Missionary Positions

Christian, Modernist, Postmodernist

by Robert J. Priest

In the late 1960s and early 1970s "the missionary position" became widespread as a technical expression for face-to-face man-on-top sexual intercourse. It was accompanied by standard (and undocumented) stories as to the origin of the expression, stories featuring missionaries and either Polynesians, Africans, Chinese, Native Americans, or Melanesians. By the late 1980s and 1990s the expression had become a core symbol in modernist and postmodernist moral discourses. This paper examines accounts of the origin of the expression, provides evidence that it originated in Kinsey's [mis]reading of Malinowski, analyzes the symbolic elements of the missionary-position narrative as synthesizing modernist objections to Christian morality, analyzes the "missionary position" in postmodernist narratives as synthesizing postmodernist objections to modernist morality, and explores some of the functions of this myth within the academy.

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We see, then, that the sexual practices of a people are indeed prototypical and that from their position in coitus their whole psychic attitude may be inferred.

GEZA ROHEIM, "Psycho-analysis of Primitive Cultural Types," 1932

Three years ago I was invited, as an anthropologist and a seminary professor, to give a lecture on morality and postmodernism to the faculty of another seminary. Intrigued, I accepted. This invitation led me not only to visit another institution to which I had strong connections as an academic and as a Christian but also to travel down a complex intellectual path. My initial goal was to compare conservative Christian, modernist, and postmodernist moral discourses. Rather than focus on explicit propositions or grand abstractions, I chose to search the moral discourses of each movement for distinctive metaphors, myths, and symbols. One trope which I first observed in postmodernist writings was that of "the missionary position." This trope appears, for example, in dozens of titles such as "Postmodernism and the Missionary Position" [Wilde 1988], "Pomosexualities: Challenging the Missionary Position" [in Rogers et al. 1995], and "[Un]doing the Missionary Position" [Kafka 1997]. Eventually I collected hundreds of usages of the expression both in contexts marking the postmodernist break with modernism and in contexts marking modernist breaks with Christian morality. A single symbol occurs at two different boundaries, employed by two different movements on behalf of their moral visions.

As I explored the image of "the missionary position" I discovered a history quite different from that imagined by many people, and this discovery reinforced my desire to examine its meanings and functions as a discursive symbol. This examination, in turn, led me to consider some troubling issues of openness and closure in contemporary academic discourse. In this article, I offer a guided tour through this terrain.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines "missionary position" as "a position for sexual intercourse in which a woman and a man face each other, with the woman on the bottom and the man on the top." Merriam Webster's Collegiate explains the term as arising from the idea that "missionaries insisted that this coital position is the only acceptable one." Modernist and postmodernist usages of this trope clearly draw on this imagery but employ the phrase in contexts in which coital kinesics is not directly the subject. Before analyzing this trope in moral discourse, an excursus on the origins of the expression is needed.

The Random House Unabridged Dictionary [second edition] explains that it was "so-called because it was allegedly favored by Christian missionaries working among indigenous peoples, in preference to positions in which the man approaches the woman from behind." Westheimer [1995:171] writes: "South Pacific folk didn't limit themselves to one position, and ... missionaries ... were shocked by this 'sinful' behavior. ... Mission-


Similarly, sources are unclear as to when the expression was coined. Partridge [1984] and Richter [1993] date its origin to the 19th century, but Wilson's [1972] sexual dictionary appears to be the first reference work to include it. The Oxford English Dictionary included it in 1976 but gave a date of 1969 as the first usage it was able to document. The Random House Unabridged indicates that the term first showed up ca. 1965-70. Many sources preface their account by phrases ("it is thought that," "allegedly") indicating that they are repeating an undocumented story. Other sources present it straightforwardly as historical fact but without documentation. I asked for help in documenting its origin from various Internet discussion groups. Those who responded seemed sure of their facts but could not remember their sources. On every lead they suggested [Malinowski, Michener, Mead, the Human Relations Area Files] I drew a blank.

Initially the earliest references to the expression I could find were in 1962 and 1963. Masters [1962:63] writes that this position "is sometimes referred to as the 'missionary position' by natives of primitive lands." Graves and Patai [1963:69] state: "Malinowski writes that Melanesian girls ridicule what they call 'the missionary position.'" Unlike later references, these report a native expression but do not assume that it is part of the English language, though Masters seems to believe that readers will have heard the story before. Graves and Patai pinpoint a specific source. No such reference occurs in Malinowski, but three other authorities [Gotwald and Golden 1981:339; Camphausen 1991; Westheimer 1993] refer to Malinowski as the source and a fourth [Partridge 1984] references an unnamed ethnographer. In published sources on the topic, Malinowski is the only name given. It seemed obvious that each was depending on some as yet unidentified further source which itself cited Malinowski.

Further searching turned up such a source. Alfred Kinsey, in Sexual Behavior in the Human Male [Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948], documents an American preference for face-to-face man-on-top woman-below intercourse, which he calls "the English-American position." He writes [p. 373], "It will be recalled that Malinowski [1929] records the nearly universal use of a totally different position among the Trobrianders... [and]... that caricatures of the English-American position are performed around... campfires, to the great amusement of the natives who refer to the position as the 'missionary position.'" The book referred to is Malinowski's The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia, but no such account occurs in it.

Kinsey only reports a story; it is not until the late 1960s that writers begin to use the expression for this position in intercourse. Some of them clearly cite the story in a form [with references to Malinowski] that can only have come from Kinsey [Graves and Patai 1963; Gotwald and Golden 1981:339; Camphausen 1991; Westheimer 1993]. Many had doubtless tried without success to document Kinsey's reference and, rather than cite a clearly faulty source, decided to cite no source at all. Despite extensive efforts, lexicographers and sexologists have turned up no usage of this expression prior to Kinsey.

How are we to account for Kinsey's faulty memory? Trobrianders do gather to play and sing mocking songs [Malinowski 1929:238-39], but under the full moon, not around campfires, and it is not here that we learn about sexual positions. Later we learn that Trobrianders mock face-to-face man-on-top woman-below intercourse [p. 338], but no context is given. Kinsey's memory apparently substituted mockery around a campfire for mockery under a full moon and conflated the topic being mocked—a certain position in intercourse [p. 338]—with the occasion when mockery occurs—a ribald night session in the village center [p. 378]. Furthermore, when Trobrianders mock this position it is said to have been learned from "white traders, planters, or officials" [p. 338]; there is no reference here to missionaries. Another memory in this same context seems key. Kinsey recalls medieval Catholic teaching that prescribed face-to-face man-on-top woman-below intercourse. Clearly he was struck by Trobriand mockery of the very position prescribed by medieval theologians. The distance between two elements separated by centuries and half a world is overcome through the simple addition of Christian missionaries.

We need not accuse Kinsey of inventing this out of whole cloth, however, for Malinowski's text does speak...
of missionaries and of Trobrianders’ coining an expression of disapproval for one of their romantic practices. On p. 479 Malinowski tells of seeing an engaged Trobriand couple in public, in his words, “leaning against each other and holding hands, in a manner which we would find perfectly natural in a pair of lovers soon to be married. But... I was told at once that it was a new fashion and not correct according to old custom [and]... that this was misinari si bubunela, ‘missionary fashion,’ one of those novel immoralities introduced by missionaries.” All of the elements of Kinsey’s narrative are present here. It seems clear that his memory reworked and combined various elements scattered throughout Malinowski’s book and elements from medieval Catholic history. In the process he transposed “missionary fashion,” which speaks of missionaries’ expanding the possible romantic repertoire, with its opposite, “missionary position,” an expression speaking of restraint and taboo and one more compatible with his rhetorical purposes. Kinsey apparently invented a legend while believing himself to be reporting historical fact and coined a new expression while thinking he was reporting an old one.

From there, apparently, the story was told and retold until the expression evolved into a technical term for face-to-face man-on-top woman-below sexual intercourse. Virtually the whole English-speaking world eventually learned both the expression and the accompanying explanation. By this time the connection with Kinsey or Malinowski appears to have been forgotten. Dictionaries, atlases, and encyclopedias of sexuality, anthropologists, and even subsequent publications of the Kinsey Institute seem unable to document usage of the expression prior to 1969. Nonetheless, they have no hesitation in explaining that missionaries taught that any other sexual position was sinful and that Chinese, Africans, Polynesians, Melanesians, and/or American Indians have used the expression to mock this missionary ethic. Comfort’s 1972 bestseller The Joy of Sex taught the expression to millions, and in 1976 the Oxford English Dictionary listed it, to be followed by the major English-language dictionaries. Older synonyms (“the matrimonial,” “the Mama-Papa position,” “the English-American position,” “the male superior position”) were increasingly replaced by “the missionary position.” By the 1990s Spanish, French, and German dictionaries carried corresponding expressions in those languages: German Missionarstellung, Spanish postura del misionero, and French position du missionnaire.

Parallel to its rise as a technical term was an increase in its invocation as a symbol. In 1973 the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) held a symposium on missionaries entitled “The Missionary Position in Oceania” [Heider 1973a, b]. While not recalling where he first heard the expression and accompanying narrative, Heider (personal communication, March 1997) reports having felt sure that readers would understand the reference. Increasingly one finds the expression appearing in the titles of books,2 articles,3 papers presented at scholarly meetings,4 chapter titles,5 and plays6 as well as in scholarly narrative, poetry, and song lyrics. Most references occur after the mid-1980s, and many recent ones are clearly postmodernist.

Like urban legends, the story of the missionary position was not generated and sustained by rational concern with evidence. No authority documents a single situation in which missionaries taught such an ethic and natives used such an expression. Yet our society has accepted the “truth” of the missionary position. In contrast to most urban legends, this legend has managed to certify itself through the accredited reality-defining institutions of society and to instantiate its truth as part of the English language. If we wish to understand the meaning and dynamism of this myth, it is to symbolism that we must turn.

A symbol’s meaning must be sought not in references external to discourse but by examining other symbols in the same discursive formation. “The missionary position” draws on symbolism present in modernist discourses, and each element of the narrative must be examined not in isolation but within those discourses. One critical element is the “social others” who ostensibly coined this derivative expression.

The Missionary Position as a Modernist Symbol

SOCIAL OTHERS


Social others are central to modernist moral discourses. As Europeans “discovered” new worlds, the concept of “modern” was defined with reference to social others who were “not modern” and constituted as superior. The


5. Rogers et al. [1993], Heidenny [1997], Trevellian [1997].

modern was constructed in opposition to the traditional grounding of morality in religion partially through discourses on social others. As Tylor pointed out, discourses about "primitive" [not-modern] man had utility for discrediting the view of theologians. Three emphases can be identified in these discourses.

1. The norms of other people were considered irrational. Captain Cook discovered that Polynesians refused to engage in many seemingly unexceptionable behaviors. When asked about their odd interdictions, they explained that such things were taboo. Europeans were fascinated by the concept. Within decades the word had moved into English usage, where it was understood to mean essentially "an interdiction that does not make rational sense." Europeans had morals, social others had taboos. What distinguished the two was thought to be rationality. And yet modernist philosophers insisted that Western morality owed too much to Christian morality, which was itself irrational and taboo-based. Modernist ethics required rational foundations which could claim universality and owed nothing to particularistic tradition or Christian revelation. Kant grounded ethics in a transcendental rationality detached from cultural particularities. Others, like Frazer, focused attention on the cultural particularities of other times and places, defining all others with reference to the modern and the subordinating them to it. In The Golden Bough (1927), writing of reason battling through centuries of superstition, Frazer devoted hundreds of pages to the taboos of others, and in Folk-Lore in the Old Testament (1923) he made clear that the Bible itself was grounded in taboo. Modernist ethics were articulated through a discourse of contrast with the morality of the not-modern other and distinguished from Christian morality through a discourse which equated the latter with the morality of the not-modern other.

2. Europeans were fascinated by accounts of people who were naked and not ashamed, of "guiltless Men who dance'd away their time, Fresh as their Groves, and Happy as their Clime" (John Dryden [Kinsley 1958:33]). Modernist discourses endlessly exploited the theme of social others who enjoyed freedom and pleasure without guilt precisely where European "Christian" morality imposed restraint and inculcated a sense of sin. By implication, Christian interdictions were not inherent in universal morality but an unnecessary and unhealthy imposition.

3. Whereas Christians insisted that God was foundational to morality, modernist discourses stressed that social others who did not worship God were nonetheless moral. The Chinese, for example, were moral: they honored their parents, their ancestors, their teachers. Their leaders were scholars, instructors in morality, and atheists. Clearly God was unnecessary to morality. "Cannibalism aside," Melville stressed in Typee, Tahitians were "more kindly" and "more humane than many who study essays on virtue and benevolence" (1846:258-59). Rather than needing missionaries, he argued, such people should send missionaries to America (p. 159).

Pivotal to the narrative of "the missionary position" is the presence of those who are not Christians or Europeans but are sexually free in ways which contrast with the sexual ethic articulated by Christians. Almost any social others will do, but the most common location for the narrative is on some South Pacific island. In assessing this symbolism, what is important is not the objective properties of social others in a geographical space but their properties as they appear in the discourses of modernity. Bougainville, Melville, Gauguin, Maugham, Mead, and Michener are but a few of the sources constructing Western images of South Pacific islanders. While narrative may locate the missionary position in the South Pacific, it is a South Pacific of the Western imagination. It is doubtless because light-skinned Polynesians, for racial reasons, occupy a more prominent place in the Western sexual imagination than do dark-skinned Melanesians that the narrative commonly refers to Polynesia or, more broadly, to the South Pacific instead of to Trobriand Melanesia.

THE MISSIONARY

Missionaries . . . considered other positions sinful. [Westheimer 1994:76]

A second element of the "missionary position" narrative is the missionary. The prior "knowledge" of missionaries which gives this image its plausibility and persuasiveness is a shared background shaped by modernist discourses which feature missionaries. Somerset Maugham, for example, skillfully exploited the image of the missionary in his short story "Miss Thompson" (later called "Rain"). An enormously successful Broadway play, three Hollywood movies, a Broadway musical, and an African-American film based on this short story were subsequently produced. Pivotal to its extraordinary grip on American viewers was the theme of the repressed missionary bringing sin to an exuberant, life-filled people. Maugham had the missionary say: "The most difficult part of my work [was] to instill in the natives the sense of sin. . . . We had to make sins out of what they thought were natural actions. We had to make it a sin, not only to commit adultery . . . but to expose their bodies, and to dance and not to come to church. I made it a sin for a girl to show her bosom and a sin for a man not to wear trousers" (1950:279, 281). The missionary's wife says that the natives had formerly been "crazy with dancing" (p. 272) but "no one has danced in our district for eight years" (p. 273). The missionary's life-denying ethic is discredited when he commits suicide after having sex with the prostitute he has publicly condemned.

Michener picked up similar themes in his "historical novel" Hawaii (1959). When a naked young woman surfed toward the missionaries' ship, the missionaries were aghast. In Michener's words, "to the missionaries she was a terrifying vision, the personification of all they had come to conquer. Her nakedness was a challenge, her beauty a danger, her way of life an abomination and
Sin is a third component of the narrative. At the time of the discovery of the New World, the concept of sin was at the heart of Western reflection on the human condition. Theology, sermons, the confessional, art, and literature united in instructing people to interpret themselves through a vocabulary of sin. The encounter with social others who lacked a sense of sin and guilt was electrifying. When in 1555 Villegaignon led Huguenot colonists to Brazil to civilize and evangelize the natives, Ronsard reproached him for trying to change a people so “innocently and completely untamed and nude, as naked in dress as they are stripped of malice, who know neither the names of virtue nor vice. . . . Live happy, you people without pain, without cares. Live joyously: I myself would wish to live so” (Delumeau 1990:127). Here we see themes repeatedly elaborated in modernist discourses on social others. Nudity and innocence were linked. Lacking any sense of sin, these people were thought to enjoy a happiness that escaped the guilt-ridden European. The image of people without guilt was a powerful and moving symbol to be exploited in discourses designed to remove guilt and sin.

Anthropologists repeat similar refrains. Margaret Mead (1949) stresses, for example, that in spite of a mission church the sexually free Samoans are still without a “conviction of Sin” (p. 126), “an individual consciousness of sin” (p. 164), or a “doctrine of original sin” (p. 277). Kroeber (1948:612) claims that there is “little or no sense of sin” in “Asiatic, Oceanic, native American, and African cultures”—that it is found principally in “Anglo-Saxon and Protestant culture.” Missionaries enter spaces where sin and guilt are absent and bring with them “cosmic guilt” (Mayer 1983:618). The result, according to one anthropology text, is that a “pall of Protestant gloom hangs over many a community in the Pacific and tropical South America that once throbbed with life, laughter and song. The concept of sin must rank with smallpox among our most damaging exports” (Keesing 1981:40). The sin motif is central to the narrative of the “missionary position” and to modernist discourses about missionaries and social others more broadly. In his 1975 presidential address to the American Anthropological Association, Walter Goldschmidt (1979:296) stated, “Missionaries are in many ways our opposites; they believe in original sin.” In Science and Magic in Traditional Iron Smelting in Malawi: The Materialist and the Missionary Position, van der Merwe and Avery (1986) consider and reject one missionary’s explanation of the sexual taboos involved in iron-smelting magic: that even those with “lax” morals “recognize perfectly the beauty of purity, suspect its happy influence [and] know very well that sin displeases God, attracts punishment, [and] causes many failures even in temporal affairs.”

[Missionaries] found what the “heathens” were doing between the sheets to be sinful and . . . [told] them the “Missionary” position was the only one that God endorsed. [Wells 1997]
ETHNOCENTRISM

"If it wasn't for all those British missionaries, the entire heathen world would still be procreating in the most unspeakable ways. Upside down, bent over double, end-on-end, back-to-front. Disgusting, isn't it?" "Ghostly," he said with a shudder. "No self-respecting Englishman would ever use anything but the missionary position." [Dubow 1997]

Goldschmidt is not alone in positing an antithesis between anthropologist and missionary [cf. Stipe 1980; Bonsen, Marks, and Miedema 1990; Stocking 1992:20; Van der Geest 1996]. Littlewood contrasts "the missionary position, close to the locals but with the aim of transforming them," and "the anthropologist's planned and sanctioned 'going native'" [1985:197]. Salamone writes: "The ideal culture of anthropological students codes missionaries as 'enemies'" [1979:54]. If missionaries are identified by an idea of sin, as Goldschmidt says, anthropologists historically have been identified by their emphasis on cultural relativism and respect for cultural difference. It follows that if the key anthropological virtue is respect, then the primary sin is to evidence a lack of respect by crossing boundaries with a message implying moral judgment—in a word, to be ethnocentric. And if "the anthropologist's severest term of moral abuse" is "ethnocentric" [Geertz 1973:24], then perhaps the anthropologist's clearest example of ethnocentrism is the missionary.

