this time, she also encountered her own difficulties with issues of race. Walker-Barnes assisted a Black male student experiencing discrimination in the clinical psychology program. She felt the need to try to protect her student. However, in her advocacy work, she realized that she was also unsupported and at risk, personally and professionally, because she was the only Black person in her work context. As a result, she started experiencing health problems

and realized that she was giving too much of herself to others. She decided to shift her focus to include more self-care, which became a focus of her work as a clinical psychologist.

In the midst of this struggle, she started to sense a call towards ministry, and she decided to pursue seminary education and training. She finished a meditation session and noticed how much her health and life had changed for the better as she embraced self-care. She knew these changes improved her life and wondered to herself if it could work for other women. That is when she heard a voice answer her back that said: "Yes, it can." From there, she started working with her church, and she transitioned into ministry.

Walker-Barnes's battles with breast cancer were significant life events that further propelled her into her current advocacy ministry. Becoming an advocate for herself as she dealt with breast cancer diagnoses and treatment caused her to become more vocal about her personal experiences of racial and gender-related injustice. She knew that she would never be the same person she had been after dealing with this life-or-death battle complicated by the racial disparities in healthcare. Walker-Barnes became uncompromising and unapologetic. Once she encountered cancer, she started "demanding more for herself and from the world around her." During this time, she felt the need to "make sure that her life mattered."

Focus Area

Informed by her circumstances and her understanding of African American and Black cultural norms, psychology studies and practices, and her theological work and knowledge, Walker-Barnes coined the unique term "StrongBlackWoman." By this term, she means "a legendary figure typified by extraordinary capacities for caregiving and suffering without complaint" (Walker-Barnes 2014, 3). In her book, *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (2014), Walker-Barnes explains how destructive and rampant this example of womanhood tends to be in the African American community. She argues that "If, as a Black woman, you do not display these attributes, you are treated with disdain and made an outcast. But 'strong' is a racial-gender code word," often used to dictate the self-sacrificing actions of Black women in service to others (3). In her critique, she analyzes the adverse effects of the "StrongBlackWoman"

trope, which results in disparities between African American and Black women's health compared to other groups of people. Her work is essential to both the church and secular institutions, since African American women actively participate in both types of organizations.

Walker-Barnes's personal experiences with being a "StrongBlackWoman" led to her realization that this concept needed to be further explored and developed. She writes, "Ten years ago I came to a startling realization: I was a 'StrongBlackWoman,' and being one was not working for me" (1). Walker-Barnes goes on to explain that turning thirty was a catalyst for change since, in relation to this milestone, she was experiencing a personal crisis that included, "a state of physical and emotional crisis: high blood pressure, weight gain, chronic self-doubt, fear of making mistakes, insomnia, fatigue, headaches, frequent illnesses, low self-esteem, mood swings, and feelings of rage" (1).

Walker-Barnes sheds light on the Christian Church's role and responsibilities to its Black female congregants. Secular disciplines had studied the effect of the "StrongBlackWoman" trope (3) on Black women's health, but the church had not begun to study this phenomenon. In *Too Heavy a Yoke*, Walker-Barnes uses her understanding of both psychology and theology to bridge this gap and shed light on the church's role in the creation and the perpetuation of the "StrongBlackWoman" (3). Walker-Barnes asserts that "the church reinforces the mythology of the "StrongBlackWoman" by silencing, ignoring, and even romanticizing the suffering of Black women" (5).

Walker-Barnes poses solutions to this seemingly unsolvable problem of burdening Black women with unrealistic and unhealthy expectations in service of their community and the evils of racism. She suggests possible resolutions and uses her understanding of womanist approaches, her understanding of pastoral care, and her personal experience as a Black woman to outline six methodologies. These solutions include: "the credibility and accountability of the pastoral caregiver; honoring lived experiences; empowerment for self-definition; cultivating critical consciousness; developing self-awareness; and community building" (163).

First, Walker-Barnes suggests that "Effective pastoral care with the 'StrongBlackWoman' begins by adopting a womanist approach to care" (162). She compares this to conventional counseling: "in contrast to traditional counseling, which stresses the importance of therapist affective and cognitive neutrality, the work of pastoral caregivers is firmly rooted within their life experience and their own sense of

Christian identity and values" (163). She emphasizes the importance of understanding that Black women have a unique set of needs that conventional medical and mental health practices have not often acknowledged; "whereas traditional counseling places stringent limits on therapist self-disclosure, pastoral care and counseling recognize that the relationship between the caregiver and the care recipient, rooted in their joint membership in the church universal, is bidirectional, such that each influences and is influenced by the other" (163).

Second, Walker-Barnes claims "Honoring Lived Experiences" as an essential aspect of a womanist reframe. "[A] crucial role of pastoral caregivers is to facilitate the storytelling, or 'coming to voice' of StrongBlackWomen by providing an environment of unconditional positive regard in which they can narrate their lived experiences and by recognizing the influence of structural conditions in their struggles" (167). This methodology is an essential way to honor the lived experiences that Black women often cannot express.

Next, Walker-Barnes explores "Empowerment for Self-Definition" as an indispensable factor in empowering Black women to enact both self and community care. "To the extent that African-American women find that oppression continues to render the 'StrongBlackWoman' necessary, they must be empowered to choose—consciously, self-critically, and, perhaps most importantly, temporarily—its performance" (171). In other words, Black women need the freedom to choose to either operate as a "StrongBlackWoman" to combat racial oppression or reject the burden of strength in favor of self-care.

Walker-Barnes states that "the challenge for pastoral caregivers is to help African-American women appropriate the life-giving properties of the 'StrongBlackWoman' in a way that does not also activate its death-dealing attributes" (171). This needed resolution can be tied into voice and expression since they both have to do with naming oneself and experiences. For example, allowing Black women the freedom to validate and define their own experiences free from the judgment and the backlash that often accompanies their self-expression is a way to allow them the use of the more positive attributes of the "StrongBlackWoman."

Walker-Barnes explores "Cultivating Critical Consciousness" as another factor in pastoral care that aims to develop critical consciousness. She reminds the church that the defense of African American womanhood should not solely burden Black people, "rather, it is the call of the church universal to take up the burdens of African-American women" (174). By engaging in the social justice and redemptive

work of protecting and nurturing Black women, the church will help to reverse the damage caused by the church's complicit role in the African slave trade. The caring of Black women by the church, particularly in America, could potentially assist in building bridges between the Black Christian and White Christian church communities. This context is especially segregated in America.

In a natural sequence, "Developing Self-Awareness" follows. Walker-Barnes writes that a Black woman "must learn to notice, rather than ignore or minimize, the signals of distress that her body and mind transmits . . ." In other words, an important mindfulness practice for "StrongBlackWomen" is learning to recognize one's healthy limits and honoring those limits. "Mindfulness practice can help StrongBlackWomen to recognize the realistic 'load' limits that they can bear while maintaining health-sustaining behaviors. This is an essential element of self-awareness" (176, 179). Since African American women have not been allowed to function in a way that allows for self-awareness and self-care, this step can be viewed as a radical rebellion against the cultural norms set in place. Actively rebelling against destructive cultural norms used to continue the legacy of harmful "StrongBlackWomen" practices is a necessary step to ensure freedom from this particular bondage. Personally, I have followed the practice of setting healthy boundaries for myself, including my workload. I have experienced both peace and better sleep at night since I have been able to operate from a more relaxed state.

Walker-Barnes identifies "Community Building" as the last component necessary to engage a counter-cultural approach to womanist pastoral care. "First, community provides space for the dialogue that is necessary for self-realization and self-definition. Within the context of community, StrongBlackWomen are given sanctuary and rest; they are released from their roles as caregivers and burden bearers" (184). Next, this safe community "fosters interdependence . . . Further, within communal spaces, women form relationships that model an important balance between relational engagement and healthy boundaries . . . Finally, the community provides accountability" (184). Community is key in the healing process and maintenance of Black women's care. For example, certain communities have been a place where I have been able to be heard, validated, and supported in my growth.

Walker-Barnes holds that each of these components is vital to the health and rejuvenation of Black women. Through her academic research aimed at practical solutions, Walker-Barnes increases aware-

ness for myself and others that Black women should no longer bear unreasonable burdens and die early deaths in the twenty-first century. Walker-Barnes helps us to see that we have the tools, resources, and advocacy needed to counteract messages that support a toxic burden for Black women. Informed by Walker-Barnes's work, I have found that we have to give ourselves permission to act in ways that support our well-being. Also, we have to be willing to be an outcast for a while, as others who are accustomed to Black women bearing unnecessary burdens adjust to our newfound self-care routines. This act often entails being labeled "lazy," which has been used to control African American women in America for centuries. This accusation is an attack that comes from those nearest to us as well as strangers. However, for those genuinely interested in relieving the burdens carried by Black and African American women, Walker-Barnes's book is a source of practical insight and understanding of Black women's struggles. Further, her suggestions for womanist approaches are necessary to alleviate the unique burden African American and Black women bear.

Bringing the Voices of Her People

Walker-Barnes's most recent book—*I Bring the Voices of My People* (2019)—is a timely analysis of the unstable racial climate in the United States. In this much-anticipated follow-up to *Too Heavy a Yoke*, she offers a sharp critique of both White supremacy and the Christian Church's role in maintaining the institution of slavery. Walker-Barnes (2019, loc. 2390) asserts that "White supremacy, in all its variations, is an evil ideology that relies upon brute power to enforce and maintain itself." Her analysis of racism and White Supremacy identifies that "the church, unfortunately, was neither an innocent bystander nor conscientious objector to the horrors of White Supremacy" (loc. 2409). Instead, the church advanced and perpetuated many atrocities by engaging in slave trading and preaching a warped theology that supported White supremacy practices (loc. 2409). Furthermore, Walker-Barnes holds that since the American church was complicit in this horrible act, it is most certainly the church's job to heal the wounds inflicted on the victims. Her vocal stance on this matter is vital at the racially charged and divisive crossroads we find ourselves at at this point in history. Black women scholars and theologians are

needed to speak to oppressive systemic powers that seek the continual silencing of Black women. Walker-Barnes brings a needed academic and pastoral legitimacy to the fight for racial equality, equity, and social justice since her work has been both academic and practical.

Walker-Barnes draws on critical race theory to confront various assumptions around race in America. She suggests this movement was born from recent events related to the election of Barack Obama as our first Black president. Questions regarding the legitimacy of his presidency and the backlash from the political right-wing have intensified the unstable racial climate and the unresolved sin of slavery in America (loc. 648). Walker-Barnes causes her readers to go beyond a surface approach to racial reconciliation in our current climate of seemingly irreconcilable differences. She confronts her readers with hard questions. Will it be on the oppressor's terms, or does true racial reconciliation need to happen on the terms of the persecuted? Often the church has shied away from inviting the oppressed group into the reconciliation process. This approach fails to build an authentic community between the oppressed and the oppressor and does not provide adequate closure. The failure to reconcile past oppressive sins is evident in the current relationship between Africans of the diaspora in America and the American White evangelical church. Walker-Barnes boldly addresses this miscarriage of justice in her writings by naming these atrocities and boldly proclaiming a demand for their end.

However, Walker-Barnes does more than surface issues and offers critiques in *I Bring the Voices of My People*. As she does in her book, *Too Heavy a Yoke*, she provides practical tools for the journey. She concludes with a hopeful, practical delineation of "six spiritual commitments that enable and sustain our participation in God's mission: being held captive, confessing and lamenting, standing in solidarity, keeping Sabbath, cultivating grace, and watching God" (loc. 3934).

Walker-Barnes suggests that the first tool in true racial reconciliation is being held captive. She opens up our understanding of this tool by explaining that,

> For me and many others, only one thing keeps us on a journey in which we are destined to encounter people who devalue our personhood: captivity. . . . That is, we are held captive by the understanding that reconciliation is core to the gospel, that it reflects God's intention for humanity, and that it is central to our identity as Christians." (loc. 3943)

This first instrument of change requires an unwavering commitment to our participation in God's plan. Further, Walker-Barnes informs those who would participate that, as captives of Christ, this Christian journey involves other people as well as our own active and willing participation. She describes it as "an eschatological movement whose outcome we can neither predict nor control" (loc. 3981). Our active role in building relationships and being in community with believers that do not share the same race is mandatory for this work. However, when we create these communities, we can not afford to shy away from the painful legacy of slavery in America and how this has shaped our interactions, particularly between Black and White people.

The second tool for successful racial reconciliation is confessing and lamenting. "[B]oth practices counter the ahistorical tendencies that privilege White supremacy. . . Confession and lament are our acknowledgment that reconciliation is God's journey, and thus we expect God to act" (loc. 4036). This is a necessary, inescapable step toward healing the atrocities committed against Black people and a way to display true humility and intent. Walker-Barnes describes the tendency of Americans to fail to confess when we are wrong as an unwillingness and strong disdain for accepting responsibility for our actions (loc. 4003). She goes on to write that "If we have difficulty confessing mistakes, then we are even more resistant to confessing sins, especially those that involve the complicity with systemic racism that we have been conditioned not to notice" (loc. 4000). However, "racial reconciliation requires precisely that: confession, that is, the capacity and willingness to notice, name, and accept specific responsibility for one's active participation in and passive complicity with White supremacy" (loc. 4000). Without this step of honesty, racial reconciliation remains an ideal, since healing for the grieved party requires that the offender owns their part. White supremacy has been too harmful for this confession of responsibility to be dismissed. This vital step moves the reconciliation process forward towards healing and justice.

Third, to successfully move toward reconciliation requires standing in solidarity. Walker-Barnes writes, "in solidarity, people run together toward a greater objective. In racial reconciliation, that objective is threefold: the destruction of White supremacy, the healing and repair of the historical wounds of racism, and the establishment of a racially just society" (loc. 4054). After her definition of this act, she proceeds by stating that

> with solidarity, however, the privileged make an outward movement. In racial reconciliation, this means that White people must move from the center to the margins because they finally realize that the White supremacy that lies at the center of the human imagination is not actually divine; it is an idol. (loc. 4101)

Once this idol is removed, White people can genuinely see how the "idolatry of White supremacy" (loc. 4103) has been vital in shaping their lived experiences. At this point, White people start decentering themselves and allow oppressed people to move from the margins so that both groups, the oppressed and the oppressors, can work together to dismantle the center (loc. 4103). This step in the reconciliation process may be difficult for some White people to apply since it requires removing themselves and their perspectives from the centered position. Decentering requires making room for oppressed people to be heard and demands much sacrifice since acknowledgment and confession personalizes the process.

Keeping the Sabbath is another tool in the quest for racial reconciliation. Walker-Barnes writes that "it is countercultural, then, to sustain a practice of ceasing our doings. This practice is even more difficult for individuals with an activist personality, who are deeply aware of systemic injustice and motivated to dismantle it" (loc. 4129). Nevertheless, although difficult, "Sabbath is the antidote to our hypervigilance and state of constant activity" (loc. 4138). "Further, it is vital that we hold our role as ambassadors of God's mission of reconciliation together with our obedience to God's commandment to rest" (loc. 4184). Keeping the Sabbath is a countercultural response to being a "StrongBlackWoman." It is a way to display self-care in a world that has been dehumanizing Black women and our need for self-care both during slavery and continuing into the twenty-first century. Dr. Walker-Barnes models this keeping of the Sabbath in the self-care rituals she uses in her everyday life; she engages in walking and gardening and notes that "Meditation is profoundly important as I double down on self-care. . . . This summer [self-care] has to be a focus, so already this morning, I have meditated, done yoga, and walking." Even more, she is mindful of her news and media consumption and has boundaries around the times when she watches the news. "As a strategy, I watch no news in the evenings . . . I can't do this because it is too close to the time when I want to go to sleep." She also shared that she has been training to become a mindfulness teacher and that her training "has been an anchor because it is helping me stay grounded."

She is "learning how to prioritize these things" (Walker-Barnes, pers. comm., May 20, 2021).

Cultivating grace is a fifth tool recommended by Walker-Barnes. She writes that "Grace is a multivalent term that includes dimensions of compassion, accountability, and humility. It shapes how we view the racial/ethnic other, how we understand and demand accountability for racism, and how we view ourselves" (Walker-Barnes 2019, loc. 4190). Grace is a complicated step since "for White Christians, grace means that the debt they pay may not be one that they personally incurred" (loc. 4239). Understanding that White supremacy and social injustices are generational and have unfairly impacted Black descendants of slavery would be vital for this step. However, "for people of color, it means that the payment we receive is far less than what we are owed" (loc. 4239). Cultivating grace can be seen as "a paradox that creates profound tension, which can be soothed only by focusing our attention on the Three-in-One who makes even the hope of reconciliation possible" (loc. 4239). The act of cultivating grace is needed for both Black and White Christians since one party needs to be willing to correct injustices, and the other party has to decide that this correction is enough. This ongoing process can be challenging because the precursor to restorative justice would include having hard conversations around the sensitive issues of racial injustice, the history of race in America, and true racial reconciliation.

Walker-Barnes describes her last recommendation as "watching for God." She uses a line from the book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston (1937) to describe what this means for Christians seeking racial reconciliation in the twenty-first century. She identifies how seeking racial reconciliation often starts as an exciting journey. However, both White and Black Christians may become fatigued, disillusioned, and apathetic over time. It is then that "we sit in the dark, watching for God," much like the main characters Janie and Tea Cake in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* did while a hurricane raged in front of them. This step shares similarities with the idea of keeping the Sabbath. Both require ceasing from labor and waiting for God as an act of faith.

Walker-Barnes holds each of these methodologies as counter-cultural social justice acts, since they require that participants humbly retrain themselves to better serve the cause of healing racial injustice. Each step is necessary as they build, one on the other, toward the ultimate goal of racial reconciliation.

Modern-Day Advocacy

A potential side effect of upward mobilization in African American communities is the loss of ethnic or Indigenous ways of knowing that get left behind in favor of knowing that advances professional careers. Walker-Barnes shared some of the ways she and her family have experienced. "When my family [moved] from the deep south to Atlanta, which was the urban area, we jettisoned our connection to the land." Thankfully, there has been an urgent and fresh movement igniting among African Americans to get back to their roots and organic ways of knowing and living predominant among our ancestors. Although her grandfathers were farmers, Walker-Barnes has expressed a disconnection from the land that happened over time as her family pursued upward career mobility and freedom. "I realized the damage that they had done to me . . . that [the] disconnect from the land and nature was doing to me. Thus, part of my own process, I think, a healing of some of the wounds of slavery and oppression, was actually reconnecting to the land." Now Dr. Walker-Barnes and her husband have started gardening together. They view this time spent gardening as a way to "heal some of the wounds of slavery." They see themselves enacting a modern-day advocacy that connects them back to their roots in the land and the organic practices of their ancestors (Walker-Barnes, pers. comm., July 7, 2020).

Walker-Barnes also identifies time in the garden, connecting to the earth and her roots, as part of her self-care ritual. She shares her personal journey of taking time to engage in self-care: "Because I am so busy, right, that I can't care for myself. For me, that is part of self-care, but it is even more significant than that. [It] is about getting back to nature, getting back to God's creation." Dr.Walker-Barnes is an active participant in this reverential movement of living in harmony with self and the earth. She uses various communication platforms to disseminate her message about connecting with nature as a form of self-care.

As an example of her advocacy for self-care, Walker-Barnes uses social media platforms and her website to share her vulnerability and personal journey with cancer and other life-informing experiences. She is intentional about using her platforms to share publicly. Walker-Barnes's "own commitment to transparency" fuels this public sharing (Walker-Barnes, pers. comm., May 20, 2021). By sharing the lifestyle changes required for her full recovery from cancer, she

is furthering her message about the importance of self-care as a form of healing and activism for Black women that resists mainstream messaging. Walker-Barnes also uses yoga to combat "the impacts of oppression for women of African descent." She promotes it as a form of personal healing, meditation, and a way to overcome trauma. She emphasizes that "one of the impacts of oppression, for women of African descent, is that we can be very disconnected from our bodies. We're often very outward focused, because of the pressures that we are under, that our families are under." She elaborates further by stating, "we are always paying attention to someone else, something else whether it is something that we need to take care of, some danger we need to look out for but we tend to stay outward focused" (pers. comm., July 7, 2020). Her yoga practice and willingness to share her journey via social media are active ways that she sets an example to other African women to engage in self-care rituals.

She uses social media outlets like her personal website, Twitter, and Instagram accounts for engaging in advocacy for self-care. She promotes self-care as a decolonizing form of reframing for African American and Black women who have been steeped in destructive and self-negligent practices. Walker-Barnes's advocacy on social media for Black women is followed by many. For instance, she has over 17,000 Twitter followers (*www.twitter.com/drchanequa*, accessed May 25, 2021), over 7,000 Instagram followers (*www.instagram.com/drchanequa*, accessed May 25, 2021.), and over 16,000 who subscribe to and follow her blog posts (*www.drchanequa.com/blog*, accessed May 25, 2021). Walker-Barnes's work provides a noteworthy example of fusing her academic accomplishments with popular culture and public activism. She has been blogging online since 2015, and her posts have covered controversial issues. She uses social media and online platforms to get her message into the world beyond the academy. For Walker-Barnes, the work and results of advocacy are not reserved for the privileged few but can be shared with the masses thanks to the Internet. She is a modern-day womanist and social justice warrior whose social media presence makes her an accessible role model for those beyond the halls of academia.

Dr. Walker-Barnes's message of self-care and advocacy for revitalizing nurturing ways of living is evident across formal, academic platforms and informal social media platforms. In both settings, she develops and spreads the message that Black women deserve to be treated with respect, dignity, and care. This advocacy is controversial in a country that is still unhealed from its participation in the

transatlantic slave trade. It makes her work critical, necessary, and bold at a time when self-advocacy and advocacy for others can be viewed as a threat.

Backlash over "Prayer of a Weary Black Woman"

In the spring of 2021, Dr. Walker-Barnes found herself at the center of a heated, public controversy over racism in the United States after the 2020 publication of a meditation she composed for the New York Times bestseller, *A Rhythm of Prayer: A Collection of Meditations for Renewal*, edited by Sarah Bessy (2021). Her contribution, entitled "Prayer for a Weary Black Woman" (69), took the form of a lamentation. In her prayer, Walker-Barnes lays her rage about the racism that is the context of her everyday life before God, as Job did when his family, friends, and possessions were taken from him. However, she asks God to save her from her anger and hatred toward the White people who overtly and inadvertently support the evil of racism. It is the heartfelt lament of a Black woman who has suffered the oppressive evils of systemic oppression and spent a lifetime working to heal the wounds of others who have suffered. This top-selling book was available at popular outlets like Target and Barnes and Noble. By mid-spring 2021, its popularity had caught the attention of right-wing social media sites. Screenshots of Walker-Barnes's prayer were shared via Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook (Fallert 2021). Walker-Barnes found herself in the midst of a media backlash that was intense and personal. She shares that she experienced "an avalanche of new emails, direct messages on social media, voice mails mainly through her work phone. . . . One person called every department on her university's campus demanding her termination." She even received threatening messages telling her to die and messages containing the use of the n-word. Walker Barnes worked closely with law enforcement regarding her safety and the safety of her family. Ultimately, she and her family had to leave home for a week due to the intensity of the hateful attacks on her work and her family (Walker-Barnes, pers. comm., May 20, 2021).

Walker-Barnes considers her dependence on and affinity for the psalms and lamentations in the Hebrew Scriptures and her choice to model her prayer on this biblical format. "As a two-time breast cancer survivor, they are my prayer books. At the start of Covid, I had so

much anxiety, I turned to the Book of Psalms." She also shared that, during hard times, "I'll read through the psalms as my morning devotion." When writing "Prayer of a Weary Black Woman," her thought in writing the prayer was, "Let me do it as they [biblical psalmists] do it, let me pour out my heart" (Walker-Barnes, pers. comm., May 20, 2021).

