2-1-1998

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Recommended Citation

Hawley, J. C. (1998). Making Disciples of All Nations. In J. C. Hawley (Ed.), *Christian Encounters with the Other* (pp. 1-16). NYU Press.

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Making Disciples of All Nations

John C. Hawley

The whole problem is this: how to utter God in a practice of faith where I must decide what I wish to do with the woman or man I find in my path—make of him or her a human being with a right to life or a slave for life.—Jean-Marc Ela (139)

Perhaps there is such a thing as seduction. Conversion. Perhaps cultures absorb one another. If it is true that the Franciscan *padre* forced the Eucharist down the Indian's throat, maybe she forgot to close her mouth. Maybe she swallowed the Franciscan priest. After all, the churches of Latin America are crowded with Indians today. It is Europe that has lost its faith.—Richard Rodriguez (Crowley 9)

With this remarkable image Richard Rodriguez makes a point similar to one recently discussed at length by Kwame Anthony Appiah, to the effect that “the experience of the vast majority of [the] citizens of Europe’s African colonies was one of an essentially shallow penetration by the colonizer” (Appiah 7). The notion assumes a variety of shapes in contemporary writing reaching the West from the missionary’s target populations. In *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1956), for example, a novel that reads like a manifesto for the liberation of the imaginations of his fellow Cameroonians, Mongo Beti offers a bitterly ironic salvation to the French Fr. Drumont, a 20-year veteran missionary. Only by rejecting the work that had given meaning to his adult life—only by accepting a dark epiphany that calls into question his zealotry and sends him home to France—does Drumont emerge with his integrity intact. In his bitter parting conversation with Monsieur Vidal, the smug colonial District Administrator who demanded the Church play a pacifying role, Drumont explains his decision:

"These people worshipped God without our help. What matter if they worshipped after their own fashion—by eating one another, or by dancing in the moonlight, or by wearing bark charms around their necks? Why do we insist on imposing our customs upon them?"

Vidal's mouth fell open and he flushed slowly as he gazed at the Father, who turned as he spoke and watched the courtyard slowly emptying.

"I've never asked myself this before. Why don't the Chinese devote themselves to converting all Paris to Confucianism or Buddhism or whatever? Oh, I'm not saying that I've solved the problem. Perhaps I'll never solve it, except by the Grace of God. But all the same, I'm certain that it's a serious question." (150–51)

It is not simply that some metaphorical version of Mr. Kurtz has now died in Drumont's eyes; nor, clearly, that the priest's God is dead. Rather, Drumont discerns that all of those who might find their own reflection in a Mr. Kurtz and in the idealized colonizing impulse that drives him (and them) into ever-new jungles, is death itself—the awesome, transmogrified into the horrible. And as Drumont remarks, this history raises a serious question: why does Christianity, vying with Islam for preeminence in this regard, feel the need to impose its "customs" on the rest of the world? The history of those encounters raises another question: why has an impulse at least partially driven by sincere concern for the "salvation" of others so often played into the hands of secular administrators who happily preempt Drumont's "Grace of God" that has had a vivifying effect in individual lives?

Of course, for many Christians the question has been seen from two sides. There are those who were once "pagans," for example, and who now self-identify as Christian; conversely, there are also pagans (or Muslims, Jews, etc.) who were once Christians. In both cases conversion involves not only the acceptance of a new faith, but also the rejection of another. "In one sense," John D. Barbour writes in his suggestive study of "deconversion," "the 'turning from' and 'turning to' are alternative perspectives on the same process of personal metamorphosis, stressing either the rejected past of the old self or the present convictions of the reborn self" (3). Janet Jacobs offers interesting insights into a similar, though extreme, process that sometimes occurs when one leaves a new age cult. In both conversion narratives and deconversion

narratives, there is an element of self-consciousness with regard to choice that is generally absent in the lives of those who have simply wandered out of a doctrinal faith through a barely perceived process of secularization, and absent, as well, in the lives of those who keep the faith while avoiding confrontation with the metaphysical claims of their inherited belief system. Those who write about their new understanding of reality generally envision their movement as a journey away from a former, and less reflective, self. As Barbour notes, "a conscientious and responsible account of one's life may need to explain not only adherence to new convictions but also shifts, erosions, and losses of belief" (4).