In calling for a symposium on the missionary position in Oceania, Karl Heider [1973a] writes, "Anthropologists' relationships with missionaries are remarkable: we live off of them . . . in the field; we tell stories about them in classes and at parties; and we ignore them in our ethnographies." David Spain [1984:205] agrees: "As anthropologists, we talk a lot about missionaries, but we seldom write about them. One cannot but wonder why this is true." A partial answer becomes clear if we examine the ways in which anthropologists invoke the missionary in their discourses. Typically the missionary is referred to as a symbol of ethnocentrism, as in the following quote from an anthropology text [Cohen and Eames 1982:376–77]:

"The premises of missionary work are directly opposite to those of anthropology. As cultural relativists, anthropologists begin with the assumption that any cultural system is as good or bad as any other. . . . Missionaries begin with the ethnocentric view that their religion is the true path to salvation. . . . Conversion . . . was the major objective of missionary work . . . [and] often involved the destruction of native beliefs and rituals. . . . Missionaries in the Pacific are known to have urinated and defecated on native shrines to demonstrate . . . that their god was superior to native deities."

Whether missionaries urinated and defecated on native shrines is undocumented; the phrase "are known to have" suggests hearsay. My queries of ethnohistorians failed to elicit knowledge of such a practice. Clearly the meaning of the account lies not in history but in symbol and allegory. The text's message is that the essence of ethnocentrism is to defecate on the sacred values of others as, in essence, missionaries do. Many anthropologists historically have been interested in the missionary primarily as a symbol and thus have been less likely to study missionaries than to refer to them in socializing students to relativistic values or warning that such values are threatened.

I should qualify these comments by noting that, while one is hard-pressed to find systematic examination by anthropologists of missionary realities prior to the late 1970s [for a notable exception see Rapoport 1954], there is now a sizable body of anthropological writings on missionaries and indigenous responses to them [e.g., Annis 1987; Barker 1991; Beidelman 1982; Boutilier, Hughes, and Tiffany 1978; Burridge 1991; Clifford 1992; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Headland and Whiteman 1996; Hefner 1993; Hvalkof and Aaby 1981; James and Johnson 1988; Kipp 1990; Pels 1999; Poewe 1994; Salamone 1983; Saunders 1988; Schneider and Lindenthal 1987; Stearman 1987; Stoll 1990; Swain and Rose 1988; Whiteman 1985]. Whereas historically anthropological discourses tended to allude to missionaries only briefly, often for symbolic ends, anthropologists have increasingly chosen to make them the object of careful, sustained research. Even here, of course, scholarly texts are underdetermined by the data, with standard symbolism sometimes being invoked to bring meaning to the data. For example, the title of Hvalkof and Aaby's [1981] "anthropological" treatment of Summer Institute of Linguistics missionaries—*Is God an American?*—invokes standard imagery of missionaries as symbols of imperialism and ethnocentrism. Yet only 4 of the 13 essays in this volume are solidly anthropological [Canfield 1983:56, Stipe 1985:118], and 3 of these provide rich ethnographic description which repeatedly fails to support the symbolic rhetoric of the other chapters. What missionaries actually are frequently diverges as markedly from the missionary of the modernist secular imagination as it does from the missionary of the devout religious imagination. But when anthropologists engage in careful anthropological study of missionaries, the results cumulatively tend toward understandings resistant to summary in standard stereotypes. Although the ASAO mobilized an examination of missionaries under the title "The Missionary Position in Oceania," the eventual publication [Boutilier, Hughes,
and Tiffany 1978) was of high quality and minimally reflective of the original symbolism. Many of the sources cited above are similarly of high quality.

The message of the missionary-position narrative is that the morality of the missionary is ethnocentric. How much more ethnocentric could one be than to insist that only one position in intercourse is permissible?

**TABOO**

Sex was brought into the realm of the taboo by the Christian church . . . Absolutely nothing outside of . . . missionary intercourse should go on at all. [Rifffenburgh 1997]

If Christian morality is summarized in the image of a missionary forbidding as sinful any sexual position in intercourse but one, the image is clearly one of morality as taboo. That is, the missionary’s morality is equated with the most irrational and objectionable element in the morality of “primitive” social others. In Michener’s *Hawaii*, for example, Hale tells Malama the queen that she must renounce her husband because he is also her brother. She is puzzled over such a moral judgment, but then comprehension dawns (pp. 237-38):

“You mean it is kapu!” she asked brightly. “It is not kapu,” Abner insisted. “It is forbidden by God’s law.” “That’s what kapu means,” Malama explained patiently. . . . “All gods have kapu. You mustn’t eat this fish, it is kapu. You mustn’t sleep with a woman who is having her period, it is kapu. You mustn’t . . .” “Malama!” Abner thundered. “Being married to your brother is not kapu! It’s not some idle superstition. It’s a law of God.” “I know. I know. Not a little kapu like certain fish, but a big kapu, like not entering the temple if you are unclean. All gods have big and little kapus. So Kelolo [my husband] is a big kapu and he must go. I understand.”

What, after all, is the ban on all positions in intercourse except one but a *kapu*, a taboo? In a taboo-based ethic, ethical interdictions do not make sense; they are not available universally to moral intuitions and recognitions. Instead they are imposed by raw assertion and authority. Lacking universal grounds, taboo-based ethics are, above all, ethnocentric. The irrational prejudices of one’s own tradition are imposed on social others. This is what the missionary-position story asserts about Christian morality. Thus Harmon (1998) suggests that Christian morality for Solomon Islanders is defined in terms of taboos on betel nut, tobacco, alcohol, pork, scaleless fish, magic, and fornication. Islanders who ignore Christian obligations are said to be “ignoring the missionary position.”

**ANTILIFE/ANTIPLEASURE**

How the missionaries became apprised of what position the natives were using I don’t know, but I suppose if it becomes apparent that everybody else in the village is having a lot more fun than you are, you make it your business to find out. [Adams 1994:216]

[Missionaries said the] “missionary” position was the only one God endorsed, and that the others were too exciting and likely to get you sent to hell, as most exciting things do. [Wells 1997]

A taboo morality is arbitrary and against—against pleasure, joy, desire, variety, love, life. It insists that “thou shalt not go near, thou shalt not touch, thou shalt not experience pleasure, thou shalt not exist, except in darkness and secrecy” [Foucault 1980:84] and guilt. The narrative of the missionary position essentializes Christian morality as drawing lines restrictively, banning variety, pleasure, and joy. Examining the marriages of Oberlin missionary graduates between 1840 and 1855, Clark (1989) found that in some cases marriage proposals were delivered to virtual strangers. Personal feelings were “suppressed” [p. 8], marriage decisions being governed by vocational commitment to missionary service and by the single question of the will of God. Clark analyzes the diary of a 17-year-old girl being courted by an ascetic, mirthless, rigid, and deeply pious missionary. She describes her feelings for another person, her less than positive feelings for the missionary, and her eventual submission to God’s will, as she saw it, that she marry him. Such decisions, devoid of love and attraction, are life-denying. Thus Clark’s title: “The Missionary Position.”

**MORALITY AND POWER: THE MISSIONARY ON TOP**

T. J. Last . . . like many missionaries wanted to found a Christian village which he could govern alone. [Beidelman 1982:55]

We’re the Moral Majority and we know what’s RIGHT/We’ll come to your bedroom to check every night/We’ll let you have sex on just one condition/it’s done with your spouse in the missionary position. [Shuster 1998]

Since a taboo morality lacks rational foundations, it must be grounded in power. For Tongans and Tahitians the ability to impose a taboo was directly dependent on the mana—the mystical power—of the imposer. Michener’s missionary imposed moral norms that made no sense to Hawaiians. He could not, as a result, trust Hawaiians to run the church (pp. 281, 356); he had to run and control everything himself. Such a morality, in turn, underpins specific power relationships. Such a morality, in turn, underpins specific power relationships. Francoeur (1991:402) explains that missionaries advocated the
missionary coital position because of "an interpretation of the story of Genesis in which man is created first and given primacy over woman in all things. Hence the supposed immorality of woman being in any position superior to or above a man." Man-on-top involves dominance. As one anthropologist explained to me, missionaries taught "the 'male above' sexual position to Hawaiian and Polynesian groups in the late 1800's, as an indicator of 'God's order' [i.e., God, Man, Woman, hierarchically in that 'position']." Camphausen (1991:127) asserts that the "missionary position" is characteristic only of "civilizations where women are treated as chattels."

This logic is persuasive not because of any evidence of a cross-cultural correlation between male dominance and the "missionary position" but because Westerners have been unconsciously shaped by metaphors in which power and status are conceptualized in spatial terms—as up or down (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:15-16). As a result, body positions in intercourse are easily seen as implying power relations. Even an expression like "the male-superior sexual position" not only describes the physical position of two bodies but privileges "up." In Western contexts, then, one does find sexual position occasionally thought of as iconic of power relations.

Feminists have often stressed sexual position as iconic of power. For example, in "Missionary Position," Judy Forrest (1987:208) explores Fay Weldon's novels, in which "downtowned" women (women in the missionary position) are able to "gain power," "end up in charge," and "always end up on top." Again, one may observe the appropriation of Lilith as a feminist icon. In postbiblical Judaism Lilith was a female demon that seduced men and killed babies. Under the influence of a 9th-century story (Schwartz 1992:107), Lilith became known in Judaism as Adam's first wife, who refused to lie under him in intercourse, insisting that she be on top, and then fled to the wilderness, where she took up her activities as succubus and child-destroying witch. Many females have appropriated Lilith as the prototypical feminist, rejecter of patriarchy. Two journals are named for this figure; summer music tours of female artists have been named after her (The Lilith Fair tour); a burgeoning literature of poetry and reflection on artists have been named after her (The Lilith Fair tour); a burgeoning literature of poetry and reflection on

In short, "the missionary position" may be thought of as a symbol synthesizing modernist objections to Christian morality. When this symbol is co-opted by postmodernists, however, it both extends and intensifies these objections and redirects them toward modernist morality.
The Missionary Position as a Postmodernist Symbol

I challenge puritanism, Western religion, our belief in nature external to ourselves and the missionary position. [Joe 1997]

In "Mark Twain's Missionary Position," O'Conner [1994] documents Twain's frequent negative comments about the moral and religious activities of missionaries and his positive comments on missionary "civilizing" activities. Twain criticizes missionary effort on behalf of Christianity but welcomes missionary activity on behalf of modernity. O'Conner explores Twain's A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, demonstrating frequent themes first treated by Twain in his writings on missionaries. Hank Morgan is a missionary of civilization, technology, and progress to the natives of England. "From the brutalities of feudalism [he] delivered them into the 'light' of the 'modern' world. Within Twain's novel, the Church ultimately represents a form of paganism that needs to be replaced by Hank Morgan's gospel of progress" (p. 14). O'Conner takes the expression "missionary position," created to stigmatize a missionary commitment to Christianity, and redeploy it to stigmatize Twain's missionary commitments to civilization and progress. In his book St. Gorbachev and Other Neo-missionary Positions John Hatch [1990] critiques modern agendas as neo-missionary positions. Jeremy Seahbrook [1992] suggests that while the West has liberated itself from "the controlling revelations of religion" (p. 12), it treats free-market ideas as grounded in "reason" (p. 12) and preaches free-market virtues. He argues that Western promises of development are "prescriptions for subordination [and] the maintenance of Western privilege" (p. 12). An ideology mandating that others embrace "free-market" ethics is essentially an "ideology of dominance" (p. 13). His title! "Still in the Missionary Position." Modernity's ethic, ostensibly grounded in reason, is but a cover for dominance.

THE FOCUS ON DOMINANCE AND POWER

Postmodernism has made dominance and power a central preoccupation. In a review of Sonia Boyce's London art exhibition, Michael Archer [1987] notes the rhetorical bias of modernism which excludes those already excluded from mainstream culture—such as Boyce, born in London of West Indian parents. He focuses on one art piece: "Missionary Position II addresses the interpenetration of gender, race, politics and religion within the act of submission" (p. 144). Boyce's painting Missionary Position I clearly elaborates similar themes [Beaumont 1987:12]. While religion is still present, the missionary-position idea has been broadened to implicate modernist patterns as well in dominance and subordination.

The body has long been treated as metaphor. Everything from a society to a church has been thought of as a body. Postmodernist writings, in particular, treat the body as text. If one body over another in sexual intercourse is a semiotic text narrating sexual power asymmetries and if the body is itself a metaphor for society, then power asymmetries between societies or social groups may naturally be symbolized through sexual iconography. U.S. advocacy of a Canada-U.S. free-trade agreement is critiqued by the Canadian Margaret Atwood as follows: "Canada as a separate but dominated country has done about as well under the U.S. as women, worldwide, have done under men; about the only position they've ever adopted toward us, country to country, has been the missionary position, and we were not on top" (quoted in Tomc 1993:74). In "On the Limitations of the Missionary Position," Lieberman [1991] explores the ways in which regional art publishing is subordinated to the New York cultural mecca and marketplace. In "Between the Missionaries' Positions and the Missionary Position: Mexican Dirty Jokes and the Public Subversion of Sexuality," Jennifer Hirsch [1990] argues that Mexican dirty-joke discourses which affirm patriarchy are really metaphors for Spanish dominance over Indians and Mestizos. The "missionary position" is symbolic of patriarchy, which in turn symbolizes dominance between social groups.

In "[Un]Doing the Missionary Position," Kafka [1997:62] suggests that white men force Asian men "into the missionary position—into feminine subject positions in work and social situations. . . . [Such men], in order to avoid internalizing female acculturation, . . . tend 'to reassert their lost patriarchal power' by dominating . . . [their] women." These women are doubly subordinated both "as racial minority and as women crossing between two patriarchal cultures, . . . Chinese and . . . American" (p. 4). "The missionary position,' patriarchy is a global system" (p. 170), Kafka argues. She says that anger at this "global asymmetry" is the "source of inspiration for . . . the contemporary Asian American women writers in this text" (p. 93).

In "Missionary Positions," Bredbeck [1997] analyzes E. M. Forster's story "The Life to Come," in which "two dominant topics" of Forster's fiction, "homoeroticism and British colonialist expansion . . . are fused" (p. 141). Pinmay, a missionary, preaches love, has sex with native chief Vithobai, and, guilt-stricken, preaches law. Vithobai is marginalized as the colonial enterprise advances, after "years of painful denial and repression caused by Pinmay's refusal to have further relations with him" (p. 140), Vithobai kills Pinmay and commits suicide, expecting they will consummate their love in "the life to come." Bredbeck argues that Forster deconstructs the Christian colonial missionary position but has his own "missionary position." It is Forster's "own deferred erotic desires," working through "projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt and aggressivity" (p. 147), which create "that most pernicious trope of colonial representation, the stereotype" (p. 146) of "unrepressed eroticism" (p. 145) or even of "the bestial sexual license of the African" (p. 147). That is, Forster's depiction of oth-
erness "in point of fact erases any possibility of other-

ness" [p. 144].

Postmodernists see hegemonic realities as discursively constructed. Brown, in "Alternatives to the Missionary Position" [1995], argues that the writers of Victorian [and modernist] travel narratives tend to adopt the "missionary position" as a discursive strategy [p. 596], hegemonically "positioning" themselves in the text above those they write about. [She explores an exception to the rule, the writings of Anna Leonowens.] Suzan Boettger, in a review of feminist ecological art entitled "In the Missionary Position," suggests that feminist discursive privileging of the feminine over the masculine is itself a "missionary position" violating feminists' own non-hierarchical precepts [1994:253]. In "Gotta Be on Top: Why the Missionary Position Fails to Excite Me," Marie Baker [1994], who describes herself as an "uppity" native woman writer [p. 299], suggests that white feminists control and set the agenda for writing and publishing about native women and their cultures and are thus in the "On Top White position" [p. 310]. Gina Dent, in "Missionary Position" [1995], argues that the feminist discursive form of "confession" is governed by disciplinary and exclusionary rules which privilege white feminism over black feminism or "womanism."

SEXUALITY AND MORALITY

There should be taboos on sex in the office, wrote Margaret Mead. . . . Without strict bans on workplace romance, . . . it would be impossible for women "to work on an equal basis with men." However, Dr. Mead didn't cleave to her own missionary position—her second and third husbands were close colleagues. [Kesterton 1991]

Drawing on her own rational and commonsense ideas, Mead asserted her own moral taboos on sexuality, but like the missionary in "Rain" she failed to live by themselves. Similarly, postmodernists accuse modernists of imposing taboos which restrict and restrain others. Fouc-ault [1980] argues that modernists obsessively pursue discourses on sexuality which claim to be liberating but in fact impose restraints. Medical, demographic, psychologi- cal, and sociological discourses force bodies and pleasures to submit to the dictates of rationality, replac- ing premodern concepts like sin with modern concepts like pathology that equally restrict. Thus, in "Missionary Positions" one psychoanalyst [Goldberg 1995] condemns the "missionary position" of another who sees homo- sexuality as pathological. In "Making the World Safe for the Missionary Position" [Adams 1990] we learn that literary images of lesbianism as pathological are motivated by the old restrictive ethic of the missionary position.

In "Representing 'African' 'Sodomy' in the Missionary Position," Hoad [1999; cf. 2000] argues that many homosexual-rights advocates operate with an "essentiali-zed homo/hetero binary," universalizing the homosexual as "transhistorical, trans-spatial subject." "Like their missionary forebears," they export their sexual "missionary-position" norms, failing to be sensitive to other ways of organizing corporeal intimacies which are not grounded in such a binary.

PROCREATIVE SEX

"Ah, yes. For uncounted millennia Elosia was the trysting place for all the species of the galaxy. Then suddenly, my dear Mr. Rider, horror! [Missionaries initiated] a formal prohibition of all forms of sexual activity save in the pursuit of mindless procreation. And as the Elosians—delightful trisexuals in their native form, as I recall—are fertile for perhaps a week in every thousand years, you can imagine the gravity of the prohibition." [Science fiction short story entitled "The Missionaries' Position," Peirce 1977:104].

