CONFLICTING SUBJECTIVITIES: UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS TEACHERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By

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(Under the Direction of Kevin J. Burke)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the ways in which educators that self-identify as religious produce themselves as ethical subjects within the pseudo-secular space of public schools. This inquiry has its foundations in poststructuralist theories such as Derrida's deconstruction (deeply informed by Caputo's work in that field), Foucault's thinking on discourse, and Butler's work on The Subject. Furthermore, it understands public schools in America as *brackish* spaces wherein secular facades are informed by a sedimentation of religious discourse. Interviews with three educators serve as both data and provocation to explore a myriad of theoretical concepts including Derrida's ethical perhaps, Foucault's work on care of the self in the form of regimens, competing discourses as a vehicle to produce subjects, and the deconstruction of binaries. Furthermore, theological concepts such as spiritual disciplines, hopeful doubt, transgression, and the concept of "lostness" are explored around and within this interview data.

INDEX WORDS: Religion, education, theology, deconstruction, discourse

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Hey God, I watched the news today

Why are your people so fucking mean"

(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 2005, Track 10)?

An individual's story can sometimes illuminate a larger structure.

Andre despised Christianity, Christians, church, all of it; I was pretty much indifferent to the whole thing, but would take great pleasure in his snide comments, cruel humor, and outright aggression over the subject. High school friends, we were both poor and angry and worked hard to feel superior to those that we believed were our intellectual inferiors. I was, at best, agnostic, but Andre wore his atheism with the same passion that members of the First Baptist Youth Group wore their faith. He was a terror to them and was quickly and quietly left to his own damnation. Guilty by association, so was I. Why did he possess this hatred, a hatred that over time settled into a sort of indifferent disdain for all religion? As sophomores at the University of Georgia, after a late night of drinking, Andre told me a story that gave me some insight into this question. He told me the story only once, but it has remained with me these many years.

Long before I knew him, Andre attended a small public school in South Georgia. Part of his daily ritual as a third grader was for the teacher, Mrs. Strickland, to pray a blessing over the students' food as they left for lunch: say grace, wash your hands, enjoy your meal. This seemed innocuous enough until he asked his mother why they did not pray before their meals at home.

At the time, he did not understand why this made her so angry. According to Andre, the next day Mrs. Strickland came to class late and in tears. She announced that the class could not say grace anymore because *someone*—staring angrily at Andre—did not believe in God. Years later, over Coronas and tequila shots, Andre's eyes brimmed with tears. The stares of the teacher might have been a young boy's imagination, but the bullying that followed was real, persistent, and cruel.

And God watched silently

As did Mrs. Strickland.

I do not believe that this teacher's expression of faith was the sole cause of Andre's lack of it, nor do I believe the challenge to Mrs. Strickland's actions collapsed her faith. But I am confident that this interaction—this power relationship—affected each of them. After college, I became a teacher in a public high school, and this story—this drunken, tearful memory—remained with me. I would sometimes measure my actions against this other teacher I had never met, who was most likely more fiction than fact, a construction of memory, an amalgamation of several persons. But she remained a specter of sorts for me; more so now, after Andre took his own life several years ago. Many things about my friend's life—and death—haunt me, but this incident from a time before we even knew each other has become a North Star of sorts for me especially as my own relationship with religion evolved. As a result, I hope to do better by understanding more deeply.

But that is not enough.

Understanding is not simply about doing better: it is often about surviving. Foucault (1983/1996) argued in a deeply personal manner that "knowledge is for me that which must function as a protection of individual existence and as a comprehension of the exterior

world...Knowledge as a means of surviving by understanding" (p. 374). Through his life and work, Foucault (1983/1996) revealed the deconstruction of the academic/personal binary and could argue unironically that "I am not a really good academic" (Foucault, p. 379) for that very reason. Daily, teachers maintain a tension between protecting their individual existence and comprehending the exterior world. For the purposes of this study, the focus of this individual existence revolves around religious belief, and the exterior world focuses on—but is not limited to—public education. This study explores how these educators construct themselves in these tensions, and perhaps, how the binaries by which they are often represented deconstruct: personal/professional, public/private, religious/secular, church/state, and a host of others.

My first year at the University of Georgia, I roomed with Brian, the son of a Baptist minister. Prominently placed in our meager living room he framed a poster entitled "Twenty Reasons Beer is Better than Jesus." I laughed at it because I found it clever and funny; he laughed because of the offense it produced in many visitors—he laughed because it hurt people's feelings. Where Andre's hatred for religion was nebulous and general, Brian's was fierce, precise, and vicious. He used his ample understanding of the Bible as both a scalpel and cudgel. Foucault (1971/1977) asserted that "knowledge is not for knowing; knowledge is for cutting" (p. 154). I understand Foucault's idea of cutting to be an act of revealing, of unveiling discourse; Brian used it for this purpose, but with an anger that clouded his vision. It was ungenerous to the point of being disingenuous. It was Sedgwick's (2003) "paranoid position" (p. 128) amplified to a point of unreasonableness. So, interestingly, it was the disdain for religion of those around me that piqued my curiosity about it. After graduating from UGA, I did not know how not to study, so I began to read about religion and—perhaps inevitably—Christianity. I read Augustine's *Confessions* because King's X, a rock band I liked, quoted him in the liner notes; I read C.S.

Lewis's *Mere Christianity* because I had read some of his Science Fiction novels in high school; I read Ravi Zacharias's *Jesus Among Other Gods* because I liked the cover. And with time, I began to understand. With time, I began to believe. My encounters with these texts—and many others—are key to my conversion, but were these encounters random, providential or something else entirely? Foucault (1981/1970) argues that "there is scarcely a society without its major narratives, which are recounted, repeated, and varied" (p. 56). Am I just recounting and repeating a variation of my society's major narrative? Is my faith produced by "ritualized sets of discourses which are recited in well-defined circumstances; things said once and preserved because it is suspected that behind them there is a secret or treasure" (p. 56)? I'll argue repeatedly that subjects are produced (wholly and in part) by the discourses in which they exist. Why would I be any different? Maybe I simply suspect that behind this discourse there is a secret to know, a treasure to obtain, and—for now—that suspicion is enough.

Now, as a veteran public school teacher who self identifies as religious, I am deeply interested in how my faith helps to construct who I am as an educator. Power and knowledge—what Foucault would call discourse—are always present in this construction because "the self is linked to the exercise of power" (Foucault, 2001/2005, p. 36). Furthermore, it is clear to me that my theology affects my pedagogy—my teaching philosophy—and vice versa. In fact, the work of Derrida and Caputo have helped me understand the ways in which this philosophy/theology binary has already been deconstructed showing "the affirmative move of deconstruction, the overturning and opening up of a violent structure so that something different might happen" (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 617). It is that "something different" that fascinates me. Rob Bell (2011), a former pastor who knows a bit about opening up violent structures, intones that the

> ancient sages said the words of the sacred text were black letters on a white page...all that white space, waiting to be filled with our responses and discussions and debates and opinions and longings and desires and wisdom and insight. (p. x)

This inquiry hopes to fill in some of that empty space.

Teachers freely talk about their teaching philosophy; you hear very little about a teaching theology, but it is there for many. I am interested in how that works. I would posit that the philosophy/theology binary deconstructs—is deconstructing—along with the ubiquitous church/state binary. So, how do teachers who identify as religious negotiate the brackish waters of public education—how do they construct themselves as subjects in that space? Furthermore, this inquiry addresses what Foucault (1988/1996) would call a "concrete problem... a field containing a number of points that are particularly fragile or sensitive at the present time…" (p. 411). Public education is a complex, and at times, volatile political topic; religion, more so. It is this fragility that makes this combination of topics so compelling—it is our very reticence to address it deeply that makes it important. So, again, Foucault (1988/1996) gives us some insight to what we should be studying:

> The game is to try to detect those things which have not yet been talked about, those things that, at the present time, introduce, show, give some more or less vague indications of the fragility of our system of thought, in our way of reflecting, in our practices. (p. 411)

I am attempting to dig past the externality and "make visible what is invisible only because it's too much on the surface of things" (Foucault, 1969/1996, p. 57-58).

And that is, of course, discourse. Which along with subjectivity and deconstruction are the major tools of my analysis.

Significance

"This is church

This is state

Rock 'n' roll

Amazing grace"

(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1988, Track 4).

This work is significant because of public education in America's complex history with religion and secularism as well as public educators' unique place in American society. First, religion remains an important but contentious part of American life. A recent Gallup poll found that almost eight in ten Americans identify as religious, mostly Christian; however, despite that impressive representation, seven in ten Americans believe that religion is losing its influence in society. This complexity is further expressed by the fact that while the majority of Americans (53%) say that religion is 'very important' in their lives, approximately one in five claim no formal religious identity (Newport, 2016). Nord (2010) bases some of this on America's complex history:

> The United States is a very religious country in terms of belief in God, and it is comparatively religious in terms of commitment to religious institutions, but it is quite secular in terms of its public institutions—in part a consequence of our historic decision to separate church and state constitutionally. (p. 21)

Nord's analysis is apt, but this division is much more porous than he might claim: many of these "secular" institutions are built upon a religious discourse that easily and often comes to the surface in interesting and powerful ways. Regardless, the history of the United States is a complex mixture of Puritan dogmatism and Enlightenment tolerance; we are John Winthrop's

"city upon a hill" yet embrace Thomas Jefferson's "wall of separation between Church & State." Products of this history, we remain "a very religious society and a secular state" (Asad, 2008, p. 28). This tension exists in both our public schools and the teachers who dedicate much of their lives to educating students.

Palmer (2007) argued that as educators we all "teach who we are" (p. 2). So what if a teacher defines herself as a religious person? There can be no doubt that a "teacher's previous career and life experience shapes their view of teaching…[and their] lives outside school, their latent identities and cultures, have an important impact on their work as teachers" (Ball & Goodson, 1985, p. 12). White (2009) argues that religion is a part of many teachers' lived experience but that "the majority of educational research assumes that teachers are neutral agents of the state" (p. 864). If teachers are indeed more than "neutral agents of the state," it is important to understand the ways in which their "latent identities" influence who they are and what they do in the classroom.

Religion

Defining religion is a Sisyphean task; however, before attempting to understand the ways in which religion functions in public schools, it would be prudent to posit a workable definition of it. Caputo (2001) begins perhaps as generally as possible: "By religion, therefore, let me stipulate, I mean something simple, open-ended, and old-fashioned, namely, the love of God" (p. 1). The paradox of something being both "simple" and "open-ended" only hints at the complexity surrounding religion. Moving to a more specific understanding, Keller argues that religion is "a set of beliefs that explain what life is all about, who we are, and the most important things that human beings should spend their time doing" (Keller, 2008, p. 15). Bell (2005), too, speaks enigmatically, yet about Christianity specifically:

> The Christian faith is mysterious to the core. It is about things and beings that ultimately can't be put into words. Language fails. And if we do definitively put God into words, we have at that very moment made God something God is not. (p. 19)

Bell's understanding of Christianity (echoing the thinking of Saint Augustine) is lovely and mysterious and poetic; however, it is too nebulous for my purposes. Caputo (2001) moves to something more specific:

> By "the religious," I mean a basic structure of human experience and even, as I hope to show, the very thing that most constitutes human experience as experience, as something that is really happening. I do not confine religion to something confessional or sectarian, like being a Muslim or a Hindu, a Catholic or a Protestant, although I hasten to add that the great religions of the world are important and without them we would quickly lose sight of religious categories and practices, which means that we would lose something basic. (p. 9)

Here, Caputo introduces the idea of structure in religion as "something basic" that society would lack if it were lost; however, he does not confine it to these "'confessional' religions" (Caputo, 2013, p. 44). Throughout his writing, Caputo (2013) holds in tension the ways in which confessional religions can "embody this search [for God]" but can also "block it." (p. 44). This understanding, though fascinating, may be too broad at this point in my research. Hartwick's (2014) idea of religion as a "metaphysical belief structure" (p. 2) moves somewhere closer, but Lester and Patrick (2006) give a much more precise definition of religion as "a comprehensive belief system that organizes the individual's activities and thoughts, commands adherents to engage in certain behaviors and prohibits them from engaging in others….[and] can be relevant to a wide range of activities and beliefs" (p. 335). Though imperfect—as any definition of

religion must be—, this definition is clear, concise, and workable. It also allows religion to be acknowledged as "a social and historical *fact*, which has legal, domestic and political, and economic dimensions" (Asad, 2008, p. 28). More general definitions do not allow for that.

Public education and secularism

Are public schools in the United States of America secular, religious, or some mixture of the two? I plan to reinscribe the word *brackish* to describe the religious/secular tension present in public schools. *Brackish* refers to the mixture of salty and fresh water found at the mouth of rivers—these places are called *estuaries*, enclosed places where the transition between fresh and saltwater occurs. Though complex, estuaries are incredibly fertile and allow a large variety of animals to thrive. I believe that public schools can be understood in the same manner. Interestingly enough, the term *brackish* has a secondary meaning of something that is unpleasant and distasteful. This word seems apt and rich with a strong desire to be deconstructed in the Derridian sense.

Much of the literature around religion and public schools in America delineates—and often bemoans—its movement from overtly religious institutions to significantly more secular ones. Furthermore, much of it is an attempt to describe modern public education's complex relationship with religion and devise ways to reintroduce religion into this public space. An understanding of Enlightenment thinking can give insight into modern education in the United States. When The Enlightenment divided religious and secular thinking, it also complicated the role of education in society. Writing about American education in the 18th century, Owens (2011) argued that

> Traditional Protestant education typically focused on conformity or unity within a particular religious branch or cultural tradition. The encroaching Enlightenment, in many

> ways, freed higher education from these limitations and provided students a platform within which to work independently. (p. 527)

Education began to transition from a tool of cultural transmission to one designed to create scholars, citizens, and leaders. Echoing the ubiquitous church/state binary, Clifford-Vaughn (1963) states this succinctly: "The Church was to preach resignation, the State to train for leadership" (p. 136). It seems that in the realm of education, the Enlightenment created an "[enmity] between the priest and the teacher" that was built around a "philosophical incompatibility" (Clifford-Vaughan, 1963, p. 138). Nord (2010) argues that schools in America have been secularized since their Puritan roots. In the seventeenth century, the ubiquitous *New England Primer* taught students The Lord's Prayer, The Apostles' Creed, and the Ten Commandments; now, according to a recent survey, only "about 8 percent of high schools offer courses in the Bible, but they are always elective courses, and few students take them" (Nord, 2010, p. 57).

To be clear, the public school system in America has undergone a dramatic shift in its relationship not only with religion, but also with the way in which knowledge is understood; however, this epistemological evolution is deeply connected with religious belief, specifically Christian Protestantism. This shift—a move towards secularization—embraced both a new purpose for education and a new organization of knowledge. The Enlightenment embraced science and the scientific method that produced both new knowledge and new ways of knowing. John Dewey (1910), the Father of Progressive education, bemoaned the teaching of science as "subject-matter" and argued for the "construction of a scientific habit of mind" (p. 857). This understanding ushered in a new purpose for education: not the transmission of one generation's knowledge to the next, but acquisition of the skills, the habits of mind, to create new knowledge.

Nord (2010) argues that with this belief in scientific progress "the focus of education shifted from acquiring a body of classical or theological knowledge to thinking scientifically" (p. 70). Traditional religious truths now competed with modern scientific discoveries.

This secularization of American education also coincided with new ways of organizing and connecting knowledge. According to Nord (2010), in the nineteenth century "most scholars and college professors accepted the idea of the *unity of truth*" (p. 63). According to Reuben (1996), this idea embraced two important concepts: "First, it is supposed that all truths agreed and ultimately could be related to one another in a single system. Second, it assumed that knowledge had a moral dimension" (p. 17). What was true was ultimately good; this organized understanding of knowledge implied an ultimate Organizer. It was theistic at its heart. This began to change in the nineteenth century as first universities then secondary schools began to divide knowledge more rigorously into subjects. It began with science then moved to other subject areas. This served to separate religion—which had been interwoven in all areas of knowledge—from specific subjects. It appeared that "specialization seemed to be a requirement of modernity" (Nord, 2010, p. 71). And this modernity produced a modern, "*modernizing* state, a network of secular powers that assume the task of remolding the material and moral condition of its subjects in accordance with Enlightenment principles" (Asad, 1992, p. 15).

This shift has not produced wholly secular schools, but instead a *brackish* space where ideas about religion and secularism sometimes compete, but often combine in myriad manners. Haynes (2011) offers three models for understanding the ways in which modern public schools in America deal with the conflicts around religion. The first model he calls "the 'sacred public school' in which school practices one religion" (p. 11). This one religion is almost always a form of Protestant Christianity and often harkens back to some imagined "good old days" of

religious uniformity. It is based on the belief that the nation is in some sort of spiritual and moral decline that religious belief can ameliorate. It is also untenable in a pluralistic society and illegal under the U.S. Constitution. The second model Haynes (2011) calls "the 'naked public school'—the mistaken idea that freedom *of* religion requires public schools to be free *from* religion" (p. 11). This model is often the result of confusion about modern Supreme Court rulings: schools fear any controversy, so they attempt to exclude any expression of religious belief. This, too, in Haynes' opinion is both unjust and unconstitutional. A third model is endorsed by Haynes—what he calls "a civil public school" that "opens the door to appropriate student religious expression and the academic study of religion while simultaneously keeping school officials from taking sides in religion" (p. 12). That this tension exists within the policy, pedagogy, and practice of teaching is inarguable; however, how are we to understand the ways in which this tension exists in the hearts and minds of educators themselves?

Religion and Educators

Though qualitative research can be built around looking for "gaps in knowledge," poststructural theory questions if such a thing can actually exist. That being said, a review of the academic literature reveals a significant lack of research into the area of teachers and religion, specifically into the ways that educators' religious beliefs inform their pedagogy. After an exhaustive review of the literature, White (2009) argues that "educational research explores religion in schools, but it has not yet adequately addressed teacher identity and religion" (p. 856). The reasons for this omission are both myriad yet unclear especially in light of the fact that, by contrast, the "topic of how religion should impact students' education is highlighted" (White, 2009, p. 859). To be clear, there exists a dearth of research into the ways teachers understand themselves as religious subjects while inquiry into student religious beliefs is plentiful. Adding

further complexity to this omission is Burke and Segall's (2011) work describing deeply entrenched "Christian sediments in public education," (p. 653). While research exists around student identity and school structure, "very little is known about how teachers navigate these pedagogical boundaries based on their own religious observance" (White, 2009, p. 859). My research will work to understand the ways in which teachers understand themselves as religious subjects.

Laying a Foundation in Theory

"There's a wall between us
A partition of sorts
And it makes me wonder"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1988, Track 4).

True inquiry must begin with uncertainty, with doubt; moreover, honest inquiry must acknowledge the possibility that it will also end there. Enlightenment thinking was a reaction to a dogmatic religious certainty that, somewhat ironically, replaced it with an equally intolerant secular certainty. Enlightenment thinkers "believed that unassisted human reason, not faith or tradition, was the principal guide to human conduct" (Kramnick, 1995, p. ix). This reason, embodied in Descartes' *cogito*, was the key to solving every human problem, the key to Truth. Descartes' (1637/1998) system was elegant in its simplicity: "each truth that I found being a rule that later helped me to find others" (p. 12). And how were these truths ascertained? They were attained through "my own thoughts...upon a foundation that is completely my own" (p. 9). This theory—powerful, useful, yet somewhat limited—permeated Enlightenment thinking from Smith's "invisible hand" controlling economics to Bacon's faith in the limitlessness of his scientific method. Kant (1784/1996) further embodied the certainty that science was king and

progress was inevitable when he argued that "*Enlightenment is man's exit from his self-incurred immaturity*" (p. 58). Could this "self-incurred immaturity" be part of Kant's understanding of religious belief? Everything prior to the Enlightenment was fable; everything following it must grow from it. Mankind had the potential to improve into infinity. But this invented certainty—this absolute faith in human progress—began to crack and crumble under the weight of Nietzsche, Darwin, Marx, Freud, and the postmodern thinkers of the 20th century.