There are also those who were baptized very young and who later, upon reflection and prayer, are "born again" into a genuine personal commitment and "conversion" to the faith that had, before, been imposed as a cultural template for social functioning. Significantly, in many of these cases the "new" man (or woman) shores up that conversion by distancing the old man, the former unconverted self, from the new, and by giving public testimony to the ontological change that has marvelously transpired. In a sense, the new convert divides him- or herself in half, now defining the regenerated self almost totally in contradistinction to that "other" self—the one that had been benighted but is now happily abandoned.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that individuals whose self-definition depends upon their maintenance of the break with past customs would sometimes look with suspicion upon fellow converts—whose sincerity would be frequently tested. Broader social motives have also played a role in policing the community. Benzion Netanyahu's study of the Inquisition records the attack on Spain's so-called *conversos*, the Christian descendants of the Jews who had been forced to convert during the anti-Semitic riots that swept across Spain at the end of the fourteenth century. It was believed by many then (and now) that these converts were secretly still Jews. Netanyahu disagrees: his studies suggest that it was to remove the *conversos* from their high public offices and to prevent their intermarriage with the Spanish people that they were accused of being secret Judaizers and members of a "corrupt" race that would "pollute" the Spanish blood. "This was," he writes, "the first time that extreme anti-Semitism was wedded to a theory of race" (Netanyahu 1076). In his view,

The Spanish Inquisition was not created by 'believers in Christ' in order to 'perpetuate their belief,' but by Christians who

wished to deny other Christians their rightful share in Spain's Christian society. It was an institution based mostly on false pretenses, sham pretexts, and invented accusations. For its purpose was not the exaltation of religion, but the suppression of a people that could not be reduced save by pinning on it the charge of heresy. (1076)

The issue, while couched in a zeal for religious purity, rooted itself in far less transcendent aims: money, land, power. For more than three and a half centuries the Inquisition extended its reach, supposedly in a holy crusade against insincerity. But, in Netanyahu's words,

What moved the Inquisitors (with a few exceptions, of course) to apply their dreadful techniques . . . was not devotion to this or that principle, but the desire to extend their controls and powers and demonstrate that extension in fact. They were certainly not enthusiastic at the prospect of making [a] Unity of Faith come true . . . ; for the ruthless persecution they launched . . . was not calculated to bring [others] closer to Christianity but to keep them as far from it as possible. (1080)

For a variety of reasons, therefore—a conviction of the truth of one's faith and a consequent generosity in sharing it, or fear of backsliding, or obsession with group identification—the impulse to display the *sincerity* of one's belief by becoming an enthusiastic apostle of the new faith typifies the Christian conversion experience. This begins most notably with Saul of Tarsus, whose name became Paul as a nominal vaccination against the disease of his former self. Among the various studies of the ramifications of this evangelical urge, that of Michael Ragussis on the role of Jewish conversion in Protestant England from the 1790s through the 1870s is one of the most thorough. For Ragussis, "the Jewish question" played a pivotal role during this period in defining not just the individual believer but the national identity of England, as well. This was principally because it represented, on a "local" scale, the mission that Christian England saw as the compelling moral justification for the extension of its economic and political empire. That mission was

the Evangelical crusade to reform England through a national conversion at home and the dissemination of the Gospel to "the

heathen" abroad, a crusade that swept through every corner of England and every class of English society and whose effects were felt around the world, especially in India and Africa. (Ragussis 2)