Dr. Walker-Barnes shared that she takes her platform and opportunities to speak against injustices seriously, so "I'm intentional about using my occupational privilege" to speak up on behalf of those who may not have the same opportunities to speak up and out against injustices. For Walker-Barnes, speaking up on behalf of the marginalized includes "a lot of Black people, women, people of color who could relate." Another important aspect of this controversy to note is that, for Walker-Barnes, "the most meaningful support has been black women speaking out." Finally, she shared that "this period is a lot. I hope we will give ourselves time to grapple with it, even over the next year or couple of years" (pers. comm., May 20, 2021).

Amid the extreme backlash against her, Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, announced her appointment as the professor of practical theology and pastoral counseling. The appointment had been planned since the beginning of the year (Columbia Theological Seminary n.d.), but the timing of the announcement was an interjection of good news. Walker-Barnes shared that when people spoke up in support of her as a writer and theologian during this controversy, it helped her and her family's anxiety. "For me as a writer, I'm always wanting to make sure the message I intended to get across actually came across. I questioned myself by asking myself, 'was I careful?'" Having the public support of so many allies helped her understand that she had not done or said anything wrong in her now-famous "Prayer of a Weary Black Woman." Also, people speaking up on her behalf, particularly on social media, helped mitigate the negative backlash. She feels that "when people are being attacked, those of us that support them need to speak up and be loud." It makes a difference to the individual, and it makes a difference to the presence of the conversation on social media.

Walker-Barnes spoke about this current moment in the history of our country and the potential that it holds. "We have a moment, and we have an opportunity, and we need to take advantage of it. I think there is a moment of growth here in our country." She had recently been ruminating on a quote from the esteemed activist Angela Davis—"Freedom is a constant struggle." Walker-Barnes came to a

conclusion that "we're always going to have setbacks. Freedom is not linear, and evil is real." In her understanding from reading the Bible, she shared that "the spirit of division has always been here and it will always be here. It brings with it "Hostility and turning humans against each other."

Impact and Conclusion

Walker-Barnes's work, particularly on the health of Black women, has been essential and critical for several reasons. First, she gave voice to an otherwise overlooked and voiceless segment of the American population—African American women. As an advocate for and a Black woman herself, she embodies and relates personally to the struggles and often misunderstood plight of African American women in America generally and in the Christian church specifically. She has cultivated a genuine voice through her studies and advocacy. Her work as a womanist theologian and psychologist has shaped her into a crucial voice for the twenty-first century. Walker-Barnes manages to hold the often-hard balance of advocating for Black women and being an authentic and active Christian in the twenty-first century. Her work stands as an exemplary representation for African Americans and those interested in social justice advocacy in both the academy and the church.

Dr.Walker-Barnes's academic and social justice activism is influential beyond the academy with an impact and relevance that extends to the public square. She inspires audiences from academia to religious settings and across popular culture platforms. With her strong sense of self-confidence, unique insight, and personal convictions, Walker-Barnes is an exemplary twenty-first-century African American scholar and activist. Since Black women hold a unique and critical position at the intersections of Black embodiment and female experiences, Walker-Barnes—known to many as Dr. Chanequa—has made it her personal mission to make sure that they are respected, understood, and healed.

Walker-Barnes is changing the world through the art of authentic living, written words in academic and pastoral work. Because of her unwavering dedication to representing their unseen lives, African American and Black women's issues are being placed front and center and deemed vital through her work. Moreover, Dr. Chanequa

Walker-Barnes is an applauded modern-day prophetic advocate for social justice and a voice crying out in the wilderness on behalf of disenfranchised Black and African women. Through her hard work, dedication, and relentlessness, Walker-Barnes's noteworthy legacy is secured and respected. Her achievements will continue to be celebrated by both the academy and those whom she is called to serve for many generations to follow.

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CHAPTER 7

Mary Milligan, RSHM, STD

Selvage Leadership within the Fabric of Church

> *But despite the eradication of self through total obedience striven for by religious women, despite their spiritual practices performed to achieve Christian perfection through this erasure, and finally, despite their obedience to clergy and the narrow confines of religious life, these women constituted a powerful social movement.*
>
> – Nelson (2001, 2)

JANICE POSS

In the Roman Catholic Church, women religious across the centuries have sustained the Church's mission. Inspired by vows of service, they spread the faith, ministered to the sick, and educated the masses. However, because they were and continue to be denied advancement opportunities through ordination, their work and achievements take place at the margins or the "selvages" of the interwoven cloth of the constitutional hierarchy of the institutional Church. Today, these unassuming women—many working in the academy, like Sandra Schneiders, IHM, Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, and Margaret Farley, RSM—have overcome public oversight and lack of recognition through hard-won expertise, professionalism, leadership, and notable contributions to the Church, academy, and society. These women religious academics teach and lead religious institutions of higher learning, achieving scholarly excellence and activ-

ism in support of marginalized communities. However, most do this essential work without public recognition from the Roman Catholic Magisterium. Nevertheless, they continue working under the Church hierarchy at the margins of power, living lives of service binding the Church together, like a selvage, into a communal cloth.

Mary (Bernard Marie) Milligan, RSHM (January 23, 1935–April 2, 2011) was one such woman—a member and leader of the canonical Catholic order called the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary (RSHM) and a respected academic (Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary: California and Mexico n.d.b.). In 1953, she felt the call to devote her life to God. She became a member of the RSHM, an order founded by Fr. Jean Gailhac and Mother St. Jean (Appollonie) Pelissier Cure in 1849 in Béziers, France (Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary n.d.a.). Within the confines of religious life, she thrived, gradually rising to prominence as an educator, translator, historian, scholar, board and synod member, provost, and dean. She taught at schools in Neuilly, France (Milligan 2009, 18), Marymount High School and College, and, eventually, at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) and St. John's Seminary in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (*Los Angeles Times* 2011).

When I began this project years ago, I envisioned weaving as an appropriate analogy for her biography as an academic woman religious marginalized and relegated to the selvage edge of Church leadership. Later, I was surprised to find this same analogy in her 2009 memoir, *Tell Us Mary, What You Have Seen Along the Way*, where she explains the significance of this metaphor for her life. In 1956, as a young, impressionable novice, she was sent to the congregation's motherhouse in southern France for further formation. She visited the famous Gobelins Tapestry factory in Paris, begun by Louis XIV and Colbert in 1663 to weave royal tapestries (Mobilier National/ Les Gobelins n.d.). Recalling this visit, she saw the master weavers working on their tapestries from the reverse side until completion. "At the end of construction," they finally viewed the front, seeing the culminating result of their craftsmanship. Milligan uses this experience as an organizing motif in telling her life's journey. "It is this visit, this Gobelins memory, that will assist me as I weave in and out the thoughts and experiences that made me who I became over time and who I am today" (Milligan 2009, 3).

This tapestry motif focused her on the present to the end of her life and final struggle with a mixed diagnosis of "Parkinson's or Alzheimer's disease" (Milligan 2009, 10, 11). Her doctors, never sure, di-

Image 1: Sr. Mary (Bernard Marie) Milligan, RSHM

agnosed it as Parkinson's-related Alzheimer's (Downey, pers. comm., March 29, 2021). She realized her mission in illness was to "leave a legacy or validation of my life, the story of my soul's journey in faith and hope and love" (Milligan 2009, 3). Toward the end, she was able to see her accomplishments—the reverse side of her entire tapestry (Milligan 2009, 4)—from the front, interwoven, warp over weft, uni-

fying her richly hued life threads into a totality. She emphasized the positive aspects, always feeling God in her experience of the disease (11).

I use Milligan's tapestry motif as a methodological structure highlighting her metaphorical reference to weaving by exploring her leadership in academia on the selvages of the Church hierarchy. The six tapestry sections woven and bound together represent Milligan's life experiences. First, I explore her early life and answer to the call to become a vowed woman religious. Second, I cover her education and formation as a novice in Béziers, France, where she developed her skills as a writer, historian, linguist, and teacher. Third, I address her service as a representative leader within the RSHMs as General Councilor in Rome. There she gained her Doctorate in Sacred Theology (STD) and revised the RSHM's guiding constitutions, modernizing them in alignment with the dictates of the Second Vatican Council. Fourth, I explore her vocation as an academic at LMU as general superior (1980–85), provost (1986–89), professor of theology (1989–92), dean of the College of Liberal Arts (1992–97), and as a board member and professor at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, CA. Fifth, I document her work as an academic writer and poet. Finally, I look at her accomplished leadership and frustrations as special secretary to the Bishops' Synod on the Laity (1987–89). This six-paneled tapestry is her legacy left for us as the multi-patterned cloth of a grace-filled, spiritual life lived close to God.

Tapestry #1: Early Life

The first threads of Mary Milligan's life began when her parents, Bernard Milligan and Carolyn Krebs, met in August of 1929 and married during the Great Depression (1929–39). Her father and mother of Irish and German extraction grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, and traveled independently to California. Her mother was looking for adventure with her girlfriends; her father was looking for work to support his mother and four siblings. Eventually settling permanently in California, they had four children: Pat, Mary, Jeri, and Mike. Bernard became a well-known columnist and sports writer for the Hearst-syndicated *Herald Examiner*, which became the *Los Angeles Times* (B. Milligan, *Valley News*, September 3, 1968). Carolyn cared for and raised her children at home. They lived in the San Fernando

Valley (Milligan 2009, 5–7). Mary, nicknamed "Mickey" by her family, attended St. Charles Borromeo Church and grammar school, where she met fellow parishioners and classmates (Downey, pers. comm., March 29, 2020), Cardinal Roger Mahoney, and Fr. Thomas Rausch, SJ. Mahoney and Rausch would become colleagues and friends in her adult life (Fr. Thomas Rausch, pers. comm., Aug. 8, 2020). Milligan contributed to Rausch's book, *The College Student's Introduction to Theology* (1993), which became a bestseller. Cardinal Mahoney KGC-HS, a controversial figure in his own right, would become head of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (1985–2011). Mahoney respected Milligan's work in the diocese and, at the request of Michael Downey—Milligan's long-time friend and colleague at St. John's Seminary—the cardinal presided at her funeral (Downey, pers. comm., March 29, 2021). These enduring relationships served Milligan in her roles as a leader in service to the Church.

Her family was proud of her as she was of them. She took the name Sr. Mary Bernard Marie Milligan in honor of her father, Bernard, when receiving her first religious vows in 1955 (Milligan 2009, 18). In her memoir, she identified that her mother instilled in her a "willingness to try new things, but maintain a constant, balanced, faithful and quiet presence. She felt privileged to give her mother's eulogy at her funeral in 1996" (7). These early family threads were woven tightly throughout her life's tapestry as Milligan remained close to her siblings. At the 2021 Mary Milligan, RSHM, Lecture in Spirituality, friends related that she was closest to Pat Marlowe—her eldest sister—who recently passed away (Abraham 2021). Milligan followed in Pat's footsteps, becoming a teacher. Pat wrote the foreword to her sister's memoir. Milligan visited her younger sister, Jeri, in San Clemente when she needed to rejuvenate her spirit in her sister's restful garden. Jeri was the one to count on in the family. Brother Mike wrote for *The Jeffersons*—an early African American television show featuring TV's first interracial couples (Bove, pers. comm., April 6, 2021). He encouraged her to write (Milligan 2009, 6). He attended the 2021 Mary Milligan, RSHM, Lecture in Spirituality (Abraham 2021), where he shared fond memories of his older sister, who was already studying in France when he was eight years old.

Tapestry #2: Vows and Formation

At the age of 19, Milligan finished her studies at Corvallis High School, run by the RSHM sisters until 1987 (Braxton 1986), and began her studies at Mount Saint Mary's College. Milligan felt the call to sisterhood and entered the RSHM Eastern American Novitiate in Tarrytown, New York, a year later, in 1953 (Milligan 2009, 17). Many women influenced her in these early years. They were RSHM sisters, mentors, and friends whose lives informed her own. "The women I have known and loved . . . are catalysts for change in religious communities and in the Church itself, particularly as the role of women in the Church struggles to fully evolve to its rightful place in the Church and society." Many Catholic girls felt a call as Mary did in the 1950s. The influx of novices reached its apex in 1965 when there were 179,954 religious sisters nationwide. A steep decline followed this surge. In 2019, there were only 42,544 vowed women religious in the United States (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate n.d.). Mary's career took place in the context of this surge and decline, formed by questions about the place of women religious in the Church after the Second Vatican Council in 1965, which left many issues around married and non-married clergy unresolved.

During her novitiate formation, she earned a BA in French at Marymount College in 1956 (Loyola Marymount University n.d.b.). Fluency in French became indispensable throughout her career and international travels (Milligan 2009, 17). Her extensive education was a natural outgrowth of membership in the community that already had provinces and schools in France, Brazil, Portugal, Ireland, and America. Today, their network of schools includes Mexico, Colombia, Italy, Africa (Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. n.d.a). Since 2006, social justice outreach through the RSHM NGO at the United Nations (Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary n.d.b).

The RSHM history and charism became increasingly important to Milligan over time and informed her religious life. Founder Fr. Gailhac felt the action of the Holy Spirit and understood God calling him to collaborate in humankind's salvation. Milligan was influenced by Fr. Gailhac's words, which instructed her how to lead her life as an RSHM member, particularly his words about the founding of the Institute as described in the RSHM four-volume history:

> 'God in his infinite mercy and for the glory of his name, wishing to show that only he is the Author of all good . . . deigned to choose me, the smallest and least of all, to do his work. He chose me to prove once more, alone is he the beginning and end of all good.' Accepting and allowing grace to work in him, Gailhac became a faithful collaborator in the redemption and co-founding of the Institute whose mission is to know, love and make God known and loved so that all may have life. (Milligan, Sampaio, and McConnell 1992, 5)

In the southern French region of Occitanie, Fr. Gailhac, in partnership with Mother St. Jean (image 2), provided poor, disenfranchised women with a means of survival other than being preyed on by unseemly men who would prostitute them (Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary n.d.a). These humble beginnings would become significant to Milligan when she wrote her dissertation on the Institute's history. This history was also essential when she rewrote their constitutions in alignment with the RSHM's charism and the Second Vatican Council's document for religious, *Perfectae Caritatis* (De Vroom and Horan, pers. comm., March 31, 2021).

Image 2: RSHM co-founders, Fr. Jean Gailhac (left) and Mother St. Jean Pelissier Cure (right)

While still a novice, Milligan was sent to the International RSHM Novitiate in Béziers, France. In her memoir, she fondly remembers Jeanne d'Arc Lefebvre, the woman in charge who spoke only French to the students. Her message to students guided Milligan's life journey, "*Cherchez-Dieu* (Seek God). God was to be found in all things, in the Church as well as in Scripture, the Eucharist, the community and in the Cross. . . . so in Béziers, the 'ill-matched threads' of [her] life began to take shape" (Milligan 2009, 18). Milligan considered the threads "ill-matched" because, like many women in the 1950s, including those in her Institute, decisions about her life were often made without consulting her. Rapid changes were thrust upon her without the opportunity for her to assert personal agency and come to some understanding of the purpose and connection between these opportunities. Within a short time, she moved from California to New York and soon after to southern France at the direction of her religious community. However, while in France, she began to discover a pattern that made sense of her life as an educator and student of history framed by the RSHM charism.

Milligan took her first vows after the initial novitiate period in Béziers around 1955 (Milligan 2009, 18). Eventually, she translated many of the motherhouse's documents from French into English when tasked to write the community's history from a woman's perspective. After completing her novitiate, she was sent to teach for the first time at American, Irish, and French schools in Neuilly, a suburb of Paris. While teaching in this privileged suburb, her sharp intellect absorbed refined French culture. In her memoir, Milligan recognizes the formative character of her time in Béziers.

> And so, my early years of religious life were spent in France along with two novices from each of the Institute's provinces—English/Irish, Brazilian, Portuguese, French, Eastern/Western American. There began my many future experiences in the internationality of the Institute. Not only was an internationality of the Institute taking place for me, but the French language was an indispensable *entrée* into a reality.

As she perfected her French, its nuanced variations from English, such as the use of formal and informal pronouns, provided an insight into how her relationships would emerge throughout her work abroad. "What an extraordinary opportunity I had been blessed with! It would serve me very well later in life as well as in my formative years" (Milligan 2009, 17). Her experiences and the relationships

she built within the Institute's international reach provided a global framework that would make her an international representative and leader for her community.

Always mindful of her religious calling, Milligan was cognizant of her emerging path as an academic teacher and applied to the Sorbonne. There she earned a *doctorat de l'université*—a PhD—in English in 1959. She wrote her first historical thesis on convert Sheila Kaye-Smith (1887–1955). Kaye-Smith, with her husband, Sir Penrose Fry, began the St. Theresa of Lisieux Catholic Church in Northiam, UK (Milligan 2009, 39; Our Lady Immaculate & St Michael with St Teresa of Lisieux n.d.).

Milligan's formative years in France at the RSHM motherhouse and the Sorbonne confirmed her commitment to the RSHM educational mission and its international service to the people of the global Church. Her education at the Sorbonne and her increased facility in French paved her way for educational opportunities that had, up to this point, been reserved for ordained men in the upper echelons of the Church hierarchy. After graduation, she returned to the United States "full of fervor from her spiritual and academic training." She began teaching at Marymount College, at its 1959 Sunset Boulevard location above UCLA in Los Angeles (Milligan 2009, 39–40).

In 1960, she returned to France before taking her final profession in Los Angeles. She recalls sitting in a park near the Orb River during an eight-day retreat. Reflecting on this lifelong commitment to God, she felt "connected to the community of people" in Béziers that was "broader than my own religious community, but yet part of it," she reminisced. She describes it as a connection to "a vital dimension of 'church,' a church I was called to be part of" (Milligan 2009, 18). In retrospect, Milligan realized that sitting in this park in France allowed her to embrace the spiritual aspect of her apostolic mission of teaching in the Church and provided the space to know this was going to be her entire life's mission. She was called to be an educator lifting up her students' voices, academically and spiritually.

In 1966, she completed an MA in sacred scripture degree at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana—the first university to grant theological degrees to women. Scriptural study was always crucial in her teaching, her prayer life, and as a member of the Church. She deeply felt the presence of God's face there, understanding M. Lefebrve's words said years previously in Béziers—*Cherchez-Dieu*. She had found God (Milligan 2009, 13).

Tapestry #3: History and Renewal

Back in the United States, Milligan was elected general councilor (1969–75) to help in administering the order. In light of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), religious congregations were asked to go through a renewal. Sent to Rome for five years as her community's representative, she met the institute's superior general, Sr. Maria de Lourdes Machado, and Sr. Marguerita Maria Gonçalves, who became a mentor well-steeped in the knowledge of these documents. These women aided Milligan in the process of renewing the constitutions of the RSHM Institute based on the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council, specifically the opening words of *Gaudium et Spes* (1965): "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ" (Milligan 2009, 28). These documents deeply inspired the women working on the renewal because they harkened back to the voices of their founders, Fr. Gailhac, M. St. Jean, and the community's original writings. Their committee to review these documents was "aptly named 'Sources'" (Milligan 2009, 20), which emphasized their pledge to "serve from the perspective of the poor" (De Vroom and Horan, pers. comm., March 31, 2021).

Before embarking on this monumental re-envisioning and renewal for the community, Milligan learned Portuguese to understand the needs of her sisters in Portugal and Brazil. Working alongside the Special Commission of members from the other provinces, she gave the revised constitutions their final form. They were accepted and approved by the general chapter of the Institute in August of 1980 and then by the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in their first draft (Loyola Marymount University n.d.b.). Patricia O'Connor, RSHM, reflected at the time of Milligan's death on the significance of this work:

> Mary [was] a giant in the Institute . . . Becoming a general councilor shortly after the close of the Second Vatican Council, Mary contributed significantly to the renewal called for by the Council. . . . Totally fluent in French, steeped in French history and culture, and deeply knowledgeable of French spirituality, past and present, she uniquely led us to discover anew our mid-nineteenth century French Founder, Father Jean Gailhac, and French Foundress, Mother St. Jean Cure Pe-

> lissier, our first sisters and to help us understand them at a depth we had never known before. She helped us to understand the meaning of the communal charism of a religious congregation and what this offered the Church for the life of the world . . . She wrote voluminously on our Sources, translated historical works from their original French and Portuguese with earnest accuracy. She led an Institute-wide process of rewriting our Constitutions, helping us to corporately articulate our experience of living the Gospel . . . under her leadership, our Constitutions were accepted and approved by the universal Church. (O'Connor 2011)

While in Rome, she also studied at the Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae (recently renamed Pontificia Università Gregoriana). Technically, she was the first woman to obtain a Doctor of Sacred Theology degree (1975) from this prestigious pontifical university (Loyola Marymount University n.d.b.). Sandra Schneiders, IHM, who would go on to become a prominent feminist theologian in the United States and a long-time friend of Milligan's, is listed as the second woman to graduate that same year (Schneiders, pers. comm., April 3, 2021). Published in 1975 by Gregorian University Press, Milligan's two-part dissertation, *That They May Have Life: A Study of the Spirit-charism of Father Jean Gailhac* (image 3), was the first to document the Spirit charism of founder Fr. Gailhac and his collaboration with foundress M. St. Jean. Milligan documented this history of the community from its founding in Béziers in 1849 to the establishment of the American provinces in Tarrytown, NY, Montebello, CA, and other locations during the early

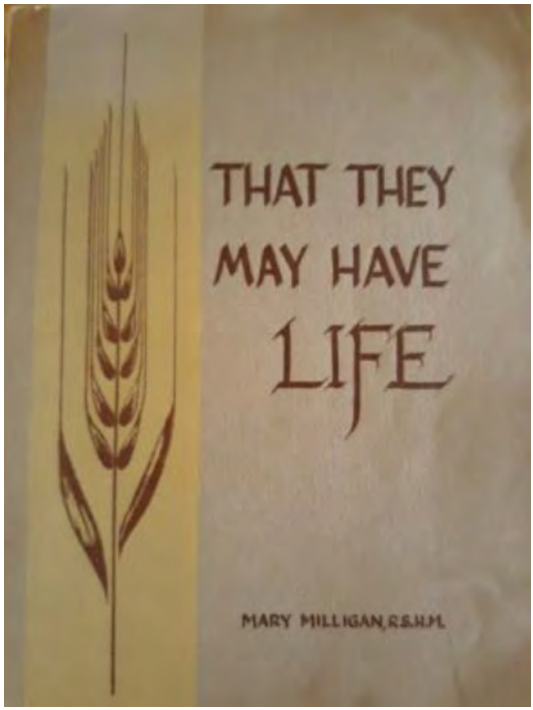

Image 3: Mary Milligan's published dissertation, 1975

decades of the 20th century by Mother Marie Joseph Butler (image 4), an Irish RSHM (Burton 1945, 15, 98, 279). Milligan's detailed description and analysis of the community's history and vows provided solid historical and spiritual foundations for the Institute's future work.

Image 4: Mother Marie Joseph Butler

Tapestry #4: Leadership in Rome

> We are called to live beyond boundaries . . . to be like Mary, followers of Jesus, open to the unexpected ways of the Spirit. Internationality is a gift from our origins. (Bailey and McMahon 1999, 6, 21, 30, 35)

With her educational achievements and understanding of the Institute's historical and spiritual foundations, Milligan became an international leader and teacher chosen early on to represent her community worldwide—in France and the Institute's other locations in Brazil, Portugal, Ireland, and America. Her formation as a novice in France spent with other novices from provinces around

the world gave her a strong sense of the RSHMs as a global Institute (Milligan 2009, 17–21). Her early training at the motherhouse gave her fluency in French, which was the language of international diplomacy. However, her friends and colleagues suggest that it was her superior diplomatic skills, sophistication, and ability to operate with "grace under fire" that made her a truly effective international leader (Downey, pers. comm., March 29, 2021; Engh, pers. comm., March 29, 2021; Horan and De Vroom, pers. comm., March 31, 2021).