"We wished to awaken the feeling of man's sovereignty by showing his divine birth: this path is now forbidden, since a monkey stands at the entrance" (Nietzsche, as cited in Foucault, 1971/1977, p. 143). With his usual dark sense of humor, Nietzsche pithily dismantles Enlightenment thinking with a sentence. Descartes's cogito begins to dissipate in the light of the purposeless of Darwin's evolution, the uncertainty of Freud's unconscious, and the false consciousness expressed by Marx. Philosophy, biology, psychology, and economics all conspired together in order to push back against *cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am, by questioning the very validity of the word "I." Who is this I? "What speaks when 'I' speak to you?" (Butler, 1992, p. 8). This question of the subject is one rooted in doubt, a doubt that is central to the Postmodern Project. Lyotard (1979/1984), who brought postmodernism from the arts into philosophy, defined it simply "as incredulity towards metanarratives" (p. xxiv). He later specifically challenges the Enlightenment narratives of scientism and consensus. Richardson (2000) elaborates on this thinking as she defines postmodernism:

> The core of postmodernism is *doubt* that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism *suspects* all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. But it does not automatically

> reject conventional methods of knowing and telling as false or archaic. Rather, it opens those standard methods to inquiry and introduces new methods, which are also, then, subject to critique. (p. 928)

The uncertainty that is central to Richardson's understanding of postmodernism contrasts sharply with the certainty found in Enlightenment thinking. According to Kant (1784/1996) the motto of the enlightenment is "*Sapere aude*! Have the courage to use your own understanding" (p. 58). Embedded in the axiom "dare to know" lies the belief that humans *can* know—that there exists a reality that can be perceived, understood, contained. This Enlightenment desire to contain reality is a way of further understanding Lyotard's concept of metanarrative. What is a metanarrative, if not an attempt to box in the world in a way that is comprehensible and even predictive? Postmodernism denies this possibility. Perhaps the motto of postmodern thinking could be "dare not to know!" Yet, even that rallying cry fails under Spivak's (2009) "persistent critique" (p. 94) because postmodern thinkers do want to know. Mazzei (2009) warns us against being "paralyzed by this certainty of uncertainty" (p. 45). Inquiry is not an exercise in futility: knowledge within the postmodern paradigm simply *does* something different than it does within the Enlightenment—it exists in a different discursive framework. "As Foucault (1971/1972) explains in his archaeological analysis, statements that are clear and coherent within one discursive formation may not be intelligible within another" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 25).

In speaking about deconstruction which is perhaps postmodernism's predecessor (Rajchman, 1987, p. 50), Caputo and Derrida (1997) argue that "deciding is a possibility sustained by its impossibility" (p. 137). If Enlightenment thinking is about certainty and what is possible, Postmodernism embraces uncertainty and the impossible. Indeed, Postmodernism rejects the certain/uncertain, possible/impossible binaries. Might there be multiple certainties,

multiple "possibles?" It is about the unexpected, what Derrida would call the event (Derrida, 1966/1978, p. 278). Mazzei (2009) calls them cracks or fissures. Despite what they are called, these surprises demand a response from researchers: "Such an unexpected outcome requires that as researchers we acknowledge that we don't know. This does not mean that we give up on the promise of knowing, but we give up on the promise of a certainty of knowing" (Mazzei, 2009, p. 59)

Within research, postmodernism demands that we embrace a level of uncertainty. It asks if research can "be a mode of thought that refuses to secure itself with the consolations of foundationalism and nostalgia for presence, the lost object of correct knowledge, the security of understanding" (Lather as cited in Mazzei, 2009, p. 58). By embracing doubt, postmodern thinking refuses to accept the security of understanding. It accepts ways of knowing, not a way of knowing. It also accepts not knowing as a way of knowing. In pointing out the limits of modernism, postmodernism recognizes its own limits. However, " a recognition of the limits of our received practices does not mean that we reject such practices; instead, we work the limits (and limitations) of such practices" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. ix). Like any academic endeavor, certain structures must be accepted and foundations must be laid, but we must acknowledge "one of postmodernism's lessons—that foundations are contingent" (Butler, 1992, p. 21).

And what are these foundations? Within what framework is this inquiry designed? Foucault (1982/2000) was interested in "the way a human turns him-or herself into a subject" (p. 327). When educators attempt to describe themselves and their actions, they are also constructing themselves; Foucault understood discourse as a way of not only organizing but creating reality. Furthermore, power produces knowledge and knowable subjects—subjects that

can be “constituted again and again” and are “open to formations that are not fully constrained in advance” (Butler, 1995, p. 135). The work of Derrida, specifically his deconstruction, has laid a foundation for this research. Deconstruction is “a way of releasing and responding, of listening and opening up, of being responsible not only to the dominant voices of the great masters, but also to other voices that speak more gently” (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 57). It is a way of hearing the voices of teachers who work in the brackish waters of public education.

Discourse and Power

The concept of discourse has its roots in literary theory (Bove, 1990). Just as literature allows the author to construct his or her own world, discourse is a tool that can, in a sense, construct reality:

> To be more specific, we might say that “discourse,” used in this New Critical [Literary Formalism] sense...helped to constitute and organize an entire field of knowledge about language; it helped discipline the judgement, and thereby the response, of students and teachers; and, in so doing, it revealed its links to forms of power—such as teaching—that have effects upon the actions of others. (Bove, 1990, p. 51)

Even though discourse began as a form of literary criticism, it is still about hierarchy and control: certain discourses (read genres) were superior to others; discourse also “marked differences and established identities…[it] set the limits of certain kinds of language use” (p. 50). These literary critics proposed the idea of “essentialist—and, thus, timeless—‘genres’”(p. 50) behind which they could both hide and evaluate, i.e., judge. They could conceal their own “historical needs and wants” (p. 50) and thereby exercise power and control specifically by denying the existence of that control. The power of discourse lies in the fact that it becomes “transparent, naturalized, and self-evident” (p. 52). It is the “commonsensical” things that so readily control individuals

and groups, and this control is a type of power—a power that lies in the naming of things. It is because of discourse's connection with power that it should be analyzed.

Power, as understood by Foucault, is not something gained or lost; it is not a possession, instead,

> power is relations; power is not a thing, it is a relationship between two individuals, a relationship which is such that one can direct the behavior of another or determine the behavior of another. (Foucault, 1988/1996, p. 410)

Furthermore, power permeates—it is "everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 93). It is not simply hierarchical nor lateral; it doesn't simply come from above or rise from below; it is made of relations that "are thus mobile, reversible, and unstable" (Foucault, 1984/1996, p. 441). It can be somewhat stabilized, stratified, or normalized in particular systems, but it is essentially fluid. However, "it should also be noted that power relations are possible only insofar as the subject is free" (Foucault, 1984/1996, p. 441). And it is the freedom within power relations, this access to subjugated knowledge, this contact with differing discursive fields that creates "the possibility of resistance. We are never trapped by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to precise strategy" (Foucault, 1977/1996, p. 224). To clarify, power exist everywhere and is often unstable; within that fluidity freedom exists and is often discernable in the form or resistance; lastly, all of this blends together to produce subjects. Foucault is haunted by this "problem of power...To know and to subject, to know and command, are intimately linked..." (Foucault, 1975/1996, p. 138). To be clear, Foucault argues that "I constitute myself as subject by a certain number of relationships of power, which I weigh upon me and which I lay upon others" (Foucault, 1983/1996, p. 361).

Power exists in the classroom. It is not inconsequential that according to Bove (1990), discourse began in the classroom; and discourse is the place where "power and knowledge are joined together" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 100). If power is ever present, if it is fluid, if it produces resistance, what are its "*functions and effects"* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 56)? Jackson & Mazzei (2012) argue that "an analytics of power, therefore, is concerned with power's multiple functionings—how it is exercised and its effects—within specific networks of relations" (p. 55). The specific network that this project will look at will be the ways in which religious belief operates in the brackish waters of public schools. The ubiquitous wall of separation between Church and State is ever present in public education though it is yet another construct used to stop both thought and action. Teachers with strong religious beliefs can be "caught up in a web of power relations and practices that [are] constantly in tension" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 58). So coming full circle, it is necessary to understand that power "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse'" (Foucault, as cited in Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 51). Power produces subjects.

How is the positioning of the subject connected to power? The answer to that question will inevitably lead to a discussion of agency. Domination, a form of power that attempts to negate agency, "works through the regulation and production of subjects" (Butler, 1992, p. 13). But domination is only an attempt: agency is still possible even within harsh external restrictions. In fact, Butler (1993) argues that agency is possible even though a subject's positionality "is constituted by these positions" (p. 9). Building on Foucault's work, she argues that "the subject is itself the effect of a genealogy which is erased at the moment that the subject takes itself as the single origin of its action" (Butler, 1992, p. 10). How is this possible? How is genealogy erased? Butler (1992) posits that "agency belongs to a way of thinking about persons

as instrumental actors who confront an external political field" (p. 13). So does this argument come full circle now? Agency is defined by "an external political field," i.e., a power structure; a subject's position is defined (or constituted) by the positions it adopts. Is this perhaps how a genealogy can be erased? This idea seems to "subvert the very definition of the subject itself" (Butler, 1992, p. 10). And perhaps that is the very point: perhaps the tension between a need to adequately define the subject's position and the desire to appropriately give it agency is part of the postmodern condition.

Writing about subjectivity and agency, Foucault (1984) asked "how are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?" (p. 49). These questions that swirl around power, knowledge, discourse, and subjectivity have and will continue to inform my analysis of educators' understanding of themselves. They help to frame two of my research questions: (1) How do power/knowledge relations produce educators who self-identify as religious within public education? (2) How do educators who self-identify as religious construct themselves within possibly competing religious and secular discourses?

Deconstruction and Voice

Deconstruction is difficult—if not impossible—to define. Derrida, himself, struggled with the term: "That is why the word, at least on its own, has never appeared satisfactory to me (but what word is), and must always be girded by an entire discourse" (Derrida, 1987/1991, p. 2). It is that "entire discourse" of what deconstruction is that became much of his life's work; in fact, Derrida argued that "all my essays are attempts to have it out with this formidable question (p. 270). More often than not, it has been defined in the negative: it is not an analysis nor a critique nor a method nor a theory nor a philosophy nor a discourse nor a practice (Derrida, 1987/1991;

1987/1990). However, it can be all of those things because, "the word 'deconstruction,' like all other words, acquires its value only from its inscription in a chain of possible substitutions, in what is too blithely called a 'context'" (Derrida, 1987/1991, p. 271). Deconstruction has been used to analyze literature, critique institutions, and as a theory with which to think; deconstructive methodology is categorized under postmodern philosophy, at times it has been made into a practice by researchers "doing" deconstruction, and an entire discourse exists around it. Context—it appears—is everything. It is difficult to argue against any of this when Derrida declares "what deconstruction is not? everything of course! What is deconstruction? nothing of course" (Derrida, 1987/1991, p. 273). All that being said, deconstruction is

> a reading that *produces* rather than *protects*…[its]the task is...to dismantle [*deconstuire*] the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work in [the text], not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way (MP 256, WM 13. (Spivak, 1979, p. lxxv)

The key to identifying deconstruction is its productive impulse, it is "a way of releasing and responding, of listening and opening up" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 57).

Derrida was wary of providing specific steps or procedures for deconstruction. To solidify a system of deconstruction would be antithetical to deconstruction. Deconstruction is an approach to inquiry without a set method. That being said, Derrida (1983) did attempt to "work out...a sort of strategic device, opening onto its own abyss, an enclosed, unenclosable, not wholly formalizable ensemble of rules for reading, interpretation and writing" (p. 40). Deconstruction comes from within: within a text, an event, an idea. These "movements of deconstruction" cannot take "accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures" (Derrida, 1967/1974, p. 24). Everything is a text; everyone is a reader, but within these readings there are points at which

"language misfires, structures crack and lives can open up" (St. Pierre, 2004, p. 329). Spivak (1979) called these moments a tool, a "positive lever" with which a text could be pried open. It is important to understand that these are not simply points of irony, ambiguity, or thoughtlessness, but actually moments in a text that "threaten to collapse that system" (Spivak, 1979, p.lxxv). It is the subcurrent that imperils the direction of the river proper. The deconstructive strategy is "to spot the point where a text covers up its grammatological structure" (Spivak, 1979, p. lxxiii). *It is a point at which a text does other than what it was designed to do*. It can be found in a word, a phrase, a metaphor, anything. If a word seems "to harbor an unresolvable contradiction...we shall catch at that word. If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor" (Spivak, 1979, p. lxxv). The points at which language misfires, moments that threaten structure, words that catch: these are the starting point for deconstruction. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) call these moments "productive snags" (p. 31). These are the points of departure: any attempt to find an assured beginning, an origin of sorts is impossible. Instead, "we must begin *wherever we are*...in a text where we already believe ourselves to be" (Derrida, as cited in Spivak, 1979, p. lxxv). Furthermore, researchers thinking with deconstruction must understand that we must also end wherever we are because "such an approach...frees researchers from having to construct a tidy and coherent narrative" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 31).

Derrida was deeply interested in oppositional binaries and the structure they impose. Structuralism embraces this idea of binary thinking. In gender: male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, masculine/feminine; in culture: East/West, black/white, first world/third world; in politics: domestic/foreign, conquering/conquered, patriarchal/matriarchal; in religion: faith/reason, religious/secular, theology/philosophy; and of significance for this

research, in education: church/State, private, public. These binaries exist in all aspects of Western life and permeate Western thought. They are not equivalent; they are hierarchal, and acknowledging that inequity is essential to deconstruct. St. Pierre (2011) succinctly demonstrates this process:

> The first step in deconstruction, then, is to reverse the binary. So in the binary, heterosexual/homosexual, for example, homosexual should hold the privileged position so that heterosexuals can feel the violence of being called abnormal, deviant, sinful, evil, and so on. In the next step, the winning term is displaced to make room for a new concept that can't be understood in terms of the old structure, a concept that not only undoes the binary but also encourages entirely different thinking about sexuality. This is the affirmative move of deconstruction, the overturning and opening up of a violent structure so that something different might happen. (p. 617)

Again, deconstruction is affirmative. It is "a way of releasing and responding, of listening and opening up" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 57).

Deconstruction is difficult. It is rough and uneven and turns back on itself. However, these rough, uneven spots are, in fact, deconstruction itself and attempts to smooth them out limit its purpose. The paradox of attempting to systematically explain an idea that purposefully broke open systems is not lost on me. But Derrida understood this: "Knowledge is not a systematic tracking down of a truth that is hidden but may be found. It is rather the field 'of *freeplay*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitution in the closure of a finite ensemble' (Derrida, as cited in Spivak, 1979, p. xix). Deconstruction is interested in the infinite, the unknowable; therefore, accurately defining it is, perhaps, a fool's errand since when you label a thing, you are attempting to bring it to a close. Deconstruction, if anything, is not about endings, but

beginnings. "The trick in deconstruction, if it is a trick, is to keep your head without having a heading" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 116).

And what does it mean to "keep your head"? Or stated more abruptly, "If deconstruction happens—and deconstruction is always happening, even when we as researchers are too self absorbed or myopic to notice—what are we to make of this" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 30)? What is our method?

> A deconstructive reading, Derrida says, always settles into the distance between what the author consciously intends or means to say (*vouloirdire*), that is, what she "commands" in her text, and what she does not command, what is going on in the text, as it were, behind her back and so "sur-prises," overtakes, the author herself. (Derrida & Caputo, 2007, p. 78)

At its core doing qualitative research with what Jackson and Mazzei (2012) call "deconstructive scrutiny" (p. 21) involves the doubt that defines so much of postmodern thinking; it embraces the "sneaking suspicions that something may be wrong with what we currently believe...that something else, something other, still to come, is being missed" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 73). This sneaking suspicion can be leveled against institutions and theories, but it must also be applied to the words we speak. Maclure (2009) brings the full force of this insight to bear in qualitative research:

> But the insufficiency of voice—its abject propensity to be too much and never enough—is unavoidable. Voice will always turn out to be too frail to carry the solemn weight of political and theoretical expectation that has been laid upon it. (MacLure, 2009, p. 97)

It is the frailty, the insufficiency, to which we must listen, "not only to the dominant voices, but also to other voices that speak more gently, more discreetly, more mildly" (Derrida & Caputo,

1997, p. 57). To listen to the full voice—to what is said and what is not—is the deconstructive method that "consists in closely, seriously, minutely following the text until we see that the orthodox, received, dominant interpretation has been produced by a wave of the hand that brushes aside the deviations and transgressive moments" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 85).

The method, then, is to bring to light the deviations and transgressive moments to "supplement the insufficiences of voice; to restore it to what it should have been" (MacLure, 2009, p. 101). This understanding of deconstruction helps to formulate another of my research questions: How do educators who self-identify as religious perceive deconstruction taking place in the religiously brackish environment of public schools?

Methodology, Methods, and Received Practices

> A thinker with a method has already decided how to proceed, is unable to give him or herself up to the matter of thought in hand, is a functionary of the criteria which structure his or her conceptual gestures. (Beardsworth, 1966, p. 4)

In its simplest form, my approach to inquiry in this study was this: I read a lot of books by a lot of really smart people; I talked to a few really interesting people about what I'd read; I thought really, really hard about both; then I wrote and wrote and wrote. But even that outline is incorrect: I was reading, talking, and writing the whole time. I still am. And to be clear, this isn't an attempt to be dismissive or flippant; I go into all the details in Chapter Three—the necessary but impossible Methodology Chapter. I'd hoped to be able to do something completely new, something transformative, but Five Chapters it is. My reading transitioned into a Literature Review of sorts; talking to interesting people turned into interviews which, in turn, became data (or at least part of it); my writing was and is analysis. Again, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) help me appreciate this: "A recognition of the limits of our received practices does not

mean that we reject such practices; instead, we work the limits (and limitations) of such practices" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. ix). At times, this work is subversive (I think), but it is also within "the limits of our received actions." In the "Methods" Chapter of his *The History of Sexuality*, (1976/1978) laid out his theory about power; Derrida explicitly states that "deconstruction is not a method or some tool that you apply to something outside" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 9); writing from a theological perspective, Caputo (2006) argues for something like a poetic legitimation, a "poetics of the event, a para-logical poetics of the kingdom" (p. 112). These scholars blurred the line between theory and methodology, and I've followed them down that path. But only so far. In the end, I had to *do* something. So I "read widely and deeply in the 'original literature' in order to open up the protective structures we create that limit intelligibility" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 27). I interviewed people, but attempted to

> accept that the notion of "a" voice is a misnomer and that to begin to untangle meaning one must recognize the disparities, incongruities, and smooth surfaces that seem to form a coherent and meaningful voice. (Mazzei, 2009, p. 52)

I tried to listen to myself listening (Mazze, 2007, p. 91). And I wrote:

> When writing the next word and the next sentence and then the next is more than one can manage; when one must bring to bear on writing, in writing, what one has read and lived, this is thinking that cannot be taught. *That is analysis*. (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 621)

King's X

"Who are these people behind the stained glass window
Have they forgotten just what they came here for"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1989, Track 7).