If biblical fundamentalists are going to follow [the Bible] . . . they will no longer engage in any sexual act other than missionary intercourse—and then only when procreation is the goal. [Duberman 1991:347]

Despite biblical silence about sexual position, church authorities from the 6th to the 16th centuries taught that, except when illness, obesity, or pregnancy dictated otherwise, sexual intercourse should be face-to-face with the man on top [Brundage 1984; Payer 1980, 1984, 1993; Tentler 1977]. A procreative ethic combined with a particular medical model of conception [sperm needed to run with gravity] undergirded this teaching. While Protestants did not produce discourses on sexual position and Catholics eventually abandoned such discourses, this historical association makes "the missionary position" naturally symbolic of a procreative ethic. Those espousing "more deviation, less population" do so in opposition to "the missionary position" [Nichols 1997]—which, by extension, now stands for all heterosexual intercourse. For example, in a review of the 1995–96 Paris art exhibition "Feminine-Masculine: The Art of Sex," Stephen Todd writes: "In the exhibition's anteroom, Louise Bourgeois' pneumatic Twosome [1991] goes through its penetrative perpetual motions. Enormous, heavy-metal, and sleekly mechanical, as you pass on the way in it looks impressive. On the way out, it looks like it's pumping in the missionary position" [1995:67]. Todd argues that the position of this modernist machine is symbolic of the whole exhibition. Why? Because this exhibition sublimated "the anus as a site of erotic pleasure" and privileged "male and female reproductive organs as the locus of libidinous activity," thus relegating "sex to a progenitive role" [p. 67]. The title of his review: "The Missionary Position."
Natural Versus Unnatural Sex

Missionaries told ... converts other positions were unnatural. [Alice 1996]

[There are] 3 intrinsic differences between the animal kingdom and human-kind: the opposable thumb, the neo-cortex, and the missionary position. [La Roque 1993]

How can you tell your dog is kinky? When it starts having sex in the missionary position.

The medieval Catholic Church, observing that animals copulated in the ventro-dorsal position and humans in the ventro-ventral position, concluded that the ventro-dorsal position was unnatural to humans. That is, it interdicted ventro-dorsal intercourse on the basis of an appeal to “nature,” not to Scripture. When modernists rejected the revelation of Scripture, they nonetheless continued to make moral judgments under the rubric of the natural versus unnatural. Lawmakers ceased to ground their sexual interdictions in religion and instead appealed to nature. Homosexual acts were banned as “crimes against nature.” Of course, laws euphemistically banning “unnatural and lascivious acts,” “crimes against nature,” or even “sodomy” were unclear. When pressed, lawmakers often clarified them by defining which body parts were not to be brought into contact. A law might stipulate anal or oral sex as “a crime against nature,” for example, while homosexual relations may have been in the minds of lawmakers, the law, as written, provided no indication that it should not apply to heterosexual marital relations as well as to homosexual ones. While many states have repealed these laws, others have not.

In “Sex Laws and Alternative Life Styles” Myricks and Rubin (1977:357) write: “Many states have laws which prohibit every sexual act except sexual intercourse, in the missionary position, between husband and wife.” The Oxford English Dictionary quotes a newspaper: “In six States [in the U.S.] a woman may still be awarded a divorce if her husband makes love to her in any other than the missionary position.” Repeatedly it is asserted that in Arkansas (Hypercleats 1985), Florida (Stupid Laws 1997), North Carolina (Cariaga 1996), and South Carolina (Gwyn 1991), all sex other than married sex “in the missionary position” is illegal. At least one human-sexuality text (Gotwald and Golden 1981:339-40) stresses the same. What do these laws actually say? South Carolina bans “the abominable crime of buggery,” North Carolina any “crime against nature,” Florida any “unnatural and lascivious act,” and Arkansas “sodomy”—same sex only (Summersgill 1994). Such laws do not refer to positions in intercourse. Despite the rhetoric, it would appear that no U.S. law has ever banned ventro-dorsal heterosexual intercourse or stipulated which partner needed to be on top. But such laws have banned sexual activities, including oral and anal sex, on the ground that certain behaviors are “against nature” [cf. Leonard 1993], the same logic appealed to by medieval theologians writing about sexual position. Thus, the “missionary position” has been employed to symbolize laws which restrict sexual behavior said to be “against nature.” In an article reporting on Congress’s failure to pass a bill that would have “decriminalized homosexual conduct,” the title proclaims: “Congress Assumes the Missionary Position” (Krieger 1981).

The missionary position serves as a symbol of an ethic grounded in a distinction between the natural and the unnatural and is deployed by postmodernists against modernist moralizing grounded in such an ethic, as is evident in the articles by Adams (1990), Goldberg (1995), and Todd (1996) summarized above. In an explicitly postmodernist textbook, Rogers et al. (1995) set themselves the task of resisting “social psychology’s own missionary agenda” [p. 1]. “We seek ... not to define but to redefine” [p. 1]—that is, to deconstruct modernist discourses as mixing biology with ideology. Their chapter on sexuality [pp. 192—234] follows Foucault in seeing modernist discourses as normalizing certain patterns of sexual behavior and pathologizing others. Sexual “deviations” cease to be treated in a language of sin but are medicalized or psychiatrized as pathology [i.e., against nature]. Yet moralizing impulses underlie such modernist and scientistic categories, operating by stealth, and should be critiqued. Their chapter title: "Pomosexualities: Challenging the Missionary Position.”

In “Missionary Positions: AIDS, ‘Africa,’ and Race,” Watney (1989) examines “the discursive regularities of Western AIDS commentary . . . in the construction of ‘African AIDS’” [p. 45]. Watney argues that discourses about a medical problem are shot through with imagery and references of a moral sort (to promiscuity, prostitution, Sodom and Gomorrah, orgies) which replicate the moral rhetoric of missionaries. Medical discourse becomes a cover for moral discourse. Black Africans and gay men are rendered interchangeable, Africa becoming a deviant continent and Western gay men effectively Africanized [p. 50].

Beyond the Missionary Position

Dan Quinn struck her as a simple man. Steak and potatoes. The missionary position. [Hoag 1994:256]

We are a . . . couple . . . looking for sexual adventures above and beyond the missionary position. . . . Seeking women, men, mixed-sex couples or groups. [Polypersonals 1997]

In a book on “the sexual revolution,” Heidenry [1997] covers the antipornography efforts of Christian fundamentalists and liberal feminists in a chapter entitled “Missionary Positions,” indicating that missionary positions are espoused not just by fundamentalists but by other movements in the mainstream of modernity. Vogel (1982) in “Missionary Positions” argues that the Motion
Picture Association of America and the National Association of Broadcasters support the missionary position through rating systems which enforce an absence of “realistic sex.” Sex manuals and sex seminars bear the title “Beyond the Missionary Position,” a rallying cry for the advocacy of sexual diversity.

This expression is used in calling for the rejection of a variety of modern patterns. Food cooked in restaurant-chain “cook-by-the-numbers establishments” is “missionary position food” [Childress 1996, Nasser-McMillan 1996]. Art which essentializes ethnic and gender identity is “missionary position” art [Steyn 1996]. Those who pursue democracy in Cambodia or Congo are adopting “the missionary position” [Economist 1993, Mandami 1997]. Writers who begin with their own great ideas rather than with the need of the audience are performing “the missionary position in public” [Carr 1991]. Rhetoricians who impose their understandings of rhetoric on other disciplines with different discourse conventions are in the “missionary position” [Brent 1995; Segal et al. 1998a, b]. In “Beyond the Missionary Position” Wat (1998) calls for “student activism from the bottom up.” In “Beyond the Missionary Position: Teacher Desire and Radical Pedagogy” McWilliam (1997a:219–20) theorizes “the pedagogical relation as a power relation” in which, under the guise of “value-free knowledge ... Eurocentric and androcentric knowledges and cultural practices ... delegitimize the claims of those disadvantaged by their identity position in terms of race, class, culture, gender, and ecology.” And yet a feminism which “refuses to acknowledge its own will to power” (p. 224), refuses to affirm eros, and fails to “perform” its “critiques in ways that point to its own lack of innocence” (p. 221) is also in the “missionary position.” (For similar and highly elaborated uses of missionary-position imagery, see McWilliam 1997b, 2000.)

Final Analysis: The Missionary Position as a Symbol

Modernism and postmodernism are cultural movements sustained and transmitted through symbols. What gives definition and coherence to each is less its explicit propositions than its distinctive metaphors, narratives, and myths. As one movement emerges from and contests the hegemony of another, it co-opts old symbols and invents new ones not only to legitimate and sanctify new ideas and values but to desanctify and discredit prior ones. Postmodernism’s moral vision diverges from that of modernism just as modernism’s diverged from that of orthodox Christianity. Each prescribes ways of relating to social others, distinctive views of power/authority, characteristic approaches to the body, desire, and sexuality, and common justifications/foundations. While abstract univocal logic engages only one such issue at a time, the symbol’s multivocalic properties allow it to engage all of these matters at once. This paper analyzes such a symbol—a symbol first used by modernists to mark the break with Christian morality and then co-opted by postmodernists to mark the break with modernism. As originally articulated, the missionary-position symbol summarizes modernist objections to Christian morality as a morality of negation, as ethnocentric, and as lacking adequate foundations. By postmodernists this symbol is employed to argue that modernism itself is a morality of negation, that it is ethnocentric, and that it lacks adequate foundations. As a foundation for morality, rationality is as inadequate as God and special revelation.

Postmodernism can be read as an intensification of modernism—as a call for modernists to abandon altogether any morality of restriction and any effort to find rational grounds for morality and carry through more consistently the valorizing of social others. And yet there is another sense in which the postmodernist critique of modernism represents a significant rupture; postmodernists argue that, lacking rational foundations for morality, modernism’s hegemonic exclusion and suppression of other moral voices can only be grounded in power. This critique opens up the need for rethinking the original modernist silencing and exclusion of other voices, including Christian voices. And since it is through narrative that power is visibly operative, it is in the context of modernist narratives—such as narratives of the missionary position—that such reassessment should take place.

Ernest Gellner has suggested that while most ideological conflicts have been binary, currently “there are not two, but three basic contestants ... three fundamental and irreducible positions” (1992:1). “Roughly equidistant” from each other are modernism, postmodernism, and religious fundamentalism—which Gellner defines as any brand of religion which resists modernism or postmodernism while insisting that its own historical religious meanings are true. In these terms, any version of Christianity which continues to be missionary on behalf of historical orthodoxies may be defined as fundamentalist. Religious fundamentalism, of course, comes in different forms. Gellner’s particular focus was fundamentalist Islam; ours here is fundamentalist/orthodox/evangelical Christianity.

More commonly scholars tend to frame things in dyadic terms: modernism versus postmodernism. In part, this tendency reflects the social location of scholars within the academy, where only two positions are significantly represented. Until recently, the discourses of the academy were modernist—notable for claims to impartial, disinterested, and universal knowledge. Modernists employed an impersonal voice of authority and denied that their discourses reflected a particular position. At the same time, since religious voices were clearly reflective of particular subject positions, they were silenced in the academy. Only those writing from an “objective nowhere” were allowed a voice. More recently, postmodernists have stressed that scholars do not write about gender, race, religion, or colonial subalterns “from the moon,” to borrow a phrase from Geertz [Olson 1991: 262]. Every “social analyst is a positioned subject” [Ros...
aldo 1989:207] and is prepared by his or her position to observe "with a particular angle of vision" (p. 19). Particular subject positions "both enable and inhibit particular kinds of insight" (p. 19). Despite modernist rhetoric, no scholar sees from an "Archimedian point" (p. 169) giving a "God's eye view" (p. 173). Even modernist construals of reality contain metaphoric, value-laden, mythic, metanarrative dimensions reflective of modernist subject positions. Postmodernism has now won a place in the academy. University-based discourses are modernist and/or postmodernist. Conversation is binary; the third party is talked about, not talked with.

Postmodernists have taught us to attend to the silencing and exclusion of voices and to the ways power is used for such ends. Boas's effort to prevent missionary linguists from entering the "American Indian linguistics establishment" (Stocking 1992:69) exemplifies the power of academic gatekeepers to silence and exclude. Missionaries desirous of becoming anthropologists often have linguistic fluency and long-term field experience in minority communities (desirable traits for any anthropologist) but may nonetheless find that gatekeepers act deliberately to exclude them. Again, I have queried several dozen anthropologists who were devout evangelicals and/or missionaries (both Catholic and Protestant) about their experiences in the academy. With few exceptions, their narratives told of painful struggles with forms of exclusionary power. This paper, however, focuses on another form of power—the power of the symbol. Postmodernists have stressed that power is operative through discourse and that discourse should be assessed in terms not just of truth but of power. Anthropologists, of course, have long understood that, more than just transmitting meanings, symbols operate as active forces in the social process. As "agencies and foci of social mobilization" (Turner 1975:150), symbols not only "say" things but "do" things.

THE MISSION OF METAPHOR

What is truth?: A mobile army of metaphors . . . which . . . come to be thought of, after long usage . . . as fixed, binding, and canonical. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions . . . [Nietzsche, quoted in MacIntyre 1990:33]

James Fernandez suggests that "in metaphoric predication we are generally not interested in mere parallel alignment, but in adornment or disparagement. The intention is to move the 'I,' the 'he,' and the 'we' around" (1974:129). The missionary-position metaphor, part of a "mobile army of metaphors," accomplishes its strategic ends through disparagement. Disparagement can of course take many forms. When Michener describes his missionary Abner Hale as "skinny, bad complexion, eyes ruined through too much study, sanctimonious, dirty fingernails, about six years retarded in all social graces" (1959:139), repeating such disparaging descriptions again and again (pp. 127, 129, 131, 132, 139, 142, 143), it is clear that this is not a person the reader ought to like. It should be noted, however, that such descriptions are usually placed in the mouth of a family member, friend, or acquaintance. In this way Michener disguises his own subject position, conveying the illusion that as a historical novelist he is impartial and dispassionate while nonetheless accomplishing disparaging ends.

The narrative of the missionary position reflects a similar rhetorical move. It purports to report on an expression coined by social others to ridicule the missionary sexual ethic. The expression has power because of the illusion that it was coined by social others. In fact, however, it was coined by a modernist (Kinsey) and taught to the whole world through a ventriloquism which led listeners to believe it came from authentic social others—a move which was necessary for modernism to maintain its stance of dispassionate neutrality while ridiculing Christian morality.

One may, of course, argue that the "truth value" of the story depends not on whether missionaries actually taught such a sexual position and natives coined such an expression but on metaphorical truth grounded in a "parallel alignment" between the myth and what it symbolizes—that is, that the myth accurately portrays Christian morality as restrictive of pleasure. Nonetheless, we must not forget Fernandez's insight that "in metaphoric predication we are . . . not interested in mere parallel alignment, but in adornment or disparagement." That Christian morality contains restrictions is not enough to establish that the myth exemplifies parallel alignment; one must first consider where the restriction occurs both in Christian morality and in the myth. And while Christian communities through time have varied in boundaries drawn, drawing boundaries as to how bodies are positioned has not been common. The missionary-position myth was constructed by drawing on an element affirmed in one Christian communion hundreds of years earlier—an element not affirmed by any other Christian community or even by contemporary representatives of that same communion. The myth was created and deployed in the mid-to-late 20th century as a way of essentializing and discrediting Christian morality by obtaining the putative witness of social others against it—but in a context in which no contemporary Christians affirm such norms.

Johannes Fabian argues that anthropologists have a "consistent . . . tendency to place the referent[s] of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse" (1983:31). Social others are construed in terms of temporal distance and denied coevality. I suggest that the moral position of fundamentalist/orthodox/evangelical Christian others is essentialized not in terms of current exponents but in terms of what current exponents would consider an aberration in history. The rhetoric of the missionary position allows one to talk about Christians without truly accepting them as contemporaries.

Metaphoric misalignment occurs through allochronism and misdirection. Contemporary Christians do not
advocate restricting positions in intercourse to face-to-face man-on-top. Most do affirm an ethic restricting sexual relationships outside of marriage, but for modernists essentializing Christian sexual morality as tied to marriage has less rhetorical utility than essentializing it in terms of the missionary position. For one thing, it would be more likely to mobilize a defense, since it would be framed in terms that really do matter to many contemporaries. One would be forced to talk with and not just about those who affirm a Christian sexual ethic, and this would make the outcome of the discussion less easy to control. Furthermore, how one frames the issue is pivotal in rhetorical terms. If all of paradise can be portrayed as lying on the other side of prohibition, then one mobilizes great energy against the prohibition. When in the Genesis narrative God grants all the fruit in the garden to Adam and Eve, with one exception, and the serpent subsequently asks if God has not banned all the fruit in the garden, a modest restriction is portrayed as an extreme restriction, a great negative—something biblical interpreters understand as a key rhetorical move in the seduction of Eve. Similarly, essentializing Christian sexual morality in terms of the missionary position involves moving the boundary over to an extreme—essentializing Christian morality as a great negative, a great no to life.

It is true that particular Christian communities historically have stigmatized all sexual pleasure. Others, however, have celebrated the joys of marital sex. It is equally true that modernist forces in particular times and places have stigmatized sexual pleasure. Recent revisionist historiography argues that Victorians were more sex-affirming than is commonly thought and/or that Victorian antisensualism had modernist rather than Christian roots (Gay 1998; Haller and Haller 1995; Mason 1994a, b). Mason argues, for example, that 19th-century “anti-sensual attitudes tended above all to emanate from secularist and progressive quarters” (1994a:3), with British Evangelicalism a “counter culture” that was, as pertains to marital sexuality, decidedly prosensual (1994a, a). Measuring the effects of religious morality on sexual pleasure poses difficult methodological problems. But, adopting the modernist strategy pioneered by Kinsey of measuring sexual pleasure by counting reported orgasms, Laumann et al. (1994), in the most comprehensive nationwide study conducted to date in the United States, indicate that 21.5% of women with no religion, 26.5% of Catholic women, 27.4% of liberal Protestants, and fully 32.6% of evangelical/fundamentalist Protestants reported always having an orgasm with their partner (p. 117). Clearly realities here are more complex and variable than is sometimes assumed.

SEX AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE

Foucault suggests that modernism produced a “discursive explosion” (1980:17) on sexuality. For centuries the Western world spoke nonstop about sex while pretending it was censored and secret (pp. 33–35). Whether the topic was culture, kinship, morality, religion, or missionaries, sex was a pivotal theme. The missionary in “Rain” commits adultery; Abner Hale feels guilt for marital pleasure; Pinmay has sexual relations with Chief Vithobai; sexual play and missionary lust are central themes in At Play in the Fields of the Lord. Michael Palin’s movie The Missionary features a rescue mission “with happy whores, all of whom are sleeping with the missionary,” according to Ansen’s (1982:90) review entitled “The Missionary Position.” Kathleen Taylor’s (1993) novel The Missionary Position features a missionary who is the sole holdout in a corrupt but outwardly pious town to the seductions of Delphine. He eventually is sexually seduced, then murdered. Hayward (1978) and Dickinson (1992) have produced novels entitled The Missionary Position that feature missionaries and sex. The expression “missionary position” is part of a wider pattern in which modern discourses on missionaries are simultaneously discourses on sexuality. Discourses on social others and discourses concerning Christianity, modernism, and postmodernism often focus on sexuality. While modernist discourses about sexuality are supposedly rational and dispassionate, in fact they are moral in nature. Foucault (1980:7–8) writes:

Today it is sex that serves as a support for the ancient form—so familiar and important in the West—of preaching. A great sexual sermon—which has had its subtle theologians and its popular voices—has swept through our societies... it has chastised the old order, denounced hypocrisy, and praised the rights of the immediate and real; it has made people dream of a New City... the lyricism and religiosity that long accompanied the revolutionary project have, in Western industrial societies, been largely carried over to sex.