Nonetheless, as with the Inquisition, there yet remained the suspicion that the convert in England itself just might not be Christian *enough*—as in the case of Disraeli, whose political foes described him as representative of “‘the secret Jew’ who invades England through the passport of conversion in order to undermine English culture” (13). To be English meant to be Christian, and there were gradations of “Englishness” correlative to one’s branch of Christianity and one’s obvious degree of religious conviction. The absurdity of these demarcations was brought home with vigor by a “ritualist” Anglo-Catholic at the time who had been accused by less “Roman” Christians of being “un-English.” R.F. Littledale responded that

Christianity itself is eminently unEnglish. It was cradled in Palestine, amidst Aramaic-speaking Jews; it was published in the East by Greek-speaking Hellenists; it was brought to our shores by Latin-speaking Italians. The most solemn of its rites cannot be celebrated without a liquor which England does not produce. Druidism may, perhaps, have been indigenous to Britain in some particulars, but Christianity in none. (Shipley 68, qtd in Reed 235)

Defenses such as Littledale’s usually have little impact since, with personal and even national identity in the balance, the strongest attacks are metaphysical. As Elaine Pagels observes of the early Christians, they saw themselves “not as philosophers but as combatants in a cosmic struggle, God’s warriors against Satan” (Pagels 116). One’s role in the world gains a significance, even a grandeur, in one’s embrace of a mission to make straight the way of the Lord. Personal *metanoia* leads, then, to important questions regarding one’s changing role in society:

All converts understood, of course, that baptism washes away sins and expels evil spirits, and conveys to the recipient the spirit of God, the spirit that transforms a sinner into an ally of Christ and his angels. But then what? What does a Christian

have to do to stand 'on the side of the angels' in this world? What precisely is required if, for example, the baptized Christian is married to a pagan, or is a soldier, who has sworn allegiance to the emperor, or is a slave?" (Pagels 149)

The answer is that one becomes, in turn, a missionary, at least in spirit—one makes the other a bit more like oneself. A need to paint a backdrop against which one's own defining characteristics come into sharper focus is, understandably, at the heart of this rigid binarism. Where it is combined with tolerance and even valorization of "the other" (in the Chinese rites controversy, for example, or the Jesuit reductions in Paraguay) the history of religions grows less scandalous, less repulsive. As Peter Mason notes, however, all too often strong psychological needs quickly come into play to overwhelm an ethics of common decency: "The question of alterity," he writes, "poses the question of the border: where is the rupture between self and other to be situated?" (Mason 1). This border begins with one's body, quickly extends to one's community, and soon becomes quite literally a *geography* of difference—us *here* and you *over there*:

As for liminality, in the European imagination the monstrous human races can be located in a variety of places as long as their location is *elsewhere*, over the border In medieval epic or romance they may be situated in the forest or in the desert, both of which are places on the extreme margin. In ethnography and cartography it is the uninhabited areas of the globe which are their favourite haunts. Their steady relegation further out to the edge is in correlation to the relentless thrust of European expansion which is constantly extending its borders. (Mason 161)

But in the history of missiology there emerges an interesting bifurcation in response to this instinct for "othering" the rest of humanity. As Nicholas Thomas records, perhaps the majority of missionaries developed their methodologies based upon "an 'incorporative' ideology and a religious framework [that] characterized Renaissance colonialism: others were represented as pagans rather than as savages or members of inferior races, and their conversion served at least to legitimize expansion, even when it was not systematically pursued" (Thomas 125). In

this view, the "other" was seen as one's natural brother and sister; despite perceived unfortunate differences in customs they were considered capable of receiving the grace of God and of entering more fully into the benefits of Christendom. At its heart, this approach was egalitarian—even if dismissive of other cultures and, often enough, other values. Non-westerners were human, all right, but they were still children who needed a firm guiding hand.