In 1980, Milligan was elected tenth superior general of the RSHM—the first born in the United States. She attributed her training in France and "work learning the spirit in the provinces during the constitutions' revision" to her selection as superior general. On her return to Rome as superior general, she confronted the urgent need to coordinate their African mission in Mali, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Mozambique. Against the backdrop of Vatican II, Milligan identified several priorities which she lists in her memoir: a call to justice, new constitutions, increasing co-responsibility and collaboration among members, recalling sources and the original mission of serving poor and marginalized women (Milligan 2009, 20, 26).

In 1983, as superior general, Milligan entered into dialogue with John Paul II (image 5) and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG)around "themes of apostolic religious life; religious women in the local church, with specific attention to their relationships with bishops; and emphasis on new pluralistic forms of religious life" (Milligan 2009, 44). Her frequent lunch meetings with the Holy Father revised her less-than-positive conceptions of him (Bove, pers. comm., April 6, 2021). In her interactions with John Paul II, she comprehended the importance of energetic dialogue, consensus, and the relevance of learning the language of the hierarchy and institutional Church twenty years post-Vatican II. She realized "the definitions of religious life, of women in the church, of the identity and witness of religious women not being derived from their work alone was still

Image 5: Sr. Mary and Pope John Paul II

struggling to be born in the spirit of Vatican II"; dialogue with the Vatican was necessary for progress (Milligan 2009, 45).

In 1981, the RSHM community's ongoing Sources of Life study group, named for the communities guiding "Sources," proposed to write a more thorough history of the Institute. As superior general, Milligan asked, "A new history of the Institute? Is one really necessary?" (Milligan, Sampaio, Connell 1992, xi, 1). The members had a new awareness of the role of women in history and wanted to know more about their early sisters. In further conversation with those proposing the project, Milligan realized that a well-articulated connection between their founding documents and their current understanding of their mission had yet to be made. From 1983–90, the community's members co-wrote and published their four-volume history that previewed on the 100th anniversary of Fr. Gailhac's death, entitled *A Journey in Faith and Time: History of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary*. Milligan provided many translations of the Institute's historical documents from French and Portuguese. Aided by sister RSHMs, Rosa do Carmo Sampaio and Kathleen Connell, Milligan's instrumental contribution to writing this history created a bridge between the original charism of supporting and caring for poor, marginalized women to their newly written constitutions that retrospectively embraced the founding *raison d'être*.

As a chosen and elected superior general, Milligan's philosophy was underwritten by the old Welsh proverb, "He/She who would be a leader, must be a bridge" (Milligan 2009, 23). She was collaborative, personifying this bridge, connecting her community to their various Marymount schools, RSHM communities all over the globe, LMU, St. John's Seminary, and the Church hierarchy. She traveled the globe making connections that spread the RSHM charism, "*Ut vitam habeant*—that all may have life" (Bove, pers. comm., April 6, 2021).

Tapestry #5: Academic Leadership and Teaching

Milligan returned to the United States from Rome in 1986 and applied her skills as a formidable leader for the remainder of her career. While still superior general, she became the provost (1986–89) at Loyola Marymount University (LMU). After that, she became a professor of theology and scripture. From 1992 to 1997, she was dean of the College of Liberal Arts. While dean, she served on the board at St.

John's Seminary and was a professor of sacred scripture there until her retirement in 2006 (Loyola Marymount University n.d.b.). Milligan continued to use her spiritual, historical, and theological expertise in the context of her work in higher education and the Church to move the work of the laity, particularly women religious, from the selvaged margins of the Church to greater prominence.

Leading

As provost—a position typically held by a senior academic who oversees the creation and implementation of university academic priorities—Milligan experienced challenges due to disputes with the Jesuits about the nature of their partnership. Although LMU was to be co-equally directed by agreement with the RSHMs, the Jesuits did not identify the relationship as necessarily equal or collaborative in practice. Their complementary charisms brought them together in 1968 when the RSHMs moved their teaching center to the Jesuit Loyola Campus in Westchester, CA, from their Marymount location on the Palos Verdes Peninsula. In 1973, the Jesuit/RSHM partnership was formalized along with the addition of the Congregation of Saint Joseph of Orange (CSJ), establishing Loyola Marymount University (Loyola Marymount University n.d.a). However, the Jesuits were slow to understand that the education the RSHMs offered was not a finishing school for young women but rather serious academic preparation for professional careers.

Michael Downey remembers that, based on this bias, the position of provost was not well-defined by the Jesuits and came with little responsibility. The Jesuits expected Milligan to "go to tea" with Marymount alumni, soliciting donations for LMU's endowment. Coming from her position of influence as superior general of the RSHMs in Rome, this was a difficult time for her (Downey, pers. comm., March 29, 2021). Elena Bove noted that she felt undeservedly disrespected (Bove, pers. comm., April 6, 2021). Nevertheless, Theresia de Vroom and Michael Horan noted that she persevered with grace (De Vroom and Horan, pers. comm., March 31, 2021). She never let this bias get the best of her. Well-grounded in RSHM spirituality and charism, she had what the French call a healthy *amour-propre*—self-love. She was well thought of, supported in her community, and understood she was loved by God unconditionally, which enabled her to continue to persevere in her work for a meaningful, equal partnership with the

Jesuits and the Congregation of St. Joseph. In a conflict with the Jesuits over the continued inclusion of "Marymount" in the university's name, Milligan advocated successfully that the current name remain. She argued that the full name, Loyola Marymount University, emphasized the unique qualities of this equal collaboration between the Jesuits and the RSHMs. This collaborative, co-directed, male and female religious university is singular in Catholic higher education in that it combines progressive Jesuit, RSHM, and CSJ values in their educational approach (Loyola Marymount University n.d.a). Milligan's advocacy for the continued importance of this partnership formed the character of LMU as a cooperative endeavor to the benefit of its students.

Milligan stepped down as provost in 1989 and began teaching French, theology, Hebrew, and New Testament scripture (*Angelus News* 2011). At the urging of her colleague Dr. Elena Bove, she applied for the position of dean and served from 1992–97 (Bove, pers. comm., April 6, 2021). As a teacher, professor, and dean, Milligan recounts how she felt about her students by relating a story about a professor from Sudan she interviewed for LMU. She asked "how he would manage the gap between his own teaching and cultural richness and that of his students. He hardly blinked an eye before responding: 'I will love them.' That was my goal years earlier when first teaching in Paris, I am still in touch with a number of those students from those early years and I do still love them" (Milligan 2009, 19). One of those first students wrote in remembrance of her passing, "Mary was my teacher for two classes in Paris. I loved her classes. I never knew that it was her first teaching experience but she made a profound impact on me and my decision to enter the RSHM community. She never let her exalted position among scholars change her simplicity and connection with people of all ages and nationalities. She never forgot those she knew (Breda Galavan, April 16, 2011, comment on *Daily Breeze* 2011). James T. Keane, a more recent student of Milligan's, remembers, "she was a reserved, tactful, classy woman who always had time for young students in her office; she was a seminary professor, teaching Scripture to men at St. John's Seminary. She had that certain combination of learning and grace that allowed her to mentor professors and lead institutions while also showing special care to the little guy" (Keane 2011). An associate dean, Jeffrey Wilson, remembered their early encounter, "In no way did she make me feel junior or inferior; she was very supportive of me and all other new LMU faculty" (Finster 2011). At St. John's, her scholarly reputa-

tion preceded her. The young seminarians were impressed with her scriptural knowledge and theology (Downey, pers. comm., March 29, 2021). In 1988, Mary was awarded an honorary doctorate from Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia—a testament to her broad teaching expertise in Neuilly, Rome, and Los Angeles. In teaching, Sr. Milligan encouraged others to embody what she called "gentleness of the heart" (Finster 2011).

Her Vowed Marginalization

Milligan did, however, experience marginalization even as a prominent religious leader and long-time teacher. She narrates this particular story that illustrates a practice of exclusion that leads to such marginalization:

> I remember one retreat in particular where I and an ordained member had worked well together in preparation for the retreat and had shared in presenting the Scripture and reflected together on the readings. But when the Mass moved to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. I took my place with the non-ordained retreatants. I remember my feelings of rejection at having to move. . . . as if I had been ignored or overlooked. This occurrence has often supplied the context for me to reflect on this situation that continues to this day in the Church that I love. (Milligan 2009, 15)

This clear example of direct marginalization and exclusion is what pushes women to the selvage edge. When needed, one is included, but the emphasis on an all-male clerical class repeatedly sidelines women religious even though, like their male counterparts, they have consecrated their lives to the Church. Milligan's feelings of rejection and being overlooked touched her to the core. She did not let this go unnoticed because her resistance caused her to write about it in her memoir for others to read and witness.

Not only women religious, but all women remain marginalized in the Catholic Church because they are not male and cannot seek to be priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, or pope! Women academic scholars who are religious sisters value humility over notoriety and service over aggrandizement of individual accomplishments. Taking vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience compels them to lead anonymous lives, ego being anathema to service in Christ. This counter-intuitive self-effacement can be one reason for their marginalization.

Mother St. Jean provides an example of how taking a vowed commitment to God functions for women in the RSHM community. In 1849, she said, "How happy I am that the God of mercy put in my soul the vocation I have undertaken with so much courage. I will work with all my strength and will support you [Father Gailhac] to the best of my ability in this beautiful work" (Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary: California and Mexico n.d.a.). She followed this vocational devotion to help others, seeking to be a better person. The self-evaluation of her character, although often false, propelled her to try to overcome slow growth, the idea that she prayed badly, was weak, miserable, of bad character, lacking patience, constancy in her moods, docility, had little enthusiasm, and even coldness in the service of God. This deprecating behavior plagued nuns' prayer life and contributed to their humility, self-effacement, and rejection of roles in the limelight (Milligan, Sampaio, Connell 1992, 78).

Going a bit deeper into the issue of the self-effacement of women religious, Siobhan Nelson speaks to this self-marginalization in *Say Little, Do Much: Nursing, Nuns, and Hospitals in the Nineteenth Century* (2001). She begins with this story:

> Some years ago, at a North American nursing conference I delivered a paper on religious nurses and their impact on the . . . health care system. When I had finished, a woman stood to make a statement . . . [S]he was of Boston Irish Catholic stock. She had worked as both a bedside nurse and a senior administrator at . . . Catholic hospitals owned and managed by sisters. Yet when she undertook her MBA and focused her major paper on women in senior health care management, she had found none. The literature told her there were none; she analyzed this deficiency from a feminist perspective and duly received a high grade. After hearing my paper, she realized her error—the women were there, she'd even been working for them at the time. Yet, somehow, she had not been able to see them. (Nelson 2001, 2)

In both nursing and education, Catholic women religious built up the hospitals and Catholic schools in silence and invisibility. Not tasked with raising children or developing a marriage relationship, they could concentrate on building a better world for the families they served. Milligan was imbued with the desire for her students, community members, and all women religious to live a fuller life. As her vowed sisters, Milligan labored for her community in the Catholic schools and college and university systems where she was

assigned. It was her call to educate young Catholics in faith-driven academic knowledge.

Milligan's distinct belief, as a vowed RSHM, was in the Sacred Heart of Mary. In 1982, while superior general, she wrote how the Blessed Mother's example influenced her life as a child of God. "It was in her heart," she wrote, "that Mary discovered her own identity. She was at one and the same time daughter of the Father and daughter of her own people. . . . [This] heart of Mary . . . has been given to us as an Institute[;] let us learn interiority, . . . poverty and gentleness of heart" (*Angeles News* 2011; Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary: California and Mexico n.d.b). This vowed belief in "interiority, poverty of spirit and gentleness of heart" worked to marginalize these unseen women at the edges who freely gave of themselves in the service of God or, as in Milligan's case, to Mary, Mother of God. Milligan claimed that prayer and contemplation in the rich symbol of the heart of Mary were the creative inspiration that added to the tapestry of her life (Milligan 2009, 34). The charism of her order demanded obedience to the service of others with unwitting spirit-filled devotion and love in silent generosity. Nevertheless, while Milligan was constrained, she was not silenced. In pursuit of her vow to service, she taught, wrote, and led her community of sisters and the educational institutions for which she worked.

Publishing

As an author at home and in Rome, Milligan was often asked to publish articles in the United States and abroad on scripture, women in religion, spirituality, and the relationship between feminism and religion (*Daily Breeze* 2011). She is best known for her work on the renewal of her community's constitutions and the revisioning of the RSHM history. This history comprised four volumes attesting to her brilliance as a translator and historical writer. She also contributed to scholarly volumes on theology and scripture. However, closest to her heart was her poetry, which allowed her to explore her spirituality and celebrate her connection to God through her calling as a writer.

In 1992, she worked with colleague Thomas P. Rausch, SJ, on a contribution to the textbook, *The College Student's Introduction to Theology* (Rausch, pers. comm., August 8, 2020; Chapple and Rausch 1993). Her article, entitled "Christian Spirituality," brought in mate-

rial from Julian of Norwich and Dorothy Day, providing a woman's perspective on spirituality (Milligan 1993, 161–74). She writes, "To study Christian Spirituality is to study the manifestation of experience springing from Christian faith. Christian Spirituality studies lived experience rooted in an understanding of God, of self, of others and of the world" (162). For Milligan, women's spirituality is rooted in lived experience.

Much of her scholarly work was focused on the renewal and ongoing evaluation of religious life inspired by Vatican II, including her dissertation work on the RSHM community's charism, vows, and history (Milligan 1975; Milligan, Sampaio, and Connell 1992). Some works appear in French publications (CRC-Conférence religieuse canadienne 1978) or books (Bacq and Milligan 1987a; Bacq and Milligan 1987b; Kolbenschlag 1987, 155–61) for the community and the Church. As one of the appointed special secretaries, Milligan's anonymous drafting of the documents relating to the 1987 Bishops' Synod on the Laity, "The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World," (General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops 1987; Dart 1987) was a significant contribution advocating for a greater role of women in the Church. This work resulted in the publication of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, of Pope John Paul II. Indeed, perhaps for the first time, a Vatican document was addressed: "To Bishops, To Priests and Deacons, To Women and Men Religious and to All the Lay Faithful" and a sub-heading called Women and Men (Pope John Paul II 1988, sec. 49).

John Kissell noted in his remembrance of Milligan on the occasion of her passing that "She lobbied for a stronger role for women . . . [studying] the changing role of women in the church" (Kissell 2011). Her oral and written contributions in the deliberations in support of women during the 1987 synod carried over as her driving propheticism contribution to the 1993–94 Synod of Bishops when she cowrote "Women Religious and the World Synod of Bishops" for *America* magazine.

> Our lived experience offers us a privileged encounter with women throughout the world . . . four out of every five religious are women, we urge . . . the Synod to take . . . our experience seriously, to dialogue [further through] the synodal process, and to find ways [to]: 1. eliminate the dichotomy often observed between official church statements about the dignity of women and the actual practice of discrimination; [and] 2. more fully include competent women in de-

> cision-making roles . . . including key curial positions. (Farnham and Milligan 1994, 22–3)

As a woman religious, she desired to make her religious community, all religious communities, and all women relevant in today's world. She wrote for her community's internal publication, "Like a River," which celebrated 150 years of the Institute. This large-format, colorful publication brought together all the RSHM communities celebrating with joy in uplifting poor and disenfranchised women for a century and a half together (Bailey and McMahon 1999).

Milligan's skill as a writer extended to her love of poetry. She was inspired by poets such as Mary Oliver and used her own poetry, as Oliver did, to explore themes that were leading her to a deeper embrace of the spirit and the reality of God in her life. Her poetic explorations enhance her memoir. Her poetry gives the reader an intimate sense of her personal journey toward an ever-deeper understanding of the movement of the spirit in her own life. Her poem "Beginnings" is such a poem that communicates Milligan's understanding of the movement of the spirit across time that grows the RSHM community from the seed planted by its founders Fr. Gailhac and Mother St. Jean to its good fruit that spreads to distant lands. The poem communicates Milligan's life mission to record and spread the founding vision:

Beginnings

A seed was planted, not a large one but a small one
Just about the size of a mustard seed.
It was planted in Béziers,
In a needy people who did not know the seed was there.
It fell into a faithful heart and was carefully tended.
Women tended the seed.
It was watered by the tears of a weeping widow,
By the work of her good companions.
Like all seeds, this one needed to fall into the ground and die.
And so it brought forth good fruit.
Blown by the wind of the Spirit to distant nations,
Off-shouts sprouted.
The women did not proclaim themselves but
The one who sent them.
They lived in harmony,
they loved in freedom,

they walked in joy.
"Let us write the vision down," they said,
"For there is still a vision for the appointed time;
If it seems to tarry, wait for it;
It will surely come, it will not delay." (Hab 2:2–3)
Has the time come? Has the seed grown? Is the vision clear?
Is their faith strong?
Another wind arises. Where will it take them?
"The wind blows where it chooses,
And you hear the sound of it
But you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." (John 3:8)
Listen to the wind . . . (Milligan 2009, 21)

Michael Downey asked her, while holding vigil at her deathbed, what she would miss most. She said, "The beauty of this world" (Downey, pers. comm., March 29, 2021). She wrote this short poem that expressed the importance of the beauty of all things as a revelation of the spirit in her life to the end:

What have you seen, Mary?

What have you seen, Mary?
I have seen beauty all around me, a beauty which
Unveils all things;
I have seen the joy of expectation; I have also lived in
Expectation, yet never enough. (Milligan 2009, 53)

Tapestry #6: The Synod on Laity

In October 1987, after Milligan was no longer superior general, she was appointed by the Vatican as special secretary to the International Synod of Bishops on the Laity in Rome on "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council." She was one of three US experts recruited to assist in the proceedings because of her knowledge and understanding of the future of religious life and the Church. Milligan remembers being given no time to accept or decline and so, without time to discern and

Image 6: Mary Milligan on the Grounds of the RHSM motherhouse in Montebello, CA

reflect on this important request, she accepted. She wrote about this experience:

> Th[e] refusal to allow some time to those discerning the invitation, should have given me some inkling about the level of true discussion/discernment at the Synod itself. . . . [A] significant number . . . called had strong ties with such groups as Opus Dei and Communione e Liberazione. I saw "behind the scenes" the methodologies used by . . . these groups. They would often suggest that the Special Secretaries, of which I was one, meet once our whole group had finished its work. Fatigue was a factor and dialogue became difficult as the day went on. Fortunately, Cardinal Hume and Jean Vanier were participants. . . . I could relate to these hopeful voices of the Church. . . . [D]uring the course of the . . . Synod . . . there was a celebration Mass acknowledging the 25th anniversary of Vatican II. I took my hope from that Eucharistic celebration rather than the Synod itself. . . . I see a tapestry not nearly complete, but encompassing "ill-matched threads" being woven by persons worldwide yearning to sustain Christ's saving presence in human history. (Milligan 2009, 46–7)

The *Los Angeles Times* reported at the time that "Though two other American advisers picked by the Vatican are known as theological

conservatives, Milligan said she is uncomfortable with that label, or any label. 'I suppose I'm a moderate. It depends on what the issue is, and, secondly, it depends on the perspective of others . . .'" (Dart 1987). Milligan recognized this as a potential impediment to opening discussions about female religious life. Downey described her as a feminist Catholic with moderating views that sought to bridge the conservative tendencies of the hierarchy and the more radical tendencies that might have labeled her a Catholic feminist, as Downey described her long-time friend and colleague, Sandra Schneiders.

Dolores Leckey, lay director on the laity, went as an expert chosen by four American bishops. The Vatican added Archbishops Anthony J. Bevilacqua of Philadelphia and Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles to the US delegation. Mahony cited Milligan's post as the seminary's board president as an example of women moving up in Los Angeles Church circles (Dart 1987). Being appointed to this synod was another step up for women's visibility. At this time, the Roman Catholic Church was only beginning its receptivity to women in leadership positions within its traditional hierarchical structures.

During the Synod proceedings, Milligan became frustrated with the response of Synod participants as the question of women's roles in religious life and the laity gained attention. Milligan shared in her memoir:

> [O]ne Synod member intervened appealing that men not be forgotten . . . one of the only interventions which drew applause. I was disillusioned by this outburst. There was hardly a danger that men would be forgotten with only two women in the Secretaries group and none in the Assembly. Few women spoke to the total group. . . . [D]iscussion effectively came to an end, hardly a clarion call to discernment. (Milligan 2009, 46–7)

This example reflects how clericalism affects women in the Church. Over 30 years after Milligan's work with the synod, Phyllis Zagano addressed this issue in a recent article. Like Milligan, she identifies women's marginalization within the Catholic Church hierarchy that affirms a male-only priesthood power structure keeping women at the margins of leadership (Zagano 2020).

Despite attempts to marginalize the contributions of women representatives to the synod, Milligan was very much a part of these deliberations. Downey (pers. comm, March 29, 2021), Bove (pers. comm., April 6, 2021), Engh (pers. comm., March 29, 2021), and De Vroom

and Horan (pers. comm., March 31, 2021) all spoke to her sharp intelligence and ability to hold her ground, calmly, with equanimity in these discussions. She responded with keen, quick-witted answers when necessary (Bove, pers. comm., April 6, 2021). Because of her skill as a writer on the Synod Writing Commission, she co-wrote the final draft for the document, which outlined the direction of the diocese for years to come (*Angelus News* 2011).

Milligan's resolve in these difficult situations was grounded in her internalized, deeply held image of herself as a free and faithful disciple. "To be free makes one human and situates me in history. To be faithful makes me more conscious of the law of which Jesus spoke: 'the whole law is fulfilled in one word: You should love your neighbor as yourself, Gal. 5:14'" (Milligan 2009, 52). With that as our Christ-given directive, we can, in freedom, choose our apostolic mission each day as a person of the gospel. Her marginalization was felt, but her life in the gospel made her resilient and helped her remain grounded in faith.

Tapestry Complete: Legacy

In 2006, Milligan was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and retired after serving her community for fifty-six years. In 2009, she went to CSJ Regina Residence in Orange, where she passed on April 2, 2011 (*Angelus News* 2011). She wrote her 2009 memoir in light of her experience with her diagnosis. Her sister, Pat Marlowe, who wrote the foreword, noted that Parkinson's was an "unexpected intrusion" and profoundly impacted her life. Often, Milligan wanted to "hang up her harp," but she "believe[d] in the future in spite of the shadows of today" (Milligan 2009, 1). "My own apostolic mission was perhaps once very public and even prophetic. Today, in the circumstances of my life and the illness I live with daily, being a disciple, following Jesus, leads me to hidden and humble service, but it is nonetheless apostolic" (Milligan 2009, 52). In 2013, LMU established the annual Mary Milligan, RSHM, Lecture in Spirituality to create a forum for critical reflection on her visionary spirituality in keeping with the RSHM charism (Loyola Marymount University n.d.b).

Milligan said that she "never sought [to be a leader], but it 'came upon me,' like being baptized again or drenched with a power not of her own making" (Milligan 2009, 23). Her life's tapestry was a jour-

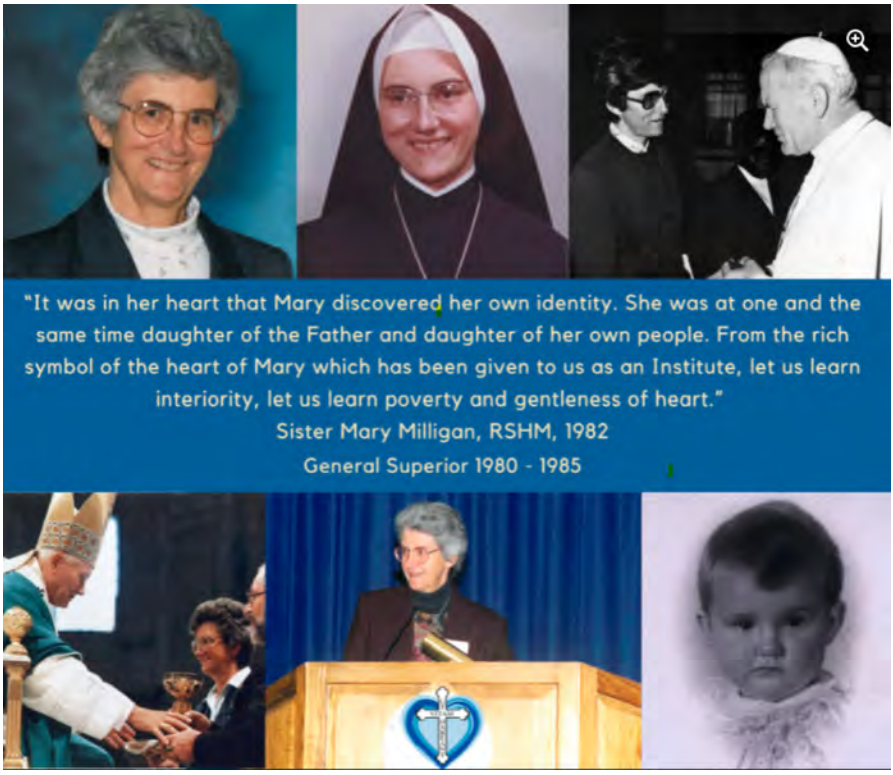

Image 7: Memorial collage

ney with God. "The color red marks the times when she experienced the grace of the Holy Spirit, the color of the flame within us . . . [to] make us 'stop' and take notice. It is also the color of love." It was her favorite color (Milligan 2009, 23–4). Downey recalled meeting her once for lunch. She was wearing a bright red suit. He was delighted, although he saw a contrast to her usual calmly subdued and reserved dress (Downey, pers. comm., March 29, 2021). Flaming red threads are woven throughout Milligan's life—a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence in her entire tapestry.