Such sexual preaching allows one to “speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation and manifold pleasures” (p. 7). As one small part of that great sexual sermon referred to by Foucault, we find the “missionary position.”

SUBJECT POSITIONS

In “Map-making in the Missionary Position,” Cornwell (1994) critiques a modernist scholar who writes about South Africa with an “impersonal voice” of “sovereign objectivity,” never acknowledging that his own discourse is implicated in the very power dynamics being authoritatively addressed—that his scientific description serves prescriptive ends. When Kinsey read of two Trobrianders, soon to be married, holding hands in public “missionary-fashion,” what he did with the story reflected a particular subject position. One could imagine someone from a different subject position accurately reporting the incident and suggesting this as a symbol of Christian morality in which marital sex should be publicly acknowledged in a socially approved relationship with hand-holding the appropriate symbol. “Missionar-
ies taught native peoples that engaged and married couples ought to hold hands in public!" moves people quite differently from "Missionaries taught native peoples that all positions in intercourse except one are sinful!" My point is not to construct an alternative myth but simply to point out that Kinsey's own narrative reworked various tropes (sin, social others, missionaries, taboo, etc.) into a myth reflective of and in the service of a particular subject position.

Kinsey's success in deploying scientific rhetoric of objectivity, disinterestedness, and neutrality was critical to the "truth" value ascribed to his writings. He wrote, as it were, "from the moon," but his writings clearly have strong modernist subject positions underpinning them [Robinson 1977:42–119]. The historian James Jones (1997) deconstructs his cultivated image of conventional family man and simple empiricist devoid of any ideological agenda. He documents Kinsey's sexual "masochism" and "homo-sexuality" (bisexuality would be more accurate) and his decree that the men of the senior staff of the Kinsey Institute "could have sex with each other, wives would be swapped, and wives, too, would be free to embrace whichever sexual partners they liked" (p. 603) and explores the relationship of all this to his early experiences of and attitudes toward Christianity in relation to sexuality. Jones writes, "Much of Kinsey's life can be read as a struggle to use science to free himself from his own religious upbringing and the sexual guilt he felt as a boy" (p. 790). Repeatedly Jones characterizes Kinsey as a man with a "mission" (pp. 333, 465, 488, 687), a "secular evangelist" (pp. 334, 335, 684) with a "gospel" (pp. 466, 615, 684, 686) to proclaim, and as displaying "missionary" (pp. 468, 614) zeal and instincts.

Like Kinsey, modernist anthropologists wrote about sexual matters with a distanced voice of dispassionate scientificity while "remaining very tight-lipped about their own sexuality" (Kulick 1996:3). Ruth Benedict's treatment of homosexuality (1934a; 1934b:100) and Margaret Mead's treatment of bisexuality (1975), for example, are solidly within the modernist tradition—writing from a distanced stance of objective rationality while remaining "tight-lipped" about the fact that their topic was deeply personal [cf. Bateson 1984:115–24; Caffrey 1989:188–205; Lapsley 1999]. With the posthumous publication of Malinowski's diary (1967) disclosing his continual struggles with sexual lust and guilt, his "pawing" of native women (pp. 256, 268), and his "hatred of missionaries" (pp. 31, 41, 46, 57), it has become increasingly difficult to maintain the modernist conviction that the personal position of the ethnographer is not a factor in the production of academic discourse.

Under the influence of postmodernism, recent anthropological treatments of sexuality are much more likely to stress that all scholars write from subject positions, that those subject positions should be explicitly noted, or even that the sexuality of ethnographers ought to receive explicit attention as a factor in the production of ethnographic texts. From this perspective, Mead, Benedict, Malinowski, and Kinsey are to be critiqued not for having personal positions but for pretending that they did not—a pretense designed to justify their own authoritative voices while also justifying the exclusion of those whose position was more evident. The postmodernist answer to the problem of possible bias is to declare one's subject position. Positioned knowledge is accountable knowledge.

Under modernism, religious scholars learned that disclosing their religious subject position was a quick way to discredit themselves. Those who could not convince themselves that their religious subject position was irrelevant to their scholarship found the modernist academy unfriendly and tended either to withdraw from academic endeavors altogether or to pursue such endeavors within a smaller, less academic enclave of schools and publishing houses devoted exclusively to their faith-informed subject positions. Some, of course, mastered the art of writing from "nowhere" and successfully participated in the larger academy. However, subject positions, whether sexual or religious, do not cease to affect the intellectual process when they are denied or unacknowledged. They simply operate in more circuitous and surreptitious ways, accompanied by camouflage or even deception.

Postmodernists call for a recognition that the social location of a scholar (in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation/identity, or religion) is salient to knowledge production and should receive explicit acknowledgment. Indeed, subject positions provide angles of vision, perspectives, and motivations and affect fieldwork relationships in ways which potentially contribute to knowledge production in areas which might be missed by scholars with other subject positions. African-Americans, women, gays, Buddhists, or evangelicals might approach social research with motivations, perspectives, and fieldwork relationships which allow them to discover truths unlikely to be discovered or pursued by, for example, white, male, heterosexual secularists. Postmodernists, then, have called for openness to the voices of social others—those whom the modernist academy has excluded.

Many religious academics realize that their own religious commitments are basic to their social location and to the perspectives from which they approach research. But with the new call for display they fear that the avowed openness to the voices of social others does not include openness to their voices—that religious subject positions are still seen as discreditable. Now judgment will be rendered not just on the merits of what is said but on the location of the speaker. The requirement that one display one's subject position in a power field where display results in exclusion or subordination is doubly problematic. Now even the survival strategy of "passing" or "staying in the closet" is no longer available.

At the same time, some express hope that the rhetoric of openness is more than rhetoric. The historian George Marsden [1994], for example, argues that the dismantling of the old Protestant establishment in higher education was laudable but went too far. It replaced one hegemonic position with another—one hostile to any expression reflective of religious belief. Marsden notes the new open-
ness to diverse subject positions, argues that such openness has inconsistently been withheld from traditional religiousists, and calls on the academy to live out its own new ethic and allow traditional religious subject positions to be present. In a follow-up book, Marsden [1997], himself an evangelical, further elaborates his hope that research from a Christian subject position will take its place alongside research from other subject positions.

The idea that a Christian subject position should be discredited because it entails personal commitments and values is a modernist norm which founders on the widespread critique that everyone writes from a subject position (Rosaldo 1989). Again and again one finds the trope of modernist scholars as missionaries (Boettger 1994; Brent 1995; Goldberg 1995; Herbert 1991:155; Hoad 1999; Rogers et al. 1995:1-14, 192-224; Segal et al. 1998; Watney 1989). A number of writers explicitly acknowledge that they are themselves “in the missionary position” (cf. Kissick 1998, Kitzelman 1998, Snow 1998, Wilde 1988, Prager 1999). While some postmodernists claim not to be missionary, most acknowledge a missionary agenda of some type. In “Postmodernism and the Missionary Position” Alan Wilde (1988) finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. To be consistently postmodernist, one should not be missionary, but if one is not in some sense missionary on behalf of postmodernism, then in what sense is one truly postmodernist? He argues that “all-inclusiveness is indistinguishable from chaos” [p. 23] and that postmodernism requires its own defined limits and categories if it is not to dissolve into chaos. As such, it requires taking a missionary position. In their postmodernist text on social psychology Rogers et al. [1995] argue that modernist social psychologists are missionary but fail to admit it. They acknowledge that they themselves are not neutral—that they have a “missionary agenda” (pp. 1, 4)—but, unlike modernists, they explicitly acknowledge the personal commitments which inform their work.

Positions affect what one is likely to see or not see. Most modernist and postmodernist scholars have been so shaped by myths and metanarratives essentializing religion and Christianity that they are incapable of uncovering the myth-making properties of their own thinking. As an evangelical Christian, son of missionary parents, educated at a Bible college and a theological seminary, with graduate degrees from the University of Chicago (M.A., social sciences) and the University of California at Berkeley (Ph.D., anthropology), I encountered these myths from a rather different subject position—one in which the myths served not to liberate or empower me but, within the academy, to essentialize, marginalize, and silence key elements of the self. I encountered such myths from a “one-down” position—a vantage point predisposing me to question and doubt. While religious people are often seen as credulous believers in contrast to scientists, who are rational doubters, in fact doubt is a function of where one stands vis-à-vis the culture’s dominant myths and certitudes. In the case of this essay, I doubted the veracity of the story of the missionary position, examined it at length, and, I believe, moved us closer to an accurate understanding of the history and symbolic functions of the expression. My subject position gave me a perspective which helped me to see certain realities that were not as likely to be seen from another position but quite capable of being considered and evaluated once they were pointed out. This essay treats evidence and appeals to standards of interpretation and reason which are public and which, if I am to count my work successful, should be persuasive to those not sharing my subject position. I submit my work to peer review by those from other subject positions, inviting critique and engagement. I disclose my subject position despite the temptation to “pass”—to conceal a discreditable position—not as an appeal to irrational subjectivity or as a demand that I be allowed to speak ex cathedra but because an essay on subject positions naturally requires such disclosure and because this provides an illustration of my point that even religious subject positions, if not excluded or silenced, may make positive contributions to scholarship.

**Positioning and Power**

If Christian subject positions are not discreditable because they alone fail to be neutral, then perhaps they are discreditable for having a unique propensity for abuse of power. Certainly Christianity has played key roles in old hegemonies, but whether it should be essentialized as dominator (as in the myth of the missionary position) is another matter. Missionaries were present in colonial settings, but their activity was often less straightforwardly colonial than modernist myths would suggest and modernism itself more aggressively colonial. In *Positioning the Missionary* Brett Christophers [1998] contrasts British secular (modernist) colonial discourses, which employed a grammar of “race,” “time,” and “space” to construct a fixed hierarchical relationship grounded in immutable and asymmetrical differences, with that of Anglican missionaries in British Columbia, who rejected this modernist grammar and the secular colonial agenda. While some colonial governments accepted interracial sexual contact, interracial marriage was seen as a threat to fixed hierarchies [p. 61]. These Anglican missionaries, in contrast, criticized concubinage out of moral concern; they encouraged European men to marry the native women with whom they were cohabiting. Their sexual morality “transcended ‘race’ and space” [p. 62]. Christophers sees the missionaries as colonialists but of a “peculiar” [p. 95] sort. They were often at odds with other white interests, were “adamant that ungodly white colonialists were responsible for Native depopulation” [p. 95], and worked to promote health, to secure means of subsistence, and to intervene with colonial governments on behalf of Native peoples [p. 95]. “Few other colonialists had Native welfare in mind, still fewer made it the kernel of their calling” [p. 95]. Missionary rhetoric stressed “transformation rather than subjugation” [p. 21] and called for a community of faith in which hierarchies of space, time, and race would disappear.
Modernist discourses essentializing Christianity as aiming for social hierarchy are motivated discourses and commonly reflect the requirements of modernist metanarrative more closely than they do actual social realities. Missionary realities vis-à-vis power are more diverse and complex than modernist myths would suggest [cf. Strayer 1976, Fields 1982, Clifford 1992, Sanneh 1989, Headland and Whiteman 1996]. Marsden (1994) documents a historical process in which Protestants lost hegemony in the academy in significant part because of their renunciation of exclusionary power. That is, it is possible to arrive at moral disapproval of inappropriate power (including historical uses of power by Christian communities) from a distinctively Christian subject position.

This is not to say that fear of an exercise of power by religious people is groundless. Any exercise of power by one group which impinges on other groups will and should raise legitimate concerns by members of those other groups. Indeed, according to Marsden, in the latter half of the 20th century it was the hegemony of “established nonbelief” which, within the academy, exercised coercive power. Coercive power incites resistant or reactionary power. Any exclusion grounded simply in power tends to encourage the excluded to strategize in terms of power—particularly if they lose faith in the rationale of the caste system which excludes them. Those employing a rhetoric that supports pluralist structures while excluding and silencing certain social groups should not be surprised if those groups fail to display strong commitment to pluralist structures. A society that muzzles academically sophisticated religious voices will instead hear religious voices that are less rational, less interested in constructive reasoned interaction, less supportive of structures underpinning procedural pluralist participation, and more grounded in and reflective of a quest for power. Silence in the academic arena is bought at the price of shouting in the political arena. Theologically conservative Christians are feared in politics in part because they are squelched elsewhere.

MYTH IN THE SERVICE OF EXCLUSION

While postmodernists stress inclusion, they have generally not directed their attention toward religious inclusion. In his study of American academia, Hollinger (1996:30) notes that “a persistent deficiency in the multicultural debate is the relative silence of almost all major participants concerning the place of religious affiliation.” In his book The Culture of Disbelief, the Yale law professor Stephen Carter writes that “for all the calls for diversity in the hiring of university faculty, one rarely hears such arguments in favor of the devoutly religious—a group, according to survey data, that is grossly underrepresented on campus” (1994:57). Even when someone like Jürgen Habermas calls for inclusion of all parties in an “ideal speech” seminar, he refuses to admit “religious fundamentalists” (1994:133)—in Stanley Fish’s (1998:80) paraphrase, “I hear you knocking, but you can’t come in!”

Peremptory exclusion and silencing of this sort is grounded in power. Silencing, of course, requires justification. Dominant groups typically generate narratives which contribute to the subordination and exclusion of other groups by essentially them as meriting exclusion. In such narratives the symbol becomes more real than the real, image equals essence. The missionary or traditional Christian of the modernist and postmodernist imagination depends very little on what missionaries or traditional Christians are. Mythic narratives displace and exclude the real. The displacement occurs in narrative, but it enables and is enabled by the exclusion or at least silencing of such persons within the academy. Academics ban such people from their midst and then tell stories about them designed to justify the exclusion. The stories assume a presence which stands in for those absent. Conversation about such people is carried on in their absence or in a voice which assumes their absence.

Modernist and postmodernist metanarratives do not simply ignore Christian narratives and tropes. Rather, they incorporate such tropes in ways which dismantle, subvert, and desanctify Christian metanarratives and justify uses of power that silence and exclude Christian voices. One may critique such narratives not only for being mythic or for justifying exclusion and silencing but for doing so in bad faith. The myth of the missionary position essentializes [and scorns] Christian morality as taboo morality and uses this very scorn of taboo morality as justification for imposing a taboo on speech from an explicitly religious subject position in academic discursive spaces. Violating this taboo is a “sin” meriting excommunication from the community of faith. This new taboo is grounded in myth and metaphor every bit as much as were the taboos of ancient Tahiti. The myth of the missionary position takes a group which, insofar as the academy is concerned, is marginalized, silenced, and dominated and essentializes it as dominator in order to justify its subordination and exclusion. That is, the dominator constructs a myth pretending great indignation over the idea of domination as a mechanism for domination and exclusion. Modernists and postmodernists project their own attributes onto Christians and justify their exclusion in terms of the dangers associated with these attributes. They employ power against religiousists and then point to any resistant power moves which their own actions have provoked as evidence that religiousists have a dangerous problem with power. Modernists claim “male” virtues of rationality and objectivity for themselves while attributing “female” traits of subjectivity and irrationality to religious believers—those on top, those in privileged positions of power within the academy. Postmodernists, of course, formally renounce any one-up claims to such “male” virtues. However, against their own stated values, many nonetheless expect religious believers in the academy to remain in the silent one-down position. Or they repeat, with Stanley Fish, “I hear you knocking, but you can’t come in!”
Nevertheless, I am not without some faith that there is openness in the academy. In fact, I am convinced that the time is ripe for this discussion and that there is no better disciplinary community to engage these matters than the community of anthropologists—we who spend our lives theorizing about relations with diverse social others.

Comments

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The influence of a significant Christian minority within the mainly non-religious profession of anthropology is recognized in Britain, where some major social anthropologists have been Catholic. But Evans-Pritchard, Turner, Lienhardt, Pocock, and Douglas have been far from evangelical in their styles of Christianity, and British anthropology has not extended to evangelical Christianity the degree of generous open-mindedness that it has shown towards countless other belief systems. Recently, however, mindful of the entanglement of their own roots in the colonial era, some anthropologists have begun to consider what they have in common with Christian missionaries as well as what divides them, with the protection of indigenous human rights as one rallying point.

I would like to develop Priest’s point that post-Enlightenment philosophers tried to ground ethics in a secular rationality. Many of my generation (I am nearly 60) were brought up in a religious tradition but opted in adulthood for some variety of liberal humanism, whether looking to the arts and literature as religious surrogates or pinning our hopes on science. Attempts have been made to ground ethical principles in anthropological findings, but they run up against two problems. First, how firm can this grounding be, seeing that modern biological anthropology presents the features distinguishing human beings from the other primates as differences in degree rather than kind—a consequence of Darwinism which is still painful to consider. Second, even if a scientifically grounded ethic were to be agreed upon in the universities, its acceptance by the wider public would presuppose nothing short of the skills of epoch-making prophecy, some kind of revival of Saint-Simonianism or Comte’s religion universelle, which currently seems unlikely.

While we are waiting for a good Scientology to be founded, I would contend that non-religious Western anthropologists are more dependent than they care to admit on the Judeo-Christian ethical heritage: particularly, on the ideal of a moral equality of all human souls and the specific rights of “marginal cases” such as severely brain-damaged children. Christians maintain these values explicitly, if sometimes naively. But if new assaults on human dignity are mounted this century—and probably the de facto neglect of elderly patients in many of our public hospitals is the thin end of a wedge—it is hard to imagine a persuasive defense’s being mounted in the idioms of the human sciences alone. Personally [for Priest’s article seems to invite a personal response] I call myself an ethical Christian without commitment to the religion’s historical claims and would happily settle for the label “Judeo-Christian,” but this is sidestepping rather than resolving the problem.

By contrast with their prominence in addressing issues of ethics and human rights, most of the world religions have been laggard in supporting the conservation movement, in which scientists have taken a significant lead. Yet they have a huge potential role to play in using their repertoire of ideas and imagery to alert the billions of people under their influence to conservation issues.

Both Judaism and Christianity have developed liberal interpretations which are more or less compatible with the anthropological spirit of enquiry. The horrors to this day inflicted in the name of religions may be adduced as grounds for opposing them root and branch, but atheist states à la Stalin and Pol Pot and the Nazi neo-pagan state were probably even more damaging, whereas the world’s current ideological orthodoxy—deregulated capitalism—meets no more coordinated and articulate opposition than from religious movements. Moreover, there seems to be a prima facie historical correlation between religion and the private charitable activity which—to the displeasure of old-style socialists and Marxists—has given rise to the now extremely influential NGO sector; and how will this develop in time, as its debt to its founders attenuates?