Missionaries, however, needed transportation to the heart of darkness, and with the ships came the competing philosophy:

At a general level this view of difference and history could be seen to be displaced by a secular ideology, which understood human variation in natural rather than religious terms, and which tended to postulate fixed hierarchies rather than mutable categories. The premise of stable racial difference underpinned not only slavery and apartheid, but also apparently more benevolent segregationist policies. (Thomas 125)

In other words, not only were these strange men and women pagans but they were actually not quite human, at all—or, more kindly, they were less fully human than the colonizer. Those rules of social exchange that had been so painfully legislated in Europe over the centuries need not be extended to these hominids. Very likely, their brutish minds would welcome the sense of purpose that the Westerner could happily provide them. Over the centuries these vying philosophies competed for dominance in the colonial territories, and variations evolved that sought to wed elements of both. If carried to its logical conclusion the secular ideology actually worked against the intentions of the missionaries, as Fr. Drumont learned: the differences between "us" and "them" are seen to be as natural and sustainable as those thought to divide man and woman:

If one kind takes on the attributes or environment of the other, if a process of conversion is initiated, the result can only be repugnant or dangerous, as in the parody of the native who is a "bad imitation" of a European, manifestly threatening the British segregationist project . . . The notion that types are essentially stable in their differences, and that any admixture, hybridization or conversion can lead to no good is manifested in

many specific ways: for instance in the notion that ill-health and depopulation arise partly from the natives' inability to make sensible or correct use of European clothes. (Thomas 132-33)

Happily, such "hybridization" has frequently been attempted by missionaries to notable effect. Tzvetan Todorov discusses the Dominican friar Diego Duran, who had lived in Mexico since the age of six and who wrote, between 1576 and 1581 his *Historia de las Indias de Nueva Espana de la Tierra Firme*. As a Roman Catholic priest he called in the Inquisition to root out religious syncretism among the Indians, yet wrote in detail (for a European audience) of how their native rites paralleled the Christian. He concluded that St. Thomas (but now known to the Mexicans, it seems, as Topiltzin) must have preached to them, and he speaks of them as a lost tribe of Israel. Interestingly, Todorov, who calls Duran "the most accomplished cultural hybrid of the sixteenth century" (Todorov 210), speculates that the priest most likely came from a family of *conversos*. "We may see this," writes Todorov, "as the reason for the zeal with which he attaches himself to resemblances while neglecting differences: he must have already, and more or less consciously, performed an activity of this sort in an effort to reconcile the two religions, Jewish and Christian. Perhaps he was already predisposed toward cultural hybridization" (210). In any case, Duran apparently interpreted his missionary role as Janus-faced, turning to the Indian his rigid demands of orthodoxy, and to Europeans his desire that Indians be seen not as subhumans but as potential members of the body of Christ. As with similarly-minded missionaries, then and now, his scorn for the secular *conquistadores* is severe, and inconsequential. In any case, exponents of this hybridization are comparatively rare. Far more typical are rationales for depicting the alterity of the unrecognizable.

A similar embrace of alterity may shape the response of those "targets" of missionaries who choose to cope with the onslaught by insincerely succumbing while maintaining interior distance. Their response is various, sometimes respectful, often defensive. As Mason points out,

In the work of assimilation, the relationship is never one of equivalence. On the one hand, the knowledge and power of the Whites may be recognized as a transformation and concentration of the shamanic power and knowledge which were once the prerogative of the Indians . . . [In any case,] various strat-

egies may be adopted to cope with the White hegemony. One is a form of resistance by encapsulation: the Whites are allowed to enter native thought and life, but only in certain restricted and circumscribed areas Another strategy is to devalue the alleged superiority of the Whites. (Mason 164)

Devalued or not, however, the military superiority frequently enough has carried the day and the tactics of the "target population" have proved futile. A level of comfort is gradually achieved by the homogenization of the foreign. "As a structure of alterity," Mason observes, "assimilation is a process by which the otherness of the other is eliminated and the other is reduced to self. Assimilation works in both directions, for it implies that, whether Indian is assimilated to European or European to Indian, it is possible in either case to reduce the other to the familiar, to self" (163).