To exist in the space between a binary, to live where opposing worldviews—especially religious worldviews—overlap can be a place of incredible power.

And danger.

In the early 90s, Rolling Stone Magazine described the music group King's X as a "biracial hard-rock trio from Houston" with a "critically applauded blend of muscular progressive metal, Beatlesque vocal sunshine, AOR [Album Oriented Rock] melodic savvy, and utopian optimism" (Fricke, 1991). With the release of their third album *Faith Hope Love*, King's X was poised to become the next great rock act in the vein of U2. They were touring with mega groups like AC/DC and Pearl Jam. They were receiving regular play on MTV. They were selling more and more albums, and, surprisingly, many of those albums were being sold by Christian book stores. All three members—Dug Pinnick, Ty Tabor, and Jerry Gaskill—were professing Christians who had worked in the relatively new Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) industry. However, early on in the band's career, the commercial nature of this quickly growing genre became deeply troubling to the group. Pinnick explains: "To me, religion wasn't something for sale. I hate the hypocrisy, and through that, it opened my eyes to the hypocrisy to a lot of aspects of the Christian community" (Prato, 2019, p. 36).

That being said, their faith was reflected in lyrics that presented a subtle but discernible Christian worldview: Their first album's title, *Out of the Silent Planet,* was named after a C.S. Lewis novel; their second album, *Gretchen Goes to Nebraska,* contained liner notes quoting St. Augstine's *Confessions*; their third album, *Faith Hope Love,* also contained liner notes quoting the entirety of Saint Paul's "love chapter" from his *First Letter to the Corinthians*. Never espousing specific doctrine, "their songs possessed an enigmatic, uplifting, spiritual edge" (Everley, 2017). So King's X existed in a brackish space: they were often criticized by religious

fans for not being lyrically overt enough about their faith; they were also sidelined on secular radio by what Pinnick called "that Christian stigma" (Everley, 2017). However, in 1998, the band, and Pinnick specifically, faced a new type of stigma. Dug Pinnick revealed to a Christian publication that he was gay. Virtually overnight King's X's albums were pulled from Christian bookstores' shelves. As a group, they became *persona non grata* in the CCM industry and community. Pinnick recalls, "they banned our records. I know that a lot of Christians were disappointed in me and turned their backs on me" (Prato, 2019, p. 181).

Years later, King's X still creates music—often with that same spiritual edge—but none of the members have anything to do with organized religion. Pinnick is openly agnostic while Tabor and Gaskill stand mute on the subject. I tell their story because it is important...important because after all the theory, method, data, and analysis, this inquiry is about what religion *does*.

What it does to people.

And though I am generous in my critique, and my data often presents religion in a positive light, I understand this topic is more complex than that. Although I write from what Sedgwick (2003) calls the "reparative position," I want to acknowledge and embrace the complexity of a "paranoid reading," also (p. 146). I want to live and write in the dangerous space between that binary.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Borderlands: Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Frameworks

"Can't you hear it?

I hear it, don't you hear it?

Listen

It's all around me

It's everywhere" (Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1989, Track 2).

In her book *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldua (1987) argues that she is something new, a *mestizo*, "a new hybrid race" (p. 27) that is created at the border of the first and third world, the modern and the ancient, the logical and the magical. Within this space, this new creature is "subject to a swamping of her psychological borders" (p. 101). As a result,

> She can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 101)

These words are extreme, poetic, but bear the ring of truth. Postulating that borders exist is nothing new. Geography, religion, race, gender, sexuality—all of these and countless other

designations create divisions, real or imagined; however, Anzaldua's idea of a "third element" (p. 102) is both powerful and transformative. She imagines a new type of person to whom "the future will belong…Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures" (p. 102).

It is that "straddling" that intrigues me: I am deeply interested in the places where differing beliefs meet, interact, and—more often than not—change. Borderlands, cultural diffusion, paradigm shifts, intersectionality, deconstruction—called by many names, these are still variations on the same theme. Existing within our inner landscape, they ask the same question: "What speaks when 'I' speak to you" (Butler, 1992, p. 8)? Butler's question addresses the somewhat nebulous concept of "the subject" within the postmodern condition; two ways in which this question may be addressed are in regards to positionality and agency. Do the positions a subject takes constitute it or does the subject preside over these positions? In other words, if "I" define myself as a teacher, do I decide what a teacher actually is or does my position as a teacher define me? Butler (1992) seems to argue for the latter:

> Indeed, this "I" would not be a thinking, speaking "I" if it were not for the very positions I oppose, for those positions, the ones that claim that the subject must be given in advance...are already part of what constitutes me. (p. 9)

Even the grammatical structure of Butler's explanation suggests an answer. The term *position* is presented as solid, perhaps immutable; the *I* is in quotation marks whose effect is to "denaturalize the terms, to designate these signs as sites of political debate" (Butler, 1992, p. 19). "I" is in flux while the positions that construct "I" exist *a priori*. It is also interesting that Butler argues that her position is defined by the things that she opposes. Later, she states that "it is important to remember that subjects are constituted through exclusion" (p. 13). Butler's

understanding of the subject is both apt and useful, but what happens when both the subject and position are in flux, when the *a priori* positions are unclear, untenable, or in transition? To clarify this question, what happens when the subject is nebulous and the context exists in a borderland that is itself unstable? Anzaldua (1987) argues that the U.S. Mexico border is a place where "the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (p. 25). I am interested in the places where public school teachers' religious beliefs grate against their role as public school educators; or perhaps where public school teachers' role as educators grate against their religious beliefs; or perhaps the places where these two do not grate, and the teachers are unaware of this. I am also interested in the places where that border begins to dis-inte-grate, where what Derrida and Caputo (1997) call a "certain auto-deconstructing tendency built right into things" (p. 74) begins to occur, is occurring, will occur.

Speaking with the voice of Ulysses, Tennyson argues "I am a part of all that I have met." Ulysses' adventures changed him because knowledge is transformative, and new knowledge—by definition—must be something previously unknown. It must be something contrary to current beliefs. Growth—learning—can exist powerfully at the borderlands between opposing viewpoints. Few areas of thought are more polarizing than religious belief. From Twitter fights to regional wars, religion—often purported to be a bringer of internal and external peace—is a source of conflict. It is that conflict that makes these differences so fraught with peril but at the same time pregnant with possibility. Preachers, teachers, rock stars, and philosophers work in and through this space of religious...tension? Division? Connection? What does this look like? What is gained by occupying this space? What is risked? Palmer (1983) stated, "to teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced" (p. xii). For professional educators, that space between the personal and public persona, the internal and external landscape, and—for

teachers who identify as religious—the sacred and the secular is a space for the *impossible* which "is not a simple logical contradiction, like *x* and *not-x*, but the tension, the paralysis, the aporia, of having to push against and beyond the limits of the horizon, *passage a' frontieres*" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 133).

I argue that teachers who self-identify as religious yet work in the psuedo-secular space of public education exist in a borderland of sorts: that they construct themselves in sometimes dangerous, sometimes powerful, often interesting ways to navigate through their understanding of self as both people of faith and public educators. For my purposes, Anzaldua's borderland is a useful metaphor—a way of conceiving of an idea so very nebulous. Her concept of a borderland seeks to create a third element—a space—that changes perception. These spaces break down boundaries, but not in the sense that these divisions no longer exist. These boundaries help to define us, and who wishes to live without identity? They break down only in the sense that they are now traversable: they demark a space but no longer enclose it. Interestingly enough, Anzaldua (1987) doesn't seem to perceive the passability of these demarcations as a path to be criss crossed over and over again. Each crossing is an advancement: "Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesia*, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again" (p. 70). Every crossing is new, because with each *travesia* you are newer and perhaps wiser. Anzaldua argues that this movement forward is painful because it precludes the option to remain stationary: "I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before" (p. 70).

Knowledge is always transformative and always requires action. Judith Butler (1990) embraced this idea, quoting Nietzsche, "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything" (p.34). Without action,

identity no longer exists. “Rigidity means death” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 101). Could an argument be made that Anzaldua’s *mestizas,* since they exist in this perpetual state of *travesia,* exist “more” than those outside of the borderlands? Perhaps not more, but definitely differently. Borderlands change perception. Anzaldua (1987) describes *la facultad* as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” (p. 61). Though Anzaldua often delves into the arena of mysticism—a boundary she crosses unashamedly—this “deep structure below the surface” resembles the idea of discourse while her breaking down of boundaries looks a lot like deconstruction.

The analytical tools most useful for this study are twofold: (1) Foucault’s work on discourse combined with Butler’s work with identity and (2) Derrida’s work on Deconstruction largely colored by Caputo’s particularly religious take on this work. In simple terms, teachers who self identify as religious produce themselves in the overlap of discursive fields: their religious discourse and their teacher discourse. Interestingly enough, these two discourses are much more aligned than a cursory look might suggest; however, they do compete, and “competing discourses emerge within discursive fields, and the language and practices of these discourses give rise to an individual’s conflicting subjectivities” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 50). It is those conflicting subjectivities that this study seeks to explore.

Furthermore, these same educators also deconstruct many of the binaries that these spaces create, and the work of deconstruction “is the breach, the crevice through which previously unheard data will silently slip to disrupt and destabilize our impressions” (Mazzei, 2007, p. 14). The heart of deconstruction is found in the innate instability of language, in the play of the trace found in *différance*. It is that instability, particularly in ways educators understand their faith and their profession that this study hopes to illuminate.

Discourse and Regimes of Truth

"I saw what cannot be seen

She spoke to me

Take what you've learned, set it free

See what you'll see" (Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1989, Track 1).

Discourse, as understood by Foucault, is—on the simplest level—things that are taken for granted: the strength of discourse is found in the fact that it is accepted without being interrogated. It is seen by not being seen. In attempting to describe how he studies discourse, Foucault (1984/1996) explains "I attempt to make visible what is invisible only because it's too much on the surface of things" (p. 58). These things "too much on the surface" are accepted as truth; in fact they *are* truth as understood by Foucault, or at least a regime of truth, a "discursive regime" (Foucault, 1977/1980, p. 113). Foucault (1977/1980) explains:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (p. 131)

Mechanism, means, techniques, status—all of this (and more) work together, pushing and pulling, rising and descending, blurring and focusing, to become truth. To be clear, Foucault does not accept the idea of a singular, immutable, transcendental, revealed, capital "T" truth. He is instead interested in "how men govern (themselves and others) by the production of truth" (Foucault, 1980/1996, p. 280). Truth is produced by discourse; discourse produces truth: they are intertwined, imbricated, and continuously circle back onto one another.

Truth is created, creating, being created.

Truth is various.

"I believe too much in the truth not to assume that there are different truths and different ways of saying it" (Foucault, 1996, p. 453). Foucault's understanding of truth is not simply a matter of semantics: the acceptance of truth as a construct that has been different at different times and in different places is central to both Foucault's thinking particularly as well as much of postmodernism/poststructuralism writ large. That is why Foucault (1984/1990) can call his second volume of *The History of Sexuality* "a history of truth" (p. 11), not simply an inquiry into the effects of truth, but truth itself. So Foucault (1977/1980) defines truth as "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (p. 133). This, of course, complicates things. The study of an immutable, revealed Truth has its difficulties, but

> If there is no absolute truth to which every instance can be compared for its truth-value, if truth is instead multiple and contextual, then the call for ethical practice shifts from grand, sweeping statements about truth and justice to engagements with specific, complex problems that do not have generalizable solutions. (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 25)

Truth is complex and specific and full of "ifs." And according to Caputo (2013), all of this "has created problems for philosophers, as all this pluralism threatens a veritable vertigo when it comes to truth, and that vertigo is called *postmodernism*" (Caputo, p. 3).

So how do discourse and regimes of truth help me to think about this topic? Foucault's concept of discourse helps to organize my understanding about the interaction of public education and private religious beliefs—if they indeed can be thought of as private—because it acknowledges the difficulties these teachers face as they traverse the overlap of discursive fields.

Palmer (2007) argues that for teachers "the personal can never be divorced from the professional" (p. xi) because "we teach who we are" (p. 2). We teach who we are, but we are complicated: we are produced in "a multiplicity of discourse and power relations that occur simultaneously and operate through complex networks" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 61). Again for my purposes, the focus will be on the complex networks of religious belief and the profession of public school teacher. Furthermore, Foucault's concept of regimes of truth allow for a more flexible understanding of truth, specifically how truth exists in different discourses. Some of my participants clearly understood—and articulated—that something can be true in their church but not at their school, and vice versa. This complex and nuanced understanding of truth allows me to set aside dogmatism and allows for a different set of questions about the discursive fields my participants navigate: "How does discourse function? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated? What are its social effects? How does it exist..." (Bove, 1990, p. 54)? One of discourse's most important social effects is that it produces subjects. A specific religious discourse produces a specific religious subject; a specific school discourse produces a specific teaching subject; the overlap of these two discourses produce something new. New knowledge produces and regulates a new discourse that, in turn, produces new actions that, again, produce new subjects: subjects that are a spiritual *mestizos* of sorts capable of new actions. "A knowing subject, then, is an acting subject" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 61). This inquiry seeks to describe—and perhaps understand—this new subject.

Discourse and Power

The story of history seems to be one of individuals, peoples, and nations "gaining" and "losing" power. It is important to note that the above terms are placed in quotations in order — as Butler (1992) would argue—to "denaturalize the terms, to designate these signs as sites of

political debate" (p. 19). As Foucault understood power, the first idea about it that must be reconsidered is that it is stable, something that exists separately, something that can be given from one to another. The very idea that power is something stable that can be gained or lost implies a definition in itself—a definition that Foucault (1997) would question rigorously: "Power is not an institution, and not a structure...it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (p. 93). Power is local and specific. Foucault understands it to be everywhere, to be mercurial, and to be inextricably connected to resistance.

Power permeates.

"Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1997, p. 93). The idea of the powerful and the powerless is a false binary; there is no essential central matrix of power from which all influence emanates. Nor is there a rigid, immutable hierarchy—"there is no all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled"; power, instead "comes from below" (p. 94). If it were possible for one group to exercise complete power over another group, social change would be impossible: the idea of complete powerlessness would remove even the illusion of agency. An understanding that power is omnipresent leads inevitably to the reality that power must be mutable.

Power is fluid.

According to Foucault (1976/1978) "power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (p. 92). These force relations organize and reorganize themselves constantly. Power does not exist in unchanging structures but is "always local and unstable" (p. 93). This fluidity exists in a lateral sense as well as in a horizontal one. It appears self-evident that power comes from above, but Foucault argues that "power comes from below; that is, there

is not binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations" (p. 94). If power "flows" both laterally and horizontally, this plasticity must involve a struggle of some sort which brings us to the concept of resistance.

Power produces resistance.

"Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 94). There is never a situation of Us and Them; there is never an outside force working against power; in fact, "there is no outside" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 301). This resistance must occur within these permeating, fluid force relations, and they are often minor. Doubtless, major upheavals exist in the personal and the social sphere; however, these are the exception, not the rule. "Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 96). For every major act of civil unrest, there exist a host of small acts of defiance, of refusal, of resistance. "These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 95). So perhaps to fully understand power, we must look closely at the ways in which it is counteracted.

Foucault (1976/1978) argues that discourse produces power and enables resistance: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it, renders it possible to thwart it" (p. 101). Though often subtle and implicit, discourse must label a thing, name it, produce a narrative. When that occurs, it is possible to refuse that label, rename that thing, produce a counter-narrative. In his *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1976/1978) uses sexual orientation as an example of this: When homosexuality was labeled "perverse" and "unnatural," it made possible a "reverse" discourse. "Homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same

vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (p.101). These differences are not about some abstract or absolute idea of right and wrong, for

> we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies. (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 100)

Acceptable/unacceptable is a false binary: It implies a stability that discourse nor power nor knowledge possess. Discourse is unfixed, "and for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 100). This instability can produce a desire to disengage from discourse, to stand mute. But that, surely, is a discourse, too.

Is silence a form of resistance or sign of acquiescence? It is, of course, both: "In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 101). Just as a type of spoken discourse creates a space for power and resistance, silence can do the same. Silence suggests a lack of knowledge or at least a reticence to reveal something known. Just as choosing not to "know" is a type of knowledge, choosing not to speak is also a type of knowledge, a type of discourse. Once again, Foucault's discussion of homosexuality serves to illuminate this idea. He argues that "the nearly universal reticence in talking about it made possible a twofold operation" (1976/1978, p. 101). Severe punishment and widespread tolerance coalesced in a discourse that often involved choosing not to know. Later the knowledge gained through the discourses of science, literature, etc., were used to create a counter narrative that changed the power structure in place. Knowledge is central and inseparable to

Foucault's concept of power. Knowledge produces and is produced by power: knowledge defines what counts as power while power decides what counts as knowledge.

Understanding power as fluid, omnipresent, and non-hierarchical is essential to Foucault's understanding; furthermore, power is often identified through resistance and even silence. Looking for power everywhere, in every interaction, in every statement can be overwhelming as a researcher, but using Foucault's complex understanding of this concept provides new tools with which to think about this topic. To be clear, a simple way of understanding power in this study would be to imagine the power of "The Church" acting on teachers, the power of "The School" acting on teachers, and then the teacher attempting to sort this out. Foucault's understanding that power "exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures" (Foucault, 1982/2000, p. 340) dismantles this simplistic structure. My participants expressed agency within their sometimes competing, sometimes combining discursive fields: they acted on their individual religious beliefs, the larger religious institutions and on their school systems. Though virtually everywhere, power was not a simple hierarchy with them at the bottom. They engaged, resisted, and, yes, acquiesced at times. However, the spaces in which they resisted were the most fruitful for my analysis. "The power relationship and freedom's refusal to submit cannot therefore be separated" (Foucault, 1982/2000, p. 342). Specifically, the places in which my participants resisted answering questions—often by answering a different question—or were silent about certain topics are areas of specific interest to this inquiry. Furthermore, looking at the ways in which knowledge exists in different discourses, in different complex strategical situations, sheds light on how my participants construct themselves. For example, formal education was valued

differently in some religious discourses than it was in the discourse of public school. Conversely, expressions of religious belief, spiritual discernment, and educators' "inner life" were valued differently within these two discursive fields. External credentials present a different type of knowledge than internal spirituality; power functions differently in these spaces as pedagogical acumen marked by an openness to difference can find itself in tension with the force of moral absolutism.

Power and the Subject

Foucault (1982/2000) in his exploration of power, knowledge, and discourse has constantly circled around the question of "the way a human turns him-or herself into a subject" (p. 327). His work around criminality, insanity, and sexuality is centered on "the functions of power as it produces knowledge and particular types of knowable subjects" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 52). How do we know that one is a criminal? Is insane? Is a pervert? Furthermore, how do we identify someone as a teacher or a religious person beyond a professional identification or a religious label. In my experience, few teachers would argue that their identity as a teacher, i.e., their subjectivity, is created by a placard outside their classroom; furthermore, no Christians that I know allow their religious identity to be defined solely by a church membership.

Foucault would argue that much of what would be called a teacher is the result of existing in a specific discourse "via knowledge produced within power relations and practices" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 64). That is, the discursive field of public education values certain kinds of knowledge, exists in specific power relations, accepts certain types of practices, and therefore produces certain types of subjects; in short, it defines truth in a very specific way. To clarify, being a teacher in an American public school does not make one an automaton with no freedom

or choice; however, Foucault (1971/1966) does refer to discursive constructions which make certain ways of thinking and being possible as a *grid of intelligibility*. I would argue that teachers exist in a knowable grid of intelligibility, as do American Christians. The interesting part is when two or more of these grids interact with one another, when they overlap or bump into one another creating new ways of knowing and being. Jackson & Mazzei (2012) ask the question central to this inquiry: "How is it possible for subjects to transform themselves in relation to others (construct subjectivity) via knowledge produced within power relations and practices" (p. 64)?