The RSHM mission and charism remains rooted in the task of uplifting poor, destitute, and marginalized women around the world, and it is still aligned with the belief *Ut vitam habeant*—that all may have life. Milligan personified this charism. Her dependence on God guided her through difficult periods. The Jesuits may have seen the RSHMs as second-rate (Downey, pers. comm., March 29, 2021), but she rose above bias with grace and class, persevering and never los-

ing her cool. Michael Horan said she was unflappable (Horan, pers. comm., March 31, 2021).

Michael Downey described her having "poised spiritual liberty." His eulogy paid homage to a women's strength:

> If Mary knew how to speak to God, she knew just as well how to speak the language of the angels—French. Over years I would greet her in the words of the angel Gabriel, the opening of the Hail Mary: *Je vous salut Marie! Salut Michel, ça va?* Our conversation would continue and she would outpace me every time. On parting . . . *tout à l'heure* (see you soon) or *au revoir* (see you again). But this night we gather to say "Adieu." A final farewell. *A Dieu*—to God . . . of 1,000 names, faces—*en plus*—still more. Mary, you have told us what you have seen along the way. And wait for us in that place—which is no place at all—in that name whose name above all naming is love—where we will never have to say goodbye to you again. (Downey, pers. comm., March 29, 2021)

With the internal support of the RSHM community and allies like Cardinal Mahoney—who presided at her funeral—Downey, Rausch, Engh, Horan, De Vroom, Bove, and others, Milligan saw past her experiences of marginalization because her colleagues recognized her as a prophetic woman religious.

Former student James T. Keane wrote in *America* in 2011, "In Praise of Difficult Women," that someone asked at her funeral, "Where is tomorrow's Mary Milligan? Who will replace her and thousands of other women religious? Losing exemplars of Christian life, we become less as Church and nation. We are blessed they exist." We are blessed by women academics and leaders like Mary Milligan, not by their being difficult, but by their forthright, successful, faith-driven leadership as educators, servants of the Church, holy women teaching us to be our best in service to others, living life to the full. Milligan moved off the selvaged margins into the mainstream fabric of the Church as a prophetic exemplar through the force of her lifelong work of binding the Church into an integrated, multi-colored tapestry. Sr. Mary Milligan, RSHM, led an extraordinary life, well-known and loved by her students, the RSHM community, at LMU and St. John's.

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CHAPTER 8

Paula Kane Robinson Arai

Navigating Cultural Intimacy and Scholarly Authority

KARMA LEKSHE TSOMO

Paula Kane Robinson Arai has had a distinguished career as a scholar and teacher. She is a respected author recognized for her contributions to the study of women in Buddhism, Zen, and Buddhist aesthetics. She earned three degrees from Harvard University, including a PhD in Buddhist studies, where she studied with Masatoshi Nagatomi (Arai 2003, 16). She taught at Vanderbilt University, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and Carleton College. She taught Buddhist Studies as the Yuki Visiting Professor at the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley in the spring of 2015 and currently holds the Urmila Gopal Singhal Professorship in Religions of India at Louisiana State University (LSU Religious Studies n.d.). She has written three books, multiple book chapters, and journal articles and has curated several art exhibits in multiple locations across the United States. Despite all these and many other accomplishments, her

academic journey has not been easy. In this chapter, I highlight her many talents and achievements and explore the tensions and disappointments she has encountered in her academic career. In addition to the typical tensions a bi-cultural woman encounters in male-dominated, White academic institutions, she experienced tensions between gentleness and power, acceptance and determination, affect and rationality, art and intellect, and submission and authority. Her work as an academic is informed by the experience and knowledge gained in holding and managing these tensions in creative ways.

Early Years

Arai grew up in Detroit, Michigan, in a multicultural family and learned to code-switch at home, toggling between the language and perspectives of her Japanese mother, Masuko Arai Robinson, and the North American cultural norms and expectations of her Anglo father, Lucian Ford Robinson. Arai believes this bi-cultural identi-

Image 1: Robinson family, 1961

ty gives her a distinctive perspective. As an American scholar with a front-row seat on Japanese culture, she easily sees through sexist, Orientalist approaches that portray Asian women as subservient and incapable and understands the damage wrought when Asian women internalize Orientalist perceptions. Her hybrid identity extends to religiosity, though she lands lightly on the Buddhist side of the fence. Her mother never described herself as a Buddhist, even accompanying her husband to Methodist Christian services, along with her children, who were baptized there. Nevertheless, her Japanese world view was thoroughly infused with Buddhist values and affinities. She began to realize that somehow her mother, raising her in Detroit, had knowingly or unknowingly imparted principles and patterns of perception that were recognizably Buddhist. Her mother's Buddhism was older, pre-war, and so tightly interwoven with Japanese cultural values that it was integral to all aspects of life, including Japanese psychology, communications, and aesthetics. Having internalized her mother's Japanese Buddhist sensibility, Arai feels a natural empathy with Japanese Buddhist women of earlier generations, and this has inspired her to research this often ignored demographic. Her mother's life, first in Japan and later in the United States, is the subject of Arai's current book project, *Samurai Daughter, Indentured Geisha, American Mother: An Odyssey from Buddhist Japan to Christian America* (Arai, pers. comm., November 20, 2020). Arai's father was also a major influence in her life. A White American, he went to Japan after WWII to "marry the enemy and begin the healing of the world." He was a big supporter of formal education, making it "natural" for her to pursue higher education to the highest extent possible (Arai, pers. comm., April 8, 2021).

Educational Journey

Inclusivity, intersectionality, and responses to power dynamics are concerns that drove Arai's education. She is grateful for the rich environments that supported her efforts to wholeheartedly engage with scholarly and public-awareness concerns. From 1978–83, she attended Kalamazoo College in Michigan, where she majored in religion and music. She studied abroad at Waseda University in Tokyo (1980–81). After graduating from Kalamazoo College with honors in 1983, she went on to study at Harvard Divinity School, earning a master's

degree in the history of religions in 1985. Arai's formal education in comparative religion began with an MTS degree (1985) from Harvard Divinity School that expanded her thinking about how systems of knowledge vary across cultures and time. An MA degree (1987) in the study of religion at Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences provided an opportunity to gain deeper insights into the nature of power and embodiment, especially in the diverse worlds of Christian theological discourse and Asian Buddhist social, political, and intellectual history. Earning a PhD (1993) involved applying her knowledge and insights to generate theories and methods that were in discussion with respected and established approaches. However, she drew primarily on the indigenous conceptual categories of the Japanese Zen nuns with whom she engaged in ethnographic and historical research on her dissertation, "Zen Nuns: Living Treasures of Japanese Buddhism,"' with Masatoshi Nagatomi as her advisor. She received generous support for her education, including a Fulbright Dissertation Grant (1989–90), Edwin O. Reischauer Institute Summer Research Grant (1989), and a Lilly Foundation Research Grant to study Asian-American Christians (1988–89) (Arai, pers. comm., September 14, 2020).

Arai navigates cautiously between her identities as a Buddhist scholar and as a Buddhist studies scholar. She seriously questions whether any term encompasses both identities. She prefers to relinquish any identity markers that essentialize human differences. Early in her career, Arai did not go out of her way to identify as a Buddhist, sensing that revealing her religious orientation might be professionally damaging. Currently, recognizing how easily labels can become reified, she understands Buddhist scholarship and practice as fluid categories that inform one another (Arai, pers. comm., November 20, 2020). Arai is not alone in this conclusion. Taking Buddhist philosophy and critical reflection at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) Annual Meeting as a reference point, it is obvious that, for many Buddhist scholars today, Buddhist practice and Buddhist scholarship are not mutually exclusive. Unlike days gone by, when rigorous scholarship and religious adherence were frequently regarded as antithetical, currently many respected scholars are practitioners of the religious traditions they teach. Ultimately, Arai developed her own worldview informed by her life experiences and her education. Reflecting on her significant formative experiences, she recalls that she carried the New Testament everywhere, met Martin

Luther King, Jr., studied in Japan for a year, and took her first class in Buddhism (Arai, pers. comm., November 20, 2020).

Arai survived and flourished in the academy by focusing on her responses to challenges rather than sinking into a litany of woes. Despite numerous obstacles, she appreciates the insights she gained through it all. She was fortunate to have caring teachers who guided her formal education. She had grown up in the social activist United Methodist Church of Detroit, where she once heard Dr. King preach, and she focused on Christian traditions as a religion major at Kalamazoo College. It came as a surprise to her when her professor—J. Mark Thompson, who specialized in comparative religion—surmised she was Buddhist, not Christian, because there was no God in her worldview. He believed she had imbibed Buddhist views from her mother, even though Arai herself was totally unconscious of it. Her mentor, John Bunyan Spencer, helped her hone critical reading and writing skills, especially when he tutored her in Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, the subject of her senior independent project (bachelor's thesis). He counseled her not to try to please anyone or second-guess what is suitable for the field, either in graduate school or an academic career, but to pursue what she would choose even if there were no external rewards. At the time, she had no idea, but it was precisely the advice she needed to weather just about everything that came afterward. With this strong educational foundation, she was prepared to launch into graduate studies in the Buddhist tradition (Arai, pers. correspondence, May 9, 2021).

Once at Harvard University, Arai enrolled in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's year-long course on Faith: A Human Quality. She credits Wilfred Cantwell Smith with showing her that religion is beyond the categories we ascribe to it; in fact, the word "religion" is a 16th-century Western category that many of the world's languages do not have a word for. For most of human history, people did not have a name for their orientation to the world but just lived their lives. Smith presented his evidence and reasoning in his influential book, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1964). In his course, she learned that, unlike monotheistic religions, the Buddhist tradition is not membership-based, which explains why Japanese do not think in terms of religious affiliation. Since Smith was her advisor at Harvard Divinity School during her MTS program, she asked to interview him for a Peace and Conflict Resolution course she was taking. When she asked how human beings might live in peace, he pronounced, "When all use the pronoun 'we' and mean everyone in the world." His schol-

arly guidance continued even after he retired, for he designed the doctoral exams. A major portion of the exams stressed comparative socio-historical aspects of the world's religious traditions and analysis of the categories central to the study of human religiosity, including scripture, ritual, and salvation. Professor Smith was central in developing the Center for the Study of World Religion—a living community of scholars where Arai lived during most of her doctoral studies. He believed one must become friends with those who live the tradition one studies. Many of the closest, most enduring friendships of her life began at the Center, where scholars help each other be better people and better scholars. Professor Smith's insightful vision of how to grow a scholar is something for which Arai is profoundly grateful (Arai, pers. comm., May 9, 2021).

During the summers, Arai was fortunate to be the administrative assistant for Dr. James Luther Adams, professor emeritus of Harvard and world-renowned ethicist. A large part of her job was helping him with his correspondence. His filing cabinets were stuffed with letters from high-profile politicians, including US presidents, world humanitarian leaders, Nobel Prize winners, top scholars, and people with all kinds of questions and concerns. Through these letters—the writings of luminary figures dedicated to an ethical and humane world—her view of the world expanded.

Image 2: Arai with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

During ten years of graduate school, Masatoshi Nagatomi—Harvard's first full-time professor of Buddhist studies—guided her in ways she only appreciated years later (Harvard University n.d.). Initially, he resisted her dissertation topic on Japanese Buddhist nuns, concerned that a Japanese-American woman specializing in Japanese Buddhist women would have trouble in the academy—concerns that were not unwarranted. When she graduated, he suggested a research topic for her to work on after publishing her dissertation as a book. During the six years it took to accomplish that, she totally forgot that conversation. Only in 2011, after completing *Bringing Zen Home*, did she remember his suggestion and realize that she had accomplished what he had recommended in 1993. The mixed messages she received during her doctoral education prepared her to overcome obstacles in order to make the contributions she was poised to make (Arai, pers. comm., May 9, 2021).

In addition to these male academic mentors, Kitō Shunkō and Aoyama Shundō have been exceptional mentors in Arai's life. Both are Sōtō Zen nuns who teach at Aichi Senmon Nisōdo—the premiere nunnery in Japan. Kitō is a senior teacher, and Aoyama is the abbess. After they first met in Bodhgaya in 1987, Kitō Sensei helped Arai integrate her questions about life as well as her scholarly focus (Arai, 1999a). Arai describes her influence in this way:

> She embodied the Buddhist teachings in an elegant Japanese manner and emanated a fearlessness and joyous kindness that warmed all who met her. Her ability to be gentle in harsh conditions modeled Japanese Buddhist women's skill in navigating prejudicial treatment with dignity. Her presence invited me into a special world that became the focus of my research, with her personal guidance. Aoyama Rōshi generated an ethos that kept me vigilant and honest about my research on the nuns' community. Her strict standards of behavior in the nunnery instilled an intense awareness and respect that not only helped me personally, but also honed my critical research skills. She helped me examine my assumptions, especially Western theories of interpretation as applied to their lives. She did not do this through academic discourse but through modeling how perception affects experience and our actions with others. The guidance of these two women enabled me to venture forth and persevere with my research agenda. They helped me cultivate the inner resources I needed to make my way in the field of Zen Buddhist studies, a field earlier dominated by male scholars and perspectives. (Arai, pers. comm., May 9, 2021)

Early Career

Embarking on faculty positions offered increased opportunities to engage and grow. Vanderbilt University (1994–2002) allowed her to defer a tenure-track appointment for a year to benefit from a rare teaching and research opportunity at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (1993–94). This sojourn not only afforded her a chance to immerse herself in Hong Kong's unique variation of Chinese society during a pivotal moment at the end of a colonial era, but the university also awarded her an HKUST Research Grant (1993–94) to pursue valuable field research in Japan. At Vanderbilt University (1994–2002), her tenure clock was extended to enable her to solo-parent her infant and provide end-of-life care for her mother. Although not part of formal research, these natural yet intense life experiences launched her into the theme of healing, which became the basis for her subsequent work. Her research was generously supported by a Fulbright Senior Scholar Grant (1998), American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship (1998), three Vanderbilt University Research Council Direct Research Grants (1995, 1998, 2000), and a Vanderbilt University Research Council Summer Research Grant (1995). Before proceeding with a tenure review, she chose to join the faculty at Carleton College (2002–07). Arai had always wanted to teach at a liberal arts college where community interaction is an integral part of the educational philosophy. She was grateful for the felicitous conditions conducive to honing her teaching skills, which she continues to refine in order to support students' learning and growth. During those years, she was awarded a Mellon Faculty Fellowship (2005), an American Academy of Religion Research Assistance Grant (2004), and a Carleton College Targeted Opportunity Grant (2003). In August of 2007, she chose to return to the teacher-scholar balance afforded at a research university and accepted a position at Louisiana State University (LSU) where she could cultivate an intimate learning-community ethos in her classes. In 2018, she was awarded the Urmila Gopal Singhal Professorship in Religions of India and, in 2020, was promoted to full professor. During her time with LSU, she received two Manship Summer Research Fellowships (2012, 2020), an ATLAS (Awards to Louisiana Artists and Scholars, 2008–09), and the LSU Tiger Athletic Fund Teaching Award (2014). Her research trajectory directs attention to materials and perspectives that have not been explored in previous scholarship (Arai, pers. comm., May 5, 2021).

Arai held multiple teaching positions and approached each one with sincerity, taking their declarations of support for social justice and racial justice at face value. Sadly, several of these institutions created an untenable environment for women, especially women of color. At one institution, her department, doubting her competence, rotated colleagues to attend and review 75 percent of the classes she taught during one term—a nerve-wracking and intimidating experience. She went to great lengths to cultivate and apply effective teaching strategies learned through faculty development programs to such an extent that the only critical comment she received was that student-to-student eye contact in the classroom was inadequate. In addition, she felt tremendous pressure to minimize her colleagues' awareness of the time and energy required to raise her child, lest it appear she was not fully devoted to her teaching and research. As is quite common in the academy, she watched male candidates with fewer awards and achievements sail through the tenure process, only to see her own tenure process aborted (Arai, pers. comm., December 4, 2020). In all these situations, guided by both her Japanese and American upbringing and insights, she worked hard to balance gentleness and power, acceptance, determination, and, often choicelessly, submission to authority.

Through all this, Arai continued to hone her teaching skills, always approaching research and teaching as synergistically intertwined. Her pedagogical approach draws heavily on ethnographic methods she developed for her research, where self-reflexive interaction drives the interchange. She is always considering ways to creatively engage in experiential learning. For example, when studying Japanese Zen arts, she has students do a tea ceremony. Since religious studies is an inherently interdisciplinary field, she also weaves in a range of methods, theories, questions, and trajectories, including history, philosophy, ritual studies, gender studies, environmental studies, and health sciences. Raising consciousness about post-colonial concerns, Arai's pedagogy is specifically designed to help students navigate a multicultural context, encouraging them to engage in a rigorous examination of their assumptions and analyze the worldviews of the people being studied. The effectiveness of her teaching is reflected in Arai receiving an LSU Tiger Athletic Fund Teaching Award (2014).

The Zen of Monastery and Family

A pivotal moment in Arai's life occurred in 1987 when she traveled to Bodhgaya, India—site of Buddha Śākyamuni's awakening—to serve as the Japanese translator for Antioch University's Buddhist Studies in India Program. The semester-long undergraduate study abroad program incorporated meditation sessions at the Burmese Vihar in the morning and the Japanese Temple in the evening. There, she met a Zen nun by the name of Kitō Shunkō at the Indosan Nippon Japanese Temple in Bodhgaya. The experience of meeting a person who authentically embodied the Buddha's teachings at this sacred Buddhist site was profoundly moving for Arai and set into motion a research trajectory that became the centerpiece of her early academic career (Arai 1990; 1999b). In the course of this encounter, Kitō Shunkō introduced her to a book by Aoyama Shundō, a nun of the next generation who received training at, and later became the abbess of, Aichi Senmon Nisōdō—a monastic training center for Sōtō Zen nuns in Nagoya, Japan (Tsomo 2020a). Deeply impressed by Kitō Shunkō, Arai determined to study the lives of the nuns at this exemplary monastic training center to better understand how the nuns developed such wisdom and compassion.

Image 3: Kitō Shunkō

In *Women Living Zen*, published in 1999, Arai writes with respect and humility about her experience of living at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō. As an undergraduate exchange student in Japan in 1980, Arai had been quite disillusioned by the consumerist tendencies of male temple priests who seemed to view their vocation as a lucrative profession. In the prologue, she relates this story:

> When I was living in Japan in 1980, I was just beginning my formal study of Buddhism at Waseda University. I learned introductory material about major Buddhist leaders in Japanese history and basic Buddhist concepts, including that compassion was a fundamental value in the Buddhist teachings. Therefore, I was rather bewildered when I heard the wife of a priest say, "Our son wants a stereo. I wonder if there are any funerals around?" At the time, I had no idea what the connection might be between stereos and funerals. Finally, a friend explained it to me. Funerals are a temple's major source of income; indeed, funerals make many priests rather wealthy. This incident, as well as casual observances of life in modern Japan, led me to an impression that there was no genuine Buddhism left in Japan. I was disillusioned. I thought that the affluent economic impulse had ruined any vestige of the tremendous history and teachings I had been studying. My cynical, naive, and uninformed conclusion about the state of Buddhism in modern Japan shifted when I met a Japanese Zen Buddhist nun. (Arai 1999b, xvii)

At the monastery in Nagoya, she found that the nuns lived very differently. The nuns are celibate, diligent, artistically creative, and keenly devoted to sitting meditation (*zazen*) (Arai 1990, 48). Impressed by their sincerity, she resolved to live and practice with them in order to experience first-hand their simple, highly disciplined monastic lifestyle and document it for posterity (Heine 2007, 581). From my own experience, I know that seekers accustomed to the social freedoms of Western societies often struggle with the rules and expectations of Japanese monastic life. It was certainly not a foregone conclusion that the monastery in Nagoya would accept an American student, allow her access to their community life, much less allow her to document it and distribute her research. Yet, impressed by Arai's sincerity as well as her language skills, Aoyama Shundō gave her high praise: "In order to write this book, Paula experienced these nuns' path in a personally embodied way; she studied our history, actual circumstances, and various other dimensions. For Paula's pos-

ture of commitment and practice, I express respect from my heart. *Gassho*" (Arai 1999b). The book resulted from Arai's experience as a dedicated participant and astute observer of life and practice at the leading training site for Japanese Zen nuns. It is a singular achievement in the field of religious studies, opening up an entirely new direction for critical inquiry by examining women's roles in Zen.

If Arai had not gone to Aichi Senmon Nisōdō and embedded herself in the life of the monastery, she would never have been able to accurately portray this model training center for Japanese Zen nuns. And the training was not easy.

> The monastery was 'bone cold' and the warmth of the *okayu* [rice porridge] was the only physical warmth I felt. I gained the nuns' trust by doing the more demanding work at the monastery. Being a little taller, with a strong back, I could do brute labor. By working hard, every single day 24/7, with no trace of arrogance or privilege, I proved over and over how honored I felt to participate in the life of the monastery. I tried not to be a drag on their practice and their efforts. I tried to compensate, knowing that the nuns were going out of their way to accommodate me. Without my embodied presence there, I think I would have been stonewalled every step of the way and gotten nowhere. Aoyama Sensei made it very clear that this was the very first time she had allowed anyone in who didn't want to become a nun. And she let me in because of Kitō Sensei. It's not a culture that appreciates the value of academic research. I had to demonstrate that I was there to become a better person and share the students' training.
>
> In fact, scholarship is part of my practice. When I'm writing, I light incense and pray. I try to be cognizant of every word and ask myself whether it matters. "Who am I writing for? Who will benefit?" I feel a sense of responsibility for where the Academy is going. I appreciate textual scholars and reap the benefits. In addition, as a woman, I have to do enough to be taken seriously. I have the advantage that I only need five dictionaries instead of 20. I've had to create my own place at the table and I've had to do it in a way that connected with the Academy so I don't get kicked out (Arai, pers. comm., May 9, 2021).