Viewed from a psychological point of view, what seems to be desired is the elimination of disturbance to one's hermeneutic framework. As Elaine Pagels reports, some of the earliest Christian theorists felt the need for univocity, a desire that appears, paradoxically, to have intensified within the many sects that later emerged from the Reformation. In a church that frequently found itself (and still often finds itself) under attack by civil authorities, it is not surprising that a circling of wagons would be the order of the day. More perplexing, however, is the prevalence of paranoia in ages when civil and church authorities seemed to speak with one voice. In 1199, for example, Pope Innocent III "equated heresy with treason for the first time and threatened the perpetual disinheritance of the heirs of heretics" (Richards 54).

Pagels notes that both Irenaeus and Tertullian, around the year 180, insist that what characterizes the true church is

unanimity—agreement in doctrine, morals, and leadership. Christians, Tertullian says, quoting Paul, should 'all speak and think the very same things.' Whoever deviates from the consensus is, by definition, a heretic; for, as Tertullian points out, the Greek word translated 'heresy' (*hairesis*) literally means 'choice'; thus a 'heretic' is 'one who makes a choice.' (Pagels 163)

It is difficult to say for whom Tertullian speaks when he advises that

[t]o stamp out heresy, . . . church leaders must not allow people to ask questions, for it is 'questions that make people heretics'—above all, questions like these: Whence comes evil? Why is it permitted? And what is the origin of human beings? Tertullian wants to stop such questions and impose upon all believers the same *regula fidei*, 'rule of faith,' or creed . . . [for] 'Where will the end of seeking be? The point of seeking is to find; the purpose in finding, to believe.' Now that the church can provide a direct and simple answer to all questions in its rule of faith, Tertullian says, the only excuse for continuing to seek is sheer obstinacy: 'Away with the one who is always seeking, for he never finds anything; for he is seeking where nothing can be found. Away with the one who is always knocking, for he knocks where there is no one to open; away with the one who is always asking, for he asks of one who does not hear.' (Pagels 163–64)

Though such authoritarian advice seems to fly in the face of the Biblical injunction to be persistent in one's besieging of heaven, it set the stage for the demonization of a broad range of "others" who would not stop knocking. Frequently enough, the attacks have been framed not only as crusades against doctrinal impurity, but against sexual license, as well. In his study of minority groups in the Middle Ages, among whom he includes Jews, witches, heretics, homosexuals, prostitutes, and lepers, Jeffrey Richards concludes that they were portrayed as having one failing in common: a perceived sexual deviancy (Richards 21, 58). Demands for conformity are not soon sated.

In sharp contrast to such intolerance is the contemporary approach to missiology, which aligns itself in many ways with the sort of hybridization encouraged by Diego Duran. Morris Inch describes the approach as "ethnotheology" (7), an attempt to conceive and express a commonly-held faith in various cultural settings. Aylward Shorter similarly notes an impressive development of inculturation theology since Vatican Council II, but also notes a reluctance to put the theory into practice (Shorter 241). But Jean-Marc Ela, the Cameroonian liberation theologian with whom this chapter opened, notes ominously that

The church will have to be destroyed as a structure of Christendom in order to rediscover a creativity adequate to the problems posed by the shock of the gospel in an African cli-

mate All false universality, perforce, ends in institutional and canonical rubble, for it is conceived without taking account of the relationship with the Spirit that a church should live in its relationship with a culture It is not necessarily true that the Judaeo-Mediterranean culture that carried Christianity to our shores is essential to the universality of that Christianity. (108-12)

Tertullian might not recognize Ela's Catholicism. Yet even today there are those who seek a purity that would seem proudly to embrace intolerance. Apparently arising from a dismay over the corruption of spiritual aims by secular demands for power, Jacques Ellul can sound, ironically, quite fascistic. In his view, "[w]e need keep the word *Christianity* only for the ideological and sociological movement which is its perversion" (Ellul 11). Many practicing Christians no doubt share Ellul's disgust over the "subversion" of their faith by the institutions that have accreted over the centuries and that seem both self-perpetuating and decaying. But whereas someone like Aylward Shorter may see signs of hope in a theology that seeks to adapt to the culture in which it finds a new home, Ellul despairs because