Under the Influence of Deconstruction

"Everybody knows a little bit
Of something"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1989, Track 4).

Deconstruction, by design, is difficult to define. Derrida (1987/1990) himself often expressed it in the negative:

> Deconstruction is neither a theory nor a philosophy. It is neither a school nor a method. It is not even a discourse, nor an act, nor a practice. It is what happens, what is happening today in what they call society, politics, diplomacy, economics, historical reality, and so on and so forth (p. 85).

It is also what has always happened. Deconstruction is both postmodern and premodern: it functions with both Foucault and Socrates, Deleuze and St. Augustine. Ancient Scriptures deconstruct along with last year's U.S. Supreme Court decision; the *Talmud,* Joyce's *Ulysses,* and Eminem's *Kamikaze* all possess "language [that] bears within itself the necessity of its own critique" (Derrida, 1966/1978, p. 5) Texts—in the broadest sense of the word—are

deconstructible because they deconstruct themselves, what Caputo and Derrida (1997) call "a certain auto-deconstructing tendency built right into things, [that] is as old as the hills, as ancient as Plato, as medieval as Thomas Aquinas, as modern and enlightened as Descartes, Kant, and Hegel—and Newton" (p. 74). On its broadest level, deconstruction is simply an acknowledgement of what is already occurring, what "*has already happened...is happening at this moment, everywhere*" (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 623). Deconstruction is timeless and persistent, it is "among other things, a persistent critique of what one cannot want" (Spivak, 1996, p. 28). And why can one not want it? Because—at the beginning at least, this "it" is unknown. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) both clarify and complicate this when they write "in thinking with Derrida and thinking with deconstruction, we are on the lookout not for what deconstruction is, or for what it means, but for what it produces, and what it opens up" (p. 27).

Deconstruction is not something that is done to a text, but a way of seeing a text; and of course, "*there is nothing outside of the text*" (Derrida, 1967/1974, p. 158). Again, "deconstruction is not a method or some tool that you apply to something outside. Deconstruction is something which happens and which happens inside" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 9). Deconstruction, a Derridean reading if you will, is then a way of seeing what is already occurring—it identifies, analyzes, and reveals. A Derridean reading—and if everything is a text, everyone is reading—is essentially to inquire "under the influence of deconstruction" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 20). For my purposes, this type of reading, this type of inquiry, examines the instability of language, looks for linguistic "misfirings," and open things up under the influence of hope.

Différance and Destabilization

As a writing instructor, I encourage my students to be precise in their communication, to "say what they mean." This type of teaching implies a one-to-one correlation between the words we use and the meaning they contain—this is more about expedience than accuracy. Derrida argues that this understanding of language is insufficient, and the term he uses to explore this idea is *différance*. *Différance*—this "discreet graphic intervention" (Derrida, 1968/1973, p. 3)—is a neologism coined by Derrida combining the ideas of deferring and difference, "an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring" (Derrida, 1967/1974, p. 23). From the French *différance*, it is a word that embraces the idea that things are different precisely because their meaning is deferred, must be deferred, because...meaning is always deferred. To clarify, in order to define a word other words must be used that can then be defined by other words that are defined by other words ad infinitum. Derrida called this constant expansion of meaning by the term *trace*, a word whose French counterpart "carries strong implications of track, footprint, imprint" (Spivak, 1974, p. xv). This implies that *différance* leaves something behind that can be examined or explored. Part of that exploration is deconstruction. *Différance* is the "play of the differences" (Derrida, 1968/1973, p. 5) or the "play of the trace" (p. 22). If trace is about exploring the meaning of a text, then play affirms that there is no final, absolute meaning: the trace goes on and on towards an unattainable horizon, what Derrida (1968/1973) refers to as

> a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. (p. 289)

Différance is indeed about the inaccuracy of any communication; it is also about the insufficiency of words; but most interestingly, it is about the instability of language.

And it is about deconstruction.

Though deeply connected, *différance* and deconstruction are not synonymous. *Différance* is not deconstruction: it is the observation that makes deconstruction possible. *Différance* is "the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general" (Derrida, 1968/1973, p. 11). *Différance* exists without, beyond deconstruction; deconstruction only exists as a response to *différance*. This is a clear and tidy starting point, but this is not correct, or more rightly, it is correct up to the point where it is not. It is an oversimplification and creates an object/action binary; undoubtedly, one that Derrida would gleefully see deconstructed himself. Under this binary, *différance* is what *is* while deconstruction is what *acts*; however, *différance* also acts and deconstruction also is. To further explain this, Derrida (1968/1973) must be quoted at length:

> First consequence: *différance* is not. It is not a present being, however excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by any capital letter. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom. And it is always in the name of a kingdom that one may reproach *différance* with wishing to reign, believing that one sees it aggrandize itself with a capital letter (p. 21-22).

If *"différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom" (an action), does it also seek to subvert any attempts to define itself? Yes. That same part of us that wants a simple, direct definition of *différance* is the same part that "desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom." Derrida (1968/1973) declares that *différance* "is not a concept, is not simply a word"

(p. 11) nor is it a self-aggrandizing kingdom that might reign over philosophy. "Strictly speaking: it [*différance*] is the condition of possibility of these things...More strictly still: *différance* is a quasi-condition of possibility, because it does not describe fixed boundaries that delimit what can happen" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 102).

At its root, *différance* is about instability.

Derrida (1967/1974) sometimes used the term "de-sedimentation" (p. 10) to describe deconstruction. This image of removing layer upon layer to reveal more and more, to destabilize what was already unstable, to view the fundamental change in something that appeared established, is one that clarifies the reality of deconstruction. Deconstruction challenges "humankind's common desire is for a stable center, and for the assurance of mastery—through knowing or possessing" (Spivak, 1979, p. xi). Commenting on these stable centers—usually expressed in some sort of hierarchical structure—Derrida pithily argues: "If I am opposed to certain forms of political hierarchy, to certain forms of power, it is precisely insofar as they tend to neutralize differences for lack of taste, for lack of refinement" (Derrida, 1987/2002, p. 21). According to Derrida, non-hierarchical structures do not exist, or if they do it is "according to certain codes" (p. 21). Furthermore, "the erasure of certain coded hierarchy always gives rise to a more subtle, more symbolic hierarchy, the code of which still remains in formation" (p. 21).

This inquiry exists at one of the intersections of religion and public education. A Derridian reading not only acknowledges, but actively looks for, the instabilities in those structures. The work of Caputo, deeply influenced by Derrida and his deconstruction, reads religion in this way. Addressing the instability of what he calls "confessional faiths," Caputo (2001) insists that they "ought to be disturbed from within by a radical non-knowing, by a faith without faith, by a sense of the secret, and that they ought to confess like the rest of us that they

do not know who they are" p. 33). In a parallel vein, the work of Burke and Segall (2011) has explored what they call a "journey of de-naturalizing the Christian sediments in public education" (p. 653). Similarly, they address the role of Christian Scripture in American public education "by rousing its sediments in contemporary educational thought" (Burke & Segall, 2013, p. 310). As I analyze data—both the published texts I reference, my own experiences, and the words of my participants--a Derridean reading asks me to look for deconstructive spaces and seek to find the "destabilizing moment" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 29).

Language Strains

The prolific American poet Emily Dickinson died in 1886 with only a dozen of her poems published. In the following decade the majority of her work was published posthumously in a "corrected" format: the apparently random capitalization was removed and the unconventional punctuation revised. It was not until 1955 that her works were published as she had written them in the truly correct form. Early on, editors felt the need to normalize Dickinson's words, to remove the transgressive elements, not knowing that it was precisely those elements that defined her work. Again, it is "humankind's common desire...for a stable center" (Spivak, 1979, p. xi) that often compels us to correct perceived inconsistencies and gloss over apparent contradictions. Deconstruction asks us to hone in on these places, these "productive snags...where imperfections are revealed, where loose ends abound, and where we (and our participants) trip up, catch on an opening, and sometimes stumble" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 31).

Deconstruction comes from within: within a text, an event, an idea. It is found in *différance*, within the play of traces. These "movements of deconstruction" cannot take "accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures" (Derrida, 1967/1974, p. 24). Everything is

a text; everyone is a reader, but within these readings there are points at which "language misfires, structures crack and lives can open up" (St. Pierre, 2004, p. 329). Spivak (1979) called these moments a tool, a "positive lever" with which a text could be pried open. It is important to understand that these are not simply points of irony, ambiguity, or thoughtlessness, but actually moments in a text that "threaten to collapse that system" (Spivak, 1979, p.lxxv). It is the subcurrent that imperils the direction of the river proper. The deconstructive strategy is "to spot the point where a text covers up its grammatological structure" (Spivak, 1979, p. lxxiii). *It is a point at which a text does other than what it was designed to do*. It can be found in a word, a phrase, a metaphor, anything. If a word seems "to harbor an unresolvable contradiction...we shall catch at that word. If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor" (Spivak, 1979, p. lxxv). The points at which language misfires, moments that threaten structure, words that catch: these are a starting point for deconstruction. These are the points of departure: any attempt to find an assured beginning, an origin of sorts is impossible. Instead, "we must begin *wherever we are*...in a text where we already believe ourselves to be" (Derrida, 1967/1974, p. 162).

These productive snags ask that I look not only at the general but the specific in my participant's words. Instead of looking for overarching themes, deconstruction asks that I open myself up to "a small but tell-tale moment" (Spivak, 1979. p.xxxv) in the text where language seems to misfire. In *Dissemination* (1972/1981), Derrida argues that "dissemination endlessly opens up a *snag* in writing that can no longer be mended, a spot where neither meaning, however plural....can pin/pen down (*agrapher*) the trace" (p. 26). To clarify, this Derridean reading asks that I fixate on the places where "language is indeed straining" (Spivak, 1979, p. xv) and attempt to use them to open up the text to something new.

Opening Up Hope

> "Whenever it [deconstruction] runs up against a limit, deconstruction presses against it. Whenever deconstruction finds a nutshell—a secure axiom or pithy maxim—the very idea is to crack it open and disturb this tranquility. Indeed, that is a good rule of thumb in deconstruction. *That* is what deconstruction is all about, its very meaning and mission, if it has any. One might even say that cracking nutshells is what deconstruction *is*. In a nutshell" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 32).

The metaphor of cracking nutshells may seem violent, but not all violence is demolition; and, despite their unfortunate phonetic similarity, deconstruction is not destruction. Although it may *press against,* may *disturb tranquility*, it does so with an eye towards creating something new "not in order to reject or discard..., but to reinscribe...in another way" (Derrida 1973/1971, p. 215).

Again, Spivak (1996) calls deconstruction "a persistent critique of what one cannot want" (p. 28). And the role of this critique? It "is that of defining the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped" (Foucault, 1984/2010, p. 38). Hope. Is critique, specifically the postmodern critique, this "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. xxiv), a hopeful exercise ? More specifically, is deconstruction a strategy of hope? Derrida (1966/1978), in applying deconstruction to structuralism's need for a center argued against a "saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseaustic side of...thinking" and instead embraced the "Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and the innocence of becoming" (p. 292). How does hope, *affirmation*, make sense within the postmodern condition? Richardson (2000) argues that "the core of postmodernism is *doubt*" (p.

928), but that doubt does not need to be one without hope. In fact, this doubt allows access to new ideas, to new futures. And hope, though always aware of the insufficiency of the present, embraces the possibility of the future, of the event.

Hope is always about the future, about what is to come. Deconstruction is always "to come." It "turns on the...promise of something to come...let us say a justice to come, or a democracy to come, or a gift or hospitality to come, a stranger to come"(Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 164). Some of the work of deconstruction is based on inverting and breaking open established binaries: male/female, reason/emotion, and present/future. In the present/future binary, the known presence is given precedence over the unknown future, a future "marked" by its very unforeseeableness. For Derrida, it is precisely the unknowability of the future, the possibility of an event in the future, that makes the future so attractive, so hopeful, because "deconstruction is a love of the future" (Caputo, 2013, p. 69). We cannot deconstruct the future, but by putting deconstruction to work in the present, the future can be made more just, more democratic, more giving, and more hospitable. Derrida and Caputo (1997) help to clarify this paradox:

> To be sure, deconstruction does not affirm what *is*, does not fall down adoringly before what is *present*, for the present is precisely what demands endless analysis, criticism, and deconstruction...On the contrary, deconstruction affirms what is to come, *a venir*, which is what its deconstruction of the present, and of the values of presence, is all about. (p. 41-42)

This aspect of deconstruction—understood largely through Caputo's work with Derrida—suggests less of a method and more of an attitude. I have devoted all of my adult life to education and religion—schools and churches are systems I know well and can say without

hesitation that I love. Yet, having "seen behind the curtain" of these structures, I have been both disappointed and disgusted by what occurs and am a harsh critic of those failings. But deconstruction is hopeful and forward looking and "never proceeds without love" (Derrida, as cited in Caputo, 2007, p. 78). Though my analysis must be critical, it can also be generous; it can proceed from Sedgwick's (2003) reparative reading that chooses to

> surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*...because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 146)

Reparative reading transgresses traditional academic discourse that forever seeks to prove, justify, anticipate, and argue against. In the "elevated" way of knowing that has become the hallmark of academia, optimism and hope are often considered trite and simple, somehow "the lesser." If this hierarchy exists, postmodernism generally and deconstruction specifically, provides a challenge to this assumption because in deconstruction "nothing [is] reductionistic, and this is because *différance* opens things up rather than barring the door closed" (Caputo, 1997, p. 4).

Religion in America--Two Views on Religious Liberty

"Humanity is looking or itself
The ancient wisdom taken from the shelf
A light so dark, a heaven that is hell"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1988, Track 1).

Massachusetts Bay Colony was founded in 1630 by—among others—John Winthrop, a Puritan whose hope was to escape what he saw as the corruption of the Anglican Church. His express goal was religious liberty, the right to worship God as he and his followers saw fit;

however, Governor Winthrop's idea of religious liberty was narrow and one-sided. In his most famous sermon "A Model of Christian Charity," he outlined his ideas about religious liberty in his colony: only those professing themselves "fellow members of Christ" and working for "the comfort and increase of the body of Christ" (as cited in Burchard et al., 2010) were allowed to live peacefully in what would become Massachusetts. To Winthrop's thinking, "religious liberty meant that the colony could not be forced to accept into residence people who did not fully accept their moral code" (Burchard et al., 2010). In short, religious liberty protected society from irreligious individuals. In one year, this idea would be challenged from within.

In 1631, Roger Williams was welcomed to Massachusetts Bay. He was a minister and a separatist from the Anglican Church who carried his controversial views from England into the New World. Williams published his most famous book, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution* in 1634 wherein he argued that "God requires not an uniformity of religion to be enacted and enforced in any civil state" (as cited in Burchard et al., 2010). A year later, he was banished from Massachusetts Bay for spreading "new and dangerous opinions" (Burchard et al., 2010). Over the next three decades, Williams worked to establish the colony of Rhode Island whose Charter declared

> That no person...shall be anyway molested, punished, disquieted, or call in question for any differences in opinion in matters of religion, and does not actually disturb the civil peace of our said colony; but that all and every person and persons may... freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concerns. (as cited in Burchard et al., 2010)

In a sense, Williams's concept was the inverse of Winthrop's: religious liberty protected the individual from a religious society.

History seems to tell us that the religious pluralism of Rhode Island won the day, but these differing ideas about society's role in religion and religion's role in society are still very much in play. Opposing views about religious liberty are still in tension within our society. The fear that the marriage of two men might harm the larger community seems to reflect Winthrop's idea of a religious liberty that attempts to insulate society from transgressive ideas. It was a society where "religious freedom...was not in a private space removed from public life but was the focus of surveillance, discipline, and security" (Curtis, 2016, p. 13). Furthermore, the decision of a city clerk to refuse issuance of a marriage license to those same two men citing religious convictions smacks of Williams's religious liberty wherein individual conviction outpaces societal goals.

In writing about religious tolerance--a somewhat different understanding of religious liberty—Lester & Patrick (2006) address this paradox:

> The strength of many Americans' religious beliefs both requires that the state aggressively promote a particularly robust form of tolerance regarding religion and simultaneously places strong limits on what type of religious tolerance the state can legitimately promote. (Lester & Patrick, 2006, p. 329)

In America, there is a complex and nuanced tension between the Church and the State, between competing understandings of religious liberty, between diverse definitions of tolerance, and a host of other complex issues surrounding religion. These tensions exists in society at large, government institutions, public schools, and within teachers themselves. Looking at the literature surrounding this complex topic provides both a framework for understanding and gateway for further inquiry. This framework provides a workable yet ever expanding

understanding of how religion is understood in public education and how teachers might conceive of themselves as religious subjects.

Religion and Schools

"Like anything else that is worth its salt, religion is at odds with itself, and our job is not to sweep that tension under the rug but to keep it out in the open and allow this tension to be productive" (Caputo, 2001, p. 94). Education, too, if it is worth its salt, is at odds with itself. It possesses internal tensions that can produce both paralysis and progress; indeed, a significant tension exists both within religious discourse itself and its interaction with other discourses. Sewall (1998) argues that "the secular and religious speak radically different civic languages. They rely on different sources of authority—one constitutional, the other theological—to justify their views" (p. 73); however, this belief is problematic: oftentimes religious discourse emerges as a response to secularism, and a secular discourse can emerge out of dissent from a religious institution, belief, point of view, etc… Public education in the United States of American can be understood within this framework: Though thought of as particularly secular, public schools in America can trace their lineage through the overtly religious Medieval monasteries to English public schools to American Puritan schools and even to the Common school movement of the 19th century. One consistent strand through each of these was a focus on religious—specifically Christian—education. And despite Jefferson's wall of separation, an assortment of Supreme Court cases, and a cultural shift away from established churches, religion remains deeply nested within public education. Baer and Carper (1998) argue that "all education is inescapably religious because every coherent curriculum rests on certain foundational beliefs about human nature, what the good life is like, how we ought to live, and so forth" (p. 35). So, are public schools in the United States of America secular, religious, or some mixture of the two? Burke &

Segall have delved into the ways Christianity remains embedded in public education's structures (2011; 2105) and the ways in which the Bible is foundational to public education (2013).