In *Women Living Zen*, using ethnographic methods that emphasized embodiment and honored women's points of view, Arai sheds light on the ritual of gratitude to Buddha Śākyamuni's cousin and attendant Ānanda, who advocated for the admission of women to the monastic order in the sixth century BCE. In an earlier article titled "A

Case of Ritual Zen: Gratitude to Ānanda," she documented the powerful ways in which ritual performance enabled Japanese nuns to express their deeply felt emotions and also make a covert political statement about gender equity at the time of the Buddha (Arai 2000a). The Anan Kōshiki is an example of a genre of ritual practices performed periodically to express gratitude to specific religious figures—in this case, gratitude to the monk credited with (or blamed for) convincing the Buddha to open Buddhist monastic life to women. This ritual practice can be traced to India, recorded in the travel writings of the Chinese monk Faxian in the fourth century and adapted in Japan during the Heian (794–1185) and Kamakura (1192–1333) periods. In her analysis of the Anan Kōshiki, based on ethnographic data, Arai sees the contemporary practice of the ritual, renewed at the beginning of the 20th century, as presaging the increased independence of nuns in Sōtō Zen institutional structures:

> With the advantage of historical perspective, we can see that the revitalization of this nuns' ritual occurred on the eve of nuns launching into a public and institutionalized effort to bring egalitarian practices to bear on Sōtō regulations. The ritual ends with a declaration that all women can attain enlightenment. From this vantage point, the erroneous ways of the male-dominated institution are glaring, yet imminently surmountable. (Arai 2000a)

Just as Arai's first book, *Women Living Zen*, expanded the scope of Zen studies by including ethnographic data on Sōtō Zen nuns in Japan and advanced critical interpretations of female monastic practice, her second book, *Bringing Zen Home: The Healing Heart of Japanese Women's Rituals*, significantly expanded the scope of Zen studies by including ethnographic data on Japanese laywomen. In this extensive study, Arai focused attention on the ritual practices that women use in the home to cope with the hardships and transitions in their lives. Again, her language skills—especially her fluency in the "dated," rather formal Japanese she had learned from her Japanese mother—stood her in good stead with the older generations of dedicated Buddhist practitioners she cultivated, not only as an academic researcher but as a close and trusted friend. In the elitist world of academic research, the family may be considered unworthy of serious consideration. Arai took a professional risk by focusing on the Buddhist practices of women in the home. Her gamble was fruitful, however, as the colonialist penchant in religious studies is gradually

being unmasked. As the anthropologist Anna Grimshaw says in her review of the book, "Arai argues against the androcentrism of much Buddhist scholarship, seeking to establish the distinctive nature of female monasticism. She tells a story of success as she emphasizes in her account the resilience, determination, and creative adaptation of Soto nuns to changing historical circumstances" (Grimshaw 2001, 254).

In this work, Arai (2011a, 66) argues for the healing power of funerary rites, despite negative associations:

> The dominance of funerary, memorial, and ancestral rites in the ritual landscape of contemporary Buddhism in Japan is so pronounced that scholars and lay people commonly refer to the phenomenon as "Funeral Buddhism." Most people even report their primary engagement with Buddhism is when someone passes away. In addition, the biggest summer holiday, Obon, is a Buddhist rite to honor ancestors. Although scholars have done research on the topic of Japanese ancestor worship, the question of whether funerary, memorial, and ancestral rites offer healing for those living in modern Japan has not been thoroughly explored. Throughout this study, the positive roles mortuary and ancestral rites play in contemporary Japan become evident, especially in the lives of mature Buddhist women.

In her field research in Japan, Arai found that rituals for the dead and buried serve many constructive purposes; they help allay fears, remind adherents of impermanence, confirm the interrelatedness of all life, provide an opportunity for healing, and offer "an understanding of the dynamics of identity cultivation and transformation in the face of loss" (Arai 2011a, 67). In her field research, she also found that relating her own performance of ritual when her mother died created an intimacy with the twelve women whose narratives constitute the ethnographic foundation of her study. Her vulnerability transformed her research. Had she presented as a knowledgeable scholar, her informants—or, as she prefers, "consociates"—would have been reluctant to open their hearts. By preempting them in emotional openness, she made trusting friends eager to share their own vulnerabilities. The narrative she recounted to her twelve consociates is the story of her mother's death in Nashville that opens her book:

This book took root on December 18, 1996, the day my mother died. After months of listening to the whir of the oxygen machine, a vacuum of silence filled her bedroom. Even though I had known she would die soon, when I stood looking at the threshold of life and death I felt as if one wrong move would send us off into an abyss of despair. The last several months had been one long fear of wrong moves: too much morphine or not enough, too much talking or not enough, not enough water or too much.

Suddenly all the palliatives seemed harshly out of place. Hands shaking, I cleared the bedside table of the vials of morphine, anti-nausea salves, and pink star-shaped sponges for removing sticky mucus from the tongue. The ultimacy of the moment engulfed me. How was I to ensure my mother's passage through this perilous transition? Kitō Sensei had encouraged me to call her. The elderly Zen nun had helped my mother and me through the past nine years, applying her healing balm of compassion. It was the middle of the night in Japan, but I knew that, although she devotes long days to ministering to others, at 3:45 a.m. Kitō Sensei would be at her temple: there she nurtures the Bodhi tree seeds she brought back from India. The telephone in my hand was a lifeline. I knew intellectually about Sōtō Zen rituals that recognize the deceased as a Buddha, but it was Kitō Sensei, in her unheated worship hall ten thousand miles away, who guided me through those first terrifying, disorienting moments.

Trusting her to know what to do, I followed her instructions for the ritual of safely sending off the deceased on her journey of death. Frantic to treat our new Buddha properly, I rushed to find the bronze plum blossom incense burner, sandalwood incense sticks, white candle, and plain carved wooden figure of Kannon, goddess of compassion, adding some white chrysanthemums I had been keeping on hand for this moment. Not more than ten minutes after my mother breathed her last, the bedside table was transformed into a mortuary altar. As I offered a stick of incense in her honor, I saw my mother's face take on the peace that I have seen so often on images of Buddhas. Our relationship was transforming before my very eyes.

When I placed the incense in the burner, I became one with all who had done so before. In the moment that had threatened to be the loneliest in my life, I instead experienced a profound connection with all grievers, past and future. I was not alone. I was united with everyone who had lost a loved one. Kitō Sensei had guided us through this critical transition with a wisdom that transcended barriers of

> space, time, life, and death. At that moment, the healing power of ritual became a visceral reality. (Arai 2011a, 1–2)

As the bereaved daughter in these very personal passages, Arai illustrated her own experience of the constructive power of ritual; she allayed her fears about sending her mother on the perilous journey between life and death; she witnessed the impermanent nature of the bedside table as it was transformed from an apothecary into a mortuary altar; she confirmed her interrelatedness with all those, past and future, who had lost a loved one; she healed her anxiety and loneliness; and she transcended the limited identities of both the deceased and the bereaved. No further analysis is necessary.

Healing Body and Mind

One of Arai's major contributions in *Bringing Zen Home: The Healing Heart of Japanese Women's Rituals* is her observation and identification of a spiritual discipline practiced by women to restore a non-bifurcated body-mind way of being. She coined the term "way of healing" (*yudō*) to denote this spiritual discipline, which she considered parallel to the arts of calligraphy, tea, flower arrangement, poetry, and painting (Arai 2011a, 31). In so doing, she acknowledges the Japanese Zen context of these arts, liberally infused with Chinese Daoist aesthetics and ethics. She also acknowledges the Buddhist practice of recognizing one's delusions, desires, and aversions and healing one's suffering. Amalgamating these historical, cultural influences, she constructs a theory of *yudō* with ten distinct principles: experiencing interrelatedness, living body-mind, engaging in rituals, nurturing the self, enjoying life, creating beauty, cultivating gratitude, accepting reality as it is, expanding perspective, and embodying compassion. As the term "way of healing" implies, restoring a non-bifurcated body-mind is not conceived as an end goal but occurs in "each act of compassion and every expression of gratitude" (32).

Arai points to a strong connection between rituals and healing because rituals connect us with our bodies in ways that are intuitive, beyond reason, language, and cognitive processing. Rituals facilitate healing because they holistically involve the body and the senses to produce "a non-dualistic experience of reality" (Arai 2011a, 3). She notes that although rituals are not formally recognized as healing,

when the teachings of Dōgen—founder of Sōtō Zen in the thirteenth century—are applied in everyday life, ritual activities heal. Among the women she befriended, Zen Buddhist rituals were no mere formality but fulfilled emotional and psychological needs, especially in coping with the challenges of birth and death, grief and loss, love and loneliness.

The connection between death awareness and healing is a significant theme in Arai's research. In the prologue to *Bringing Zen Home*, she quotes from a private 1999 interview with the highly respected Sōtō Zen master and Komazawa University professor Suzuki Kakuzen Rōshi, who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer:

> You must take death as the point of departure to understand healing. It is only then that you will see that you are already healed. This is the vow of Hotoke [Buddha], of Kannon [Bodhisattva of Compassion]. It is not that you pray and then receive the compassion of Kannon. It is only a matter of whether or not you become aware that you are already healed. (Arai 2011a)

The approach of equating the dead with the Buddha is a later doctrinal development not found in the early Buddhist traditions. The notion derives from a specific interpretation of the Mahāyāna theory of Buddha-nature. In Sanskrit, the term for Buddha-nature is *tathagatagarbha* (literally, "embryo of enlightenment"), meaning the seed or potential for awakening that exists within each sentient being. In Sōtō Zen, Buddha-nature is regarded as already manifest within sentient beings; we need only awaken to that reality, our true nature. As a consequence of this interpretation, Japanese Buddhist adherents in general and Sōtō Zen practitioners in particular attribute to their departed loved ones a status equivalent to a fully realized Buddha. Attributing this exalted status to the departed helps allay all fears about their destination after death. It sets survivors' minds at ease, helping them integrate the pain of loss and cope more skillfully with their grief. Therefore, funerary rituals and memorial services are skillful means (*upāya*) that Japanese Buddhists use to manage and come to terms with their feelings of remorse, abandonment, and longing (Arai 2011a).

As Arai's interviews with female Sōtō Zen adherents attest, rituals performed on behalf of the departed viscerally and holistically help them cope with grief and loss. These rituals—performed daily, monthly, or annually at a home altar or a temple, with or without

the assistance of a priest—create bonds of care and affection and enable the practitioner or parishioner to traverse the cold, alienating, and somewhat artificial binary between the living and the dead. The dead become what she terms "personal Buddhas" for the living, helping them cope with the physical, mental, and emotional adjustments that accompany their loss (Arai 2011a, 67) and challenge their sense of identity and security. Philosophy aside, imagining their departed loved ones as enlightened beings with whom they may communicate and whose protection they may receive is deeply comforting and healing for the bereaved. Arai's contribution is her discerning awareness of how Buddhist philosophy becomes a source of personal healing.

Emotion and Intellect in Tension

Throughout her childhood and into adult life, Arai realized she was out of sync with her world. For example, as a young woman, she intuitively realized how women's emotional, spiritual, and intellectual lives were intertwined. She wanted to understand those intersections more deeply even as she pursued her academic studies. However, when she proposed researching Zen nuns in Japan, her advisor found the topic unworthy of serious consideration, stalling her dissertation. "Serious" dissertations, at least at Harvard, focused on textual studies, not ethnography. The implication was that ethnographers got too close to their subjects, which was assumed to somehow distort their rational thought processes and capacity for critical analysis (Arai, pers. comm., November 17, 2020).

What Arai proposed was even more radical for her time and location at Harvard than a simple dissertation on Zen nuns in Japan. She intended to literally embed herself in the daily lives of her subjects. Although there could hardly be a better way to understand the nuns' thinking, feelings, and perceptions than to live closely among them, when she presented her proposed topic and methodology to her dissertation committee, her advisor stopped communicating with her for a year. There is a sense that those interested in understanding women's daily lives and feelings are not truly scholars because they deal with real life instead of theoreticals. Arai's relationship with her research subjects was presumed to be "too emotional"—a common societal assumption about women that can strongly affect women's

own self-perception. This assumption is leveled against women in general and especially against women who deviate from professional expectations. Professor Nagatomi's concern was driven by the fact that a woman working on women in Buddhist texts had recently been denied tenure at Stanford. He was concerned that if Arai worked on Buddhist women and their embodied practice, she would never get a job or keep one. Nevertheless, Arai intuitively felt that her approach was valid. Despite some trepidation at standing her ground amidst recognized authorities in her field, she overcame her doubts and decided to pursue her ethnographic fieldwork. As she puts it, "Undaunted, I plowed ahead, got a Fulbright, went to the nunnery, and immersed myself in the life there" (Arai, pers. comm., November 20, 2020).

In her article "Gender and Emotion: What We Think We Know, What We Need to Know, and Why It Matters," Stephanie A. Shields (2013, 423) notes that it is difficult to deny that "emotion's representations in beliefs and stereotypes have a powerful effect in shaping how we interpret our own and others' emotional behavior." This "differences paradigm . . . aids the circulation of essentialized beliefs about gender from popular culture to psychological science." In academia, it is not uncommon to see women's and men's work evaluated differently through the lens of affect by students, colleagues, and administrators. Research that takes feelings into account may be regarded as suspect, lacking in academic rigor, and discounted, based on the assumption that emotion and reason are intrinsically oppositional rather than complementary, equally valid modes of perception. Moreover, there is a commonly held assumption in many societies that rationality (the stereotypical province of men) is preferable and more worthy of value than emotion (the stereotypical province of women). This assumption may lead one to devalue the affective dimension of human experience and devalue or discount people who evince emotion or take it to heart. In Arai's case, her very identity was seen as suspect. Her dissertation committee assumed that she could not be objective in studying Japanese women because her mother was Japanese and she was part Japanese. This experience of being typecast plunged her into a vortex of self-reflexivity that revolved around the dynamics of culture, language, power, and the theories, methods, and root assumptions that undergird scholarship (Arai, pers. comm., November 20, 2020).

A cross-cultural exploration of the nature and expression of emotion is an integral aspect of Arai's scholarship and especially salient

in her work with Japanese women. In general, in Japanese society, possibly influenced by Buddhism and Shinto, the public display of emotions may be associated with weakness and, to spare others pain and embarrassment, may be avoided. The devaluing of affect and the association of unbridled emotion with women is not limited to Japanese or other Asian societies, of course. It occurs all too frequently in societies around the world, especially at universities. When emotion is thought to cloud judgment and is associated with women, it can become a pretext for discrimination; women as emotional beings are regarded as less suited to be hired, promoted, and become president. Discounting the affective dimension of human experience is an unmistakable, relentless, often crushing assertion of male intellectual superiority that women in the academy must endure to survive. This has certainly been Arai's heartfelt experience. Although the affective dimension of Arai's personal experience was ignored and denigrated in an academic setting, in Buddhist texts, certain human emotions are regarded as virtues to be cultivated (loving kindness, compassion, patience, and more), whereas other emotions are regarded as afflictions to be eliminated (anger, hatred, jealousy, pride, and more). The Japanese Buddhist women that she befriended and studied so appreciated her open expression of emotional vulnerability that they opened their hearts in turn. Her vulnerability and honesty about her personal perspective and experience became an asset in her research.

A Distinctive Ethnographic Methodology

Because Arai's work was based on her personal experience of living for more than one year at Japan's leading Sōtō Zen monastic training center for nuns and deals explicitly with emotional healing, I was curious to learn more about her ethnographic methodology and her experience of conducting research from both an insider's (emic) and an outsider's (etic) perspective, as both a practitioner and a scholar. On the one hand, in academic research, it is commonly assumed that getting too close to one's subject—often labeled "going native"—contaminates the data and impedes objectivity. On the other hand, keeping a distance and attempting to do research as neither an insider nor an outsider may leave one with a view from nowhere. As Thomas Nagel (1986, 3) frames it in his influential work *View from Nowhere*, "This book is about a single problem: how to combine the perspective

of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his [sic] viewpoint included. It is a problem that faces every creature with the impulse and the capacity to transcend its particular point of view and to conceive of the world as a whole." Arai responded that being both an insider and an outsider has been the secret to her scholarship. Having grown up in a bi-cultural household, she always had to see through different lenses. When she first decided to take up ethnography, she asked others for some pointers but soon realized that she was on her own and would have to figure it out herself. Arai is explicit about her methodology:

> First-, second-, and third-person perspectives are based on a concept that people are independent, individual existents. I write with cognizance that I am not a separate entity. Rather, whatever appears on the page emerges out of a "relational voice," a voice that expresses a flux of mutuality, reflexivity, and interbeing. Shared time, spaces, and conversations generate an experience whose causes and conditions are too numerous to know. Even so, I am aware that my agency permeates my thoughts and writings, and I assume responsibility for what I convey. (Arai, pers. comm., April 8, 2021)

This relational or interrelational voice is interactive and relies on holistic interactions between the researcher and the research subject, who is perhaps better characterized as a conversation partner. A mutual understanding and appreciation establish a balance of agency and authority between the two dialogue partners in this reflexive conversation. Arai assumes responsibility for her reportage and her interpretation of the exchange, which she both conceptually interprets and also literally interprets from Japanese to English while engaging in a shared, mutually respectful exchange. Her innovative methodology relies on communication beyond words and concepts. Her qualitative research methodology contrasts with standard academic ethnographic methodologies that assume the importance of objectivity and even assume that objectivity is possible. She challenged those methodologies and the more traditional constructive, textual, theological approach that her professors expected of her because they did not illuminate the Japanese context she encountered in field research. In the course of many trips to Japan, as she engaged with both monastic and lay Buddhist women, she intuitively developed and followed her own interrelational methodology (Arai, pers. comm., April 8, 2021).

When Arai arrived at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō, she resolved to follow the rules to the best of her ability. That way, the nuns could see that she respected them and their way of life. This approach was an essential component of her ethnographic research methodology and a key element in negotiating Japanese social mores and Buddhist monastic culture. Aoyama Rōshi, the incumbent abbess, was very skeptical of scholars and kept a strict eye on her. This vigilance created an intense environment in which Arai pushed the limits to prove her sincerity. For four months, she vied to clean the dirtiest spaces and carry the heaviest tables to compensate for all mistakes and inadequacies. Only then did she begin interviewing. She quickly realized that the Western way of doing ethnography by trying not to contaminate the data was useless. She did her best to see each individual as a whole person and asked questions as respectfully as possible. Because scholarship is so highly respected in Japan, and because she was a research scholar from Harvard, albeit a doctoral candidate, she needed to reassure her consociates that she was not knowledgeable. They were. By revealing her insecurity and vulnerability, she empowered them and made them feel safe to speak freely. Though she had to be continually mindful about how her words and actions affected other people, she eventually passed the test (Arai, pers. comm., November 17, 2020). Aoyama Roshi confirmed that her disciples opened up about topics they had never shared with her, including details about their lives before becoming ordained (Arai, pers. comm., April 8, 2021). Because the typical categories used in ethnographic research did not parse with what Arai was observing, she upended the process. First, she conducted her fieldwork, and later she tried to match the data with theoretical constructs to see which theories fit into an academic discourse.

By the time she wrote *Bringing Zen Home*, she felt much more competent to explain that the standard ethnographic categories often did not fit the data she had collected. She had to continually reevaluate her methodology and revise it to determine what methods worked best with these women. She started the relationship with each interviewee (consociate) with the story of her mother's passing and explained how, through that experience, she came to understand the power of ritual. Without sharing her story, even with Aoyama Roshi's affirmation, she would not have been able to gain their trust.

Arai discusses her methodology in the first chapter of *Women Living Zen*, under three subheadings—Scholarly Contexts, Theoretical Considerations, and Methodological Considerations (1999b)—and in

the first chapter of *Bringing Zen Home*, under "Mapping the Terrain" (2011a). The methodology chapter in the first book discusses the traditional view of the second-person observer as being the litmus test for scholarly research:

> My research methods are attuned to the intersubjective dynamic between researcher and consociates, and, therefore, operate in the second-person. I use the second person to refer to the space and dynamics between people. It is the "we" of relational interaction. The second-person approach is especially fitting for qualitative research that aims to understand people's healing experiences. A second-person orientation focuses on the relationship of the people involved in the research. . . . .
>
> There is no fixed word for 'I' in the Japanese language. The nuanced complexities of navigating selves as fundamentally relational beings is evident in the fact that there are fifteen ways to say 'I' in contemporary Japanese, each one designating an aspect of the self, depending on what one wants to present to another person. You can indicate gender, stress social status, negotiate levels of formality, note age, or convey a combination of any of these. Delineations of subjectivity and objectivity are not helpful in this sociolinguistic context, which makes a second-person mode of research especially helpful. (Arai 2011a, 7–8)

This approach entails not keeping a distance and getting emotionally involved. Although some scholars, such as the learning scientist Wolff-Michael Roth (2012), argue that first-person reporting is a valid perspective, it is still suspect in the academy.

Arai self-consciously works with the women from a healing perspective. She keeps a field journal related to her own experience. Over the course of her academic career, Arai developed a distinctive methodology—"affective empathy"—that is central to her research. While doing fieldwork for *Bringing Zen Home*, intermittently spanning 1998–2009, she saw that Japanese Buddhist housewives opened their hearts and shared their spiritual lives on a very deep level when they trusted they would be understood. This methodology is fluid and has evolved significantly. For example, after over three years of developing close relationships with women about their painful and healing experiences, she decided it was important to open up more about a significant change in her personal situation. Although it was not a situation that any of the women had experienced, she revealed

that she got a divorce, which unleashed a flood of emotions. From these experiences of dealing with trauma, she learned that one may no longer be stuck in the pain yet still not be impervious to the pain. She also realized the critical difference between empathy, which can be both physically and psychologically draining, and compassion, which is empowering. Initially, she doubted her capacity to complete an in-depth study about Japanese women's spiritual lives. She was concerned that an open heart might affect the nature of the data she collected. As her fieldwork progressed, she recognized that taking on another person's pain could paralyze her and, through her own experience, verified that the more sensitive the material, the more care one must take to ensure that one's data is reliable. Gradually, balancing scholarly objectivity and heartfelt subjectivity, she became more intuitive.

Her circumstances as a guest living and working at the monastery also enabled Arai to gain the trust of her consociates, since the laywomen trusted the nuns. Although doing field research with a toddler was demanding—even more than solo-parenting while teaching—the fact that she was a mother helped deepen her relationships with the women. Early in the field research with the women, however, she came down with pneumonia and had to cancel all the initial interviews she had just scheduled. This turned the tables of power. She was sick and needed their help. The situation provided the perfect catalyst for a change in their point of view. Rather than being seen as a professor of Buddhist studies with a Harvard PhD, she was a sick woman with a two-year-old opening the door in her pajamas. Suddenly she was no longer an elevated scholar but simply a human being in need of assistance, and they were the ones who knew how to take care of the situation. That shifted the power balance and cut through the notion that Arai knew more than they did because she was a scholar. They helped her through her illness and the ongoing grief of her mother's passing. Given this change in the power dynamic of researcher and subject, they were able to share their understanding as consociates in a way that went far beyond superficial answers to contrived questions. They were the experts and took her to the special places and events that helped them heal.

Using a methodology that embraced subjectivity over objectivity, Arai's consociates revealed their vulnerabilities and put their most painful foot forward. Expressing deeply felt emotions can be awkward, painful, and embarrassing, so normally people do not go there. However, in this special case, these spiritual friends felt safe shar-

ing their feelings with her, not because she was lighter-skinned and decades younger, but because her sensibilities and aesthetics were attuned with theirs. "You are different, but you don't feel different," they said. She was not a member of the community, yet culturally she was Japanese through and through. Having been raised by a Japanese woman who deliberately raised her with traditional Japanese values––hoping cultural refinement would shield her from enmity by White Americans with fresh memories of WWII––Arai embodies the sensibilities of the older generation. The remarkable contribution she offered was to be a bridge to help preserve the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of an earlier generation that went through dramatic socio-cultural changes (Arai, pers. comm., November 2020).

Resolving Scholarly Tensions with a Zen Sensibility

Arai is a prolific and versatile scholar with broad interests in multiple disciplines: Buddhist monasticism, gender studies, comparative religion, literary criticism, and Zen aesthetics, to name a few. Her publications on Buddhist ritual practices, particularly healing rituals (Arai 2011a; 2016) and women's rituals (2000a; 2000b; 2007), pointedly resist drawing distinctions between philosophy, practice, and poetics. A poignant essay on authentic Zen monastic experience, "The Zen of Rags" (2017) illustrates her capacity to engage in fresh and insightful interpretations that weave together work with original texts, ritual theory, philosophical analysis, and ethnographic research to unpack "so many levels of meaning and metaphysical principles embedded in the use of a rag!"