Christianity imbibes cultures like a sponge. Dominated by Greco-Roman culture, it became territorial and feudal (benefices) in the feudal world with all the beliefs . . . that back it. It then became bourgeois, urban, and argentiferous with the capitalist system. It is now becoming socialist with the diffusion of socialism Today it is letting itself be permeated by the values of African, Oriental, and American Indian cultures Tomorrow we might have adjustment to Islam as today we have adjustment to Marxism. We now have a rationalist or liberal Christianity as we used to have an Aristotelian or Platonic Christianity in a mockery of being 'all things to all men.' (18)

As high-minded and crusading as this criticism intends to sound, what is its aim? Does it imagine any faith can be timeless, bodiless, and purely interior? Should it withdraw from "the world" and serve, not as a heaven, but as a fortress? In a nutshell, Ellul's approach is clear: "Syncretism is a triumph of the prince of lies" (48). The appeal of this prosaic defense against "subversion" has always been strong in human his-

tory, and its overlay of righteousness and personal asceticism has provided impetus to a type of personal conversion. "With the grace of God," it seems implicitly to say, "I will not be like the rest of men"—not, for example, like that poor publican in the back of the synagogue. Not like that "other" over there.

Taking much the same data, though, R.A. Markus demonstrates that in the first three centuries Christianity constantly reworked its notion of mission; not surprisingly, as culture became increasingly "christianized" conversion also had to take on ever new meanings. Similarly, today's optimists like Shorter can offer far more confident programs for future incursions of the "grace of God" that seem both less fearful (and fear-some) than Ellul's, and less dependent on human perfectibility:

To take a monocultural view of the universal patrimony of the Church is patently false It is, for example, Greek and Slav, Coptic and Syrian. Its theological tradition is not merely Western, let alone Scholastic Among these precedents we must surely count former projects of inculturation which were not accepted at the time but which won the Church's recognition afterwards. (256)

But "afterwards" follows a painful path. If the history of conversion, Christian and otherwise, teaches nothing else, it surely suggests the need for a cautious response whenever anyone declares with confidence that he or she has discerned in someone "foreign" the activity of the devil. In fact, surveying the contemporary religious scene observers as diverse as Shorter and Richard Rodriguez can find the true source of spiritual power in the least familiar of "our" brothers and sisters. Rodriguez, for example, offers this provocative commentary on modern missionary efforts:

Today's Indian convert to evangelical Protestantism could turn out to be an ecumenical pioneer. By casting so wide a net over the Catholic South, after all, Protestant missionaries may be harvesting more than they want. The accretions of the souls they reap may be a cultural Catholicism. Some ancient Catholic sensibility is finding its way into low-church Protestantism. (Crowley 11)

But a "cultural" Christianity, Catholic or Protestant, seems to be what disturbs critics like Ellul. Could not a purer doctrine, after all, stand outside culture as a prophetic voice of witness—as a call, like that of Jeremiah, to repentance and a renewed turning toward God? Human history suggests that the answer to that question is no. The central doctrine of Christianity, the Incarnation, likewise suggests that God himself does not stand outside culture, but enters in to it. But enter at what point? Veteran missionaries like Shorter, far from rejecting the enterprise as did Mongo Beti's disillusioned Frenchman, finds the true impetus for conversion coming these days from the voices of the *powerless*—those who, in ways that might placate Ellul, are perhaps most like the earliest Christians. "At the present time of writing, the vocation of the small Christian communities is to be the keeper of the Church's conscience for inculturation" (270). A *conscience for inculturation*: no longer anathema, but a command from *below*.