Referring to public education in the 19th century, Carper and Hunt (2011) argued that it was a "quasi-Protestant institution" (p. 85); it has now undeniably evolved into a quasi-Christian institution. Religion—particularly Christianity—"pervades educational practices and the lived curriculum of schools even when religion is not a topic taught in school" (Burke & Segall, 2011, p. 633). This is evident in public school's explicitly Christian calendar which—after its agrarian roots—is built around the Christian holy days of Christmas in the form of a Winter Holiday and Easter in the form of Spring Break (Burke & Segall, 2011). Both the birth and death of Christ encircle the school calendar. Furthermore, the language of education—deans, offices, convocations, professor, etc…—have their roots in Christian nomenclature. Even the ubiquitous apple as a metaphor for knowledge, and by extension, teaching, has its roots in the Biblical story of the Fall. It represents the fruit that comes "from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17, New American Standard Version). And in this discourse, the source of all this knowledge is the Bible or its proxies.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Teaching, reproof, correction, training—these sound uncannily similar to the day-to-day activities that occur in public schools today. Though the Bible is no longer taught as a religious text—and seldom taught as a literary or historical one—in American public schools, it is still a "foundational text" capable of "rousing its sediments in contemporary educational thought" (Burke & Segall, 2013, p. 310). Superficially, the titles of books read (*East of Eden, The Sun Also Rises, Number the Stars*) and the language used ("fall from grace," "cast

the first stone," "good Samaritan") have their roots in the Bible. However, the Bible—and the way it is understood—has had a deep impact on the way texts are understood, subjects are taught, and students are assessed. Just as the Bible is generally accepted in a Christian worldview as divinely inspired and inerrant, textbooks are accepted by many students as "heavenly transcribed, as simply handed down, as founts of true knowledge" (Burke & Segall, 2013, p. 317). Furthermore, having a singular text, one that contains all the relevant information, is accepted as infallible, and—more often than not—is presented as authorless, smacks more of a religious discourse than a secular one. Tangentially, there has been significant work among conservative Christian groups to mold school textbooks to fit their own views (Sewall, 1998). "All this is to suggest that, while the texts are different (textbooks replacing the Bible), the very approach to 'the text' and its reading has changed very little over time" (Burke & Segall, 2013, p. 317). Even assessment has its roots in the Biblical understanding of accountability from the word *test* which shares its Latin root with *testament* to the "chapter and verse" organization of educational standards (Burke & Segall, 2013). It is clear that "testing is important, necessary, and heavenly, a fundamental component of God's operation" (Burke & Segall, 2015b, p. 83). It appears inarguable that "the Christian sediments in public education" (Burke & Segall, 2011, p. 653) exist in the structure of school.

I have reinscribed the word *brackish* to describe the religious/secular mixture present in public schools. As I wrote earlier, *brackish* refers to the mixture of salty and fresh water found at the mouth of rivers--these places are called *estuaries*, enclosed places where the transition between fresh and saltwater occurs. Though complex, estuaries are incredibly fertile and allow a huge variety of animals to thrive. I believe that public schools can be understood in the same manner. Interestingly enough, the term *brackish* has a secondary meaning of something that is

unpleasant and distasteful. My research attempts to analyze this duel understanding of the brackish waters of public education: some of my participants have thrived as they navigate the borderlands between their (somewhat) public profession and their (again, somewhat) private faith. School has proven to be an estuary for them. Others struggle in this space and attempt to build untenable barriers between these two spaces, unable to let deconstruction do its work within the complex and myriad binaries produced there.

Religion and Educators

Though qualitative research can be built around looking for "gaps in knowledge," post structural theory questions if such a thing can actually exist. That being said, a review of the academic literature reveals a significant lack of research in the area of teachers and religion, specifically into the ways that educators' religious beliefs inform their pedagogy. After an exhaustive review of the literature, White (2009) argues that "educational research explores religion in schools, but it has not yet adequately addressed teacher identity and religion…" (p. 856). The reasons for this omission are paradoxically myriad and unclear especially in light of the fact that the "topic of how religion should impact students' education is highlighted" (White, 2009, p. 859). Adding further complexity to this omission is Burke and Segall's work describing deeply entrenched "Christian sediments in public education" (Burke & Segall, 2011, p. 653). While research exists around student identity and school structure, "very little is known about how teachers navigate these pedagogical boundaries based on their own religious observance" (White, 2009, p. 859) beyond the ubiquitous martyr/savior archetypes of teachers (Burke & Segall, 2015a).

Palmer argues that in education "...the personal can never be divorced from the professional" (Palmer, 2007, p. xi) and much of his work revolves around understanding and

cultivating the "inner life" of teachers. He argues that in the national dialogue about education, the discussion seldom goes deeper than merely questions about content and methods—essentially "what" and "how" questions. Occasionally, "why" questions about purpose are posed. However, the question that drives him—the one seldom asked—is "the 'who' question—who is the self that teaches" (Palmer, 2007, p. 4)? White's (2009) survey of the academic literature echoes Palmer's conclusion that "religion is a part of many teacher's individual and social lived experiences within cultural and institutional contexts" (p. 863). Furthermore, my personal experience as a twenty-year veteran of public education and the experiences of my interviewees also speak to this reality.

Derrida argued that his work "inaugurate[d]...not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly, the signification of *truth*" (Derrida, 1967/1974, p. 10). Ideally, both education and religion are consumed with a pursuit for truth. Perhaps all teachers are in some manner theologians. I am a competent veteran teacher and deeply religious, although my understanding of religion—and Christianity specifically—is well out of the mainstream. Teachers talk freely about their teaching philosophy; very little is said about a teaching theology, but it is there. I am interested in how that works. I would posit that the philosophy/theology binary is deconstructable, along with the ubiquitous church/state binary. So, how do teachers who identify as religious negotiate the brackish waters of public education—how do they construct themselves as subjects in that space?

It is important to note that Hadley (2019) addresses similar issues of teacher identity in the face of religious belief; specifically, she looks at early career literature teachers in secondary education who identify as evangelical Christians. Furthermore, she focuses on their pedagogical

practices as well as the ways in which they "navigate what they perceive as tensions in their role as both a Christian and a public school teacher" (p. 50). Hadley's work exists in a similar plane as my own, but this study is different in two significant ways: First, this inquiry did not focus on pedagogical practices—though it is inevitability and inescapably present. Instead, my interest was in subjugation, in the ways in which teachers who self-identify as religious are constructed as subjects—particularly ethical subjects as Foucault understands them. Second, it could be argued that I use significantly less data. Hadley (2019) uses multiple interviews and interview techniques, observations, pictures, videos, and even blogs; my data, at least as understood in a more traditional sense, consisted of single, semi-structured interviews. This decision was based on my own search for "an impossibly full voice that challenges...truths and authentic meanings" (Mazzei, 2009, p. 47). It is a specific methodology that blooms out of a general theoretical framework. All of this being said, I encountered Hadley's work while writing this dissertation, and it has informed much of my thinking about religion, education, and the myriad ways in which they interact.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Doing Things a Bit Differently: A Poststructuralist Approach to Inquiry

"The gate flies open wide

A momentary river flow

Then back to scrutinizing

Watch to see the water slow"

(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1990, Track 8).

In my early years as a high school teacher, my Freshmen's first foray into research was a narrative poem. They selected a story from Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*, picked a character, and wrote a poem incorporating several literary devices; in-text citations and a Works Cited list were required. This assignment was one of my many nods to Tom Romano[1] (1995; 2000) and was simple enough: it generally took about two days to complete. None of this was a problem for most of my students—the problem came the next day when they were required to read their poem aloud in front of the class. Many of my students were—and are—deathly afraid of standing in front of their peers, but I always modeled this activity for them, had students from previous semesters visit and read their "veteran" poems, and gave them a checklist with specific requirements: stand up straight, don't sway, maintain eye contact, keep your voice steady, and a host of other "dos and don'ts." Some students did well, others did not. However, one semester something different happened: one student disregarded virtually every requirement of my rubric.

[1] Romano's work in multigenre writing has deeply influenced the ways in which I teach, assign, and assess writing. Poems, narratives, dialogues, and an assortment of other types of writing are as common in my classroom as are expository essays and research papers.

Dynesha was a quiet and reserved African American female. When called on, she would answer a question but she would never otherwise volunteer a response. Historically, the day before The Day—while students are typing—I go to each one individually. There are always several that need some reassurance; there are often a few that outright refuse. Because of her reticence in class, I was worried about Dynesha, but she assured me she was prepared. And she was. When it was her turn, she stood up without her paper, explained that she would be doing things a bit differently, and began: "She told me,/A kick in her stomach, and a flush in her feet/There was a baby like me/Was he going to cheat?/Or Beat?/Repeat repeat…"

She did not stand up straight: she stood to the side almost like a runner ready to sprint. She did not stay still: she stomped her foot several times, moved her hands in a wave-like rhythm to the beat of her poem, and moved back and forth in front of the room. She did not maintain eye contact: sometimes she looked at the class, but other times she looked at her hands, her stomping foot, or even the ceiling. She did not keep her voice steady: her inflection was not according to punctuation, or even line breaks, but according to the importance she placed on words: "Repeat," "Baby," and "Alive" were all spoken an octave higher than the rest of the poem. In less than two minutes, I watched a fifteen-year-old systematically dismantle my sacrosanct Public Speaking Rubric. At the time, I wasn't sure what to make of her work, and time hasn't changed my sense of disquiet—of mystification-- what she did. However, I now perceive Dynesha's willingness to disregard my prescriptive instructions and transgress the classroom norms through my own Postructuralist lens[2]. She wasn't destroying my assignment: she was opening it up, revealing the deconstruction that was inevitable. Furthermore, what she

[2] The idea of lenses is somewhat problematic for me. The theorists whose work I've immersed myself in over the last decade are not simply a lens that I can take on or off at will. They are " in [my] very bones" (St. Pierre, 2009, p. 232). I can no more "take off" Foucault than I could my religious faith or profession as a teacher. All that being said, lens seems to suffice in this instance.

produced existed in the overlap of at least two discourses: that of her church and school. Poetry meant two very different things in those differing places that intersected within her.

This section will first attempt to focus the often nebulous space of the theory and theorists with which I am thinking. Much of this has been discussed in the Theoretical Framework section in the previous chapter. Truthfully, I must admit the line between theory and methodology has become difficult for me to define, and perhaps that is a deconstruction of a sort in itself. In fact, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define methodology as "the general logic and theoretical framework for a research project" (p. 35) which offers little assistance in delineating that division. Later in this section, I briefly discuss the evolution of this inquiry as my original plan "broke" in places. Lastly, the methods themselves are discussed in more detail.

Methodology from Another Planet

In his personal journals, Kierkegaard (1843/1996) offered a critique of philosophy postulating that even though "life must be understood backwards...it must be lived forwards" (p. 161). Research methodology within a postmodern framework is much the same: it perhaps can only say what it has done, not what it will do. That is because as the theory/method binary begins to deconstruct itself, the pre-existing narratives cannot contain what is truly new. "We can't see the new because of the structures of the present, and we have no language yet to say it" (St. Pierre, 2015, p. 84). We cannot put new wine into old wineskins; we cannot put new language into old stories—our narratives do not suffice, they cannot be trusted. It is this "incredulity towards metanarratives" that defines postmodernism (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. xxiv), and methodology is simply another metanarrative of which we must be incredulous. Foucault (1984/1990) makes this clear:

> As to those for whom to work hard, to begin and begin again, to attempt and be mistaken, to go back and rework everything from top to bottom, and still find reason to hesitate from one step to the next—as to those, in short, for whom to work in the midst of uncertainty and apprehension is tantamount to failure, all I can say is that we are clearly from another planet (p. 7).

Beginning again and again.

Attempting and being mistaken.

Working in uncertainty.

Working in apprehension.

Foucault's words have reassured me and given me hope. While writing about religion, Caputo (2001) embraced his doubt and argued "since I doubt that there is something called "The Answer" to this question, in caps, the only thing we can do is to *answer*" (p. 28). Echoing his phrasing, I doubt there is something in Postructuralism that could be called "The Methodology," so the only thing to do is to begin again and again, attempt and be mistaken, work in uncertainty, work in apprehension. The theorists with whom I am thinking—Foucault, Derrida, and Caputo—were undoubtedly scholars of the highest order, and their inquiry sometimes lacked definable, linear methods. Foucault created an elaborate plan for his *History of Sexuality*, but his research took unexpected paths that were only expressed after the fact. His plan transformed; his method became power, a non-method of sorts. Working with Geoffrey Bennington, Derrida (1993) deconstructed his life's work with a unique book divided into two sections: "Derridabase" written by Bennington and "Circumfession" written by Derrida. Bennington summarized Derrida's ideas on top of each page while Derrida added commentary—what the authors called "periphrases"—along the bottom third of each page. Caputo repeatedly blurs

(deconstructs?) the line between philosophy and theology and has "come out" as a theologian with works such as *The Weakness of God* (2006), *The Insistence of God* (2013), and *The Folly of God* (2016): the discursive regimes of philosophy and theology overlap in his work.

Keeping Your Head in Deconstruction

If deconstruction is a methodology at all, it is one without a method or practice. (Derrida, 1987/1990, p. 85). That being said, Derrida (1983) did attempt to "work out...a sort of strategic device, opening onto its own abyss, an enclosed, unenclosable, not wholly formalizable ensemble of rules for reading, interpretation and writing" (p. 40). Some of these strategic devices embedded in the instability of language have been discussed earlier in my theoretical framework—again, the theory/method binary cannot maintain itself. Importantly, deconstruction is affirmative. It is "a way of releasing and responding, of listening and opening up" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 57). To be clear, deconstruction is not simply reversing binaries, and thereby, reversing the hierarchy nor is it about artlessly mixing opposites—it is about revealing something new. It is about "the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 6). Deconstructive approach is not neat and tidy, it does not contain a "prescriptive and closed set of procedures, but an essential self-questioning, an opening through which the hidden is encountered, the possible made impossible" (Mazzei, 2007, p. 14).

The paradox of attempting to systematically explain an idea that purposefully breaks open systems is not lost on me. But Derrida understood this: "Knowledge is not a systematic tracking down of a truth that is hidden but may be found. It is rather the field 'of *freeplay*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitution in the closure of a finite ensemble' (Derrida, as cited in Spivak, 1979, p. xix). Deconstruction is interested in the infinite, the unknowable; therefore,

accurately defining it is, perhaps, a fool's errand since when you label a thing, you are attempting to bring it to a close. Deconstruction, if anything, is not about endings, but beginnings. "The trick in deconstruction, if it is a trick, is to keep your head without having a heading" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 116). And what does it mean to "keep your head"? Or stated more abruptly, "If deconstruction happens—and deconstruction is always happening, even when we as researchers are too self absorbed or myopic to notice—what are we to make of this" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 30)?

Paralogic Legitimation as Permission

Thus (re)enters Lyotard's (1979/1984) "quest for paralogy" (p. 66). Working from Kuhn (1970), Lyotard described a world where data was unstable and consensus did not, could not, reveal truth. Kuhn used history, Lyotard used philosophy, to dismantle Enlightenment ideas about scientific methodology and the very nature of knowledge. In describing Lyotard's paralogism, Jameson (1984) writes:

> This view not surprisingly will then determine Lyotard's ultimate vision of science and knowledge today as a search, not for consensus, but very precisely for 'instabilities,' as a practice of *paralogism*, in which the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous 'normal science' had been conducted. (p. xix)

Paralogism, as described above, reinvents not only the answers available to science—and by extension, philosophy—but also allows postmodern thinkers access to a new type of questioning. In short, it creates new paradigms in which we can think new things. "Paralogy depends on open access to and a willingness to engage knowledge outside the paradigm, knowledge that can produce compelling breakthroughs in thinking about old problems in new ways" (St. Pierre,

2012, p. 498). Postmodernism may be defined by doubt, but there exists a hopefulness within it as well. By opening closed systems, by asking novel questions, by "thinking about old problems in new ways," we allow the possibility to recreate our world: a world in which stability at the cost of freedom is no longer allowed; a freedom that is not defined by an inherent nature or essential being but by "a capacity to move beyond a particular historical constitution" (Caputo, 1993, p. 255). Feenburg (1995) amplifies this: "Paralogy is a micropolitics that rejects totalization...it represents a new type of resistance" (p. 132). And what does it resist? An insatiable need for certainty; a never ending search for consensus. It embraces doubt. This approach "legitimates the illegitimate possibility" (Mazzei, 2007, p. 20). It gives permission to do things in a different way.

What I Did

"Who can restrain Pleiades
Or know the laws of heavenly's
How many times have we been wrong before"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1989, Track 9).

The original purpose of my dissertation was to describe and gain an understanding of the ways in which educators who self-identify as religious construct themselves as subjects at a small, rural, public high school in Northeast Georgia.

And it is still that.

And more.

And less.

I interviewed six educators who self-identify as religious and one who self-identifies as nonreligious. The interview with a young, nonreligious math teacher was the first "break" with

my original plan, but her story was important and added depth and dissonance to this work. The words of these seven teachers are beautiful and tragic; inspiring and heartrending; full of love and anger. As I spoke to these men and women, it became evident that speaking about religion only within the confines of their profession was difficult, if not impossible. Nietzsche (1886/1992) argued that "Whoever is a teacher through and through takes all things seriously only in relation to his students—even himself" (p. 269)**.** At times, teaching was larger than their faith; at times, their faith was larger than teaching. In essence, my thinking was too limited as I began my interviews: teachers do not simply construct themselves in or for their classrooms, they are more than that. Meanwhile, while this study expanded in one direction, it narrowed in another. My own beliefs about faith and teaching became impossible to contain. My own biases could no longer be accommodated by a simple subjectivity statement, and though I might have expected this, it still came as a surprise of sorts. My focus became both larger and smaller than the classroom. The words shared with me are undoubtedly data, but more. Mazzei (2007) helps me to understand this:

> Our texts, in the form of data generated from interviews with participants, are unmasterable, polyvocal, not containable, and because of this, we continue to search for the multiple meanings, voices, layers—not in hopes of learning the secret, but in hopes of remaining true to the passion of endless inquiry. (p. 26)

To be clear, the words of my participants are important—central even—to this inquiry; however, I no longer ask them to bear the burden of being true, correct, or the final word. "For poststructuralists, however, presence and other related concepts of qualitative inquiry--for example, voice, interview, narrative, experience—cannot secure validity, the truth" (St. Pierre, 2009, p. 223).

Along with my interviews, I continued to read and document my reading through annotations, notes, and a reading log. I divided my reading into categories: Academic Reading, Religious Reading, Scripture, and what became, essentially, a miscellaneous category. But with time, it became difficult to place some texts into categories; with time, it became unnecessary. Having studied Derrida, I perceive this as deconstruction, what Caputo and Derrida (1997) call "a certain auto-deconstructing tendency built right into things" (p. 74). Somewhat ironically, I was looking for deconstruction in my research and was surprised when it happened in my own work.

Simplistically, a method is just a plan; however, we can only plan for what we know. This echoes a famous (or infamous) press conference given by then Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld concerning the 2002 war in Iraq. He argued that "there are no 'knowns':

> There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don't know.

It is these "unknown unknowns" that haunt us, that entice us, that lead us into inquiry. Echoing Kierkegaard, Lyotard (1979/1984) both clarifies and complicates this dilemma:

> A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the works he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. Hence, the fact that work and text have the characters of an *event*; amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization (*mis en*

> *oeuvere*) always begins too soon. *Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*). (p. 81)

What seems to have happened—and continues to happen—is instead of simply identifying the deconstruction taking place within my data, everything began to "auto-deconstruct": my understanding of what data is, my theoretical framework, the categories I had created. All of this and more became fluid and nebulous. The constant reading of theory had a lot to do with this instability. "It seems to me that if we are steeped in poststructual theories—if they are in our very bones—we do indeed find ourselves doing it differently" (St. Pierre, 2009, p 232). As I read more, my theoretical framework evolved, and therefore, my plans became larger; furthermore, the texts I used as data expanded. I am writing this in the past tense, but it should more accurately be understood in the future perfect tense—this is not what I have done, it is what I am doing.

All of this being said, a structure still exists. This dissertation follows a basic five chapter format. Though the lines between theory, methods, and data are somewhat blurred, those lines still exist. "A recognition of the limits of our received practices does not mean that we reject such practices; instead, we work the limits (and limitations) of such practices" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. ix). So it becomes necessary to get down to the details, the research questions that both guided and limited this inquiry, the participants chosen to join in this process, how data was collected, and the site of the research itself.