When anthropologists study exotic belief systems they are adept at pointing out the elusiveness of concepts such as belief and the prevalence of performative utterances and ritual in religious practices. I suggest that anthropologists’ distaste for evangelical Christianity stems less from rejection of its truth value (since this bothers them less in other contexts) than from the embarrassment which a sophisticated cosmopolite might feel if seen in the company of a sibling similar in many ways but blunt and tactless. However, anthropologists are good at making up for their blind spots when these are pointed out to them (e.g., tourism and mass media). One sign is the increasing number of serious ethnographies of Christian groups and missionary activities. But comparisons between Christian and non-Christian forms of proselytizing activity are not commonly encountered: comparisons with Islam and with present-day Buddhism could be especially fruitful.

Finally, that Priest’s valuable article will lead to a moratorium on all metaphorical uses of the term “missionary position” outside the sphere of sexology is a consumption devoutly to be wished.
This is a brilliant and timely essay, informative and well argued. (One might add exhaustive if that were ever so.) Regarding the origins of the phrase in print Priest seems to me authoritative, but folklore, I think, takes it back much further. Unless I wholly misremember, right after World War II we ex-servicemen-become-undergraduates were wont to forget in pubs, where old India hands would discuss the Kama Sutra, Hindu temple carvings, and Rajput paintings, contrasting these with, say, Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and other works as well as with what missionaries were supposed to have been teaching. And it was then, I think, that I first encountered the phrase, which must have been part of Indian Army lore for generations. But there! Let that add to the mythology!

Novelists [except perhaps for Paul Scott in his series *The Jewel in the Crown*] nearly always pick on “the missionary” as though they had visited an old store where the only missionaries in stock were “dirty old man,” “wimp,” or “frustrated spinster”—all under “pathetic characters.” No doubt there are such among missionaries, as there would be in any extensive community. But my own researches and a fairly extensive acquaintance with real missionaries show them to be of much sterner and more subtle stuff than a novelist can handle in a bit part. But then, with a slight twist of the neck writers such as Hitchens might well write a hagiography of, say, Hitler, who dealt pretty decisively with a particular population problem and also tried to ensure that no undesirable babies should be born.

Priest’s analysis of the dialectic between modernist and postmodernist is well taken. However, it could be argued that this particular dialectic belongs within a wider historical process. In contrast to other world religions, Christianity tends to repeat the circumstances of its birth and entry into a civilized ambience well supplied with a plethora of other gods and rituals by continually breeding a series of ongoing dialectics at several levels but always moving towards secularism [at the level of the individual, where religious enthusiasts frequently abjure their faith, as well as collectively: the break with Judaism or fulfilment/innovation, accommodations or not with extant rites, orthodoxy dealing with heresies, the normative or popular religion/religious orders, tradition/Protestantism, Enlightenment/modernism/postmodernism and, some might add, post-Christianity. Also, within these dialectics, the notion of hierarchy cannot be avoided. Indeed, there is no enthusiasm that does not assume the missionary zeal and position. While in monastic life the claim to be more humble/compassionate/moral was a capital sin [of pride], today there is no hesitation in claiming the moral high ground. In Canada the New Democratic Party claims to be the party of compassion, and in the United States Republicans claim to be compassionate conservatives.

Priest ends his essay with the statement that the time is ripe for more openness in academe and that anthropologists will surely lead the way. May the dream come true!

In addition to the breeding of oppositional ideologies, anthropologists have to deal not only with competing theoretical perspectives (each assuming its own dogmatic missionary position), a present if passing phase of political correctness, and the much more durable procedures for recruitment, granting tenure, and promotion in vogue in many universities but also with the legacy of socio-intellectual arrogance and bigotry bequeathed to the subject by such as Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. I once knew an anthropologist, now deceased, who had spent about ten years as a Jesuit priest and missionary. Resigning his priesthood and leaving his order, he spent some years qualifying as an anthropologist—M.A., Ph.D., and all. But could he obtain a faculty posting? He was told again and again that, qualified as he was, the faculty would not stand for a colleague who had been a Jesuit missionary. Can we imagine that happening in history or economics or even sociology? I doubt it—and certainly not in biological or physical sciences. Perhaps we really ought to rethink where we come from and who and what we are and do as anthropologists. That is why this essay is timely.
is slippery—sometimes academic anthropology, sometimes the secular university at large, sometimes rather loosely invoked formations, "modernism" and "postmodernism." I often wished the analysis more attuned to the diverse work accomplished by the symbol in particular contexts of use and abuse. What sorts of modernists have anthropologists been, and what is their peculiarly entangled relation with missionaries? Are so-called postmodernists—who deploy "the missionary position" to deflate any and all prescriptive rules, sometimes including their own—really of a piece with scientists who use it to reject religious agendas in the name of objectivity, primitivists who just want native peoples to be left alone, or political radicals who want victims to get out from under? Is hostility to Christian moralism sufficient to unite them? Perhaps the image works so widely because it articulates basic issues of authority, morality, positionality, gender, sex, and power.

While rightly insisting that Christian practice has been more complex than the "missionary-position" stereotype allows, Priest could have grappled more with colonial and neocolonial contexts for evangelization. Christian morality [distinct from moralizing] has indeed supported liberation theologies and radical reformers. It was not always as ignorant or heavy-handed as the "missionary-position" stereotype suggests. But often enough it was [and is]. Moreover, when backed by overwhelming economic, military, and cultural power even the most sensitive evangelism can seem not very different in its effects from cruder forms of oppression. By focusing his essay so exhaustively on the "missionary position" image, Priest sometimes gives the impression that criticism of aggressive, intolerant evangelism is a colonial-period phenomenon, an outmoded stereotype: no missionary today would do anything like what Kinsey described/satirized. But what if, instead of missionary positions, we focused on insisted radio messages or intrusive airplanes? There are probably more well-funded Christians preaching today in remote, powerless places than in Kinsey's time. And the articulation of their message with global American power has obvious neocolonial importance. Perhaps there is a rational kernel in the "missionary-position" stereotype which helps account for its continued use.

Priest's appeal for more inclusiveness in anthropology raises questions about the social process I have called "disciplining" [Clifford 1998:chap. 3]. How does an institutionalized intellectual community recognize its own, negotiate its borders? Priest urges that "academically sophisticated religious voices" need to be heard. What are the marks of this sophistication? If scholars such as Priest are to draw explicitly on their "religious subject position," what protocols guarantee their professionalism? Empirical research? Scholarly citations? An analytic tone? A graduate school pedigree? Note the present article's carefully explicit anthropological moves [the elaborate, at times belabored, symbolic analysis] and its final invocation of anthropological community values [a devotion to thinking about diverse social others]. Moreover, here the Christian scholar is heard [accepted for publication in a prestigious journal] speaking from an excluded "subject position," a familiar place of enunciation recently carved out by feminists, multiculturalists, and indigenists. Beyond invoking the negative experience of exclusion, Priest does not [yet] offer an academic defense of religious content, an explicit Christian analysis rather than a discussion of the Christian academic predicament. It would be interesting to know how Priest thinks about the stronger claim, particularly in relation [and alliance!] with recent attempts by indigenous scholars to make room in the academy for non-Western epistemologies.

Priest is surely right that the difficulties facing openly Christian scholars are inseparable from the long, agonistic, and mutually implicated relationship of anthropologists and missionaries. But, as he notes in passing, the disciplinary hostility to and ignorance of the full range of missionary positions has changed in recent decades. The more complex scholarship that Priest cites, much of it by anthropologists, goes some way toward questioning a sharp distinction of professional roles. Anthropologists have repelled, depended on, admired, and deplored their neighboring "fieldworkers." On the spectrum of missionary positions, those nearest anthropology in attitude and practice have often been uncomfortably close, mocking disciplinary pretensions to depth of knowledge and ethical commitment. No wonder a line has been insistently drawn and redrawn, sometimes stereotypically. Yet there has always been complicity, contamination. The fact that much of the recent scholarship on missionaries that Priest applauds has been produced from within the professional community he critiques would suggest a need to complicate the diagnosis, to grapple with countercurrents of modernist/postmodernist secularism. This would advance a self-critical, historically positioned dialogue.

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Priest writes of multiple myths of missionary positions—in the bestsellers of Michener and the novels of Maugham, on the Internet and in song lyrics, in dictionaries and in encyclopaedias of sexuality, in Kinsey's sexology and in symposia on Pacific anthropology—but concludes his article with a speculative statement about a singular "myth of the missionary position," one that "takes a group [Christians] which, insofar as the academy [embodying modernist and postmodernist discourses] is concerned, is marginalized, silenced, and dominated and essentializes it [Christianity] as dominant in order to justify its subordination and exclusion." He invites a richly developed and nuanced anthropology of missions, one focused specifically on the Christian missionary as social actor, and he laments the anti-Christian bias of the modernist and postmodernist discourses he characterizes. At issue for Priest, himself avowedly both an-
thorpologist and seminarian, are the meanings and consequences of the use of "missionary" as a modifier for a sexual position. His authority derives from what he would call his "subject position" as Christian more than from ethnographic or sociolinguistic research on his topic or from the historical and anthropological literatures on missions, sexuality, and imperial politics (see, e.g., Etherington 1999, Manderson and Jolly 1996, Stoler 1991). His concern is not in reading the missionary position as metaphor for colonial or even sexual domination but rather in reading it as a device for distorting what he characterizes as positive Christian attitudes toward pleasurable marital sex. His approach to the symbol is not so much discursive as literal.

Priest begins by arguing that attribution of the phrase "the missionary position" to the Trobriand Islanders is myth, by which he means false or imagined, because Alfred Kinsey in his work on human sexual behavior (in the male) mistakenly wrote that Malinowski had recorded the phrase in *The Sexual Life of Savages*. As Priest's reading of Malinowski reveals, Kinsey confused one phrase and one setting with another. Priest is curious to know why. He traces the first use of the expression to 1969, and he focuses on three elements of modernist discourse—a fascination with social others, sin, and negative stereotypes of missionary attitudes toward sex—to account for its origin and subsequent popular use. Not discussed is the sociopolitical context of the late 1960s, a surprising omission given the pivotal significance of 1969 in U.S. domestic politics and in the development of feminist and lesbian/gay sexual politics in the United States. Some ethnographic data, in addition to the use of textual sources, might have been revealing. For my generation of post-World War II baby boomers, the phrase "missionary position" evoked images of neither Christian nor sexually liberated South Pacific islanders; instead it stood for the conventional morality of our parents' generation, for the presumed normalcy of heterosexuality (e.g., to thumb one's nose at someone, to give someone a glad hand or a thumbs-up). The "missionary position" and its hitherto unrecognized role in the history of anthropological thought. Here is clearly a well-trained anthropologist-scholar!

Priest has produced a cogent and provocative essay on the intellectual significance of the construct "missionary position" and its hitherto unrecognized role in the history of anthropological thought. Here is clearly a well-trained anthropologist-scholar!

There does seem to be some confusion about how to define "the missionary position." Priest begins by calling it a "technical expression" but then proceeds to refer to it as a "myth," "tropes," "image," "symbol," and "legend." A folklorist would probably label it as a "folk metaphor" functioning as a *blason populaire* or stereotype, in this instance a stereotype of the Christian missionary and his or her attitudes toward morality and sexuality. Many folk metaphors are based on body postures or gestures (e.g., to thumb one's nose at someone, to give someone a glad hand or a thumbs-up). The "missionary position" is thus a folk metaphor referring to a specific body posture. It is certainly not a myth, which is a fulminated. Citing Jean Comaroff, he notes that the mission communicated "a language for contesting the new modes of domination it had itself helped to create" (1999: 309). Similarly, Margaret Jolly, in her analysis of the interplay between eroticism, exoticism, and the politics of empire in the Pacific, links the effects of the U.S. military presence to those of Christianity; she writes that they were "both colonizing and decolonizing" (1996: 121). These kinds of analyses provide the more complicated reading of Christianity that Priest invites, and they qualify a reading of Christianity as unidirectional and essentialized dominator.

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Priest has produced a cogent and provocative essay on the intellectual significance of the construct "missionary position" and its hitherto unrecognized role in the history of anthropological thought. Here is clearly a well-trained anthropologist-scholar!

There does seem to be some confusion about how to define "the missionary position." Priest begins by calling it a "technical expression" but then proceeds to refer to it as a "myth," "tropes," "image," "symbol," and "legend." A folklorist would probably label it as a "folk metaphor" functioning as a *blason populaire* or stereotype, in this instance a stereotype of the Christian missionary and his or her attitudes toward morality and sexuality. Many folk metaphors are based on body postures or gestures (e.g., to thumb one's nose at someone, to give someone a glad hand or a thumbs-up). The "missionary position" is thus a folk metaphor referring to a specific body posture. It is certainly not a myth, which is a full-fledged sacred narrative explaining how the world and human-kind came to be in their present form. Rather it is a *blason populaire* or derisive slur of the same order as "Bronx cheer," "French leave," "Irish pennant," "Philadelphia lawyer," and "Russian roulette" (Cray 1962).

The traditionality of "the missionary position" is well documented by Priest—especially praiseworthy is his demonstrating the false attribution of the item to Bronislaw Malinowski. It is a common occurrence in folklore for informants to insist upon "origins," but in the ma-
majority of instances the purported origins are little more than folk etymologies. Freud, for example, is typically credited with saying, “Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar,” but there is no evidence that he ever uttered these words. What is sad and unfair is that this anti-Freudian, anti-symbolic platitude is put into Freud’s own cigar-smoking mouth by those hostile to psychoanalytic interpretations. [For other pseudo-attributes, see Boller and George 1989.]

There is no doubt that missionary-anthropologists have made important contributions to our pool of ethnographic knowledge. Bruno Gutmann (1876–1966) would be one example (Winter 1979). Missionaries very often have a far better knowledge of the culture and language of the people among whom they may have spent a lifetime than do many academic anthropologists, whose periods of time in the field are necessarily much shorter. Verrier Elwin, one of the finest ethnographers ever to write about India, illustrates this, although he eventually left the church and abandoned his initial celibate missionary status to become anti-Christian and an advocate of free love and indigenous rights (Guha 1999). Nevertheless, it is likely that Priest’s eloquent plea for more tolerance of missionary-anthropologists is doomed to fall on deaf ears. There are two reasons for this. The first is the announced underlying agenda of missionaries. One of the most articulate and respected spokespersons of this position [not cited by Priest] is Eugene A. Nida, author of Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions. Here is one of his statements (1954: 23):

No one must imagine, however, that cultural anthropology is the answer to the problems of Christian missions, but it can aid very materially in the process by which the missionary endeavors to communicate to others the significance of the new way of life made possible through the vicarious death of the Son of God. . . . The task of Christian missions is essentially one of communication, making known in human language the nature of that life which comes from God.

Other anthropologically informed primers make similar declarations: “The mission of the church of Jesus Christ is to introduce Christ into the lives of people everywhere: ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation’ [Mark 16:15]. The missionary becomes an agent of change whether he likes it or not” [Mayers 1987:xii]. Priest criticizes anthropologists who accuse missionaries of ethnocentrism, but it seems to me that missionaries have made their own bed, judging from the unequivocal credo accepted by Nida and others.

Priest fails to appreciate that religion involves a projective system [Freud 1949] and that Christianity is very much a Western projection with overt Oedipal elements. The Electral appeal to females has a virgin impregnated by a heavenly father figure, while the Oedipal appeal to males has a son born of a virgin mother (meaning that his father never had sexual intercourse with his mother) with, in some sects, the doctrine of consubstantiation insisting that Jesus and God are one, making the son the same as his father—in effect, making him his own begotten [Dundes 1980]. In that context, Christian missionaries could be said to be engaged in an unending, unrelenting effort to foist their hegemonic projection onto the non-Western pagan “Other.”

The second reason Priest’s efforts will probably be in vain is the continued existence of Western folklore about missionaries. Those who take pleasure in recounting jokes, for example, are not likely to be swayed by Priest’s argument, even assuming they ever read it. Here is one chestnut: A famous French sexologist is giving a public lecture on coital positions. He announces that there are 70 known positions and proceeds to give details of all of them. At the end of his lecture, a voice from the back of the room asks, “What about the missionary position where the man lies on top of the woman?” “Oo la la!” says the Frenchman. “Ziss I never heard! That makes 71!” [For another version, see Legman 1968:545–46.] This joke is also a comment on the stereotype of the alleged French proclivity for exotic love-making, the lecturer being depicted as being unaware of the “normal” coital position. There are also jokes dealing specifically with missionaries and their repression of sexuality. A missionary is attempting to teach English to a native chief. Walking along, they see a man with an axe cutting down a tree. The missionary explains, “He is chopping down that tree.” Then they see a man drinking water from a spring. Says the missionary, “He is getting a drink of water.” Then they come upon a couple in a forest glade in the act of intercourse. “What’s that?” asks the chief. The missionary, somewhat embarrassed, not wanting to use the appropriate descriptive terms, resorts to “He is riding a bicycle.” At that point, the chief whips out a gun and shoots the man in the glade dead with one shot. The missionary is horrified. “I have tried to teach you the Christian way of life where there is no violence, no killing. Why did you shoot that poor man?” The chief explains, “My bicycle!”

So long as such jokes continue to circulate, the stereotype of the sexually repressed missionary in Western thought is likely to persist. Finally, it is surely somewhat ironic that an anthropologist named Priest, an admitted evangelical Christian son of missionary parents, should write about the “missionary position,” thus putting himself in the position of a missionary trying to convert other anthropologists to his way of thinking.

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Priest is a fine intellectual sleuth. He has an ear for exaggeration, a nose for the non sequitur, an eye for the moralism that hides beneath the costume of the apparently simple truth. His investigative report is a work of discovery. It should teach us to watch both our stere-
types and our tongues. If I find myself compelled to take issue with a few of its editorial flourishes, this is in no small part because it succeeds in casting the contemporary aporias of intellectual tolerance into such provocative relief.

In “the missionary position,” Priest discerns a key symbol of the stigmatization of the Christian subject within the academy, modernist and postmodernist alike. He is, however, less quick to discern that his deployment of the latter four categories is also symbolic and that it is guilty of many of the same distortions and elisions that he identifies in the deployment of the first. Many pietistic Christians could balk at his operative reduction within the academy, modernist and postmodernist alike.