Motivated to foreground embodied experience as an integral aspect of the predominantly text-centered field of Buddhist Studies, she and Kevin Trainor have devoted five years to co-editing the *Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Practice*—a volume that includes 39 scholars from around the world. To midwife scholarship that is contiguous with but not central to her own specialization was a keen intellectual challenge. The volume illuminates the conceptual categories, methodologies, and themes that undergird current inquiry into and understandings of the body, practice, ritualized activities, and modes of lived experience linked with Buddhist traditions. In keeping with a broad analytical reorientation within Buddhist studies over the past several decades, it reflects the fact that embodiment, material-

ity, emotion, race, gender, and ethnicity shape the manner in which most Buddhists engage with their traditions. The volume is organized around Buddhist practice and draws out how practice often represents a fluid and dynamic means of defining identity and negotiating the challenges of everyday social and institutional life. In writing the "Overview of Practice in East Asia," she had the chance to synthesize and distill decades of knowledge acquisition and insight into a few dozen pages. Co-authoring the introductory chapter was a chance to develop relevant theoretical and conceptual issues that will engender advances in research and understanding of embodied modes of scholarly and religious practice. Publication is forthcoming with Oxford University Press (Arai, pers. comm., April 8, 2021).

After surviving stints in narrow-minded academic environments where her gentleness and heartfeltness were perceived as intellectual weakness, she freed herself from the mental shackles of sterilized "objective" scholarship and flourished in the messy realm of lived dynamics. Rather than relinquish her integrity to fight for power and position, she found a sweet vantage point beyond the fray. To date, her most liberating scholarly endeavor was her radical foray into Japanese Buddhist aesthetics. As she had done in the monastery and in Japanese women's homes, she threw herself wholeheartedly into yet another new direction—though this time with no inhibitions—to articulate the heart of Zen.

The world of Japanese aesthetics is vibrant, with its own vocabulary of concepts specific to Japanese culture—such as *wabi*, *sabi*, *mono no aware* (Parkes and Loughnaned 2018)—that evoke a simple, natural, or rustic ethos of beauty. This ethos is often portrayed as conveying the unmediated insight and directness of Zen philosophy and practice (Bai 1997; Hoover 2010; Parkes and Loughnaned 2018). There is some controversy regarding the cultural provenance of Zen aesthetics as purveyed in modern times, extending to martial arts, motorcycle maintenance, and health spas. Shōji Yamada (1963) provides a critical analysis that challenges traditional narratives regarding Zen aesthetics and makes a case for Western influences in the field. That Arai was bold enough to venture into Zen studies, a sub-field dominated by male voices, is a tribute to her creativity and courage. With numerous publications in various aspects of Zen philosophy and practice (1990, 1993, 1999b, 2000a, 2000c, 2007, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017), she was well-prepared to make this leap.

It is rare for Buddhist scholars to bridge the disciplines of art and religion in more than a formulaic way. Arai's momentous cre-

ative project *Painting Enlightenment: Healing Visions of the Heart Sutra* weaves together art, religion, and science in a published book and multiple exhibitions that feature the oeuvre of Iwasaki Tsuneo (1917–2002), a Japanese biologist and Buddhist painter (Arai 2019). Emerging from her prior research on healing (Arai 2006; 2011b), the book explores the healing dynamics of visual scripture in Iwasaki's art. It required ethnographic field research and fluency in spoken and written Japanese to do in-depth interviews with the artist and read relevant primary and secondary materials. Her expertise in Japanese Buddhist culture and Buddhist Madhyamika philosophy enabled her to contextualize and interpret the Buddhist art he created with the *Heart of Wisdom Sūtra, a* seminal Buddhist scripture. His art demanded she expand her research vistas to include Buddhist art history, theories of aesthetics and perception, basic levels of cellular and evolutionary biology, and astro- and quantum physics to fathom and analyze the aesthetic and scientific dimensions of his work. The range of activities and conversations generated from this effort integrate her scholarly, educational, and community endeavors in ways that have garnered diverse, interdisciplinary, and international attention.

Image 4: Exhibition of Iwasaki's Work.

Iwasaki—a Japanese contemplative scientist—integrates Buddhist metaphysics and art by fashioning perceptible forms of everyday objects using strands of the *Heart of Wisdom Sūtra* written in

tiny Chinese characters. His visionary work re-imagines the ancient art of sūtra copying as a means of creating merit and transforms it into a practice of replicating sūtras as prayers to heal humanity. He creates flows of dynamic energy that, like a mirror, reflect DNA—"a record of interrelatedness that spans billions of years and connects all life forms" (Arai 2019, 36). For him, the ethical implications of this boundless interrelatedness are obvious: "DNA reveals a profound commonality that, in Buddhist terms, underlies empathy and merits compassion." For Arai, Iwasaki's art encodes both the compassion and the wisdom of the Buddha—fleeting phenomenal forms arising from emptiness, the universe in a dewdrop, with each dewdrop teaching impermanence and reflecting the interrelatedness of all life.

Arai has been devoted to sharing Iwasaki's work because it helps her heart ring with compassion (Arai 2019, 97). The wisdom of compassion then translates into concrete acts of compassion, such as listening empathetically to those who are bereaved. With these insights, she has dissolved all the vestiges of doubt she saw reflected in her circumstances and maintained her integrity through many difficulties. By consistently responding from the heart, her gentle power creates a compassionate bridge between cultures. Her eyes were opened by the injustices endemic in the system, but, instead of becoming bitter, cynical, or jaded, she learned to empathize more deeply. Her open heart and profound insight into the human condition are a triumph of resilience.

Arai's story is one among many, including those whom the academy rejected. Her experiences of the academy reveal the creative strength of her intellectual and personal qualities and demonstrate how the environment, history of biases, and power dynamics can be challenging and challenged. She knows she is not the only one who faced the tensions of being a bicultural woman who encountered male-dominated, White academic institutions. Yet there were few in her midst during the hardest periods. Raising a child on her own intensified the demands on her time and energy. Navigating the tensions between gentleness and power, acceptance and determination, affect and rationality, art and intellect, and submission and authority, Arai forged a unique path, hoping others would be more readily treated with the open-minded and critical awareness that reflect the higher values of the academy.

Image 5: Arai with her son Kenji in Yosemite National Park.

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CHAPTER 9

Agustina Luvis Núñez

A Life of Wandering through the Horizons of God's Justice

Tú te rizas el pelo y te pintas; yo no;
a mí me riza el viento, a mí me pinta el sol.
Tú eres dama casera, resignada, sumisa,
atada a los prejuicios de los hombres; yo no;
que yo soy Rocinante corriendo desbocado
olfateando horizontes de justicia de Dios.

You curl your locks and paint yourself, not I;
I am curled by the wind; [I am painted] by the sun.
You are homebound, resigned, submissive,
Confined to the whims of men; not I;
I am Rocinante galloping recklessly
Wandering through the [horizons] of God's justice.

– Julia de Burgos, "A Julia de Burgos" [To Julia de Burgos], translated by Skyler Gomez (2019)

JULIANY GONZÁLEZ NIEVES

To be a woman, *caribeña, puertorriqueña y negra*, and the only female systematic theologian on the island of Puerto Rico is not a small feat. To do theology in a disaster zone—a country ravaged by 500 years of colonialism, savage capitalism, natural disasters, and a corrupt government that leaves its people to die—is a very different setting than that of nice offices in the metropolis. Moreover, to exist as a Black Puerto Rican woman in a field not only dominated by White Euro-American men in the broader scope but also by white *Latinidad* in our smaller communal scope is a borderline miracle. That is the story of Agustina Luvis Núñez, currently the

only female systematic theologian in Puerto Rico and who, in many ways, *ella misma fue su ruta* [she herself was her route], like Julia de Burgos. And in that journey, her life has become one of wandering through the horizons of God's justice.

The Woman

Agustina[1] was born on March 31, 1959, to Luz Belia Núñez González and Mario Luvis Grey in Loíza, a town named in honor of Taína chief Yuisa and the very center of Afro-Puerto Rican culture. Born into a poor family and community, her parents' immovable commitment was to her and her sister's education. In spite of poverty, Agustina describes her childhood as a happy one where her needs were always covered, and the church provided a space of belonging (Luvis Núñez 2020). Her faith community—a Pentecostal autochthonous church, Iglesia Defensores de la Fe—also played a crucial role in Agustina's formation and her future interest in theology. In her reflection "I was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me," published on the *Global Ministries* website of the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ, Luvis Núñez recounts how her local church immediately mobilized to share what little they had with an influx of Dominican immigrants who started to arrive in the 1970s to their *barrio*, La Central. She writes, "My Pentecostal church never reflected theologically on the meaning of this work, but we never quit seeking to help those who had recently arrived" (Luvis Núñez n.d.). Her community embodied for her what a life of wandering through the horizons of God's justice looks like. In many ways, Agustina's life is a legacy of that witness to the God of Life.

Agustina's formative years and her growth as a student took place within the context of the Black Puerto Rican communities of Loíza and Canóvanas. However, it was when she began her college career at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) in Río Piedras that her process of *concientización* about her identity as *una mujer negra* in a racialized society began. This allowed her to look back on her life and identify the ways in which she had been racialized since she was a little girl, even within the local church. Agustina says, "I was in the church but I was never cast as the Virgin Mary or one of the angels for our church's Christmas play. If there was even a role for me, it was as one of the shepherds, who represented the lower social strata"

(Luvis Núñez 2020). For Agustina, "to be a Black woman in Puerto Rico is a question mark, a constant questioning from society of her capabilities, moral values, integrity, and even her sexuality and libido. It means having to prove what is assumed of other people. To be a Black woman in Puerto Rico is to be always read through the stereotypes" (Luvis Núñez 2020).

After graduating in 1980 with a bachelor's degree in biology, Agustina went on to further her studies at the UPR's Medical Sciences Campus to become a medical technologist. In her class of forty students, she was the only visibly Black person. Despite the challenges that structural racism poses for Black people in Puerto Rico and the economic limitations of her family, Agustina graduated in 1982. After twenty years of working in the healthcare field, she began studies at the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. The years of involvement in Christian education at her local church, and her many questions, which were often left unanswered by her pastor, were what led her there. She says, "My pastor would always begin his prayer saying, 'God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' and I would always ask him afterwards, 'Why don't you mention Sarah, Hagar, Leah, and other women?' To which he would say, 'You ask too many questions'" (Luvis Núñez 2020). She believed formal theological studies could help her find answers to those unanswered questions, so she began by taking classes that interested her. From taking one course to a second one to a third one, Agustina completed a Master of Divinity degree in 2001. Towards the end of her program, a faculty member encouraged her to further her theological studies. This led her to the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, where she earned a Master in Theology degree in 2003 and a PhD in systematic theology in 2009 (Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. n.d.).

In Chicago, her identity as a Black Puerto Rican woman from the island intersected with the USA's reductionist perception of Latinas. Luvis Núñez was (and is) "too negra" to fit the USA's imaginary of Latinas, yet "too Latin American" to escape the challenges faced by them. In her, the multiple oppressions of being a Black, Spanish-speaking, island-Puerto Rican woman in the USA compounded. The seminary context was not free of these dynamics. She recounts,

> Many times, I felt that the knowledge that us Puerto Rican women or Latinas could bring to the table was invalidated. Sometimes, the academic nature of what one wanted to do was questioned. For instance, it meant that my academic advisor, a Puerto Rican man, didn't under-

> stand well the point of my dissertation, which was a proposal from the perspective of Puerto Rican and Caribbean women about what the church should be. (Luvis Núñez 2020)

Agustina's dissertation project was not just another "contextual" ecclesiological proposal grounded in pneumatology. Its subversive genius is found in her use of the annual Fiesta de Santiago Apóstol in Loíza, considered by some a syncretistic festival that merges Christianity and Yoruba religious elements, as a metaphor for the ecclesia. After various conversations with her advisor, they reached an agreement, and she finalized her project "Sewing a New Cloth: A Proposal for a Pentecostal Ecclesiology Fashioned as a Community Gifted by the Spirit with the Marks of the Church from a Latina Perspective." In it, she provides a mapping of Pentecostal ecclesiology that moves from a general scope to the particularity of Hispanic Pentecostalism and ultimately focuses on an Afro-Puerto Rican Pentecostal ecclesiology in a feminist key. Luvis Núñez's project is ambitious. It is also critical, not only of Euro-American theologies, including feminist ones, but also of Latino/a theologies that are silent about Afro-Latino/a and Afro-Caribbean culture. Her project is then a response to the deafening silences that have characterized these theological enterprises. This response comes through the storytelling of who she is, the town that saw her birth, and the voices of the island-Puerto Rican women Luvis Núñez interviewed. After positioning her readers concerning the history of Loíza and its socio-economic realities, the author introduces the reader to the town's annual festivity of Las Fiestas de Santiago Apóstol, which honors Santiago, considered by many "protector from enemies and invaders" (Luvis 2009, 150). Given the history of invasions and attacks on Loíza, for Luvis Núñez, "The devotion to the Saint Santiago got force among people who constantly had to defend themselves" (Luvis 2009, 150). She goes on to beautifully detail the different aspects of the festival, which is a space of koinonía where "There is no distinction between the sacred and the profane; it is one sole life" (Luvis 2009, 155). For her, "This lively experience comes as a metaphor to describe what it means to be church. The church is a Loíza's popular feast" (Luvis Núñez 2009, 157).

By taking the festival as a metaphor for the ecclesia and aspects of Pentecostal, Caribbean, and feminist theological frameworks, Luvis Núñez proposes an Afro-Puerto Rican Pentecostal ecclesiology that responds to the context, history, and realities of the island. This constructive project provides the theological coordinates for future

ecclesiological elaborations that take the Afro-Caribbean context seriously. In a time when Pentecostal theological elaborations on ecclesiology were lacking, Agustina crafted a multidisciplinary and intersectional proposal for "a Pentecostal ecclesiology from the perspective of Hispanic women" (Luvis Núñez 2009, 4). In it she laid the groundwork for her distinctive Caribbean, feminist, and Pentecostal approach to theology.

Agustina's teaching career as a seminary professor began in 2003 when the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico (SEPR) invited the then-second-year doctoral student to teach a summer course. To make it possible for her to teach the class without adding more work to an already demanding doctoral program, her supervisor, Dr. José David Rodríguez, allowed the teaching experience to count as a 3-credit independent study. That summer, Agustina taught a course on feminist theologies. The following year, the seminary invited her back, but this time to teach a course on Pentecostalism. Her success in these positions prepared the way for a full-time job offer, which she took in 2005. During the job interview, the committee asked her about her ordination status in the church. She was a layperson. The committee noted that professors engage in significant pastoral work with their students. They advised her to seek ordination within her denomination. Agustina followed their advice and requested ordination within the Iglesia Defensores de la Fe. But from the beginning she made it clear she had no interest in pastoring a local congregation. Instead, her calling was teaching in the seminary context and the church. Given that nobody in Puerto Rico ordains for the vocation of theological education, she expected a negative response. However, to her surprise, the denomination ordained her. "It felt good," she says, "to know that they see teaching [in seminary and beyond the traditional pastoral understanding] as an ordained ministry of the church" (Luvis Núñez, pers. comm., February 5, 2021).

From 2005 to 2009, Luvis Núñez devoted herself to work for the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, and the completion of her doctoral studies. With her return to her homeland, Puerto Rico became the immediate context for her theological thought and doctoral project. In 2009, she successfully defended her dissertation, becoming Dr. Agustina Luvis Núñez, and, a year later, she was promoted to assistant professor of theology at the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. Eleven years later, she continues serving this theological community, but now as director of the doctoral program and as associate professor of theology. She has also continued to work in the healthcare field

as a medical technologist, overseeing operations for various laboratories in the east of the island (Luvis Núñez, pers. comm., February 5, 2021).

The Writer

In the Caribbean and Latin America, *la teología se hace a pulmón*. That literally translates as "theology is done with the lungs." The Spanish phrase captures the idea of doing things in a context of incredible difficulty and impossibility, where the most basic resources and support are lacking. So, it is an "in spite of" theologizing. This is important when considering the track record of publications of our Caribbean and Latin American theologians and biblical scholars. Furthermore, location determines the nature of the questions a scholar asks as well as their approach. As an island-Puerto Rican, Dr. Luvis Núñez brings her embodied faith to prose from the colonial, socio-political, and economic context of an island that has not known freedom since 1508. First as a colony of Spain, and then of the USA, "Puerto Rico is one of the world's oldest colonies" (Yale University n.d.). Hence, the concerns and questions Luvis Núñez engages in her writing are significantly different from those of people located outside the Caribbean. Her publications bear testimony to this.

In her book *Creada a su imagen: Una pastoral integral para la mujer* [Created in His Image: An Integral Pastoral Care for Women] (2012a), Luvis Núñez argues for the need of a pastoral ministry that serves women holistically and provides educational tools to that end. The book is divided into two sections. In the first section, the author guides the reader through a quick-paced trip through the Old and New Testaments, highlighting the key roles women play in the biblical narrative. Of particular importance to the author is Jesus's treatment of women and how it should become a model for the church to affirm the dignity and equity of women within and beyond the faith community. Ultimately, Luvis Núñez aims to show the biblical and theological reasons that anchor her proposal. The author also provides a candid description of "the cruel reality" women face and the church's responsibility in the face of patriarchal violence. She writes,

> It is in the Church where the image of God in women and men is affirmed . . . It is in the Church that we learn about the praxis of Jesus as

> one that dignifies the whole human race. It is in the Church where we live the Pentecost, where the Spirit pours over men and women, boys and girls, as a symbol of equality. Any practice that attempts against these affirmations goes against the very will of God, and therefore, it is sin. To hurt a woman is to hurt the very body of Christ. (Luvis 2012a)

For Luvis Núñez, the Church is then the ultimate space of transformation not only for victims but also for perpetrators.

After providing a biblical and theological rationale for her project and a sociological description of the challenges women face in relation to patriarchal violence, Luvis Núñez ends the first section by providing practical steps churches should take as they move towards pastoral care that is effective for women. These include publicly denouncing all forms of violence as sin; educating our church communities about the diverse types of violence women face in their context; and creating spaces for reflection in which the faith community can discuss topics such as sexuality, reciprocity, human dignity, and biblical stories about women like Tamar and Bathsheba. The second section of the book provides liturgical materials that center the perspectives and experiences of women. These include communal prayers and liturgies for healing in cases of sexual abuse and miscarriages. As well, there are ceremonies for specific days, such as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Luvis Núñez has also contributed to multiple edited volumes such as *Otros Caminos: Propuestas para la crisis en Puerto Rico* (Isla Negra, 2012), for which she penned the chapter "La crisis, momento oportuno para afirmar las marcas de la iglesia" (Luvis 2012b) and *El sexo en la Iglesia* (Publicaciones Gaviota, 2015), for which she wrote "Liberación: Reflexiones teológicas sobre el abuso sexual y nuestro rol como Iglesia." In "La crisis, momento oportuno para afirmar las marcas de la iglesia" (Luvis Núñez 2015), Dr. Luvis Núñez addresses the long economic crisis engulfing Puerto Rico since the early 2000s, which has only worsened with time. For her, this crisis emerged from a global and local economic system that neglects human dignity and hence human rights. Luvis Núñez considers this crisis an opportune moment for the Church to affirm its identity as one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church in a way that is critical and relevant for the context. For instance, when discussing holiness, she acknowledges how this ecclesiological marker has historically been used to exclude that which is deemed unholy or profane. She then provides an alternative understanding for holiness as a mark of the Church that could allow

the community of the Spirit to speak and act into the crisis in ways that bring life. Luvis Núñez writes,

> To affirm the mark of the holiness of the Church is to recognize that it is based on the fact that she is the body of Christ and is called to share in the kingdom of God. It is the connection with Christ that makes her holy. When the Church points to the kingdom of God, it finds many ways to face the crisis and show its holiness. It is holy because it lives governed by norms that are above the individualistic and private values of our society. Its holiness is found in its intention to embrace those whom society marginalizes, abandons, and sets apart. It is holy when it recognizes the human dignity of those whom society qualifies as the other. [The Church] is holy when it relinquishes power to empower those who have had neither space nor voice. (Luvis Núñez 2012b)

This critical reading of the marks of the ecclesia provides a new space to rethink the nature and mission of the church in more robust, expansive, and creative terms.

In "Liberación: Reflexiones teológicas sobre el abuso sexual y nuestro rol como Iglesia," Luvis Núñez continues her critical discussion of the crisis of sexual violence in Puerto Rico and the responsibility of the Church to address it. She identifies and challenges the simplistic and reductionist definitions of sin that often harm victims of sexual abuse within our communities and expounds on how sin operates and manifests in the context of sexual violence. Furthermore, she addresses "the myths about forgiveness" and its close friend "forgetting." Luvis Núñez draws deeply from the work of Dan Allender and Mary Potter Engels and contextualizes it to the realities of the island. It is important to note that, in all these publications, Luvis Núñez's focus is ecclesiology (Luvis Núñez 2015).

She also wrote the entry "Caribbean Theology" (Luvis Núñez 2008) for the *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church* (IVP Academic, 2008). This is a significant contribution, as Caribbean theologies have yet to receive the attention that other so-called contextual theologies have. Her entry serves as an excellent starting point for people unfamiliar with the field's history, features, sources, methods, challenges, themes, and tasks.

Beyond the academic publishing sphere, Luvis Núñez also writes for one of Puerto Rico's major newspapers, *El Nuevo Día*. She is very much a public theologian and embraces her role as an educator for

and of the community. In one of her columns, "Ante la corrupción, urge una Iglesia que tome en serio el Evangelio," she calls the church to take the gospel seriously and denounce in word and practice the government's corruption (January 21, 2020). Previous to that, she wrote on the killing of Alexa Negrón Luciano, a transgender homeless Black Puerto Rican woman murdered at the hands of transphobic men. Her other columns include "La iglesia y el proceso político en Puerto Rico," (October 26, 2020) and "Esta es la historia de Cuca" (October 30, 2017).

The Theologian

Dr. Agustina Luvis Núñez is a Caribbean theologian doing theology from and within the Caribbean context. However, given the history and socio-political reality of Puerto Rico, her theology is both Caribbean and Latin American, and, to a certain extent, connected to some USA Latino/a theologies, particularly in their feminist streams. Her work is then in continuity with these traditions yet distinctive, most especially in regard to its race and socio-political priorities (Luvis Núñez, pers. comm., September 7, 2020). Although Latin American feminist theologies have acknowledged the need for an intersectional approach; in their praxis, they have often been a "*teología incolora*" or one that acknowledges mestiza and Indigenous Latin American women but rarely includes Black Latin American women. Argentinean theologian Nancy Bedford writes about her own *concientización* as a White Latin American woman and what that means for her theologizing,

> Maybe because from the perspective of the dominant culture in Argentina, the African heritage of the Río de la Plata tends to be forgotten or devalued; as a theologian that lived and worked in Argentina, I never thought too much about the relevance of this cultural and philosophical heritage for my theology. I used to include the writings of James Cone . . . in the contemporary theologies program, but it didn't occur to me to reflect too much about my own privileges as a person with white skin. Racism seemed wrong to me but I didn't understand that it was a structural reality that benefited me just for being white, regardless of my personal attitudes. In fact, I hadn't thought too much about the theological ramifications of the topic nor I had I

> sat—as a feminist theologian—at the feet of womanist theologians. Racism seemed to me as a secondary problem in our [Latin American] context. (Bedford 2017)

This tendency of seeing racism as a secondary problem in the Latin American context seems to be pervasive, particularly in relation to issues of anti-Blackness. One reason is that those doing Latin American theology in academia are mainly White and light-skinned Latin Americans. This is also true for USA Latino/a theologies, which have almost exclusively been constructed around the notion of *mestizaje*—an identity that centers Spanish heritage and identity, limitedly acknowledges Indigeneity, and excludes African heritage. In the USA, the latter has been translated in the racial imaginary as "brown," and is often applied to and reclaimed by almost everyone with some Latin American ancestry regardless of their phenotype. This has resulted in what Bedford (2017) calls "una teología 'incolora'" or "monocromática." The second term seems to be more precise. Although Caribbean theology is not completely exempt from this danger, particularly when done by White and light-skinned Caribbean theologians, the context itself demands a prioritization of Blackness and African heritage. Furthermore, it requires the inclusion of voices and contexts such as Haiti, Jamaica, and the Afro populations of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, as well as those from Central and South American coasts bathed by the Caribbean Sea, which are often neglected by both Latin American and USA Latino/a theologians. This prioritization is evident in Luvis Núñez's teaching and work as a public theologian.