Research Questions

This study sought to address three overarching questions formed by my own experience as a public school teacher with sincere religious beliefs, informed by poststructural theories, and transformed by the process of research itself.

(1) How do power/knowledge relations produce educators who self-identify as religious within public education?

(2) How do educators who self-identify as religious construct themselves within possibly competing religious and secular discourses?

(3) How do educators who self-identify as religious perceive deconstruction taking place in the religiously brackish environment of public schools?

Sample and Sample Selection

I invited seven participants to work with me in this interview project, all of whom agreed to be interviewed. The sample selection criteria for this study were as follows: (1) A veteran educator with at least five years of experience in the classroom, (2) who self-identifies as religious in his or her worldview (though in one instance that changed to a self-described non-religious person), (3) from a myriad of academic disciplines. I looked for experienced teachers who have a more established sense of who they are in the classroom. Many "rookie" teachers are simply trying to survive. It was essential that the participants view themselves as religious—that is central to the research itself. However, interviewing a non-religious person gave great insight into the way in which religion can construct subjects who deny its viability. The academic disciplines break down as such: three math teachers, two literature teachers, one social studies teacher who currently works with special education students, and one administrator who was formerly a literature teacher. Interestingly enough, two of the participants have seminary degrees and one is a lay minister (a pastor who has not completed a formal collegiate ministry program). Within these seven, four are female and three male. Again, I was—and am—curious as to how religion plays a role in different teachers' constructions of self, so diversity was important to this inquiry.

Data Collection

Interviewing was my primary method. Interviewing is useful because it is, essentially, interaction—my interaction with the participants, their interaction with me, our interaction with the questions. This allows the interview to become "both the tool and the object, the art of sociological sociability" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 361). This idea stands in contrast with Bogden and Bilken's (2017) definition of an interview as "a purposeful conversation between two people...directed by one in order to get information from the other" (p. 103). My goal was not to simply extract knowledge from my participants. Interviews should not simply reveal or explain understanding, they have the power and potential to create it. I am reminded of Flannery O'Connory: "I don't know what I think until I read what I say." Perhaps individuals are unsure of what they believe until they are asked about it; to paraphrase: we don't know what we believe until we say it. I used semi-structured individual interviews. I did not use structured interviewing that "asks each respondent a series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 363). Though useful in some cases, the rigidity of structured interviewing denies the interactive goal of this study as well as limiting the unique experiences of the participants. Furthermore, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argue that "reading the same question to each subject assures nothing about the response" (p. 109). Through trying to understand the same phenomena, each participant—myself included—had different experiences and perspectives that guided the interview process. I know that I am not the "ideal" interviewer: "cool, distant, and rational" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 366). My participants are not people that I hold at arm's length, nor is the topic one that I can be fully objective about. The semi-structured interview does not assure me what some might call "precise data" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 366), but does allow an attempt to "understand the complex behavior of members of a

society" (p. 366). That society being—of course—public school teachers. To clarify, a more open interview process took much of the control away from me, and "when the interviewer controls the content too rigidly, when the subject cannot tell his or her story personally in his or her own words, the interview falls out of the qualitative range" (Bodgen & Biklen, 2007, p. 104).

I prepared and used an interview guide in an attempt to keep the process both focused and open (Appendix A). I recorded and partially transcribed the interviews along with taking copious notes over them. To be clear, I immersed myself in these interviews by listening to them daily. Sometimes I actively listened to them in front of a keyboard stopping and starting to transcribe, reflect on, and take notes. Other times, I listened more casually while driving, exercising, doing household chores, or simply resting. I then analyzed them looking specifically for areas where power and discourse seem to produce differing subjectivities. Furthermore, I looked for what Spivak (1979) calls "positive lever[s]" with which to pry the text open. Using poststructuralist theories, I was not interested in creating categories, i.e., structures, so much as deconstructing those categories. Looking at power, discourse, and subjectivity was my focus in this analysis along with observing deconstructive moments.

Creswell (2013) describes data collection as "a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions" (p. 146). These "interrelated activities" include location, sampling, storage and a host of other important details. However, data itself is more complex: it contains my own thoughts and experiences, those of my colleagues, friends, and family. It contains what I know and do not know. And although the voices of my interviewees are central, "all those comments are data—words are data just as the 'voices of participants'—and should be treated as such" (St. Pierre, 2009, p. 231).

Site of Research

The site of this research was my workplace: East Jackson Comprehensive High School (EJCHS) located just outside the city limits of Commerce, Georgia. EJCHS is just over a decade old and serves over 1,300 students, 8th through 12th grade. It is a Title I school which indicates a high percentage of low-income students. All of the interviewing took place at this site after school.

Five Chapters

This process has not been linear: it has been circular and circuitous.

Qualitative research appears to follow a trajectory of finding gaps in The Literature, deciding on a methodology, and from there, devising specific methods. After that, data is collected and interpreted through some sort of theory that was initially embedded in the methodology or simply picked up along the way. Finally the findings—whatever those might be—are presented. I tried to do that and failed along the way. Not because that type of inquiry is flawed in any way, but because the theories that I had encountered and internalized simply didn't work in that manner. Butler's work on The Subject exists only on "contingent foundations" (Butler, 1992, p. 21) that are always open to critique; Foucault's work on sexuality underwent a "theoretical shift" (Foucault, 1984/1990, p. 6) that changed the entire trajectory of his inquiry; Derrida's deconstruction refuses to become a system or a method or a process; Caputo's work readily deconstructs the line between philosophy and theology thereby adding layer upon layer of complexity. Simply put, within a poststructuralist framework, theory and method are imbricated to the point that they are indistinguishable, data is everywhere and everything, and no plan can exist in a straight line.

So, what did I do?

I continuously circled around my questions reading theory, reviewing my interview data, examining my own discourse, and looking at texts connected (and sometimes not connected) to this inquiry. All this occurred under the influence of deconstruction—under the assumption that none of this was ever "done." And I was writing, always writing: copious notes on everything that I was reading. Everything. I would catch at a word or phrase from my interview data and search for it through my notes making connections to other data that might traditionally be understood as theory or methodology or literature. Or I would do the reverse and search my interview data for something else I had read. Or I wouldn't reference my interviews—what is traditionally labeled as The Data—at all and make connections in other areas. And as cumbersome and time-consuming as that was, it *felt* more like true inquiry.

The trick was (and is) presenting this process—this messy, messy process—within an academic discourse. Though my poststructuralist outlook might question methodology and methods, I still had to *do* something. Though that same view might question the ability of language to represent, well, anything, I still had to produce writing. And though deconstruction doesn't allow for any final answers, I still had to articulate an answer or at least explain why there wasn't one. And though I at times attempted to expand the boundaries of what a dissertation was, I still worked within those boundaries. I still wrote five chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Things They Carry

"I know it's been said so many times before

I once was blind but now I see

And sometimes it just don't make much sense

But I believe"

(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1990, Track 1).

I'm not interested in the things that are simple or easy: the elementary parts of being an educator, the painless parts of embracing a religious faith, the manageable parts of balancing both are not what this inquiry is about. As an undergraduate, I had a history professor proclaim that the historic facts of which we are completely certain are of absolutely no value. This was, without a doubt, hyperbole, but it has resonated with me over the years. The parts of being a teacher that are more established—best practices, if you will—are important, but they do not impassion me or my work in the classroom. Those things that give me pause are precisely the things that entice me because "teaching is seductive simply because of its complexity" (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018, p. xvii). My faith is no different. The things of which I am (relatively) certain are essential, but the questions, the doubts, are what force me to look deeper. Doubt, in this sense, is a spiritual strength. Keller (2008) helps me make sense of this paradox: "A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it" (p. xxiii).

Furthermore, writer Rob Bell argues that faith, religion and church should be an experiment filled with exploration (Shanneh, 2012). In my experience, this exploration necessitates a high tolerance for doubt. And—to further bedevil this—when my profession interacts with my religious beliefs, the complexity increases exponentially. I do not cease to be a teacher when I leave the school grounds—just look at the moral turpitude clause common in teacher contracts. My religious faith does not go dormant itself when I walk out the church doors. I remain an educator in my church; I remain a Christian in my classroom. Palmer (2007) gives us the "reason for these complexities: we teach who we are" (p. 2).

And therein lies the question.

And, perhaps, an answer of sorts.

My attraction to—my fascination with—postmodernism and its connected poststructuralist theories are rooted in my own personal, professional, and personal/professional interactions with doubt. Like my own, Foucault's work exists in the "midst of uncertainty and apprehension" (Foucault, 1984/1990, p. 7). Furthermore, in speaking of his own religious beliefs, Derrida calls any absolute statement "obscene...I wouldn't say I am an atheist. I wouldn't say I am a believer, either. These statements I find completely ridiculous, ridiculous" (hiperf289, 2007). Building on the work of Derrida, Caputo (2007) argues that "doubt is the condition of faith, not its opposite, making faith possible as (the) im/possible" (p. 121). And finally, speaking from both a postmodern and Christian point of view, Bell (2013) states, "doubt is often a sign that your faith has a pulse, that it's alive and well and exploring and searching. Faith and doubt are not opposites; they are, it turns out, excellent dance partners" (p. 92).

Uncertainty and apprehension.

Obscene and ridiculous.

The im/possible.

A dance.

Doubt

"Who can restrain Pleiades
or know the laws of heavenly's
How many times have we been wrong before"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1989, Track 9).

Doubt is powerful. Modern American education requires tangible, i.e., measurable, results; religious dogmatism demands certainty; "normal science" embraces a totalizing consensus; totalitarianism commands complete acceptance. However, Caputo and Derrida (1997) treat deconstruction as an Old Testament prophet that "takes no delight in sacrifice and burnt offerings, or in the rites and rituals, the dogmas and doctrines" (p. 173). Instead, deconstruction embraces the uncertainty of the future, of what is to come; it is "messianic all the way down but its Messiah is *tout autre*" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 164). It is the coming of the other, of the unknown. It embraces doubt; furthermore, doubt, rooted in serious thinking, is dangerous to positivism, dogmatism, consensus, and absolute acceptance. In fact, Gilbert (2014) links thought and doubt explicitly stating "thinking is something other than compliance: it is engagement with uncertainty and doubt" (p. 65). Thinking is doubt and doubt is resistance. Doubt creates fissures in the foundations of certainty that allow change to take place. However, this doubt is not simply questioning for the sake of questioning, doubt for doubt's sake. It is thoughtful and purposeful. It is viewing, thinking, and writing from the margins. Greteman (2013) encapsulates this idea when writing about a queer theory that challenges "hetero and homonormative ideas about life...and asks that we find ways to resist, subvert, transgress, or

challenge such ideas to make alternatives possible—to make the 'unthinkable', thinkable and redistribute the sensible" (p. 258). Doubt should not be illogical, nor should it necessarily be logical. Instead, it should entertain a different type of logic altogether, perhaps a deeper, more complex type of reasoning. Referencing Foucault's work on madness, Caputo (1993) discusses the importance of what he calls unreason: "Reason without unreason is a smooth surface, a superficial transparency; reason with unreason speaks from the depths, *de profundis*" (p. 239). The word "with" is of the utmost importance here; it hints at a deconstructed binary, at something made new. Reason with unreason creates a new way of understanding that carries with it depth and profundity.

Thus enters Lyotard's (1979/1984) "quest for paralogy" (p. 66) which sounds a lot like the unreason found in Caputo's work with Foucault's thinking on madness. Working from Kuhn (1970), Lyotard described a world where data was unstable and consensus did not, could not, reveal truth. Kuhn used history, Lyotard used philosophy, to dismantle Enlightenment ideas about scientific methodology and the very nature of knowledge. In describing Lyotard's paralogism, Jameson (1984) writes:

> This view not surprisingly will then determine Lyotard's ultimate vision of science and knowledge today as a search, not for consensus, but very precisely for "instabilities," as a practice of *paralogism*, in which the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous "normal science" had been conducted. (p. xix)

Paralogism, as described above, reinvents not only the answers available to science—and by extension, philosophy, theology, pedagogy—but also allows postmodern thinkers access to a new type of questioning. In short, it creates new paradigms in which we can think new things.

"Paralogy depends on open access to and a willingness to engage knowledge outside the paradigm, knowledge that can produce compelling breakthroughs in thinking about old problems in new ways" (St. Pierre, 2012, p. 498). Postmodernism may be defined by doubt, but there exists a hopefulness within it as well. By opening closed systems, by asking novel questions, by "thinking about old problems in new ways," we allow the possibility to recreate our world: A world in which stability at the cost of freedom is no longer allowed. A freedom that is not defined by an inherent nature or essential being but by "a capacity to move beyond a particular historical constitution" (Caputo, 1993, p. 255). Feenburg (1995) amplifies this: "Paralogy is a micropolitics that rejects totalization...it represents a new type of resistance" (p. 132). And what does it resist? An insatiable need for certainty; a never ending search for consensus. It embraces doubt.

By finding truth in anomalies and instabilities, paralogic legitimation works towards a more inclusive world view. If there are no foundations, or as Butler (1992) would argue, only "contingent foundations," then our definitions of normalcy begin to fracture. This is good: it embraces beliefs, ideas, and individuals that have been marginalized. This inclusion allows new types in inquiry. Again, writing about queer theory—an idea that echoes much of Lyotard's paralogical legitimation and Derrida's deconstruction—Greteman (2016) argues that by "writing from the margins" we can embrace "that which is strange or not normal." By perceiving questions from these "margins," we may utilize new ways of thinking to find more useful answers. Counet (2000) reflects this type of logic, stating "this 'paralogical' research is the antithesis of a stable system. Science must be open, narrative, differential, and agonistic. The differential, paralogical activity finds its legitimation in the production of the unknown and the other" (p. 94). Greteman seems to argue that paralogism *embraces* the other; Counet, that it

creates the other. I would argue that it *is* the other, or at least "the advent of the other" (Caputo, 2007, p. 51). It seems paralogy's very existence forces us to seek out those ideas in the margins and, when we cannot find what we need, create them. And to be clear: this is not simply an academic exercise. What occurs in the abstract inevitably finds its way into society. Feenburg (1995) gives us an ominous warning of this:

> This is Lyotard's gamble. In his view contemporary society is torn between two possible futures, the terroristic pursuit of a total system, dedicated to maximizing efficiency at the price of uniformity and unfreedom and an emerging model of temporary contracts between individuals and claims. (p. 132)

This "terroristic pursuit of a total system" continues to take several forms from autocratic and dictatorial government to religious fundamentalism and fanaticism.

Fundamentalism

In a general sense, "fundamentalism is the passion for God gone mad, a way to turn the name of God into the name of terror" (Caputo, 2001, p. 107). Fundamentalism attempts to enclose itself and keep unorthodox ideas outside the wall of literalism and tradition. It is rooted in the past (or a simulacrum of it) and is seldom about the present; it is never about the future—at least not a progressive future. This blind acceptance of a specific metanarrative and an obsession with an imagined past puts fundamentalism at odds with postmodernist thought and deconstruction—those types of critique have no place in fundamentalism as defined by Minikel-Lacocque (2015) where "there is no room for critical thinking, negotiation or intellectual shades of gray. Rather, a black-and-white and right-or-wrong philosophy prevails" (p.182). Fundamentalism tolerates no doubt while postmodernism is defined by its "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. xxiv). This incredulity is about not only accepting the

larger stories in which we live but attempting to navigate the space between them which is itself, of course, just a larger metanarrative of inclusion. Always and forever, Foucault (1995) reminds us, "There is no outside" (p. 301). This is one of the constrictions in which postmodern thinking exists, but fundamentalism refuses to acknowledge anything outside of itself as useful or even real, it "attempts to repress the abyss within, and the extremism and violence to which it is prone are symptomatic expressions of this repression" (Caputo, 2001, p. 108). Fundamentalism is religion of a kind; however, Caputo (2013) defines religion much differently as "Augustine's idea of the restless searching heart in the midst of a mysterious world, not the rites and doctrines of what are called the 'confessional' religions" (p. 44).

A mysterious world.

Intellectual shades of gray.

The abyss within.

Hopeful doubt.

Postmodernism is about doubt, a purposeful and piercing doubt that takes everything out of focus; deconstruction is about hope, a secular messianism that maintains the frame of religion without identifying as religion. Postmodernism, deconstruction, and religion—doubt, hope, and faith—can converse with each other. Perhaps they must. Again, "doubt is the condition of faith, not its opposite, making faith possible as (the) im/possible" (Caputo, 2007, p. 121). Lyotard's, and by extension postmodernism's, project *is* doubt. Richardson (2000) verifies this:

> The core of postmodernism is *doubt* that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the 'right' or privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism *suspects* all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. But it does not automatically

> reject conventional methods of knowing and telling as false or archaic. Rather, it opens those standard methods to inquiry and introduces new methods, which are also, then, subject to critique. (p. 928).

Confession: A Shimmering Mirage

"Let me take my thoughts away
To think about another day
Remembering the times I pray
To help me deal with me"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1993, Track 4).

I find it interesting and useful to couch my interview data as confession: confession as professional practice, confession as religious practice, confession as power, and confession as a statement of belief. Now etymology can be a nebulous science, but in breaking down the word confession, we are left with the Latin *fess* which means to "declare or acknowledge" and *con* which carries the idea of doing something with some person or group. To "acknowledge together" is a nice place to start in understanding confession, though its complexities will be addressed throughout this section.

One of my interviewees, Lewis Staples, argued that "education kind of lends itself to reflection a little bit more so than maybe certain other occupations." Mayes (2001) understands teacher reflectivity as a process wherein "the intending or practicing teacher reflects on the deeper pedagogical, political, and biographical forces that she has internalized and which both consciously and unconsciously shape her practice" (p. 10). Demonstrably, reflective teaching has become both a common catchphrase in primary and secondary public schools as well as a "catchall term for competing programs of teacher education reform" (Fendler, 2003, p. 20). A

quick look at popular texts both in and out of college education courses mets this out: *Reflective Teaching: Effective and Evidence-informed Professional Practice* (2005), *Becoming a Reflective Teacher* (2012), *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (2017), and even *My Little Reflective Teaching Journal* (2018). These and a host of other similarly titled texts reveal the popularity of this method. Coupled with this are the countless essays, editorials, blogs, and memoirs written by teachers recounting and reflecting on their practice; more often than not, these texts are often written as a confessional journal of sorts. It is important to note that autobiographical narratives and confessional journals are two common practices of reflection for teacher educators (Gore, 1993).

Fendler (2003) draws a direct line between these confessional journals and Christian confessional practices. Specifically, Foster (1978) describes using a "Diary of Confession" (p. 149) as one of the twelve spiritual disciplines in Christianity. In thinking about my interviewing protocols, I am struck by how similar they were to traditional Christian confessional practices. These confessions were always taken in private behind closed doors with explicit promises of confidentiality, they were significantly more formal than any previous discussions I might have had, and at times, the roles of interviewee/confessor and interviewer/confessor[3] became uncomfortably apparent as I found myself attempting to comfort a participant as they worked through a particularly difficult idea. Phrases from me like "a lot of teachers feel that way" and "I know exactly what you are talking about" pepper the later parts of my interviews. Foucault (1976/1978) argues that historically the ritual of confession requires a "partner who is not simply the interlocutor but authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and

[3] Interestingly enough, the word for the person who gives the confession and the person who receives the confession are the same: Confessor.

intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile" (p. 61-62). In these interactions was I offering judgement? Forgiveness? Consolation?