Temporary aporias of intellectual tolerance into such proble with a few of its editorial flourishes, this is in no types and our tongues. If I find myself compelled to take

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確かに slips twice at this juncture in his argument: once in his conflation of discursive subjectivity with its living, breathing counterpart and again in his conflation of bibli-

holy activism with devotion. His claim that “the devoutly religious” are “grossly underrepresented on cam-

pus” is, moreover, Carter’s own. In Carter’s Culture of Disbelief, the claim has a pointed rhetorical effect but rather feeble evidential support. It rests upon a single and by no means comprehensive survey of the religious beliefs of members of the faculties of various social and natural sciences, who surely constitute a minority on campus and are far from sovereign within the academy itself. As scientists they are perhaps [symbolic] standard-bearers of academic propriety—of those discursive norms that mark the dividing line between academic reasonableness and either creationist or Castañeda extrav-

gance—but do those putatively modernist norms include or entail a moral relativism whose postmodernist de-

volution comes to nothing more than moral irrationalism?

Precisely because they are so “symbolic,” so much terms of grand pronouncements and grand polemics, “modernism” and “postmodernism” continue to defy precise definition. Priest, for his part, is in broad accord with Gellner’s definitional precedent, behind which the stolid Oxonian polemics against Wittgenstein’s alleged extravagance always lurks. Quite apart from this, his good car remains carefully tuned; some of the self-ap-

pointed postmodernists whose moral reflections he cites do indeed sound just plain anti-Christian and some of the others rather arbitrary, if not positively incoherent. Even so, a slightly more charitable ear might detect in much of what they have to say about sex especially a simple hedonism—hardly beyond criticizing but still ra-

tionalist and, as subject positions go, as venerable as the early Socrates. It might not even be excessively char-

itable to detect at least an occasional hint of the more complex hedonism of an Epicurus or the hedonistic lib-

tarianism of a John Stuart Mill. Priest is right to un-

derscore that the most adamantly egalitarian and “in-

clusive” of the authors he cites have trouble articulating a criterion that would justify the exclusions they actually exercise. He is to my mind far less charitable than he

ought to be in summarizing as “irrationalist” what is often an earnest [if sometimes immature] attempt to re-

spond to a problem with which self-appointed modernists and self-appointed fundamentalists are also strugg-

ling: how to think, write, and live responsibly in a world in which the plurality of subjectivities and moralities is an irrevocable fact.

As Priest indeed recognizes, the problem is not whether our inclusiveness, our tolerance, should have limits; it could be nothing more than chaos without them. The problem is instead one of their most respon-
sible tempering. Priest touches upon all the prevailing alchemies: blithe bigotry, substantive absolutism, En-

lightened formalism, pragmatic communitarianism, sit-

tuationist emancipationism. All have their infelicities, their palpable inadequacies. Then there is Priest himself, setting an example for us that, his personal confession notwithstanding, strikes me as having nothing “funda-

mentalist” about it at all but instead as in elegant and eloquent conformity with the guidelines of social-sci-

entific objectivity that Weber articulated almost a cen-

tury ago. It has its impetus in patently [if not exclusively] personal commitments. It makes its appeal, however, to commitments—some substantive, others formal—that may fail of universality but press toward being as im-

personal, as public, as possible. It is an exercise not sim-

ply of method but of an intellectual ethic. It might seem old-fashioned, but I have to agree with what I take to be Priest’s own judgment—it is still the most responsible ethic we have.

Priest offers a salutary reminder that any joke will be unfunny to someone sometime and may even be hurtful. He provides a persuasive rhetorical analysis of how the phrase “the missionary position” is deployed in order “to ridicule Christian morality.” Making an appeal to notions of inclusion and tolerance that he finds in an entity of uncertain definition that he terms postmod-

eranism, he implies that the analytic, historical, and sa-

tirical work performed by the phrase “the missionary position” is derogatory and implicitly academically il-

legitimate. However, given the heterogeneity of the refer-

ces of the phrase, something which Priest clearly estab-

lishes in his tracking of its emergence in diverse disciplines, genres, and publics, it is possible to argue that some missionary positions are more useful than others.

I use the phrase as a playful, if perhaps ungenerous, shorthand for a range of discourses which attempted to regulate the corporeal intimacies of indigenous peo-

tles—many of which intimacies looked sexual to Eu-

ropean observers, missionaries notable among them, but may have had cosmological, religious, or political sig-

nificance to the practitioners. In the context of Buganda
in the 1880s, the analytic category “sex” itself, as applied to an unspecified range of activities between the kabaka (king) and his pages, may have been a missionary (im)position. While the missionary archive does not tell us whether “penis in vagina, man on top of woman” was explicitly taught as the only legitimate method of achieving sexual gratification, it does reveal that many corporeal intimacies, many other positions of potential pleasure and/or power (particularly those between members of the same gender) and bodily exchanges that looked sexual to missionaries, were not to be sanctioned. These missionary positions, while not entirely reducible to the now-commonsense referent of the term, on what bodies were good and bad things for natives to do with their bodies often had unforeseen consequences. In the case of Buganda, it might not be going too far at all to assert that the consequences of the missionary recodings of same-sex corporeal intimacies as sodomy—the missionary position in this instance—involved the burning alive of more than 30 young men and a civil war. While the colonial regulation/imposition of sexuality was not left to missionaries alone, they were often at the leading edge of such initiatives, as even the most cursory glance at the Intelligencer, the newsletter of the Christian Missionary Society, will reveal. Missionaries were concerned with telling natives what to do with their bodies on a range of issues from personal hygiene to polygamy to initiation rites to practices that looked to them like sodomy. In my playful usage, the missionary in the missionary position functions as a metonym for European colonialism and as its straw man and, contra Priest, not simply as a metaphor for beating up on missionaries. Flesh-and-blood missionaries in East Africa in the 1880s had positions on what constituted normative sex. Some of them were funny, some disastrous.

While Priest does a thorough job of documenting many instances of the use of the phrase and bemoans the fact that they tell us nothing of what missionaries actually taught about sex, he too tells us nothing of this except to imply that they may have permitted heterosexual intercourse a tergo in monogamous marriage. While I suspect that his tracing of the genealogy of more recent uses of the term back to Malinowski via Kinsey is correct and his description of the term as functioning as something like an urban legend is accurate, much more careful trolling of the primary sources available in the archives of colonial missionaries is in order to establish what exactly were the missionary positions on sex. If we can accept the missionary as a metonym of the European and as representing that branch of the colonial enterprise most concerned with native bodily pleasures in contradistinction to, let us say, bodily labors, a return, sensitive to tone, of Malinowski’s [1987:284–85] perhaps foundational anecdote may be instructive:

Above all, the natives despise the European position and consider it impractical and improper. The natives, of course, know it, because white men frequently cohabit with native women, some even being married to them. But as they say: The man overlies heavily the woman; he presses her heavily downwards, she cannot respond (ibilampu).

Altogether the natives are certain that white men do not know how to carry out intercourse effectively. As a matter of fact, it is one of the special accomplishments of native cook boys and servants who have been for some time in the employ of white traders, planters and officials, to imitate the copulatory methods of their masters. In the Trobriands, Gomaya was perhaps the best actor in this respect. . . . Gomaya’s performance consisted of a very clumsy reclining position and in the execution of a few flabby and skeletal movements. In this the brevity and lack of vigour in the European performance were caricatured. Indeed, to the native idea, the white man achieves orgasm far too quickly; and there seems no doubt that the Melanesian takes a much longer time and employs a much greater amount of mechanical energy to reach the same result.

Besides noting that traders, planters, and officials are mentioned here, not missionaries, Priest wisely leaves the anecdote well alone and argues instead that in Malinowski’s account, missionaries “expand the possible romantic repertoire” by allowing an engaged Trobriand couple to hold hands in public. While not wishing to knock public hand-holding, the fact that this is staged in Priest’s text as an expansion tips his ethnocentric normative hand. In his heartfelt appeal for his religious difference to be tolerated by the hegemonic norms of the contemporary academy, how tolerant is he prepared to be of people whose difference is offensive precisely to the religious beliefs that render him different? The article’s use of the terms “Christian,” “modernist,” and “postmodernist” is further at odds with its sustained appeals to diversity, respect, and inclusion. A massive diversity of competing epistemologies is homogeneously yoked together in the service of Priest’s polemic, and in the colonial and postcolonial spheres the neat sequence and apparently oppositional assumptions of these periodizing logics refuse to map. Missionaries often presented Christianity as the agent of modernity against indigenous practices, which were staged as primitive and backward. Priest’s implicitly progressivist “expansion of the possible romantic repertoire” may indicate this legacy. Christianity frequently fused with local customs to produce the hybridity, fragmentation, and collapse of master-narratives that Priest associates with what he calls “postmodernism.” This leads me to ask where he would put the epistemologies (sexual and other) and broader symbolic orders of the peoples missionaries proselytized in his schema. Neither Christian nor modern, they could perhaps be postmodern, though this would seriously undermine his implied chronology. Perhaps they are not sufficiently important for him to consider. His own historical and analytic schema lends legitimacy to the allegation of ethnocentrism that he wishes to defend his missionary position against.

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Priest tends to read his sources cursorily. The idea of caricature is central to Malinowski’s anecdote, and sensitivity to tone, genre, and irony are not the strengths of Priest’s article. I think he is correct in claiming that many scholars invoke the phrase to ventriloquize the natives laughing at the missionary—as a metonym of the European. However, what he does is not that different. He too wishes to occupy and ventriloquize the position of the native—as a metonym of sensitivity to tone, genre, and irony are not the strengths of caricature is central to Malinowski’s anecdote, and sensing. Until the historical scholarship of the impact of flesh-and-blood missionaries on the sexual practices of colonial or soon-to-be colonial subjects is done—and many of the scholars Priest cites do precisely such work (though one would not know it from reading his article)—the risk of shuttling back and forth between these identificatory positions, of ventriloquizing as silencing in the benevolent project of giving voice, is large. In his wider appeal for the inclusion of devoutly religious voices in academic anthropological debates, which venture a claim that evangelicals are entitled to a kind of academic affirmative action, there is an acute, if somewhat expedient, sense of many of the paradoxes and contradictions in U.S. multiculturalism. To unpack these would take us too far from the missionary position, but Gayatri Spivak’s (1999:x) notion of “not presenting the ethics of alterity as a politics of identity” is a useful shorthand for thinking about the problems of power and silencing, agency and victimage, that Priest raises.

Remaining within those realms of power and silencing but I hope invoking some of the double-edged lightness of Malinowski’s anecdote, in the spirit of its inspired silliness, I conclude: As long as Christmas Day continues as a public holiday in many countries which experienced European rule, as long as the bulk of the world’s business continues to be conducted according to the schedule of the Christian calendar (the politically correct change of Anno Domini to Christian Era is purely cosmetic), as long as there is a single sodomy statute of colonial provenance on the law books of any country, as long as the mouth and anus are not accorded the same respect as organs of sexual pleasure as the genitals, as long as President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe invokes Christian—paradoxically as African tradition—to call homosexuals lower than dogs and pigs, I do not think we need to feel too bad if we, along with Gomaya and Malinowski, continue to have a little fun at the expense of the missionary position. In fact, there may be an ethical and political obligation to do so.

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The missionary position is a myth and a proper one at that. It not only convinces us of its inherent applicability in describing the present but provides us with an explanation of its origins. While the myth was gradually created during the 1960s and 1970s in the Western literature, those employing it trace its origins to colonial times and to mostly Pacific locations. Apparently few ever doubt its veracity. Priest, however, leaves little doubt that Alfred Kinsey originally based the myth of the missionary position on a misreading of Malinowski’s work.

The missionary position stands for what we perceive 20th-century missionary intervention to be: the imposition of Christian moral ethics and Western gender relations on indigenous peoples and—what is most pertinent here—religious bias on Western ethnography. These issues are interrelated and, as Priest shows, alternatively challenged and underwritten at various levels by both modernist and postmodernist discourse in ethnography and the social sciences in general. The pervasiveness of the myth is further shown by the fact that it serves as a focus both in the postmodernist critique of modernism and in the modernist critique of missionary ethnography.

What we need to recognize, though, is that ethnography is finally about representation. Modernism and postmodernism and, in this respect, Christian ethnography too are, as Priest indicates, “cultural movements sustained and transmitted through symbols.” The acceptance of any ethnographic statement, whether Christian, modernist, or postmodernist, is dependent on its conformity to cultural conventions. This is not just a matter of “writing properly” but implies the social inclusion or exclusion of the ethnographer in specific discourses. This is an ongoing social process, and postmodernism at least realizes its own involvement by actively exploring the “social other” it creates in the process of ethnographic description.

Yet, it is here that Priest neglects to account for the full complexity of what he is dealing with. Not only ethnographers but also the people they have studied and the audience(s) they address come together [Rohatynskyj and Jaarsma 2000:7]. Modern ethnographers have long been able to deceive themselves about describing people able to access and comprehend what is written about them. Their audience has been either academic or professionally interested in the academic description and analysis of the “other.” The people studied have been objectified and safely ignored, their ability to comprehend what was written about them considered limited and their independent access to such information nonexistent. Postmodernists can no longer cling to these easy qualifications. Not only do they acknowledge the existence of multiple voices in ethnography, but in the present era of globalization the traditional subject of ethnography definitely becomes an interested audience. Grant McCall [2000:77–81] acknowledges not only that we should account for the presence of an audience in present-day ethnography but also that such an audience may be “native.” Exchanges like those between Roger Keesing and Haunani-Kay Trask show that indigenous audiences may very well sustain and transmit alternative and opposing representations [Keesing 1989, 1991; Trask 1991].

An indigenous audience will inevitably recognize itself and reclaim rights to its image. Priest shows post-
modernist assessments of the missionary position to move away from just this point. Postmodernists acknowledge their agendas in ethnographic writing, thus placing themselves in the missionary position (notice the shift from the missionary position being forced upon the native to one willingly adopted by the ethnographer), but by that very acknowledgment they move their ethnographic data farther into the background, sometimes reducing it nearly to the anecdotal. Where modernists acknowledged the missionary ethnographic voice it was in part to condemn it as ethnocentric and biased. The postmodernist acknowledgment of multiple voices—especially indigenous ones—in present-day ethnography may well lead to similar exclusions.

Identifying the missionary position for the myth it is, Priest has opened something resembling Pandora's box containing far more than just the one myth. Above I pointed to the need to acknowledge the existence of an indigenous audience. Doubtless ethnography applying this particular myth is read in the Pacific, but to what effect? Is ethnography just seen to describe the phenomena in “acceptable” anthropological terminology, or does it introduce the phenomena through its authoritative description? What if “the missionary position” becomes culturally acceptable and, like “cargo cults,” for instance, another small part of some Pacific identities? There is a lot that still needs to be reviewed not only about this myth and its particular effects but also about others that we accept without question simply because they are part of our academic anthropological culture.

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The controversy that Priest deals with is apparently, among many in the history of anthropology, one in which the theses and antitheses cannot, or cannot easily, be resolved into useful syntheses. It is old, tenacious, and, as he demonstrates, replete with possibilities for misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and exclusion. It continues to smoulder, surfacing with a certain regularity only to disappear again with no tangible result, because the anthropological debate on it does not conform to the standards of the discipline.

Reading ethnographic descriptions of religious phenomena and their alteration as a result of Christianization, one gets the impression that mission work has almost universally failed. The relevant ethnographic data are rarely given or are not convincing, and if anthropologists to discuss the missionaries’ work it is either done in their absence or places them in the position of unacceptable opponents, one in which they find it very difficult to argue their case. Attacks on Christian missions—at least in German anthropology—almost always begin with the word of an eminent anthropologist whose evaluation of Christianity is as low as his understanding of it. His arguments usually call forth a strong reaction among his professional colleagues. If things go well at all, there will be a somewhat less eminent colleague who will defend Christianity because he knows it well and attempts to live according to its tenets, but his arguments are generally dismissed or not taken seriously by the profession.

With Priest’s contribution the controversy reemerges but this time, it seems, with new stipulations. First of all, it is an anthropologist who has a decidedly Christian background who takes hold of the hot iron, and instead of launching an attack he presents us with an analysis. Moreover, he has researched his subject carefully and in great depth, as his bibliography demonstrates, and he argues with remarkable intellectual vigor. In addition, his play on the words “missionary position” and “position of the missionary” is masterful, a constant challenge to follow his penetrating thought processes to their logical conclusion.

Priest points out what writers such as Michener and Maugham have not been ashamed to publish: descriptions of missionaries and their work as attempting above all to show the pagans how sinful they are and equating sexuality with sin. (With his own sexuality the missionary, of course, is unable to come to terms.) He also demonstrates the carelessness of unsupported claims that missionaries had taught their pagan charges that “the missionary position” was the only morally unobjectionable one, claims relegating missionaries to a position outside the realm of common sense. He shows that this myth functions in the same way as those used in Pacific island societies after initial settlement to justify claims to land titles and power after the fact.

Those who use the myth of “the missionary position” in the way outlined by Priest make the classical mistake of taking an “etic” point of view and leaving it at that. Any anthropologist with a modicum of self-respect will reject an ethnographic description which gives credence only to this point of view and energetically demand that the “emic” point of view be explored—that the missionaries’ worldview as well as that of those among whom they work be taken into account.

Priest is not without hope for positive change in this situation. I am eager to learn how the community of anthropologists will react.1

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Priest draws our attention to the rhetorical uses of a phrase that has roots in anthropology but has now entered everyday speech. Perhaps his essay will make anthropologists more cautious about using it, but I suspect that the phrase “the missionary position,” like the old chestnut about Eskimo words for snow and even the culture concept, will not soon disappear from common discourse. To the extent that scholarly terms percolate into the general vocabulary, they do so because they are

1. Translated by Helen Ens.
useful or seem to ring true to people’s knowledge and experience. We employ this one so frequently, both in and outside the discipline, because it resonates with an issue that has no easy resolution: the morality of relativism versus other kinds of moral convictions. Because this issue is so central to our discipline, anthropologists have been among those who keep reproducing the phrase and the myth of its origins.

Priest fingers Kinsey as the pater of this now ubiquitous phrase and suggests that he had a personal motivation for resenting missionary moralizing. If it is now clear that the phrase “the missionary position” does not actually appear in The Sexual Life of Savages, it is still clearly consonant with many things in that salaciously titled book: Trobrianders did mock the man-on-top position, and missionaries who aimed to discipline and shape the natives’ sexuality were certainly part of the social environment of the Trobriands. The mythical phrase fits Kinsey’s, and no doubt Malinowski’s, preconceptions about what missionaries probably would advocate.

It is our preconceptions, both past and present, that Priest’s essay especially challenges. Anthropologists are not alone responsible for creating the image of the sanctimonious missionary, as Priest’s literary examples illustrate. Barbara Kingsolver’s recent best-seller The Poisonwood Bible again stereotypes the missionary as an arrogant, narrow-minded boor in the heart of darkness. Those who make missionaries the focus of scholarly study, Priest observes, less frequently stereotype and homogenize them than scholars who view them only from a distance, but in general our postmodern archrelativism has not yet extended to include missionaries and the missionary project.