In the chapters that follow we offer a comparative historical survey of Christianity's encounters with the non-Christian, with the hope that readers may begin to answer Fr. Drumont's compelling question: why do Christians do this? We believe the sites of conversion that we have chosen to discuss are representative, fascinating and comprehensive in type, though this is a bold assertion in the face of the essential individuality of confessional documents. And, as with Karl F. Morrison in his study of Augustine, we are struck with the paradox that "there has been unusual consistency among a host of witnesses to this point: that the experience of conversion is beyond thought or words. Equally, there has been no lack of efforts to express the inconceivable and ineffable" (vii): the process of conversion generates, among other things, a plethora of texts. Reflection on such a powerful human experience has also produced a plethora of studies. David B. Barrett's, for example, provides a statistical accounting of the past, present, and future plans for Christian missiology. Among the most thoughtful recent studies is Lewis R. Rambo's, which demonstrates that

for some people the consequence is a radically transformed life. Their patterns of beliefs and actions are significantly different from what they were before. Others gain a sense of mission and purpose, and yet others acquire a very quiet sense of security and peace. The conversion process can also have a destructive effect. . . . In any case, conversion is precarious. (170)

As in Barbour's study of deconversion, we are also interested in noting how the various individuals under discussion seek to find "metaphors and rhetorical strategies adequate to explain how the workings of conscience required the rejection of a former faith" (6)—and the acceptance of an Other. These studies reflect the fact that conversions, whether joyously embraced or cruelly imposed, upset human ecologies. They suggest that "true" conversion bubbles up from below, as Richard Rodriguez has suggested. "The agents of change and growth in the church," he writes, "are always the people in the pews, not the cardinals in their silks. The shepherd is moved by the sheep, even by the sinner within the flock. Isn't that the point of the Guadalupe story? The Spanish bishop is the last one to see" (Crowley 11). A similar sense of egalitarian availability to influence—which may appear to many as syncretism, senility or psychosis—closes Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*. In that play's interesting mix of nostalgia, manic alienation, and hope, Mongo Beti's Drumont might find a kindred soul in Father Jack, an old man returning home to Ireland after twenty-five years of missionary work in Africa. To the dismay of his sisters he now calls Africa "home," and conducts a ritual as a fitting metaphor for the cross-cultural exchange at the heart of true gift-giving (and, some would add, of true missiology):

Jack: Now, if I were at home, what we do when we swap or barter is this. I place my possession on the ground—(*He and Gerry enact this ritual.*) Go ahead. (*Of hat*) Put it on the grass—anywhere—just at your feet. Now take three steps away from it—yes?—a symbolic distancing of yourself from what you once possessed. Good. Now turn round once—like this—yes, a complete circle—and that's the formal rejection of what you once had—you no longer lay claim to it. Now I cross over to where you stand—right? And you come over to the position I have left. So. Excellent. The exchange is now formally and irrevocably complete. This is my straw hat. And that is your tricorne hat. Put it on. Splendid! And it suits you! (Act 2)

Fascinating examples of similar cultural exchanges in missionary work are available in studies by James Axtell and John V. Taylor, among others. Yet, the reactions of Fr. Jack's kind Christian kin to his unwelcome conversion remind theatergoers that the "invasion" of one religious culture by another is disturbing, generally casting the convert, for

his former community, as one of the stricken.

If one recalls the skepticism greeting early converts in the New Testament when they returned to share their stories of wonder, it should be no surprise to imagine the scene from the eyes of any faith community today: here was one of "us," now corrupted and led astray by something which threatens to make him or her into someone we no longer recognize. But the shape of that apparent loss always carries marks of its origin (Barbour 211), as a seed reflects its soil. One's movement from one system of meaning to another is never pure and is always syncretic, and remains "precarious" no matter how binary and final the convert may appear to envision the rebirth ("I was blind, and now I see"). Who knows where such changes lead an individual, a religion, or a society? As Richard Rodriguez pointed out, "missionaries may be harvesting more than they want" (Crowley 11): willy nilly they ironically enact the Biblical injunction to bring in the weeds along with the wheat—even if some enemy hath done the sowing.

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