Caribbean theology also centers a comprehensive de-colonial agenda. This is in response to the region's shared history of colonialism and neo-colonialism, which significantly differs from that of Latin American countries. The colonial history in the Caribbean is marked by the genocide of the Indigenous people, the kidnapping and exploitation of enslaved Africans, and deculturization. For Luvis Núñez (2018), "[d]ecolonization has to go as deep as colonization has. There needs to be a conversion of the heart, a reorientation of the mind, a re-evaluation of values, a deconstruction of oppressive structures, and a construction of proper structures." By bringing these Caribbean priorities and engagement with race to the forefront while continuing to locate her work in relation to Latin American and USA Latino/a theologies, Luvis Núñez provides a relevant intersectional feminist theological perspective.

The Teacher

Dr. Luvis Núñez currently serves as associate professor of theology as well as director of the DMin program at the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. There, she teaches courses on theology and history, Christian ethics, Pentecostal theologies, feminist theologies, and Caribbean theology. Luvis Núñez has also taught theology courses at the Universidad del Sagrado Corazón in Puerto Rico and at institutions in the United States and Cuba (Luvis, pers. comm., September 7, 2020). As it is for many Latin American and Caribbean theologians, the classroom is the main stage for Dr. Luvis Núñez's work. This should not be undervalued. Her impact in the theological formation of ministers, laypeople, and others is significant for local churches on the island.

The Activist

Luvis Núñez has actively participated in the Colectivo Interreligioso de Mujeres as well as in La Mesa de Diálogo Martin Luther King, Jr. The Colectivo Interreligioso is a non-profit organization constituted by women from different religious and spiritual backgrounds. It aims to support and affirm other women in their journeys while proposing alternative ways of life framed by tolerance, love, and respect. Meanwhile, La Mesa de Diálogo, another non-profit organization, seeks to promote the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a life of non-violent active resistance that should be embodied as we seek to abolish all forms of exploitation, discrimination, exclusion, inequality, and oppression. La Mesa promotes collaboration and solidarity in Puerto Rican society. Additionally, Luvis Núñez participates in La Pastoral de Mujeres y Justicia de Género (PMJG) in Puerto Rico, a group founded under her leadership in 2010 and associated with the Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (CLAI). The PMJG coordinates and facilitates initiatives and dialogues that affirm the dignity of women within and outside the church. For instance, when cases of femicide in the island started to rise, La Pastoral met with the current governor of Puerto Rico, Wanda Vázquez Garced, and other sectors, requesting them to declare a national state of emergency (Santiago and Zijlstra 2020).

More recently, Luvis Núñez was featured in the photographic exhibition "Feminismos en Puerto Rico," inaugurated in the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico on November 25, 2020. This project featured 247 feminist activists from the island with the goal of acknowledging and honoring women's fight for equality (Coordinadora Paz para las Mujeres 2020).

Beyond her role as theologian, professor, and practitioner, Luvis Núñez continues her work in the healthcare field. Currently, she serves as supervisor of various clinical laboratories in the east of the island. As a healthcare worker, she also engages in the work of justice through education, particularly during the COVID-19 global health crisis (Luvis Núñez, pers. comm., September 7, 2020). As reported, the testing rate for COVID-19 in Puerto Rico during the pandemic was far lower than anywhere else in the United States (Mazzei 2020). This left the people on the island extremely vulnerable. Hence, access to education is key to ensure the safety of the people. Luvis Núñez is focused on this type of education in different spaces, providing scientific knowledge and theological insight into how faith communities can do church during the pandemic.

Conclusion

Dr. Agustina Luvis Núñez has lived and continues to live a life "galloping recklessly wandering through the [horizons] of God's justice" (Julia de Burgos quoted by Gomez 2019). Her faith continues to be the foundation of her convictions on human dignity. This very faith in the God of life has led her to a theologizing that the walls of academia cannot contain. Luvis Núñez's life and work is ultimately a letter to Caribbean and Latin American girls and women, reminding them that *Dios es el Dios que las ve*.

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Notes

1 In this essay, Agustina Luvis Núñez is referred to as "Agustina" when discussing her childhood and years as a student and otherwise as "Dr. Luvis Núñez" or "Luvis Núñez" in line with conventions for referencing professors and theologians of distinguished stature.

CHAPTER 10

Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng

Green is Better than Blue

SHERYL JOHNSON

Chinese-Canadian Professor Emerita of Religious Education, the Rev. Dr. Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, is a critical innovator in Christian religious education and a passionate leader in feminist and anti-racist initiatives within the church and theological academy. Ng taught at both Vancouver School of Theology and Emmanuel College in Toronto, primarily in Christian education. She has also served in various capacities within the United Church of Canada as an educator and minister at the church's local, regional and national levels (Ng, personal communication, February 23, 2021). She is currently the only Asian North American woman featured in the "Christian Educators of the 20th Century" database published by Biola University's Talbot School of Theology. The database is a peer-reviewed resource covering approximately 215 of the century's most influential Christian educators. Ng serves in many notable leader-

ship roles in both the church and academy, including on the steering committee of the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network and as the co-chair of the Committee on Asian/North American Asian Theologies at Emmanuel College (Ng, pers. comm., February 23, 2021).

Ng served as a senior faculty advisor and co-coordinator of Pacific, Asian, and North American Asian Women in Theology and Ministry (PANAAWTM). In this capacity, she has mentored and supported many generations of women as scholars of theology and ministry practitioners (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020). Ng (2018) writes about this commitment also in the framework of resisting tokenism and expanding opportunities for other racialized women, stating,

> One of the realities of being the sole (or one of only a few) Asian women in an institution or organization is that one frequently gets called on to give leadership, serve on a committee, or simply show up. While fully aware of the danger of tokenism, one is nevertheless reluctant to leave a group one cares about without representation. It took me some time to come up with a compromise. I learned to counter invitations by suggesting instead names of younger women—often students but also leaders in local churches.

Ng is truly a scholar-practitioner, modeling the praxis-based approach deeply rooted in her feminist and justice-oriented values. Her denominational and ecumenical service reflects her commitment to church leadership. As a church leader, she contributed to several anti-racism programs of the United Church of Canada and developed an "anti-racist spirituality" (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020). Interdisciplinarity, justice, and liberation are key to her work and scholarship, as she draws together work in critical race theory, educational theory, cultural anthropology, theology, and beyond. Her background in literature also contributes a keen attention to language, narrative, and symbolism. Ng has written extensively for church and theological contexts. Her publications span a wide variety of topics and formats, including Christian education curricula, worship, and liturgical resources, anti-racism, intercultural dialogue, and gender justice in theological and educational contexts. Her philosophical orientation on the formation of future generations works as a noteworthy methodological approach that provides a praxis-oriented way of addressing racism and sexism in the church and in the academy. The saying "green is better than blue"—a metaphor that has influenced Ng's work—exemplifies her humility in that

it expresses that future generations will surpass the old. This underscores her strong support for younger scholars and the mentoring of next generations.

I first met Dr. Ng in 2010 when I was an MDiv student at Emmanuel College in Toronto. She had returned from retirement to teach several courses and was teaching my seminary Christian Education class. I knew her name from numerous church resources and publications she had edited and authored and was excited to take her class. I remember the course being anything but ordinary. Ng introduced concepts and connections to the class using Chinese characters and terms and drew from her tremendous store of diverse ministerial experiences. A few years later, I took a course on interculturalism that she co-taught with Dr. Marilyn Legge. This was one of my first experiences in a class explicitly addressing race and culture. Dr. Ng and I later crossed paths again when I served from 2013–16 as the minister to children and youth at Fairlawn Avenue United Church in Toronto—the United Church congregation attended by Dr. Ng. I was intimidated to serve as a minister for Christian education in front of such a giant in the field. However, Dr. Ng was nothing but supportive and encouraging, always looking for ways to offer expertise and resources, often in the form of the gift of books from her collection! It is this early experience with Dr. Ng as a mentor and supporter of my own work as a Christian educator that motivates my interest in sharing her story.

Dr. Ng introduced me to the Chinese proverb that states, "green comes out of blue, but is/can be better than/superior to blue (*qing qu yu lan, er sheng yu lan* 青出於藍, 而勝於藍)" during an interview I conducted with her in the fall of 2020. She also uses this expression in her 2018 article entitled "My Religious Education Sangha and Dharma: Learning-Teaching as an Asian in the North American Diaspora" to describe her commitment to mentoring the next generation, especially scholars and practitioners of Asian descent (Ng 2018). This expression, which originated with the Chinese philosopher Xunzi, encapsulates Dr. Ng's career and commitments. The saying relates that young (green) indigo plants will eventually produce a great deal of indigo (blue), more than the originating plant. It is a proverb that is often used in reference to education, meaning that students often exceed and go beyond their teachers. Dr. Ng certainly built upon what she received from her teachers and educational experiences. Her strong commitment to mentoring means that she prepares the next generation to go beyond what she has done.

I propose that the metaphor also resonates in another way with Ng's career (although not an original interpretation of the proverb). Green is a secondary color, composed of two primary colors; yellow and blue. Much of Ng's work has involved crossing boundaries and bringing together two or more elements to create innovative insights and coalitions. This boundary-crossing has included bringing together different cultures, religions, genders, academic disciplines, age groups, and generations. Ng is a bridge builder and interpreter, using her diverse experiences to form innovative connections and coalitions. This chapter will begin with an overview of Ng's life and career and then will consider her key theoretical ideas and approaches and finally, her specific academic and professional contributions and scholarly publications. I make the case for her notability by leaning into interviews with Ng conducted in the winter of 2020–21. Using these interviews, an extended interview conducted by Mai-Anh Tran in 2004, and other primary sources, I illustrate how her notable contributions to the academy were driven by her passion for a future generation who would do better than their predecessors as builders of a more just church and world.

Early Life and Education

Ng was born in Hong Kong in 1936, during the period when it was under British colonial rule, to parents who identified as non-religious and supported humanism and rationality. However, they were also steeped in Confucian and Taoist worldviews and orientations. Ng grew up as the second daughter in her middle-class family of eight children. Her father, Ng Yan Yee, was a businessperson and her mother, Wong Shuc Kee, was a homemaker, although she had completed high school, which was considered progressive for the time. They both were committed to education and strongly encouraged Ng in her studies. Ng also recalls her father giving her stamps from different countries. This piqued her interest in the world and global affairs and also encouraged her interest in writing and poetry from a young age. She also remembers her parents' support of her participation in a children's journalism initiative and poetry competitions (Ng, pers. comm., March 4, 2021).

Ng locates the beginning of her feminist consciousness to the birth of her younger brother, who immediately had a higher status

because he was a boy. This patriarchal favoritism irked Ng and disturbed her sense of justice. While growing up, the family moved several times due to the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. Although this was a difficult experience, it also helped Ng to be comfortable adapting to new contexts and situations. This exposure contributed to her interests in language, translation, narrative, and cultural diversity. Her childhood included time spent in Vietnam and Macau before returning to Hong Kong to begin high school. She recalls reflecting, for instance, on the status of women in different contexts and cultures and realizing this varied in different places (Ng, pers. comm., March 4, 2021).

Ng encountered Christianity first through her schooling. She attended a Baptist mission school and Sunday school, and then a Catholic church during her high school years. During her childhood, Ng's family did celebrate various festivals such as the New Year. However, her parents considered religion to be riddled with superstition and not for educated people like them. There were also Taoist influences in her home, which she only identified later in life. In her home, she remembers art depicting nature in a way that emphasized the smallness of humanity in relation to the vastness and greatness of the natural world. She also recalls attention paid to a sense of balance through the properties in various foods (Tran 2004). Ng describes her education and upbringing within colonial systems as another formative influence. She notes that her teachers spoke negatively about ancestor worship and the necessity for Christians to reject common practices such as making food offerings to ancestors. Ng found a middle ground, not observing all of the traditional rituals fully. For example, she recalls standing respectfully in front of her family's ancestral tablets but not bowing to them like her great-grandmother (Ng, pers. comm., March 4, 2021).

After high school, Ng went on to study English for her Bachelor of Arts degree, earned with honors, at the University of Hong Kong, graduating in 1958, and then earned a Master of Arts degree in English literature in 1960 (Ng, pers. comm., February 23, 2021). She took these studies under the direction of English poet Edmund Blunden. Ng recalls that Blunden was sensitive and often engaged themes related to nature in his writing. As a mentor, he encouraged his students, including Ng, to enter poetry competitions, invited students to his home to share his latest poems, and "stimulated students both intellectually and relationally" (Ng, pers. comm., March 4, 2021). During her university years, Ng met various types of Christians, both Catho-

lic and Protestant, all jockeying for her allegiance. Despite her familiarity and experience with Catholicism in her high school education, Ng chose to become Protestant, specifically Congregationalist. She made this choice based on the church's stances on social and theological issues. She was also attracted to the Congregationalist emphasis on unmediated access to God, not requiring a priest (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020).

In 1960, the same year she received her master's degree, Ng began her doctoral studies at Columbia University in New York City. In 1964, she took a leave of absence from her studies to begin her teaching career in Singapore at Trinity Theological College, teaching alongside her husband, Kam-Yan Ng. English language, religious literature, and spirituality were among the courses she taught. The couple's first son was born during this time. Ng was one of the first women to teach with the same "status" as her husband, unlike most other women at the college married to male faculty members who taught for free and without faculty status (Tran 2004). During this time, Ng's theological understanding became more complex as she encountered the possibility of diverse interpretations of Biblical stories. These interpretations resonated with her and moved her away from literalist and singular interpretations toward those offered by sources such as postcolonial Biblical scholars (Ng, pers. comm., March 4, 2021).

Ng's theological views continued to develop with her introduction to feminist Biblical interpretation and analysis of social location and power through figures like Paulo Freire. This shift emphasized critical subjectivity and active ownership of one's faith which resonated with her earlier choice of Protestantism (Tran 2004). However, Ng's introduction to critical and feminist theology primarily arose through a process of self-study and conversation with colleagues rather than her formal theological education (Ng, pers. comm., March 4, 2021). She notes in her 2018 article in *Religious Education* that Rachel Conrad Wahlberg's 1975 *Jesus According to a Woman* and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott's 1977 *Women, Men and the Bible* were especially foundational texts for her scholarly formation.

Early Career

From 1966–67, Ng and her husband lived in Toronto, Canada, on sabbatical. Kam-Yan was a visiting scholar at Emmanuel College, part of

Victoria University within the University of Toronto, where Ng would return to work throughout her career. In 1967, Ng and her husband returned to New York City. Ng completed her PhD in 1969 with a thesis entitled "The Figure of the Child in Victorian Novels of Protest." During this period, the young family attended the vibrant and multicultural Riverside Church where Ng taught in the Sunday School program, directed by the dynamic educator Josephine Bliss. Bliss was educated at Union Theological Seminary and served Riverside's children's ministry from 1955–76 (*New York Times* 1988). However, it was primarily circumstances that provoked Ng to teach in the program. Ng recounts using the excuse of being the teacher for a different class to convince her young son that he could be left in his own class. The experience of a holistic and meaningful Christian education program sparked her interest in the field as she participated in Riverside's practice of teachers developing their own curricula each week. Ng recalls that Bliss was a gifted educator and offered a great deal of weekly professional development for the teachers, introducing them to child development theories and encouraging them to use narrative and stories in their classes (Ng, pers. comm., March 4, 2021).

In 1970, after their second son's birth, Ng and her family moved back to Toronto. At that time, Ng's husband began a ministry role at Toronto Chinese United Church. Although her husband's career instigated the move, Ng certainly took advantage of the opportunities it presented (Ng, pers. comm., March 4, 2021). She resisted being cast as a minister's wife. Instead, she became increasingly involved with denominational initiatives, especially those related to education, within the United Church of Canada. She began with a role as the liaison between her husband's congregation and the Presbytery—the United Church congregations' regional organization. This opportunity launched her into many other projects and initiatives. For example, from 1975 to 1980, Ng served as writer-in-residence for mission education and curriculum development for the denomination's Division of Communication and Division of Mission (Ng, pers. comm., February 23, 2021). Again, circumstances led her toward Christian education: having young children and her love of writing and resource development (Tran 2004).

In 1978, Ng returned to Emmanuel College to begin her Master of Divinity degree (Victoria University Archives. n.d.). She completed her MDiv in 1980. From 1980–81, she served as a Ministerial Associate for St. James-Bond United Church in Toronto, overseeing education and outreach. From 1981–86, she served the United Church's

Hamilton Conference as its Christian development officer (Victoria University Archives. n.d.). Ng was ordained in the United Church of Canada in 1986 (Ng, pers. comm., February 23, 2021). The decision to be ordained was largely due to her commitment to equity and the fact that, in Asian communities, ordination is necessary for credibility, particularly for women. Without ordination, Ng was treated as inferior to her husband, so ordination was required to live into the couple's commitment to minister together as equals (Tran 2004).

Theological Teaching Career

Ng began her theological teaching career serving as the assistant professor of educational ministries at Vancouver School of Theology (VST) in 1986. She also served as its director of lay education from 1986–89 (Ng, pers. comm., February 23, 2021). During this time, she began working with Indigenous communities, designing the curriculum for their Native Ministries' MDiv-by-Extension program (Religious Education Association. n.d.). Her commitment to cultural specificity contributed to developing a program that honored Indigenous pedagogy and traditions (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020).

Ng encountered feminist theology first through White feminists but later realized that her experience as an Asian, and specifically a married Asian woman, was unique (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020). A vital community for her in that realization was the organization Pacific, Asian, and North American Asian Women in Theology and Ministry (PANAAWTM, formed in 1984), where she met prominent theologians Rita Nakashima Brock and Kwok Pui-Lan. The PANAAWTM website states that the organization is composed of "Asian and North American Asian female students, faculty, ministers, and community activists who are committed to bringing women's voices and concerns to the faith communities and society." Their website notes that they publish on topics related to feminist studies in theology and religion, host conferences, and mentor the upcoming generations of leaders from these constituencies. Kwok offers,

> Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng is a beloved mentor and wise elder for sisters in Pacific, Asian, and North American Asian Women in Theology and Ministry. She has made sure that we include Canadian women in our theologizing and networking. She contributed to developing teach-

> ing materials and strategies in teaching Asian and North American women's theology. As a pioneer in her field, she calls attention to solidarity between North American Asian women and Aboriginal women. (Kwok, email message to author, February 23, 2021)

Through the experience of connecting with PANAAWTM, Ng re-claimed and began to use her Chinese name, Wenh-In, whereas previously she went by Anne or Greer Anne. Ng's involvement in PANAAWTM extended well beyond participation and mentoring to include roles such as conceptualizing the organization itself and securing funding. A central project of Ng's with PANAAWTM was a research report entitled "Developing Teaching Materials and Instructional Strategies for Teaching Asian and Asian American/Canadian Women's Theologies in North America," published in 1999 (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020).

Another critical organizational involvement of Ng's is REA:APPRRE, the Religious Education Association: An Association of Professors, Practitioners, and Researchers in Religious Education. Their website describes that the organization works to "advance substantive research, probing scholarship and practical approaches to religious education" and publishes the journal *Religious Education* (Religious Education Association n.d.). Ng was one of the early, if not the first, Asian woman to have participated in the organization, and her work has been published extensively through that journal. Ng served as president of APPRRE, before its merger with REA, from 2001–02. REA and APPRRE have been important academic "homes" for Ng, since her work is primarily situated within the field of religious education (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020).

Ng left VST and returned a third time to Emmanuel College in 1995 to serve on the faculty as associate professor of Christian education and to coordinate the Centre for Asian Theology, which she helped found (Tran 2004). Ng retired in 2002 but has remained involved in educational and ministerial leadership, particularly in the area of racial justice. This has included work for the United Church of Canada to develop "anti-racist spirituality." This work is featured in a 2004 resource that she edited entitled *That All May Be One: A Resource for Educating toward Racial Justice* (Ng 2004a). In 2010, the Senate of Victoria University, affiliated with Emmanuel College, granted her an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree to recognize her many contributions (Victoria University n.d.).

Reflecting on her sense of calling, Ng identifies her work in religious education and teaching as her primary ministry. However, she has also felt called to and has enjoyed other aspects of ministerial leadership. Her pragmatism emerges in her reflections. Ng notes that she did not intend to spend her career in this area, but because she had certain experiences and competencies, it is where she was well-situated to contribute. She also believes it is an area of great importance (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020). Empowerment of the next generation is another common theme throughout her life and work, including her mentorship of women in the academy. Religious education of children, the seminary education of ministers, and her mentoring work through organizations such as PANAAWTM all share the element of empowering those who are developing in their identity and vocation. Long-time colleague and PANAAWTM collaborator Kwok Pui-Lan attests, "as one of the senior scholars in her field, [Ng] has unceasingly nurtured the younger scholars" (Tran 2004).

Key Ideas and Approaches

Cultural Diversity

Multiculturalism, interculturalism, and contextual specificity have been key themes in Ng's life and work. Each of these relates to bringing together two or more elements to create something that is innovative, responsive to context, honors diverse heritages, and crosses boundaries and conventional limitations. Ng also describes how she used aspects of Euro-American theologies and theories of education to gain legitimacy in contexts where her identity caused her to be viewed with skepticism or denied authority. These include her work with predominantly White congregations and academic spaces (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020). However, she has found that many of these theories do not resonate with non-White communities or with her own lived experience. For example, in Ng's work with the Vancouver School of Theology's Native Ministries program, she proposed that the basic competencies of ministry might be achieved differently by different communities, in ways that were appropriate to their diverse contexts and experiences (Tran 2004). This esteem

for diversity also relates to theological concepts. Ng proposes that the Indigenous orientation toward the four directions might be more culturally appropriate for some than that of the Trinity. Ng outlines this approach to Indigenous contexts and theologies in her 2020 article entitled "Complexities in Religious Education with Asian/Asian Canadians and Indigenous Realities: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report on Residential Schools" (Ng 2020a).

Ng's sensitivity toward cultural diversity resonates with her Canadian location, where multiculturalism has been an official policy since 1971 under Pierre Elliott Trudeau. These policies were initially conceived as a combination of biculturalism and bilingualism in English and French communities. The idea of multiculturalism expanded this orientation to recognize the increasing number of non-European migrants to Canada since the 1960s. Ng's husband was involved in a specific initiative for publicly-funded Chinese language schools related to this policy (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020). However, over time, Ng has become increasingly aware that multiculturalism is insufficient to address the structural inequality between various cultural groups. She notes that, too often, multiculturalism focuses on non-White ethnic groups maintaining their language, food, and customs and not on equity, for example, in employment and access to services. She considers this topic in many of her publications, including her 2003 chapter entitled "Land of Maple and Lands of Bamboo" (Ng 2003).

This awareness of multiculturalism's shortcomings led Ng to integrate postcolonial analysis into her thinking (Ng 2005). This analysis is rooted in her own experience of growing up in colonial Hong Kong, understanding England as her homeland due to that colonial relationship. Nevertheless, Ng is also careful to say that she values some of what she received from colonialism, such as her experience in the British educational system. She has a great deal of appreciation for hybridity, complexity, and nuance (Ng, pers. comm, March 4, 2021). This appreciation extends to her current analysis of the Canadian-US relationship, focusing on the particularity of Canadians' experiences as distinct from that of their US neighbors. These distinctions include differences between Asian-American and Asian-Canadian social locations and experiences. Ng is also very attentive to the diversity of Asian and Asian-North American experiences and the ways that, over time, these identities can themselves evolve, particularly over journeys of migration and establishment in new lands (Ng 2003). She describes the many diversities within migration expe-

riences, ranging from one's specific originating country and culture, period of time when the migration occurred, circumstances leading to one's migration, age when a person or their parents migrated, and so forth. These diverse experiences are often homogenized within the overall category of "migrant."