As someone who has written about missionaries [although not from the perspective of a Christian], I agree with Priest’s assessment of the climate of opinion in anthropology about missionaries and about religious conviction in general. A religious perspective expressed openly in the academy generates mainly embarrassment. In other public settings in heterogeneous societies, people are reticent about religious conviction so as not to infringe on others’ religious sensibilities. In academic settings, reticence reigns because not being religious at all is the unspoken norm to which we hold ourselves, an article of faith for us, as it were.

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This is a delightful paper. Who knew that the “missionary position” was Kinsey’s misreading of Malinowski? But more than that, it is an important paper, for it is about the silencing of the religious perspective in contemporary academic discourse. This silencing is particularly striking in American social science. While most Americans say that they are religious (95% routinely say that they believe in God, or in a spiritual power greater than themselves), atheism is the common theological stance in social science departments and the presumption of nonbelief is widespread.

I believe that the author is correct when he claims that modernist and postmodernist metanarratives can incorporate Christian tropes in ways that desanctify the Christian metanarrative: angels as an ironic theatrical gesture, the cross as a fashion accessory, Madonna. In the academy, a devout faith in Christ can seem somehow incompatible with serious social science. To hear that colleagues are Christian can be enough to cause one to dismiss them or at least to think about their intellectual questions quite differently. A colleague said to me recently, speaking of his discovery that a peer was deeply religious, “I thought he was normal, you know, like us.” (In these presumptions, devout Judaism often is interpreted quite differently from devout Christianity, primarily because Judaism can be thought of as an ethnicity and therefore does not necessarily raise the specter of belief commitment.)

This is a foolish prejudice, as blind and arrogant as the worst of missionary enthusiasms. One’s faith should be no more relevant to the collection of data than one’s skin or age, which is to say that it may affect what data can be collected but it should not affect the data per se. A male graduate student may have a harder time conducting fieldwork among young women than a female would; a non-Jewish student will likely have more difficulty conducting fieldwork among the Hasidim than a Jewish one. In fact, faith may well be an advantage in studying religious practice. E. E. Evans-Pritchard was a Roman Catholic, as is Mary Douglas, and anthropology’s understanding of religion would be much the poorer without them.

The prejudice is also foolish because neither rational analysis nor empirical data can clinch the argument against divinity. I once heard Rick Shweder silence a room of argumentative anthropologists by asking why we were so concerned to explain why a Hindu widow might immolate herself upon her husband’s funeral pyre, for who were we to know so confidently that she would not, as she thought, transcend mere mortal existence and become of another realm? He was right. We do not know whether we have immortal souls, whether there are angels, whether Jesus was sent by a heavenly father to redeem us from our sin, or whether Tuhami was indeed visited by a Moroccan demoness.

And yet there is also sense behind the prejudice. Having a religious conviction is not like being of a different race, gender or sexual orientation, because faith—at least, devout Christian faith—entails a belief commitment about the fundamental nature of reality. So too does one’s race, gender, and sexual orientation, but the multicultural stance has been to accept those differences as different ways to be in the same world. Religious faith, and particularly a devout Christian faith, tends to assert that there is a different kind of world, that it cannot be the case that both the atheist and the believer are correct in their understanding of their world.

I myself feel that I cannot write about religion effec-
tively unless I take seriously the inherent undecidability of divinity. It seems to me intellectually dishonest and essentially uninteresting to approach religion as a problem of false belief. I think that the anthropologist's job is to enter another world as a well-intentioned guest and that to empathize with those others demands that one does not begin by thinking of them as deluded. Yet I find that I can only leave room intellectually for the reality of divinity if I assume that divinity manifests itself to different peoples in different ways and that all religions are thus epistemologically more or less equivalent.

It is only fair to disclose my own subject position here. For years I have believed in the inherent undecidability of divinity and believed that the anthropologist's task in understanding religion is to begin with the fact that we all have brains and bodies and then to explore the way culture and social practice affect our capacities to experience. I have believed that this was the only reasonable position for an intellectual to accept. And then a few months ago I had an insight. Of course I believe this. I was raised a Unitarian. What I have just described is about as close as Unitarians come to a creed.

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13 IX 00

Priest's paper confirms a thesis I have developed elsewhere (Pels 1990): that the modern anthropological suspicion of missionaries—which has its roots in, among other things, colonial desires to build on and protect indigenous religion—acquires specific cultural elaboration only after the postwar decolonization period. I still think this can in part be explained by the fact that missionaries were, under decolonization, the most appropriate scapegoat that anthropologists could find to uphold their own self-image as critics of ethnocentrism and to avoid being branded, together with missionaries, as quintessential colonizers. Priest's painstaking collection of mentions of the "missionary position" suggests that a broader cultural and historical shift may have been occurring at the time, one that in fact may show continuities with a later, "postmodern" phase. This raises the question why such metaphors and the sexually repressed nature of the Christian missionary that they symbolize did not make their appearance in novels and scholarly discourse earlier. I do not think Priest's paper advances us towards a historically informed answer to this question. Nor is that, perhaps, his intention.

I wonder, however, what other intentions this paper has if it does not ask about the cultural, sociological, and historical circumstances that cause the spread of such a metaphor to the extent that no stylist in his right mind would dare to use it any longer. Perhaps the latter result is one that Priest is happy with. The paper is, in any case, not an argument about the practice of Christian missions as such—Priest cannot seriously claim, as he does at several points, that these "missionaries of the modern secular imagination" are not and have not been "flesh-and-blood missionaries." If indeed he makes that claim, I wonder how he has managed to overlook all the references to Christian missionaries struggling against alien sexual mores and habits in the "careful, sustained research" by historians and anthropologists that he lists in extenso in another part of his argument. In my own case, at least, the prohibition of certain sexual practices, especially as taught by African female initiation, was a constant worry of Catholic missionaries, and they discussed them in detail with their African followers and amongst themselves (in Latin, to be sure; see Pels 1999: chaps. 2 and 4).

If, then, the paper cannot be meant to investigate the sociocultural and historical context of the metaphor of "missionary position" or to unmask a wrong image of missionaries, what is it supposed to achieve? It seems to be to point out that religious subject positions are, by stereotyping such as is achieved by metaphors of the "missionary position," excluded from the academy. Modernist positions often use stereotyped images of religion—the play of power of modernism is demonstrated by many of the "postmodernist" examples Priest mentions. It would indeed be important to research the extent to which the modernist belief in secularization has, in practice, led to the exclusion of certain religious subject positions from the academy, but Priest offers little that allows one to say where and how they do, except by drawing up a series of quotes of a single symbol and fleshing out some of their parameters. I do not think that it is accepted anthropological practice (except, perhaps, by some latter-day "postmodernists"?) to base an inquiry on the isolation of a single symbol from its social and historical background and to refrain from the ethnography that shows how this symbol works in social practice. With this problematic mode of argument and its selective citing of the evidence on missionary behavior, Priest's paper invites a critique that may do other Christian subject positions' contribution to academic debate considerable harm.

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1 IX 00

In the current film An Affair of Love, which chronicles a relationship initiated by a woman's desire to act out a specific sexual fantasy with an anonymous partner, there is a pivotal moment when the male partner asks the woman whether they can make love "normally." She asks whether he means "the missionary position." He reassures her that this is not what he means and that what he wants would encompass her preference for being on top. What he seems to be asking for, although he is unable to explain it explicitly himself, is that they engage in sex that is not an obsessive, repetitive act of fetishism but a culturally and psychologically recognizable expression of love, of feeling for a specific other.
Seeing this film so soon after reading Priest's essay reinforced for me the value of taking issue with the repetitive, fetishized use of the phrase “missionary position,” which, as Priest demonstrates, has for some time served to short-circuit understanding rather than advance it. Priest also nicely turns the hermeneutic tables on some of his academic colleagues by noting how metaphor and myth operate in their own writings, stressing the pragmatic function of these rhetorical devices in indicating respect or disdain.

Those of us who carried out ethnographic research on missionaries in the '70s, before it became an accepted genre of anthropological research, sometimes used the expression “missionary position” because we thought it was clever—generally in a quite superficial way, without advancing it. Priest also nicely turns the hermeneutic tables on some of his academic colleagues by noting how metaphor and myth operate in their own writings, stressing the pragmatic function of these rhetorical devices in indicating respect or disdain.

The center of gravity in Priest's essay is the following sentence: “My subject position [as a believing Christian] gave me a perspective which helped me to see certain realities that were not as likely to be seen from another position but quite capable of being considered and evaluated once they were pointed out.” While acknowledging that there are public, intersubjective standards of scholarship, Priest argues that he is in a privileged position, because of his own social history and beliefs, to see certain things that may be invisible to his colleagues.

This may be true in some ways but perhaps not in as deep a way as Priest asserts. These are times when it is all too common to draw overly facile and momentous connections between identity and outlook. As I read this essay, I was reminded of one of Charles Saxon's classic 1950s cartoons in The New Yorker: the scene is a PTA meeting in an affluent Connecticut suburb, the topic is the construction of a new school, and a young woman with pearl earrings and hair in a ponytail has the floor; she is saying, “I am a mother and I think Cinderblock is ugly.”

What exactly does Priest mean when he says that his “perspective” enabled him to write this essay? Let us consider a magisterial version of the type of project undertaken by Priest, Robert Merton's (1965) inquiry into the origins and history of the phrase “standing on the shoulders of giants” as a way of acknowledging an intellectual debt to one’s precursors. This study grew out of Merton's work in the sociology of science, but, as a pre-postmodernist, he would not have thought to engage in any epistemological special pleading about his qualifications to produce it. His achievement resulted from a combination of motivation, scrupulous scholarship, careful thought, and elegant writing.

Why do some missionary linguists, as Priest points out, do excellent and important work? Because they had the motivation to stay for very long periods of time in “the field,” far longer than most academic anthropologists and linguists. Because they shared with their successful academic colleagues the intelligence and patience to grapple with a deeply unfamiliar language. Because a number of them have also had good linguistic training.

This is not to say that one cannot inquire productively into how the vocation and worldview of missionaries may have affected their linguistic research. One can, for example, ask interesting questions about the effects of Bible translation projects on language learning. Protestant missionaries in New Guinea had a compelling lesson in the cultural rootedness of metaphors when they had to try translating the moral concept of Jesus as shepherd into the local language of pig husbandry. Such inquiries, though, need to be undertaken with care and precision.

While it is very much in the interest of cultural anthropology to encourage conversation among many different voices, this is not the same as adopting an “it takes one to know one” position. On the contrary, if we want to gain any intellectual altitude at all, we must stand on the shoulders of those giants who understood that cultural study depends upon a willingness to journey away from one's self.

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1. The phrase is attributed to Isaac Newton: “If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”
If it is true, as Priest asserts, that the expression “missionary position” came into existence through Kinsey’s lapse (one wonders how accurate the remainder of his book is), we should be grateful to Kinsey for providing us with an irresistible metaphor. (I say “If it is true” because I would not be surprised if—in spite of Priest’s meticulous search—one day an old ethnographic text cropped up in which this coital position is indeed called the “missionary.”) The metaphor is irresistible because it joins in one image two worlds which in “real life” hardly tolerate one another. It flourishes on the soil of one of the most powerful classic figures of style: the *contradictio*. A missionary having sex! It is both shocking and amusing. From its beginning, the expression was destined for success. Priest’s long list of titles from articles, books, and seminars bears witness to its popularity, and so does his own essay. The only thing that can stop it is its becoming a cliché. In fact, with the publication of this essay that point may have been reached.

Priest is to be commended for the clever way in which he bends the “missionary position” metaphor back to fit those who love to use it. Popular among anthropologists because of its capacity for criticizing and ridiculing missionaries and their ethnocentrism, the expression has a boomerang effect, revealing the complacency and intellectual ethnocentrism of anthropologists themselves [cf. Van der Geest 1990].

Unfortunately for our discussion, the European whose sexual movements were ridiculed by the Trobrianders was neither a missionary nor an anthropologist but a Greek buccaneer [Malinowski 1929:284]. Malinowski even knows his name: Nicholas Minister. (“Minister”!! Could this be a clue?) Why did they not imitate the wooden movements of the anthropologist residing in their midst? My tentative answer follows:

There are at least three aspects of fieldwork on which anthropologists are less than informative: their tagging along with missionaries, their sex life, and their defection. Priest’s essay playfully deals with two of these topics.

One reason for anthropologists’ lack of openness on these subjects is, I suspect, that revelation of these practices in their daily life in the field would not enhance their carefully constructed image of being almost integrated into the community in which they conduct their research. Anthropologists in the field have had and still have much more contact with missionaries than they like to admit in their publications. They have enjoyed the missionary’s company, his beer, and his toilet.

And why so taciturn about sex? I have pondered this for a long time. Could it be prurience, cowardliness, disgust, racism, anxiety about relatives at home, inhibition about revealing intimate experiences, fear of disease, methodological strategy, or simply the fact that they had no sex life to speak of? Only dreams and desires! Evans-Pritchard [1976:240] writes that his teacher Seligman told him “to take ten grains of quinine every night and to keep off women.” The almost complete absence of any reference to the sexual part of participant observation (for some exceptions, see Cesara 1982, Krumeich 1994, Kulick and Willson 1995, Markowitz and Ashkenazi 1999) makes one wonder about the anthropological position.

Reply

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I thank the respondents for their comments, critiques, humor, insights, and willingness to participate in this conversation. I attempt below to address the issues which have been raised.

While the respondents seem convinced by my evidence with reference to Kinsey, one challenge is tentatively raised. Burridge believes that he first heard the phrase “missionary position” during his undergraduate days at Oxford “right after World War II” and infers that the story predates Kinsey. Kinsey’s best-seller came out on January 5, 1948, in the second year of Burridge’s undergraduate work. People gathering in pubs to discuss the Kama Sutra or *Decameron* would have been the very ones to read Kinsey’s narratives and incorporate them in their discussions. Unless Burridge is certain that he first heard this phrase at the beginning of his undergraduate work and not halfway into his second year, such a memory would not contradict the genealogy I propose. Strictly speaking, my argument would not preclude the possibility that Kinsey had been telling this story in public lectures for several years. According to another story, widely repeated by reputable sources, the Vatican has a collection of pornography surpassing or second only to that of the Kinsey Institute. The story is false; E. Michael Jones [1993:88–94] has traced it to Kinsey’s lectures beginning in the early 1940s. I suspect that Burridge’s friends were directly or indirectly indebted to Kinsey’s 1948 book and, in the best tradition of urban legends, reworked the story to imply personal knowledge from their own prior associations. Burridge’s memory would thus provide evidence of just how quickly Kinsey’s story spread.

Clifford, Faubion, and Hoad suggest that my rendering of “modernism” and “postmodernism” either distorts or fails to be adequately nuanced. Certainly, it is not easy to attain consensus on one’s usage of these terms. As Gellner [1992:22] says of “postmodernism,” “it is not altogether clear what the devil it is. . . . Clarity is not amongst its marked attributes.” However, I believe that my usage of the terms falls well within the bounds of disciplinary understandings. Since these commentators fail to specify exactly where I have misrepresented either of these, all I can do is acknowledge that more nuancing of the variations within each would be helpful.
Faubion would also question my usage of “evangelical” and “fundamentalist.” “Fundamentalism” is Gellner’s term. In modernist discourse its invocation typically “conjures up a jumbled and troubled universe of connotations, clichés, images, feelings, poses and plots: militant, strident, dogmatic, ignorant, duped, backward, rural, southern, uneducated, antiscientific, anti-intellectual, irrational, absolutist, authoritarian, bigoted, racist, sexist, anti communist, war mongers” (Harding 1991: 373). In Gellner’s case, I did not detect such a loaded usage. However, both because of such problems with the term and because in American Christianity, at least, it has a much narrower range of reference than Gellner’s usage implied, I simply noted that his identification of a religious subject position divergent from both modernism and postmodernism would apply to any Christian who affirmed historical orthodoxies—including but by no means limited to those who identify themselves as fundamentalist or evangelical. I referred to “fundamentalist/orthodox/evangelical Christians” simply to bypass a necessarily lengthy defense of particular terms. I do not fully understand Faubion’s concern with Pietism—a movement which historically was orthodox and which, through its influence on Methodism and holiness movements, has closer links to American evangelicalism than he supposes. Indeed, the seminary at which I teach was founded by immigrant pietists from Scandinavia.

I do use the term “evangelical” by itself on two occasions—one to identify myself and once to identify some anthropologists I interviewed. It is in this setting that I employ the term “devout” to which Faubion objects. He correctly recognizes my use of Carter’s term, but Carter is not speaking of evangelicals when he uses the phrase “the devoutly religious.” That is, my “devout evangelical” is but a subset of Carter’s “devoutly religious” and is not designed to make any claims to special devoutness of one religious group over another. The individuals to whom I referred are devout in the conventional meaning of the term. I do not fully understand the import of Faubion’s idea that “biblicist activists” cannot really be devout, but in this case it is irrelevant because the individuals to whom I refer are in no sense characterized by such activism.

Dundes questions my usage of the term “myth,” which he would reserve for sacred and religious narratives. He wrongly assumes that I am confused; I employed the term against this venerable (modernist) tradition, and until Dundes can provide me with a more adequate substitute than blason populaire (which applies to the phrase, not the accompanying story) or “joke” ([Dundes, Hoad, Shapiro] which applies to a story but not to one believed to be true), I will retain the term “myth”—a term I use in ways congruent with the approaches of, for example, Klass (1995: 135–26) and Barthes (1972). In Barthes’s view, any narrative which is understood as unproblematic, grounded in assumptions we are not fully conscious of, and understood as a reality justifying one’s beliefs but in fact a social construct rationalizing one’s motives and values is a myth. A myth is a “semiological system, . . . a system of values” rather than “a system of facts: myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system” [1972: 131]. People really have believed that Christian missionaries taught social others that any sexual position except one was sinful and that social others coined the derivative phrase “missionary position.” Many really have believed that American sex laws banned everything except the missionary position. They repeat these narratives because they believe them to be true, and the typical response is not laughter but amazement and reflection. Of course, when a myth is discovered not to be true but “an instrument,” “it discredits itself in [Barthes’s] eyes” (1972: 129). While the basic missionary-position narrative does not fall into the category of “joke,” it has certainly provided the starting point for many a joke, and therefore I am quite willing to speak of joke, metaphor, stereotype, meme, symbol, or blason populaire in the appropriate context. That is, while I employ the term “myth,” I do not consider it the only relevant one.