Now, a short elaboration of the religious nature of confession seems appropriate. In the New Testament, believers are exhorted to "confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed" (James 5:14, New American Standard). This admonition has existed on a spectrum of formalized yearly private confessions to a priest in Catholicism (established by the fourth Lateran Council in 1215) to a significantly more nebulous personal confession to God in some Protestant traditions. In my own life, I have a semi-formalized practice of meeting with two friends of mine to discuss/confess my own shortcomings/sins several times a year. Be it in a confessional booth, a private prayer closet, over a few beers at dinner, or in a written journal, confessional practices do appear to have a singular goal: healing. My understanding of healing in this context is both a connection with God and the catharsis experienced when one is relieved of the burden of a painful secret. This relief is amplified when this confession is made to a similarly flawed fellow human being:

> Some of the most comforting words in the universe are "me too." That moment when you find out that your struggle is also someone else's struggle, that you're not alone, and that others have been down the same road. (Bell, 2007, p. 53)

Foucault argues that confession is both a "technology of the self" (Foucault, 1981/1997, p. 177) and "one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 58). As a technology of the self, confession allows

> individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as

> to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power. (p. 177)

In the same sense that confession serves as a spiritual discipline to draw one closer to God, it can also work as a transformative process of self improvement. In fact, within the Christian faith, those two actions—connection to God and self improvement—are often one in the same. Foucault (1982/1997) echoes this idea: "In order to recover the efficacy that God has printed on the human soul and the body had tarnished, man must take care of himself and search every corner of his soul" (p. 227). Furthermore, confession is a "a mark of truth" (Foucault, 1982/1997, p. 249). That is, truth may be incomplete without it. An example of this can be found in the judicial system where Foucault argues

> When a man comes before his judges with nothing but his crimes, when he has nothing to else to say but "this is what I have done," when he has nothing to say about himself, when he does not do the tribunal the favor of confiding to them something like the secret of his own being, then the judicial machine ceases to function. (Foucault, 1978, p. 18)

With nothing but the facts, without confiding, without the secret, the machine cannot function. It seems this is true not only in the judicial system, but in education and religion, too. So for my purposes, confession is a practice by which an individual may understand themselves as an ethical subject; it also produces truth not in the sense that the confessor reveals (or could reveal) a complete truth, but that it possesses "in between the words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering mirage" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 59).

A shimmering mirage.

Finally, it is useful to understand the word confession as a statement of faith, a tool to clarify a religious belief system. Often formalized in writing, these statements of faith are

designed to be confessed. Foucault (1982/1997) argues that "Christianity is not only a salvation religion, it is also a confessional religion: it imposes very strict obligations of truth, dogma, and cannon" (p. 243). One of those strict obligations is made clear in the Gospel of Luke where Christ declares "everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8). These confessions can run the spectrum from Calvin's lengthy *Institutes of the Christian Religion* of the 16th century to the relatively simple Apostle's Creed of the 3rd Century. Historically, religious organizations have used these confessions as both doctrinal tools and as gatekeepers to separate those in the faith from those without. My church has one, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) at my school has one, I have one (more or less), and my participants have their own confessions of faith to make. Though useful, this way of thinking has its limitations. Arguing against such systematic ways of understanding Christianity, Rob Bell analogized Christianity not as a list of rules and regulations but as a universal conversation that any and all could join in. These are the conversations—confessions—of several teachers who try to make sense of their faith as Christians and profession as educators.

Arriving at an Ethical Perhaps

"What is this that gives me hope
In the middle of the night
Makes me turn to you"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1988, Track 6).

Minnie Souris (pseudonym used) is a thirteen year veteran Literature teacher. She is petite and, though in her thirties, her youthful smile and energetic gait cause her to be easily mistaken for a student—she has had more than one run-in with a cafeteria worker over this

confusion on teacher dress down days. Despite her small stature, Minnie is a force to be reckoned with in the classroom: she seldom stops moving, her wit is the stuff of legend, and she is loud. Very, very, loud. Her voice echoes down the halls while she is teaching. Loved by her students, Mrs. Souris' classroom almost always has a few students—current and former—lingering after the final bell. This popularity amongst her students is particularly impressive in the light the classes she teaches: all have high-stakes assessments connected to them: End-of-Course and Advanced Placement Tests. To have high test scores (which she does) and be loved by students is an impressive feat for any teacher. Minnie and I have worked together, taught together, hosted book clubs together—we are both colleagues and friends. Though in constant communication, our "official" interview took place on a sunny Tuesday afternoon in my classroom. We talked for over an hour.

Towards the end of the interview, Minnie began to delve into her deeper theological understanding of God: "So if I really want to wrap my brain around God, I have to wrap my brain around His highest creation." Although this idea of humans as God's highest creation is patterned after the work of classicists such as Plato and Aristotle, it was developed and Christianized in the Middle Ages into the idea of The Great Chain of Being with man being placed under angels but above animals. So, despite its pre-Christian roots, this idea is not heterodox. Furthermore, according to Scripture[4], humanity was, indeed, created in the "image" and "likeness" of God (Genesis 1:26). Building on this somewhat established foundation, Minnie intertwines her theological understanding with her pedagogical experience. Her students who are made in the "image of God" (God's words), who have had less time to be "jaded" (her words) by the world around them, who are her "neighbors" (both God's and her words), are a

[4] The word scripture can refer to any body of sacred or authoritative texts, but for my purposes the word Scripture and Bible are interchangable; therefore per Merriam-Webster's guidelines, both are capitalized.

pathway to better understanding God. Minnie has also taught American Literature for over a decade, and some of her thinking smacks of American Transcendentalism. When I asked about this connection, she didn't deny it, but chuckled, called me an ass-hat, and confessed, "I'm still trying to figure this thing out." Minnie continues this idea: "I feel like I've arrived...I feel like I am arriving at a better understanding of how God is by seeing who people are...if that makes sense."

Minnie has not arrived.

She is arriving.

She echoes Derrida (1987) in that "I want to arrive, but I do not succeed in arriving" (p. 154). Minnie's interview—especially in areas where she is speaking of her faith—is peppered with phrases such as "in my opinion," punctuated with "I think," and qualified with "sometimes." It appears she is living in what Toth (2007) calls "the Derridean perhaps" (p. 246). Minnie's indecision does not come from a place of weakness, but one of strength—she is willing to bear the burden of indecision while understanding that "justice calls, justice is to come, but justice does not exist" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 154). Justice, God, truth, the right answer are always "to come." Moral certitude is a tenet of a fundamentalism that she is deeply troubled by as she—through her words, silence, actions, and inaction—wants to prove to her students that "I swear we're not all like that." To be clear, the "like that" to which Minnie alludes includes the marginalization of students that do not fit traditional ideas of masculinity or femininity along with her own experiences with sexism—both implicit and explicit—within churches she has attended. She specifically references that over the years she has been invited to teach young children, teenagers, and even other women at churches but never men. Despite her knowledge of the Bible, her understanding of pedagogy, and her ability to communicate, she is limited by

Scripture that forbids a woman from teaching a man (1 Timothy 2:11-12). Notwithstanding the fact that this "pisses [her] off" and she can imagine some "work arounds" for it, she has made a tenuous peace with this arrangement. In Minnie's search to become an ethical subject she "must embrace and celebrate the infinite deferral of certainty" (Toth, 2007, p. 253). In order to more clearly understand her thinking, the idea of an ethical subject must be explored along with the idea of deconstruction "to come." Foucault helps us with the first; Derrida with the second; and overshadowing all of this is the specter of fundamentalism.

Foucault's Ethical Subject

Niesche & Hasse (2010) argue that it is possible to divide Foucault's work into three periods: his work on the discursive production of knowledge, his work on the relationship between power and knowledge, and his later work on ethics. Towards the end of his life, Foucault understood ethics as "the elaboration of a form of relation to self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct" (Foucault 1984/1990, p. 251). Foucault's later writings (most notably his work on the history of sexuality) and interviews focused on his evolving understanding of ethics and the production of an ethical subject (Rabinow, 1997). That is not to say he abandoned his work on discourse, power, and knowledge; in fact, it could be argued that his later focus on ethics could be a cumulation of sorts because "the concern for the self is linked to the exercise of power" (Foucault, 2005, p. 36). And power, knowledge, and discourse are intricately embrocated. That being said, Foucault's later work, "his so-called 'ethical turn,' has proved to be something of an enigma for commentators and critics" (Smith, 2005, p. 135). It is that enigmatic nature of this work that makes it so useful to think with. For Foucault is not himself, nor is his ethics, nor am I:

> If readers, therefore, are looking for the "real" Foucault in these pages, they will be disappointed. In like fashion, if they expect contributors to be "true" to Foucault, they will be disappointed, for Foucault is not himself...The freedom of Foucault lies in the fact that each of us must constitute him again and again for our projects and our lives as we reconstitute ourselves. (St. Pierre, 2004, p. 325).

It is that very flexibility—that ability to reconstitute both Foucault and ourselves—that is both empowering, daunting, and exemplifies that "vertigo...called *postmodernism*" (Caputo, 2013, p. 3). Yet within that vertigo something—an ethical subject—is produced and that production can be understood through two access points: First, ethics requires freedom; second, the production of ethical subjects is a process.

Ethics is generally thought of as the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles; it concerns how people treat one another. Essential to that "treatment" is the idea of choice and freedom. "Yes, for what is ethics, if not the practice of freedom, the conscious [*reflechie*] practice of freedom...Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics" (Foucault, 1984/1977, p. 284). Let me attempt to explain: for Foucault, ethical behavior is not possible without choice. It is not what one does (or refrains from doing) that makes one ethical, it is what one chooses to do (or not to do) that makes one ethical. Choice itself is foundational. Put bluntly, "a slave has no ethics" (Foucault, 1984/1977, p. 286). A slave may help or harm, but without choice he or she is simply a moral automaton. Of course, for Foucault ethical practices are "nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group" (Foucault, 1984/1997, p. 291). Freedom is complex, and "real ethical practices are of course saturated with power relations" (Smith, 2005, p.145). And power

relations require freedom; otherwise power devolves simply into domination. Thus we are left with a " stylize[d] freedom—that freedom which the 'free' man exercised in his activity" (Foucault, 1984/1990, p. 97).

This concept of a styled freedom is important to understand Foucault's ethics, Christian beliefs, and the thinking of Minnie. In his second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explored the nature of power and freedom through the lens of sexuality in the Classical Period. If ethics necessitates freedom within the constraints of power relations, then freedom requires self-master within the constraints of moderation. Writing about men who through their social status could exercise sexual power over women, slaves, and younger men, Foucault argued that "what was affirmed through this conception of [self] mastery as active freedom was the 'virile' character of moderation" (Foucault, 1984/1990, p. 82). Not exercising "power" over another was itself a sign of power. This type of moderation smacks of a particularly Christian worldview. The Apostle Paul explains that "all things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Corinthians 6:12). Specifically, Paul was speaking about dietary laws; however, on a larger scale he was ruminating on the emancipatory nature of moderation. He was espousing the Christian idea of "power [being] perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Foucault (1984/1977) himself was curious about the "problem" of this "paradox" because "in Christianity, salvation is attained through the renunciation of self" (p. 285). Keller (2008), arguing from an explicitly Christian point of view, seems to embrace this stylized freedom: "Freedom, then, is not the absence of limitations and constraints but it is finding the right ones, those that fit our nature and liberate us" (p. 49). Conceptually, many of these ideas around Postmodern, Classical, and Christian views of

ethics may seem far too abstract for the classroom, but "whether acknowledged or not, education always involves ethics" (Christie, 2005, p. 39).

Minnie's morality—her positioning as an ethical subject—is wrapped up in her view of love and compassion: "I just think that's all I'm put here to do [love God and love my neighbor] and everything else is just noise." When I inquired if it was loving to have earlier called me an ass-hat, she laughingly said I was, "a big boy….and could take care of myself." It seems clear that Minnie has thought about how freedom, power, and inequity might function in her life. She also suggested jokingly (I hope) that I was some of the noise she had to work around. However, she later elaborates on what that noise might look like in her classroom: "Mercy and grace...just because I can fail a kid, punish a kid, embarrass a kid...I don't do that. I could. I don't." It is important that Minnie views her ethics through a lens of freedom and restraint: Her ethical positioning acknowledges her ability to act, but is defined by her choice to not act.

She could.

She doesn't

The rest is just noise.

A Short Autobiographical Diversion

I want to talk about something else, now, and I hope you will indulge this short autobiographical digression. While writing this section I was taken back to a book I read as a Freshman in college: Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). I was introduced to the book through a drunken Friday night viewing of Stanley Kubrick's 1971 movie adaptation in a friend's ill-furnished apartment. The movie so intrigued (and infuriated) me, that I purchased the book the following Saturday and read it in a day and a half in my own also ill-furnished dorm room. This dystopian novel deals with Alex, a teenage delinquent, who upon arrest is subjected

to the Ludovico Technique—a fictional form of aversion therapy that renders him unable to commit any sort of violence essentially transforming him into a moral automaton. In my opinion, the novel fails to have any sympathetic characters except for one: a prison chaplain, "Prison Charlie," who dissents, who argues against the morality of a forced morality. Aptly, he asks "is it better for a man to have chosen evil than to have good imposed on him" (Burgess, 1962, p. 71)? That question, the Ludovico Technique, and Alex's eventual fate haunted me. Nor was it lost on me that the only moral character in the novel was genuinely religious. If asked casually, I would say that Lewis's *Mere Christainity* (1952) was foundational to my conversion to Christianity; however, it would be more accurate, truthful, and complicated to say Burgess's novel had planted the seeds many years before that.

An Ethical Subject and Regimen

Building on the idea of the necessity of freedom to be ethical, Foucault (1984/1990) argues that

> Self-formation as an "ethical subject," [is] a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. (p. 27).

In constructing herself as an ethical subject, a "decent person...a decent human being." Minnie has concluded that her faith is important enough, large enough to encompass her profession: the divide between who she is as a Christian and who she is as a teacher is porous. This permeability is rooted in both the already and always present "Christian sediments in public education" (Burke & Segall, 2011, p. 653) and in JH's own sense of freedom. One is left to wonder how this might change if public schools in America looked much different or she did not

adhere to the beliefs of the majority religion. Curtis (2016) argues that "the production of religious freedom creates divided selves" (p. 6). This division seems less abrasive in Minnie's case due to the privilege of place—a rural school in the Bible Belt—and her personal privilege: educated, middle class, white. None of this is meant as a criticism of Minnie or our school; after all, she *is* trying to be a decent person. She has chosen Scripture and her own conscience to guide her towards her moral goal of loving her students because they are her neighbor. This, however, is a process. She is arriving, and this process is attained and maintained through specific personal/spiritual disciplines such as prayer, study, and writing. Again, Foucault gives us a framework for understanding this.

In studying Classical thought, Foucault wrote about ethics as care for the self; specifically, he wrote about regimens. Regimens consisted of systems—dietetics—designed to produce "good health maintenance and proper care of the soul" (Foucault, 1984/1990, p. 103). It is important to understand that physical health and moral fortitude implied one another: to embrace a strict physical regimen required an "essential moral firmness" (p. 103). The body reflected the soul and the soul reflected the body. In short, "regimen was a whole art of living"; it required and provided knowledge "through which human behavior could be conceptualized" (Foucault, 1984/1990, p. 101).

These regimens divided life into specific areas of concern. Book VI of *Epidemics* provided a list of such divisions that was widely accepted in Classical thought: "exercises [*ponoi*], foods [*sitia*], drinks [*pota*], sleep [*hypnoi*], and sexual relations [*aphrodisia*]" (Foucault, 1984/1990). Types of exercise were divided into "natural" and "violent" categories, and appropriate times of the day and seasons of the year combined with participants' age and food consumed dictated what type of exercise was required. The temperature of baths, firmness of

beds, and details of "evacuations—purges and vomiting" (p. 101) were all outlined in detail. Within these categories, it was also essential to find "the right measure" (p. 102). This was connected to the idea of balance; regimen was designed to prevent excess, not create it. It was believed that excessive concern over physical development could make "the soul sluggish" (p. 104) while excessive adherence to a regimen to the detriment of civic responsibility was as bad as idleness. Furthermore, regimen was meant not only to be "serial": a sequence of activities designed to build on one another." It should also be "circumstantial": "a manual for reacting to situations in which one might find oneself, a treatise for adjusting one's behavior to fit the circumstances" (p. 106). Lastly, a true regimen was thought to be tailored to the individual based on his knowledge—general knowledge of health (physical and moral) plus specific knowledge of himself. From a doctor, he "ought to receive a rational framework for the whole of his existence" (p. 107). However, by paying attention to himself, a man "can discover better than any doctor what suits your constitution" (p. 108). Regimen acknowledged the tension between outside expertise and internal self-knowledge, and through that knowledge, it attempted to construct individuals into ethical subjects.

These regimens--and later techniques for care of the self—were designed to create ethical subjects that were both disciplined and free. A paradox is contained within that idea: a simplistic idea of freedom could become hedonistic, but in the Greek mind discipline produced a truer freedom. This acceptance of limitations actually increased possibilities. By reflecting on sexual morality, men were able "to stylize freedom—that freedom which the 'free' man exercised in his activity" (Foucault, 1984/1990, p. 97). An ethical subject was a free subject: "The care of the self, for Epictetus, is a privilege-duty, a gift-obligation that ensures our freedom while forcing us to take ourselves as the object of all our diligence" (Foucault, 1984/1986, p. 47).

Christianity and Classical thought are deeply interwoven (Rabinow, 1997, p. xxiii) with the first both building on and reacting to the latter. It is therefore of little surprise that Christianity has its own forms of self care, its own regimens. Collectively, these are known as spiritual disciplines. Built around the Apostle Paul's admonishment to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7), many of these spiritual disciplines predate Christianity; however, more recently they have been loosely codified—In the Protestant tradition—by the works of Richard Foster and Dallas Willard. Like Foucault's regimes, these disciplines had their own areas of concern—categories to help clarify and organize. Foster (1978) enumerates twelve spiritual disciplines and divides them into three distinct yet overlapping groups: the inward disciplines that include prayer and study; the outward disciplines that include solitude and service; and the corporate disciplines that include confession and worship. Willard (1988) works with a non-exhaustive list of fifteen disciplines that he divides into two groups: disciplines of abstinences such as fasting, chastity, and silence as well as disciplines of engagement such as service, fellowship, and celebration.

Minnie embraces her own regimens in the form of spiritual disciplines that she uses, quite consciously, to construct herself as an ethical subject. Prayer is central to her life as a Christian and she engages in it because she accepts that it is an effective tool for both inward and outward change. She adheres to the Biblical admonishment that the "urgent request of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect" (James 5:16). She even has a ritual of sorts: "Every year...when I...before I ever meet my kids I call them all by name and pray for them. I walk around my room and I touch every desk and I pray." This effect can be, of course, directed outwardly. Minnie does pray for the well being of her students and the safety of her class as a whole; however, the spiritual disciplines are also designed to be internally transformative. Foster (1988) helps us

understand that "to pray is the change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us" (p. 330). Therefore, prayer as an activity becomes circular: prayer produces a more "righteous" subject whose prayers are then more "powerful in...effect" leading to more righteousness then more powerful prayers and on and on. Furthermore, Willard (1988) argues that "[prayer] cannot fail to have a pervasive and spiritually strengthening effect on *all* aspects of our personality" (p. 184).