Context and Contextualization

Context and contextualization are commitments that are deeply connected to cultural diversity and colonial legacies and realities. In addition to raising her own cultural context, Ng also profoundly values the complexities of the moment and the community she is situated in and responds to in her work. She gives the example of changing family structures as something that she has been attentive to in her educational curricula and teaching and church-based work. Specifically, in her 1997 article entitled "Contextualization of Religious Education in an Age of Disbelief," she shares an example of receiving feedback from an editor about the references she made to families in children's religious education curricula she wrote. The editor introduced her to the need to ensure that diverse family structures were exemplified in fictional stories for children.

Theologically, Ng understands contextualization to be a matter of justice. She challenges the unspoken 'norm' of the privileged enforced in relation to race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation. Ng identifies that these privileged perspectives are particular but too often taken to be normal, natural, universal, and superior. By analyzing dynamics such as power, privilege, and intersectional difference, one can see how all perspectives arise out of particular contexts. Due to power differences, some receive a great deal of attention and are given legitimacy, while others do not and are not. In her 1997 article on contextualization of religious education, she calls upon her colleagues to engage in contextualizing praxis, asserting,

> we need to learn how to do theology and interpret the Bible contextually. We need to learn how to make it possible for those hitherto excluded from theological conversation by reason of age (children, youth, seniors), sex (women and girls), sexual orientation (gay and lesbian individuals and families), ability (the physically or mentally challenged), social class (single parent families or the poor on welfare), and racial/ethnic origin (the so-called non-white minorities and

> their congregations), to join in asking faith questions and to participate in the search for understanding. (Ng 1997)

Ng's interest in Biblical interpretation is informed by her scholarly commitments to feminism, postcolonialism, contextualization, and liberation. In turn, her analysis of and fresh perspectives on Biblical stories carry over to her research, writing, seminary teaching, and curriculum development. As a religious educator in seminary settings, she is committed to ensuring that clergy take their role as congregational Bible study leaders seriously and that they engage with these stories from critical perspectives. Members of the clergy have an important role to play in ensuring that critical scholarship about the Bible does not remain solely in the theological academy. By the work of the clergy, biblical scholarship should inform the perspectives of congregations and laypeople. For Ng, the role of clergy in Confirmation classes is vital. This can be one of the few congregational educational initiatives where clergy are sure to have an active role. In this formative interaction, they influence the faith of the young people they serve (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020).

Practice, Experience, Diversity, and Pragmatism

Religious education is a practice-based field, so it is not surprising that practice and experience are central to Ng's work. She understands the importance of her rooted location within the church. From this perspective, theologies and theories are valid insofar as they are connected to and rooted in lived experience. This commitment speaks to the divide that Ng identifies, which can emerge between doctrine and practice in church settings when ministries do not attend to both. Ng notes that being a seminary educator in Christian education is an important bridge-building role. In that academic role, she helps clergy understand the importance of Christian education as a bridge between theoretical doctrine and practice for their future congregations (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020).

Ng is truly a scholar-practitioner whose work spans a variety of genres and fields in both the church and the academy. She has developed liturgical resources, educational curricula, and bible study programs, written hymns, and designed new spiritual practices. Her work not only spans various forms but also takes an ecumenical and interfaith perspective. Her work as a researcher and author crosses

denominational boundaries. It is published in explicitly ecumenical spaces, including PANAAWTM and other societies and organizations related to Christian education, Asian and Asian North American theology and practice, feminism, and more. Her publications are varied, including coverage in the United Church's *Mission and Mandate* magazine introducing the denomination to the work of Paulo Freire (1979–82) (Tran 2004), a resource for creating children's messages for worship services published in *Word and Witness* (Ng 1993–96), a theological teaching guide (Ng and Kwok 1999), and a prayer of thanksgiving from a multicultural perspective for a prayer resource book (Ng 1998), contributions to the *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* and *Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education*, Advent devotional reflections (Ng and Uyede-Kai 1997), and a resource book for interracial marriage (Ng 1993).

Strategic pragmatism is also emblematic of Ng's approach to education for justice in the academy. She describes strategies she has employed, such as co-teaching anti-racism sessions with a White co-leader of equal seniority, working with allies, knowing her audience, and setting realistic expectations for a session's results. For example, while all participants may not be totally changed after a session, if one person leaves with a fresh understanding of the effects of racism, that is an accomplishment. She also describes the strategic approach she takes at times of co-leading a session with a person of the dominant race or gender. This ensures that challenging messages will be received (and not immediately dismissed) and allows her co-leader to model respectful engagement, listening, and learning from and with her (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020).

In relationship to religious formation, Ng describes herself as rooted in a Taoist cosmology and commitment to the notion that one can only love God through loving one's neighbor—a justice-oriented commitment found in many faith traditions, including Christianity. She is a strong advocate for integrating one's cultural heritage and orientations, which she models in her own life, work, and religious practice. Ng speaks of the value of the more Euro-Christian practices of prayer, scripture reading, and critical interpretation combined with Chinese calligraphy and Taoist nature walks. As a bridge-builder, she notes that this approach has been useful in connecting with people of Indigenous heritage and other cultural groups, as they bring together various elements in their own practices. Ng's audience and community of accountability is in no way limited to Asians or Asian North Americans or even other culturally marginalized

groups. With all types of audiences, she articulates the possible contributions of traditions, histories, and values from Asian and Asian North American communities to the diverse and global Christian community. Her concern for broad engagement manifests in her diverse and varied publications, speaking engagements, worship, and educational leadership (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020).

Power Analysis, Critical Methodology, and Interdisciplinarity

Another critical theme in Ng's work is power, particularly in relationship to margins and centers. As she has moved between margins and centers of power in her own life and has had access to positions of more or less power in various contexts and settings, Ng reflects on power from her own diverse experiences. Ng asserts that even social justice agendas must not be imposed upon groups, particularly without attention to cultural particularity (Ng, pers. comm., November 11, 2020). She takes a holistic and intersectional approach to power analysis, looking carefully at the interplay of various aspects of social identity and location as they are manifest across multiple contexts. For example, she considers the teacher's position with respect to power. Informed by her experience, she does not assume the teacher will always have greater social power than her students, given the complexities of different situations. Ng argues that "for racial-ethnic minority teachers, who already have diminished social power in the presence of 'majority' colleagues or students, to 'give our power away' too drastically in the seminary classroom is to further erode our hard-earned credibility" (Ng 2000, 317–18). In this way, she challenges some of the general trends within feminist and critical pedagogy towards students' empowerment, reminding us that not all teachers or students have the same access to power.

One key methodological approach for Ng is that of the hermeneutic circle or spiral. She describes this methodology as a process that begins with present experience and context, which is analyzed using a variety of interpretive and theoretical tools. Using these tools, she reflects on, analyzes, and evaluates findings through the lens of justice-seeking and cultural difference. Ng seeks to apply her findings on multiple levels, from the most local level to the global. This circle and spiral approach can be seen in her research as she moves from experience to culturally and academically rooted analysis to various applications for the church and community's life. Ng wrote about a

formative experience in her work for the United Church of Canada when she was tasked with introducing the work of Freire in an accessible way to a lay audience. She notes,

> That early challenge to present the ideas of Paulo Freire in an accessible manner deepened into a lifelong commitment to liberative pedagogy for all sorts and conditions of people in academy, church, and society. Engaging in such education for justice pointed me in the direction of education for anti-racism/racial justice. (Ng 2018)

Ng's methodology is also interdisciplinary. With her varied background in Asian philosophical traditions and English literature, she brings fields such as sociology, cultural anthropology, critical race theory, educational theories, and literary studies into conversation with theological and biblical disciplines. For example, in her 2004 article entitled "Beyond Bible Stories: The Role of Culture-Specific Myths/Stories in the Identity Formation of Nondominant Immigrant Children," she explores both the possibilities of engaging prominent cultural and literary narratives in religious education (Ng 2004a). Ng is comfortable working in multiple arenas simultaneously in ways that bring together the theories or sources most fitting to the issue at hand. Her motivation for this type of cross-pollination often arises from the real world and lived experience. Throughout her writing, she names specific experiences and draws upon her own life story. This is illustrated by the way she connects her analysis of postcolonialism to the story of claiming her Chinese name.

> The fact is, born and growing up in the former British colony of Hong Kong, my siblings and myself were all given English names as well as names in Chinese at birth. . . . For most of my school and university days, plus the first part of my professional life, therefore, my name in Chinese remained silenced and hidden. It was not until the early 1990s when, through a process of conscientization and being encouraged by the examples of Asian feminist theologians such as Kwok Pui Lan and Chung Hyung Kyung that, I dared to 'come out' by reclaiming 'Wenh-In' in a large church gathering as a public, anti-colonial action. Naming as an integral part of uncovering our hidden histories and present realities applies not only to persons, but just as significantly, to organizations and movements. (Ng 2018)

Publications

Ng has published or co-published over fifty book chapters, journal articles, edited volumes, educational curriculum resources, liturgical resources, and other publications. This section will provide a sense of how Ng employs the key themes and ideas that I have noted previously in specific works. Most of her academic publications have related to explorations of race, culture, gender, and power in the specific context of religious education. She often employs specific case studies, personal experiences, and poetry in her writing, making theory quite accessible and tangible for the reader. Finally, most of her works include practical calls to action and specific examples of how her arguments manifest in new practices, particularly in church settings.

"Contextualization of Religious Education in an Age of Disbelief"

In her article "Contextualization of Religious Education in an Age of Disbelief," published in *Religious Education* in 1997, Ng notes that contextualization is a process that "consciously situates any groups' theologizing and mission in the historical, social, political, and economic conditions in which it finds itself" (Ng 1997, 193). Contextualization involves critiquing the forces that may have "shaped or warped" a theology or belief system, such as missionaries coming from abroad. Ng asserts that in order to contextualize the field and endeavor of religious education undertaken by many churches in the present age, the theology informing that endeavor must also be contextualized. This contextual analysis takes place from a rooted, self-critical perspective that is aware of all of the factors shaping the educator. Factors shaping the present context of "so-called disbelief" must also be thoroughly considered. Drawing on the work of contextual theologians such as South African Albert Nolan, Ng helps us to see that it matters who has access to the "doing" of theology, it matters who is in a position to educate, and it matters where this all takes place (194). She shares examples of how religious educators have worked to diversify their ranks and to attend to the specific nuances of their locations and communities (195). However, she also tells us that there are many aspects of context that remain to be considered by religious

educators, including, for example, materialism, capitalism, violence against women, and racism.

"From Confucian Master Teacher to Freirean Mutual Learner"

Ng's article "From Confucian Master Teacher to Freirean Mutual Learner: Challenges in Pedagogical Practice and Religious Education," published in 2000 in *Religious Education*, is informed by deep reflection on her early context and formation. She considers the dilemma that feminist, liberative pedagogy presents to those formed by Confucian educational ethos. Ng identifies a layer of complexity that emerges when also trying to honor her Christian formation and her early formative traditions and context, which have their own justice-rooted pedagogy (Ng 2000, 308). Ng considers the elements of Confucian teaching, including valuing community over the individual, hierarchy over egalitarianism, deference to authority, and distinct gender roles, that tend to be found in churches comprised of people with Confucian cultural heritage (309). While retaining elements of Confucianism can represent a form of contextualization of Christianity, it also presents challenges to those attempting to utilize liberative pedagogies, as these emphasize individual agency, the value of challenging authority, and egalitarianism. However, employing a careful analysis of Confucian Master Kongzi, Ng suggests that there may be more commonality with Freirean approaches than is often thought, including respect for equal access to learning, diversity in understanding, and use of "field trips" and embodied pedagogy (Ng 2000, 312). Ng asserts that it may have been later teachers and philosophical influences that established what we think of as Confucian hierarchical values and pedagogies (315–16). Additionally, Ng suggests that liberative pedagogy may, in fact, benefit from some aspects of Confucian approaches. Although Confucian pedagogy is often understood as a more hierarchical form of education, it respects the teacher's unique gifts. This sense of respect for expertise and teachers can be essential when the teacher possesses less power than her students—a situation Ng often encounters as an Asian-Canadian female (318).

"Land of Maple and Lands of Bamboo"

Ng published "Land of Maple and Lands of Bamboo" in 2003. She begins with a poem she wrote that explores bamboo as a metaphor for a certain kind of theology: representing ideas such as flexibility, resilience, and growth in community (Ng 2003, 99). In the poem's conclusion, she questions the relationship of bamboo, representing women of Asian descent and their theological beliefs, to the larger and taller tree species that are native to North America. She suggests this metaphor represents Asian women's struggle for racial justice amidst unequal relationships with people and institutions of European descent. This poem both introduces and encapsulates Ng's argument beautifully. She locates her analysis in her own experience and story, noting the colonial forces within mindsets that she and many racially nondominant persons must address (101).

Many of Ng's articles include original poems. Ng reflects that poetry is deeply tied to her life and identity: her father wrote poetry, she wrote poetry as a child and then studied and wrote it at university, she has continued to write poetry throughout her life, and part of her name, Wenh, means to recite poetry or to sing. Asked about her use of poetry, Ng shared, "when my whole person is involved in something . . . it is much easier to express things first in poetic form than in prose. I can then look back at the poetry and do the analysis in prose form." She shares that she finds poetry more expressive and universal (Ng, pers. comm., March 4, 2021).

In this article, Ng also raises critical linguistic and cultural preservation and reclamation tasks within immigrant communities and churches (Ng 2003, 102). Ng shares her creative experiments toward "cultural recovery" of Asian practices in church contexts; however, she also cautions against dangers including Orientalism, romanticism, and misappropriation of cultural practices, which even well-meaning persons of Asian descent can engage in (103–4). Still, she concludes that, despite these pitfalls, there must be space made for creativity, flexibility, bridge-building, and hybridization (104).

In "Land of Maple and Lands of Bamboo," Ng employs this posture of openness to her use of biblical hermeneutics. She embraces culturally and racially minoritized peoples' perspectives. She finds value in their sometimes transgressive interpretation of Biblical narratives. Ng finds that, when they share their understanding of Bible stories, they often find commonality with those from other margin-

alized groups across categories like culture, gender, and sexual orientation. Ng asserts a need for solidarity among people of non-dominant identities who share perspectives such as orientations toward the communal over the individual. However, she is cautious because there can also be significant power differences between various racialized persons and groups (109). Ng sees that denominations often use polity to create bonds between persons and congregations with the same ethnic background. However, she also identifies that polity connects people or congregations across multiple non-dominant ethnic backgrounds. Her consideration of the tension between unity and diversity present within these different arrangements suggests the presence of internal hierarchies and power differences that must be addressed (110–11).

Post-Colonial Theology

Ng takes up her postcolonial concerns in a 2005 article entitled "Reading through New Eyes: Post-Colonial Theology," published by both the *Catholic New Times* and *Making Waves*, the magazine of the Women's Interchurch Council of Canada. She skillfully introduces her readers to the need for postcolonial biblical interpretation as a first step in addressing the oppression of colonialism since the Bible is so central in all of Christian life. She argues that a "'post-colonial' reading advocates an oppositional stance, one that intentionally adopts a position of resistance in approaching familiar stories 'from the other side,' the losing side, the voices that were not heard, the incidents that were never recorded" (Ng 2005). Ng explores the story of Rahab, a Canaanite woman who plays a role in the biblical story of the Israelites' capture of Jericho. Through this exploration, she considers how these stories are often told from dominant perspectives. However, other interpretations emerge when paying attention to those who have been colonized and oppressed, especially those further marginalized by gender and status (Ng 2005). Ng concludes by noting how the Bible has been used as a tool to support imperialism and racism but, through a hermeneutic of suspicion, might be of service to struggles for justice and a rejection of colonial powers (Ng 2005).

"My Religious Education Sangha and Dharma"

Ng continues to publish on a variety of topics and remains active in societies such as the Religious Education Association (REA). In 2018, Ng published an article entitled "My Religious Education Sangha and Dharma: Learning-Teaching as an Asian in the North American Diaspora." In this article, Ng reflects on her experiences within REA and her career as a scholar and popular educator. From the perspective of her life's work in the academy and the Church, she explores the intersections of theological education and church-based education (Ng 2018). Ng reflects on her career and influences, describing how she strived to bring lenses such as liberative pedagogy, feminist theology, and postcolonial analysis into both church and academic contexts. She also notes how she, with others, has worked to honor racially minoritized voices and perspectives within mainstream organizations. At the same time, she has worked to create distinct and separate spaces for these minoritized communities to nurture their own analysis and honor their specific experiences outside of mainstream organizations. She concludes by sharing her own need for ongoing education and learning, including her desire to learn more about Indigenous communities' experiences in Canada (Ng 2018).

"Complexities in Religious Education with Asian/Asian Canadians and Indigenous Realities"

In 2020, the society's journal, *Religious Education*, published her paper presented at the 2019 REA conference in Toronto entitled "Complexities in Religious Education with Asian/Asian Canadians and Indigenous Realities: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report on Residential Schools." This paper continues her long commitment to Asian-Canadian relationships and solidarity with Indigenous communities (Ng 2020a). While noting some connections between Indigenous and Asian-Canadian experiences of racial minoritization, she is careful to note the benefits of European colonization that she has received by living in Canada.

Ng offers her characteristically nuanced analysis of the situation of Asian and Indigenous communities in Canada. She notes their internal diversity, particularly for Asian communities and their histories, which are commonly erased in Canadian society where all are

marked as "visible minorities" (Ng 2020). Asian and Indigenous peoples share this status and several cultural features, such as a greater communitarian orientation and regard for holism over dualism. They also share experiences of profound exclusion and marginalization by Euro-Canadian society. At the same time, Ng emphasizes the different realities of Indigenous communities. As the original inhabitants of the land, they have unique experiences of colonial land exploitation and theft. She details the Indian Residential Schools system's atrocities supported by mainline churches and the resulting calls to action emerging from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established to address this legacy.

One crucial aspect of this work is her call for education about Indigenous realities. Ng specifically addresses the importance of having "newcomer" immigrant communities, including Asian immigrants, participate in learning about the painful history of the land they now inhabit. She also notes the importance of religious education that addresses colonialism and the painful impacts of missionaries' work with Indigenous people and more broadly. Ng also describes the need for anti-racism education for clergy and lay leaders and an anti-racist approach to religious education. Raising her commitment to liberative education, she also asserts that this education must be connected to work for justice and must encourage the church to engage actively with contemporary Indigenous movements struggling for justice.

"Let (Racial) Justice Roll Down Like Waters"

In 2020, Ng published an article entitled "Let (Racial) Justice Roll Down Like Waters" in the United Church of Canada's *Touchstone* academic journal. In this piece, she draws upon anti-racist thought within biblical interpretation and theology to call for renewed efforts toward anti-racist practices in the church—specifically the United Church of Canada. She cautions that it is the impact, not the intent, of anti-racist actions that matters most and notes that, too often, actions are token gestures and do not fundamentally question hierarchies of racial privilege and power (Ng 2020b, 28). Ng bolsters her call to action toward racial justice for the United Church by appealing to its legacy and identity as a justice-oriented denomination and its past work on interculturalism and related endeavors (Ng 2020b, 28–9). Further, she points to the momentum she observes toward deeper

racial justice engagement in the denomination as it moves from "tolerance" of diversity to "valuing such differences as assets" (Ng 2020b, 30). This appeal to the positive history of the denomination and anticipation and celebration of the transformation already underway speaks to Ng's prophetically challenging and profoundly optimistic and hopeful orientations.

In this section, I have focused primarily on Ng's academic publications. However, she has written, edited, and created a wide variety of materials, including curriculum resources for both children and adults, liturgical resources, and various other media. This demonstrates Ng's comfort with a variety of formats and her skill writing for both academic and lay audiences.[1] Ng's academic background and pedagogical expertise bring pressing theological critique to scholars and ordinary churchgoers alike. Her vast array of acclaimed publications over the years has raised her to a high level of prominence within the field of religious education, but also more broadly. Her work has relevance far beyond religious education and has made her an important theological leader and innovator in the larger realm of justice-oriented Christian advocacy.

Conclusion

The proverb about how green can be better than blue and its implication that students may surpass their teachers evokes a strong sense of humility. Humility is a primary characteristic of Ng, her career, and her scholarship. Although she is a celebrated theological educator and professor, she is still very willing to serve and teach in local congregations, guide and mentor students and ministers, and be challenged in her analysis and integrate new perspectives. Additionally, she is continually making connections and bringing together "blue" and "yellow"—Asian and Indigenous cultures and worldviews, Christianity and other religious and spiritual traditions, perspectives from people of different generations, genders, Indigenous, settler, and immigrant experiences, or otherwise. Ng's background in literature served her well. It supported her ability to imagine beyond present realities into the realm of future possibilities. It also enabled her to relish meaningful stories and diverse personal narratives wherever they were found. Contextual considerations continue to be a driving force for her. This analytical lens allows her to engage deeply with contemporary

phenomena such as Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Conscious of her context, she considers her own particular positionality and that of other first-generation racialized immigrants.

Although Ng has been officially retired since 2002, her scholarship, publishing, teaching, and leadership continue. Her ongoing relevance as a mentor comes from her commitment to remaining current and engaged in contemporary issues, often through her mentees and students. In many ways, she has been and continues to be that "green" spoken about in the proverb. She has built on what has come before across her remarkable life and works in academia and beyond. Upon those foundations, she has created new insights and practices. Ng's legacy is her scholarship and her practice, not as two separate areas but as a seamless contribution where each is very much a part of the other. This dual legacy is fitting because teaching is both about what is taught and how it is taught. Ng would likely add many other considerations, including who is taught, who is teaching, when and under what conditions it is taking place, and for what purpose and toward what goals. Many generations of children and laypeople have benefitted from her curricula and ministry, seminary students guided by her scholarship and teaching, mentees and collaborators in organizations supporting women, people of Asian descent, and religious educators. Together, they build upon her significant contributions to the academy and church she has shaped and brightened.

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Endnotes

1 For a comprehensive list of publications in a wide variety of categories, see the list of publications that is included in Mai-Anh Tran's 2004 biography of Dr. Ng found on the Biola University database at *https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/wenh-in-ng*.

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Karma Lekshe Tsomo is a professor of theology and religious studies at the University of San Diego, where she teaches Buddhist Thought and Culture, Women in Buddhism, and Dying, Death, and Social Justice. Her publications include *Women in Buddhist Traditions*; *Buddhist Feminisms and Femininities*; *Into the Jaws of Yama: Buddhism, Bioethics, and Death*; *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Monastic Ethics for Women*; and numerous edited works on women in Buddhism. She is a founder and past president of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women and the founder and director of Jamyang Foundation, an innovative education project for girls and women in developing countries.

Women in Religion

This series, Women in Religion, is an outgrowth of "1000 Women in Religion"—a project of the Women's Caucus of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. This project is part of an initiative to create, update, and improve the online biographical presence of the lives and contributions of cis- and transgender women who are notable as scholars, activists, and practitioners in the world's religious, spiritual, and wisdom traditions. This series of biographical collections about women in religion explores and rethinks the various and often biased guidelines and principles that govern digital content creation about women.

The second volume in this series, *Challenging Bias against Women Academics in Religion* , presents biographies about women in academia who study, research, and teach about the world's religious and spiritual traditions. It addresses the question of why so many women academics, who are themselves producers of secondary sources, are absent as biographical subjects in secondary literature generally and on digital knowledge platforms specifically. Authors variously challenge the exclusionary assumptions that underlie systemic bias in the production of secondary and tertiary sources about women. This critical engagement disrupts sourcing and writing conventions that support and perpetuate bias and creates the opportunity for more expansive and inclusive biographical narratives about women.

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