Pels believes that it was only in the postwar decolonization period that negative images of missionaries arose. Admittedly, it is only after Freud that one finds full-blown narratives of sexual repression, with Maugham’s “Rain” a pioneer in Freudian fiction, but similar though less Freudian types of symbolic elements are found in Herman Melville’s treatment of missionaries [Herbert 1980, Samson 1984] and indeed in Pierre de Ronsard’s 1555 reaction to missionaries, which I cited. European narratives long before the 20th century were manipulating images of social others, sexual freedom, sin, guilt, taboo, and missionaries in accord with the purposes and dictates of modernism. While the particular story I examine dates from 1948, it fuses together in a kind of “condensation symbol” multiple symbolic associations and “truths” which long predate it.

Pels protests that I “cannot seriously claim” that “missionaries of the modern secular imagination” are different from “flesh-and-blood missionaries.” Perhaps a slight digression on the missionary-sin/guilt theme will clarify my point. In my fieldwork with the Aguaruna of Peru I focused on traditional moral discourses [Priest 1993] and the vocabulary of moral evil [Priest 1997; 1993: 488–542]. I explored missionaries’ own moral discourse and vocabulary (interviewing Nazarene, Swiss Indian Mission, SIL, and Jesuit missionaries to the Aguaruna as well as working through mission archives and literature). Assistants helped me tape and transcribe hundreds of pages of Aguaruna evangelical conversion and deconversion narratives [many featuring dreams, visions, near-death-experiences, etc.] as well as a dozen sermons preached by Aguaruna evangelists. Interviews and participant observation resulted in field notes on religious life, rhetoric, and practice. While my work is still in progress, I have rich and extensive empirical data for an analysis of sin discourses and consequences in the context of Christian missions and religious conversion. From the frequency and confidence with which anthropologists make undocumented pronouncements about the effects of missionary sin and guilt one might infer that there was an extensive anthropological literature grounded in the kind
of field research I describe. Such is not the case. But the absence of any such literature has not prevented modernists from constructing extensive narratives of missionary sin and guilt—narratives that anthropologists both have been shaped by and have contributed to. I have examined in depth one such narrative, that of the missionary position, and suggested that it derives its meaning and efficacy from a network of similar modernist narratives. Maugham’s “Rain” was enormously popular in its day. Ruth Benedict attended the play (Lapsley 1999: 88). Margaret Mead commenced fieldwork on adolescent sexuality from the very hotel made famous in “Rain” (Grosskurth 1988:27) and dreamed that her book on Samoa was mistakenly titled Seekings for Sin (Lapsley 1999:150, 171). While Maugham’s work was fiction, Michener’s is coded “historical fiction” and widely believed to be “true to history.” Alan Tippett, an ethnohistorian and specialist in Pacific missions history, systematically compared Michener’s portrayal of missionary preaching against manuscripts of hundreds of sermons preached by early missionaries to Hawaii and concluded that the distortion was so severe that only incredibly sloppy research or deliberate manipulation could explain it. In either case, he concluded that the narrative order was a direct reflection of Michener’s own inner emotional “compulsives” (Tippett 1973:147–91). Tippett notes Michener’s debt to Melville, who pioneered the rhetorical device of the fictional missionary sermon (pp. 172–74). Another clue to Michener’s sources for Hawaii is found in his 1952 admission that he never writes about the South Pacific without first rereading portions of “Rain” (quoted in Morgan 1980:257–58). While Matthiessen’s travel narrative The Cloud Forest (1987) gives a full description of his time with missionaries in the Amazon, the missionaries constructed in his novel At Play in the Fields of the Lord have closer ties to the missionaries of Melville, Maugham, and Michener. And yet, again and again I have learned of anthropologists’ telling students that this book [or film] will show them what missionaries are like.1

There is a sense in which the symbol is more real than the real. The missionary as a symbol is present in a way that real missionaries are not. Fictional missionary sermons are present to us in a way that actual missionary sermons are not. Undocumented stories about missionaries which emerge from the same modernist compulsions driving Maugham or Michener and reflect dependence on the same discursive formations quite naturally “ring true,” to use Kipp’s phrase. That is, they resonate with and ratify what is already known via modernist narratives, the more influential of which are minimally essentialized missionaries as dominators, since women were missionaries as well. I suggest that she herself, on this point, is moving to the literal rather than the discursive. Discourses and rhetoric of the missionary position do construct missionaries as dominators and symbolically male, as the French position du missionnaire makes explicit. Dominy’s point is an interesting one, however, because in the late 19th century women provided the broadest base of support for missions and made up nearly half of the missionaries. Indeed, modernist narratives of this period tended to construct missionaries as feminine. Colonialists who exercised political and economic power were coded as hard, strong, and masculine, as opposed to missionaries, whose concern with religion, conscience, and domesticity was coded as soft, weak, and feminine (Huber and Lutkehaus 1999). Postcolonial re-encoding of the Christian missionary enterprise as masculine dominance may indeed serve the scapegoating ends which Pels insightfully suggests.

Jaarsma rightly points out that the missionary-position myth also involves representations of social others, objects and, fails to give them a voice. Indeed, even postmodernist efforts to include diverse voices may sometimes be highly selective. For example, Tite Tiérou, my theological colleague from Burkina Faso, regularly complains to me that anthropological discursive representations render African Christians neither authentically African nor authentically Christian. Their voices tend, therefore, to be selectively excluded.

For Dundes, all religion is “projective” and Christianity is a “Western projection” foisted ethnocentrically and hegemonomically on others. Several observations are in order. First, neither in its origins nor in its current distribution is Christianity (as contrasted with Freud) distinctively Western. For centuries in its early history, Christianity was almost certainly stronger in Africa than in Europe—as it is again today. Christian missionaries today are more likely to be Korean, African, Brazilian, Chinese than Austrian, Dutch, French, or Swiss. The locus of authority for most missionaries and Christians around the world is a non-Western text which is as likely to condemn Western cultural patterns as to justify them. Christianity is a world religion with remarkably diverse local expressions. Missiologists devote energy and thought to helping missionaries distinguish between ideas and values reflective of their own cultures and ideas and values justified in terms of the Bible. Second, most missionaries would reject Dundes’s implication that evangelism is necessarily hegemonic or that conversion occurs only under coercion. Indeed, evidence from China suggests that in an era when evangelism was perceived as supported by colonial power conversion was minimal, but in an era without overtones of coercion large numbers freely embrace Christianity. Missiologists, like anthropologists, call for reassessment and critique of ways in which historically their professional community has contributed to colonial hegemonies, but, like anthropologists, they would deny that hegemony is at the core of their action.

What intrigues me, however, is the way in which “projection” enters into Dundes’s discussion. He has just read an essay which focuses on a narrative widely and wrongly believed to be true, in short, a projection. And
yet, rather than analyzing the psychological roots of this projection, he downgrades it from projection to joke and substitutes another narrative as the focus of his "projective" analysis. That is, while deconstructing the religious other and speculating on the psychological motives of "Priest" (in good fun, to be sure), he declines to put modernists under the same microscope. For him, the language of myth can be directed only one way, and the analysis of projection seemingly moves in only one direction as well. Creating another narrative of hegemonic Christians to replace the one just discredited might easily be interpreted as justifying hegemonic exclusion.

There is no reason a psychologically oriented anthropologist could not reverse the direction of analysis. Following another Freudian, who argues that anthropologists conduct their "private rebellion in the arcane language of academic books" (La Barre 1970:4), one might reflect on the extent to which such "rebellion" is directed toward religion, conscious, and shared. One might begin with Evans-Pritchard's (1963) claim that most anthropologists are "bleakly hostile" toward religion in general and Christianity in particular and explore possible evidences and consequences of such hostility. Edmund Leach, for example, acknowledges that part of his "inspiration ... comes from a fundamental dislike of organized religion" (Kuper 1986:381). Paul Riesman (1977:95) reports that his "long-standing antipathy" toward "Western religions" rendered him "almost incapable of looking" at Islam "with an unprejudiced eye"; Miles Richardson (1975:517-19) describes anthropology as fulfilling his quest for freedom from Christian ideas and says that in turning toward anthropology he was "moved by the bright joy of perfect hate." There is no good reason, then, that a psychologically oriented anthropologist could not take the "projection" examined in my essay and explore the extent to which it emerges from socially shared "private rebellions" as those shared by Leach, Riesman, and Richardson.

Dominy and Shapiro read disclosure of my subject position as "special pleading" (Shapiro), a claim to a privileged authority. In certain respects, this directly inverts my argument. Contra Dominy, who sees me appealing to my authority "more than" to "research," I explicitly insisted that my argument stands or falls in accordance with publicly acknowledged standards of evidence and reasoning and rejected any right to speak with authority. It was only confidence in the argument and evidence which allowed me to point out that a particular subject position (normally stigmatized and silent in the academy) might actually make a positive contribution to research and knowledge. Shapiro acknowledges the importance of motivation to knowledge but fails to recognize that specific motivations often underpin specific beliefs and fictions. A fiction is less likely to be seen as fiction when it serves the purposes of the observer. Sometimes things are observable from subordinated subject positions that are less observable to one standing even on the shoulders of modernist giants like Kinsey.

Only a few of my respondents directly address the question of exclusion and silencing of religious people in the academy. Burridge illustrates exclusion through discriminatory hiring. Luhrmann suggests that "silencing is particularly striking in American social science." Clifford implicitly acknowledges exclusion when he asks how disciplinary communities can maintain borders if the religious are not excluded. Faubion questions Carter's evidence that "the devoutly religious" are "grossly underrepresented on campus" but does not deny that exclusion occurs. Pels would like research that shows the extent to which there is "exclusion of certain religious positions in the academy." Kipp acknowledges that "not being religious at all is the unspoken norm to which we hold ourselves." Benthall suggests that some religious positions are accepted while others are not. Hoad acknowledges that hegemonic norms of the academy exclude the religious. But while Burridge and Luhrmann strongly support my call for nonexclusion of the religious and Clifford and Faubion seem to be cautiously open to the possibility, Hoad would support exclusion. The others remain silent on this. Silence in the context of an acknowledged exclusion might reflect agreement with exclusion combined with an unwillingness to try to justify it. Or, in the case of any respondents who may be religious but silent, silence may reflect awareness of a power field in which disclosure discredits. Some who fail to address exclusion directly might nonetheless be read as providing justification for exclusion.

Clifford, Dundes, and Shapiro acknowledge that missionaries may well acquire knowledge and understand rivaling or surpassing that of anthropologists. Luhrmann suggests that "faith may well be an advantage in studying religious practice." The implication, it would seem, is that any exclusion of religious people from the academy must be justified in terms other than capacity for scholarly understanding. Benthall suggests that it is not so much evangelical beliefs which are objectionable as a style which is "blunt and tactless." This charge has frequently been directed against various excluded communities (Cuddihy 1978, 1987), but the literature suggests that most evangelicals, in America at least, are as strongly committed to civility as others (Smith 2000: 61-91; Cuddihy 1978). Shapiro's observation that missionaries feed anthropologists, who often "bite" in return, directs questions of civility in another direction. Benthall also refers to "horrors ... inflicted in the name of religion," Shapiro suggests that there are "horrific episodes" in mission history, and Hoad refers to the "disastrous" effects of missionary ethics. Only Hoad provides a documented example of the negative effects of Christian ethics, and even here, assignment of culpability is at least contestable. Many of King Mwanga's pages had converted to Christianity prior to being sent to the king's court by local chiefs, and when the king insisted that they have sexual relations with him over 30 of them who were Christians refused. In response, the king burned them alive, triggering a massive civil war among three factions (all of which were opposed to Mwanga). Hoad speculates elsewhere that the king may have been requiring something with a valued cultural tradition be-
hind it and that he forced the issue and burned the pages "as an act of anti-colonial resistance" (Hoad 1999). While he provides a fascinating discussion of how these events played out in the discourses of the day, his suggestion here that missionary recoding of same-sex corporeal intimacies is what produced these results constructs a morality tale which some may understandably see as partisan.

Anthropology texts not infrequently stress, usually without documentation, that "missionary...ethnocentric...have wreaked havoc on native populations" (Van der Elst and Bohannan 1999:89). For years I assigned students Lauriston Sharp's (1952) classic on how missionaries caused cultural collapse through their introduction of steel axes to Stone Age Australians, only recently to discover a follow-up research report (Taylor 1988) demonstrating that no such collapse occurred. Although Shapiro and Benthall reference evils inflicted in the name of religion, neither presents these as necessarily central to religion or missions. Benthall explicitly provides balancing observations, as does Dominy. Pickering (1992:103) points out that the question of whether missionaries do harm is not always easy to assess: "What counts as 'damage' is open to debate and involves the application of what are very often unacknowledged criteria. Deciding what is 'good' for a society is at the very edge, if not within, the realm of the normative."

Divergent ideas about the normative underpin much of the rationale for exclusion. Kipp phrases the conflict as "the morality of relativism versus other kinds of moral convictions." Furthermore, she implicitly links this opposition to another one, that of religious versus nonreligious. "Not being religious" is the "unspoken norm" of the same anthropological community which affirms the morality of relativism. Or to turn it around, the "other kinds of moral convictions" which are objected to tend to be those which are religiously based. Religiously based moral convictions are not atypical historically. Raymond Firth writes (1951:86) that the "commonest answer...in the history of Western social thought is that the source of all morality is God." So close was the link between the moral and the religious that atheism initially brought doubts about the very idea of the moral, articulated in the oft-repeated phrase "If God is dead, then anything is permissible." Nor are religiously based moral convictions atypical in the contemporary world. They are only atypical among what some sociologists call the "New Class," consisting of those who make their living manipulating and distributing symbols—such as educators, journalists, therapists, and university professors, especially those in the humanities and social sciences. While the older middle class in America, centered in the business community and traditional professions, tends to be very religious (as Luhrmann notes), members of the New Class tend to be markedly secular (Berger 1992). Berger (1996, 1997) suggests that a globalized secular elite culture is the principal "carrier" of Enlightenment beliefs and values around the world and is nearly everywhere pitted against local populations which are distinctly religious. Around the world, as in America, a large majority operate with moral norms which are religiously informed and are excluded from or silenced in the academy.

Two intertwined modernist assumptions—one related to the religious and one to the moral—have historically underpinned these exclusions but are increasingly recognized to have been fundamentally flawed. First, it was assumed that modernist secularism would replace religion. This teleology allowed religious people to be located symbolically in the past.2 Their exclusion involved cooperating with the inevitable flow of history. By the 1980s and '90s, however, it was increasingly clear that religion remains part of the contemporary world. When people who are acknowledged as full contemporaries are excluded and silenced, the raw power dimensions of the exclusion become more evident and problematic.

The second assumption, touched on by Benthall, was that consensus could be achieved on foundations for morality which owed nothing to religion (MacIntyre 1984, 1990). Initially anthropologists seem not to have been overly concerned with morality other than to critique what they saw as ethnocentric. In 1947 the American Anthropological Association rejected the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with Herskovits making the argument that there was no such thing as universal human rights (American Anthropological Association Executive Board 1947:539-43). Many came to regret this move, and 50 years later the moral rhetoric of human rights is central to anthropological discourse. What is curious is that anthropologists have "rarely concentrated on the investigation of moral ideas" (Furer-Haimendorf 1967:2), displaying a "reluctance...to study other people's ethical systems" (Parkin 1985:4). Even the few who focus extensively on issues of morality acknowledge a problem. Elvin Hatch (1997:371) summarizes the state of affairs: "No moral theory has yet emerged that provides the theoretical basis for making cross-cultural value judgments and that enjoys widespread acceptance; hence the paradox of ethical relativism: we can't live with it, but it isn't clear how to avoid it." Benthall clings to Christian ethics because he believes that the effort to ground ethics in secular rationality has failed. He suspects that new assaults on human dignity cannot be adequately resisted with a purely secular rationality.

In the absence of any moral or ethical system able to claim that it speaks with the single acknowledged voice of moral reason, we are left with nothing but particular and competing moralities (MacIntyre 1990). Käser suggests that the divisions may be fundamental and not resolvable. Benthall, MacIntyre (1990), and Gellner (1992) argue that secularist hopes of a secure rational foundation for moral judgment have failed. Benthall implicitly warns that an attack on religiously based moralities may undercut a vital source of the very moral

2 For example, the article "Fundamentalism" in the 1931 Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (Niebuhr 1931:326-27) was written entirely in the past tense, which is where fundamentalists were thought to belong.
convictions we would wish people to have. Faubion stresses that the academy must engage a world "in which the plurality of ... moralities is an irrevocable fact." It is this "irrevocable fact" that leads Alasdair MacIntyre to call for procedural pluralism—a commitment to encouraging systematic encounters between people from divergent moral standpoints, encounters for which the university itself provides space and support (1990:232-36). What is called for is not that all parties become advocates of a single moral ideology but that all parties be committed to procedural pluralism as they engage the moral.

Hoad asks how tolerant I am prepared to be of people whose difference is offensive to my religious beliefs. The issue, of course, is whether, despite fundamental differences, we can engage the other respectfully and not only tolerate but strongly support the right of the other party to full participation. It is a fallacy to envision only two possibilities—Christian hegemony or suppression of Christian voices in support of a different hegemony. Smith (2000:61-91) discovered that at the grassroots level a majority of American evangelicals are deeply committed to procedural pluralism and to nonhegemonic forms of public engagement. One suspects that the commitment would be even stronger and more widespread if evangelicals felt that others were so committed.

Pels asks what I intend to accomplish in this essay. I do, of course, hope that it will introduce marked constraints on the invocation of "the missionary position." Initial responses suggest that I will be only partly successful. Van der Geest finds the image "irresistible." Clifford suggests this "fable" conveys "not exactly truths" but things that nonetheless "ought to be said." Dundes and Hoad defend its continued use in humor, in which Hoad believing he has an "ethical obligation" to invoke this image in mocking certain others. Benthall "devoutly" wishes for a moratorium on all metaphoric uses of the term. Pels, who has himself used the expression (1999:32), suggests that "no stylist in his right mind would dare to use it longer." With Clifford gritting his teeth on each new encounter with the expression and Shapiro now having a strong negative Pavlovian reaction to it, I suspect that this particular goal will to some degree be achieved.

More important, I hoped to provoke discussion of certain widespread biases in the academy and their implications for the representation of "religious others" and for social exclusion. Benthall, Burridge, Käser, Kipp, Luhrmann, Pels, and Van der Geest acknowledge the biases I point to. Clifford, Dundes, and Shapiro are less willing to do so. Benthall, Dominy, Jaarsma, and Kipp touch on the implications of bias for representation, while Clifford and Dundes simply invoke new images of hegemonic missionaries to replace the one just discounted. A number of respondents also touch on and/or critique rationales for silencing and exclusion. However, there appears to be a singular lack of enthusiasm for directly addressing academics' own hegemonic exercise of power and exclusion in the academy. Burridge and Luhrmann, by contrast, do directly address silencing and exclusion and strongly endorse the call for more openness in academe. This is a conversation which I hope will continue.

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