Minnie views the world as both a teacher and a student. In fact, both are intertwined in her thinking since she learns more about God by learning more about her students. Furthermore, like many literature teachers, Minnie has a passion for the written word; a passion she wants to pass on to her students: "I wanted to bring the power of the written word to teenagers." She also values Scripture and uses her training in Literature to read, study, and better understand it. These activities are all forms of another spiritual discipline: study. Minnie studies literature. This is evidenced by her two post-graduate degrees in Literature; furthermore, she and I have been part of a book club for over three years now, and I am constantly impressed by her insights into both canonical and popular literature. Minnie studies her students:

> As a teacher, I really try to know my students. I feel like that's one of the things I'm really good at...I'm not good at everything about teaching, but that's one of the things I'm really good at.

I personally have spoken with students about the connection they feel with Mrs. Souris. Specifically, senior students "line up" to have her write their letters of recommendation which are both generous and truthful. One student of mine said unabashedly "she put me in words on a piece of paper." Minnie studies the Bible, what she perceives to be "God's divine revelation." Our interview and regular conversations are peppered with biblical references. However, her

studiousness is not simply an academic endeavor, it is transformative: Foster (1988) clarifies this idea:

> Study is a specific kind of experience in which through careful attention to reality the mind is enabled to move in a certain direction. Remember, the mind will always take on an order conforming to the order upon which it concentrates. (p. 63)

For Minnie, this careful attention to reality is wrapped up in the relationships she creates with her students, with her love for the written word, and with her connection to a higher power. Through study, she is not only learning something, she is becoming something—an ethical subject, a decent human being.

A third way in which Minnie constructs herself is through writing. She makes sense of the confluence of her personal, professional, and spiritual life/lives through regular journaling. This writing is not a summary of the day nor a set of goals; instead, it is confessional and creative. Specifically, Minnie crafts poems and her journal often contains progressive drafts; she will occasionally share a finished piece, but never earlier, incomplete versions. Again, she writes about literature, about relationships, and about her faith. It would be apt to think of Minnie's writing as a metaphor for her construction of self: the drafts as the background work, the regimens, the disciplines and the final version as the product itself, the ethical subject. Foucault (1983/1997) touched on this: "But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life" (p. 261)?

Another Short Autobiographical Diversion

I've been attending church regularly for almost twenty years. In that period, small groups have become a bit of a fad. Marketed as a return to what the New Testament Church once looked like, these groups meet at a host home, are usually made up of 8-12 people, and almost

always involve food. They also have a designated (or sometimes revolving) leader with a prescribed curriculum. Some of these groups are specifically designated for couples, for singles, for those of "college age," for seniors; some of the curriculums deal with specific sections of the Bible or specific topics; however, the most common pattern is some sort of bestselling Christian book with an attached study guide designed to cultivate discussion and relationships—disciples are produced in circles, not rows. Books like Francis Chan's *Crazy Love* (2008), Kyle Idleman's *Not a Fan: Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus* (2011), and Tim Tebow's *This is the Day: Reclaim Your Dream. Ignite Your Passion. Live Your Purpose* (2018). In my experience, these books are always presented as "an easy read," and that has consistently been the case. But twenty years ago, when I was new to church culture, the book that was often referenced in sermons, taught in Sunday School classes, and used in small groups was Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*: *How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* (2000).

The premise of *The Five Love Languages* is simple enough: people understand, express, and receive love in different ways—five ways to be exact—and by observing our loved ones, we can discover their "love language" and give them what they perceive as real love.[5] The book has quizzes to discover your own love language(s) and lists of ways to receive and give that type of love. Since its initial publication, *The Five Love Languages* has seen multiple editions including versions for children, for single people, and for members of the military along with a host of summaries and study guides. But it was the first edition that I carried with me into my earliest foray into a small group at a friend's home. I had already finished the entire book and found some areas of concern that I was excited about discussing with "my" group. After eating and

[5] Chapman argues that the five love languages (words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time, and physical touch) are exhaustive, though individuals can have a primary and secondary love language.

socializing, we all sat in a circle and took an abbreviated version of the "Love Language Quiz" from the book to discover our own Primary Love Language. As each individual shared their results, two things became evident to me: no one else had read the book and, somewhat paradoxically, no one was interested in my "concerns" about this book that they had not read. However, when it was my turn to share, I naively was still enamored with the Christian clichés of being "real" and "taking off the mask." I began to explain how love and communication were complex, and as you combined them, what was expressed could vary day to day or hour to hour. I was quite proud of myself, a bit arrogantly so.

Quickly, the discussion began to revolve around my problem—although I didn't consider it a problem, just an interesting idea. Almost as quickly, the group began circling around the possibility I'd misunderstood the book—a concern I quickly put to rest by paraphrasing and quoting from my tabbed and annotated copy. By now I had completely shifted into Sedgwick's "paranoid position" (Sedgwick, 2009, p. 128) of what might be called academic argumentation. And slowly, ever so slowly, an unspoken consensus began to arise that perhaps there was simply something wrong with me—I was the problem. If I couldn't fit into the categories outlined by this text, if I didn't "speak" one of the love languages, could I even love? At some point, the conversation moved in a different direction, and my wife and I found other places to learn and serve at our church. In the two decades since, I've read hundreds of books about religion: commentaries, theology texts, histories, literature, and even self-help; however, I am most often haunted by a simplistic book that taught a lesson that it did not intend.

Derridean Indecision

In speaking about her uneasiness with organized religion Minnie ponders, "I feel like a lot of times...it's hard to explain...I feel like a lot of times the church will choose things that they

view as sins that are easily quantifiable." Quantifiable—be it seven deadly sins, ten commandments, or five love languages. Minnie's misgivings about religion and the gaugability of sin opens up new ways of thinking about faith, church, and even education. With this, she is not finding "a destruction or demolition, but a way of releasing and responding, of listening and opening up" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 57). She is seeing deconstruction do its work in her experience with organized religion. Churches are inescapably institutions, and in my experience, institutions appreciate numbers—donations, attendance, even salvations. In Christian youth camps and weekend retreats, I have been privy to conversations where the previous night's salvations have been discussed along with ways in which to "get those numbers up." It seemed then—and seems now—a foolish attempt to quantify the unquantifiable. How do you assign a number to something as personal as religious conversion? How do you rank sin? What is the measure of a "successful" church service? The Bible itself troubles this idea in its wisdom teachings: "Differing weights and differing measures/Both are abominable to the Lord" (Proverbs 20:10). This text is dealing specifically with inequity and fraud, but in a larger sense, it can be understood as a warning against measuring what cannot (and should not) be measured. In many ways, American public schools exist in the same space because much of its structures have roots in Christian traditions. Writing about school standards Burke and Segall (2015) argue that

> We would do well...to consider the ways in which we might read religion into and through so-called 'secular' documents, such as standards documents, for the echoes of the sacred that remain and that indeed might guide the very assumptions behind their creation. (p. 75)

Burke and Segall are thinking about school standards, but this idea transcends that specific application. Again, how do you assign a numeric value to an individual's understanding of a topic? How do you 'grade' writing? What does it mean when I put a number next to a student's name at the end of a semester? In planning together, Minnie and I have had multiple conversations about the nature and ethics of grading. Again, it is her uncertainty that positions her ethically; furthermore, that uncertainty creates a space for deconstruction to do its work.

Minnie spoke about having not arrived, about arriving, and this arriving is inescapably about uncertainty. But that uncertainty is not hopeless, it looks to a future that may or may not come. It is easy to ask how can one hope for what may not come? But not seeing is the very nature of hope because "hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees" (Romans 8:24)? Hope is always looking forward, it is always about the future. "There is faith afoot here. Wherever there are events there is a future, and wherever there is a future, there must be faith" (Caputo, 2013. P. 90). Caputo here is speaking about truth and deconstruction and faith, and he is blurring the lines we might construct between each of them. Deconstruction is blurring divisions, opening things up, and looking to the future. But, according to Derrida, it is not enough to look to the future—"one must love the future. And there is no more just category for the future than that of the 'perhaps'" (Derrida, 1994/2005, p. 29). Toth (2007) helps us to understand this:

> To "grasp" Derrida and deconstruction would thus be to endure and embrace the radical irony of the perhaps, the spectral promise of a truly "indecisive," therefore ethical, mode of thought. But this impossible task must remain our goal. We *must* keep the faith. We *must* believe in that which is most certainly impossible. (p. 246)

Deconstruction may be impossible, but “all things are possible to him who believes” (Mark 9:23).

The timeless, ahistorical nature of deconstruction along with its attitude of hope for a future to come combine in a Messianism of sorts. In writing about Marx, Derrida (1993/1994) described a democratic (and communist) promise that possesses “[an] absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated” (p. 81). Just as deconstruction is never complete, messiahs never arrive—that is the nature of both. Furthermore, Messianism is rooted in the idea of a promise, a promise that is true, but never fulfilled. In discussing democracy, Derrida (1994/2005) wrote, “for democracy remains to come...not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come” (p. 306). So, why is deconstruction never complete, always occurring? Why is the Messiah always arriving, yet never to arrive? Because if something were completely deconstructed, it is finished; when the Messiah arrives, the story has ended; and deconstruction is not about endings but beginnings: “Deconstruction is a perpetually self-deconstructing movement that is inhabited by *différance*. No text is ever *fully* deconstructing or deconstructed” (Spivak, 1979, p. lxxxiii).

The eschatological impulse embedded in Derrida’s deconstruction, though rooted in religion, is not itself a confessional religion, but a “religion without religion” (Caputo, 1997, p. 97). Deconstruction pushes back against the rigidity of organized religion and possesses a “passion for transgression, a passion for trespassing the horizons of possibility” (Caputo, 1997, p. xix). The Messianism of deconstruction lacks an object, is in fact, defined by that lack:

> If it is the mark of a messianism to *determine* or *identify* the figure of the Messiah, I would say that deconstruction represents a messianism that, if it does not identify the form of the messiah, does retain an identifiably or determinably messianic form, the very form of a Messiah...It does not give content to its faith and hope, but it retains the form of faith and hope. (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 177)

Deconstruction, at times, might look like religion by telling a timeless story and looking for a future perfectibility (that will never come), but it is a hollow religion. The word hollow is chosen carefully not to denote emptiness but possibility. The full/empty binary, once deconstructed, produces a new possibility for a growth to come. "This is Derrida's 'messianic' hope, a messianism *without* a determinate messianism: for this is a hope that hopes precisely for a future world that is not longer dominated by the classic hope for a coming final end" (Glendinning, 2011, p. 39).

The Last Painting

Christian apologists, C.S. Lewis (1952) wrote,

> If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. (p.138).

I desire a center: must it therefore exist, or is Lewis's apologetics from desire simply magical thinking? My mind pushes back hard against the idea that the simple hope for a thing necessitates its existence; however, my emotional center (ah, that word again!) cries out for it. Furthermore, this head/heart binary is troubling—it deconstructs, reverses, fractures, and

reconstructes into something new. But, what is that new thing? Is it Levi-Strauss's "scandal," the thing "that no longer tolerates" some (any?) binaries (Derrida, 1998, p. 283)? Scandal—what a word! To hold two contending ideas as true simultaneously—scandalous! To believe, to require, something that belongs in both slots of an opposing binary—scandalous! To believe that the center is "*within* the structure and *outside it*"—scandalous (p. 279)! I've played with language here, played with some ideas, but my question is a simply stated one: What place does my personal faith, my theology, have with my doctoral studies here at UGA, with this dissertation specifically? I ask this question because Derrida (1998) seems to blur the line between philosophy and theology, and it is a space into which I would like to go, indeed, have gone.

Postructuralism embraces the centrality of language and its power to construct reality. This idea echoes Christian theology: God spoke creation into existence; he defines himself as "the Word" (John 1:1). Essentially, he is Levi Strauss's "engineer...the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon" (Derrida, 1998, p. 285). Derrida (1998) acknowledges that if this engineer is constructed by the bricoleur, he is a "myth"; however, if he "breaks with all forms of bricolage," his identity becomes a "theological idea" (p. 285). This "theological idea" of whether god created humankind or if humankind invented god is the dividing line between whether a student of the Bible is a theologian or a mythologist. Perhaps poststructuralism gives that student a third way, a way of hopeful doubt. In my developing lexicon, hopeful doubt is synonymous with *faith*, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

So let's talk about faith. Derrida (1998) argues that for some "the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself" (p. 279). Of course, postmodernism strives

to expand our idea of what is unthinkable into the realm of the thinkable. That being said, let's assume that Derrida's assertion is correct. What, then, is that center? Could it be a place of hopeful doubt? The work of postmodern thinkers is rife with a "center" based on "a hyper- and pessimistic activism" (Foucault, 1997, p. 256) and "non-stupid optimism" (Kushner, as cited in Lather, 1995a, p.3). These writers often bemoan our "postmodern condition" (a term so often used, it seems to lack meaning any longer), but find a sliver of hope to which they can hold. Caputo (2007) goes a step further calling deconstruction "a hermeneutics of the kingdom of God" (p. 29). If hope (in a deeply religious sense) is the center, then doubt can be understood as connected to Derrida's (1998) idea of "play" (p. 279). The center both "permits the play of its elements inside the total form....[while it] also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible" (p. 279). If the concept of a center is accepted, then the very center that creates freedom also constricts it. The play is always in relation to the center. It is forever tethered to it. To clarify, in my bricolage of Derrida and Scripture, faith is the center and doubt is the play; however, there is a problem: *this is a misreading of Derrida*. According to Derrida (1998), we have passed a time when "in the absence of a center or origin, [when] everything became discourse" (p. 280).

At this point it would be relatively easy to simply say that God, faith, hope, and even doubt are transcendent and cannot be contained in philosophy, theology, or discourse—and that might actually be the case. Fortunately (or unfortunately), I can't simply use God as an intellectual "get out jail free card"; my faith cannot be a tool I use to stop thinking. And since "language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique" (Derrida, 1998, p. 284), I will attempt to use Derrida's words and language to make sense of my own thinking. Derrida argues that the center no longer exists and everything now is play. This might seem incredibly freeing,

but the idea of existence being "centerless" is in itself a center of sorts. In fact, Derrida seems to build a center around this absence of a center. In arguing against what he calls the Rousseauistic side of thinking in the negative, he embraces the Nietzschean affirmation (Derrida, 1998, p. 292). "*This affirmation then determines the noncenter otherwise than as loss of the center*" (Derrida, 1998, p. 292). What is this noncenter? Perhaps that is a question for the theologians. Or the philosophers. Or something completely new. And therein lies the challenge "to live with great passion and conviction, remaining open and flexible, aware that this life is not the last painting" (Bell, 2005, p. ix).

The Specter of Fundamentalism

> In speaking of deconstruction, Caputo (2007) argued that it
>
> does not occupy a position of opposition to Christianity or to any other concrete or determinate belief or practice. Deconstruction is rather more of a ghost, adding a specter to the Spirit whose lead we are trying to follow. (p. 55)

I see in the life and thinking of Minnie this specter of deconstruction as she works at constructing herself as an ethical subject by embracing an ethical uncertainty—by living in the Derridean perhaps. However, there is something else that overshadows her thinking: the religious fundamentalism that she grew up in, is still surrounded by, and is often reacting to. It seems she lives in a variation of Bakhtin's heteroglossia with centripetal and centrifugal forces both pushing her away and towards fundamentalism simultaneously. She attends a church that is subtly homophobic but feeds children in the community—how does one navigate that space? How do I? At its roots, fundamentalism "mean[s] irreducible minimums—fundamentals—beyond which you cannot have Christianity" (John Vaughn in Sears, 1998, p. 44). This is the centripetal force pulling towards a center. Potgieter (2014) argues that

> Religious fundamentalism refers to a contextual condition where a group of people may decide to view their religion's role in public life to be greater than it realistically should be. Consequently, their behavior is usually too religiously confident and/or they may engage in any sort of action out of religious conviction. (p. 3)

This inflexibility is a centrifugal force pushing Minnie away. Fundamentalism is often tribal and "requires 'the other' to justify its existence and contest borders in order to justify its territorial claims" (Sears, 1998, p. 40). This "othering" is disconcerting for a student of Scripture that specifically calls on believers to embrace the other, to become the other.

The certainty of uncertainty is a certainty of sorts. In our interview, the only topic that Minnie specifically spoke about with said certainty was that homosexuality was not a sin—"I hold it very firm." Of all the things that she questioned about her profession and faith, why was that one she was adamant about? I would posit that it was two-fold: first, this certainty was built around her devotion to her students. All of her students: gay or straight. As an educator, I am haunted by the bullying that goes on against my LGBTQ students; as a believer, that angst is amplified because much of that bullying has its genesis within the churches in my community. Minnie feels the same way, and she acknowledges the church cliché' of "love the sinner, hate the sin" rings hollow in the face of such hate. Bigots don't do nuance very well; however, very often neither do I. So, secondly, Minnie's full-throated embracing of the acceptability of homosexuality could be her reaction to fundamentalism. It is doubtless that parts of the Bible condemn homosexuality, but in the face the vitriol spewed from many American pulpits, she is pushed away, centrifugally, from this fundamental/fundamentalist teaching. Not only is she haunted by fundamentalism, she is still contained by it.

Nash King

"I have trouble with the persons with the signs

But I feel the need to make my own

Yes there's two ways to be

And truth doesn't depend on me"

(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1990, Track 13)

Nash King (pseudonym used) is a middle-aged white man with dark-hair, black glasses, and a nearly perpetual smile. When he walks through the halls of our school, he speaks kindly to virtually everyone with whom he comes in contact. He exudes a general goodness that some students initially perceive as goofy and awkward—and those traits are doubtlessly there—but this perception never becomes an issue because these same students soon learn to like then respect him. Simply put, Mr. King's kindness is contagious. He is a twenty year veteran who has recently transitioned from Honors and Advanced Placement classes to teaching special education resource classes. He doesn't easily share this, but it is common knowledge that the reason he became certified in special education was to fill a specific need: many special education teachers struggle with math content; many math teachers struggle with special education students, so Nash became what his department needed to serve these struggling students. To be clear, Nash has seniority in his department and is the head of that department; he could have taught whichever classes he wanted, but he chose to teach these struggling students. He chose to stand in that gap; that is the man he is.

What makes Nash interesting as a person as well as important to this study is his understanding of himself as a Christian and as a public school educator. Of all my participants, he is the one who—by my estimation—most strongly presents outwardly as religious. Monday

through Thursday, Nash wears a short-sleeved white button up shirt with a dark tie. I jokingly tell him he looks like a Baptist preacher—which he is. He is a lay minister, a worship leader at his local church, and is a member of the Gideon's association. He looks the part, acts the part, and is the part. However, of all my participants, he is the most conscientious in attempting to separate his spiritual and professional life. His work in that space has produced differing subjectivities within competing discursive fields, yet he has found interesting and powerful ways to negotiate those spaces and find joy within both.

Discursive Fields

"The volume of emotion erupting in our souls
A quiet revelation quickly takes a hold
Patience is a virtue but she won't always wait
Dissension is the tension it's what we've learned to hate"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1990, Track 1).

In an earlier chapter, I argued that discourse, as understood by Foucault, is—on the simplest level—things that are assumed; furthermore, it is that lack of questioning that makes discourse both important and often difficult to identify. Additionally, discourse is where "power and knowledge are joined together" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 100). This all works to produce specific knowable subjects:

> in other words, we can suppose that discourse—the discourse that names, that describes, that designates, that analyzes, that recounts, that metaphorizes, etc.—constitutes the field of the object and at the same time creates power effects that make it possible for subjugation[6] to take place. (Foucault, 1996, p. 157)

[6] Subjugation. What a word! It seems that here Foucault is using it as the process of becoming a subject--and that is correct. However, there is built into the word a darker connotation of

Let me try to explain, and to be clear, this is not some uncovering of a hidden meaning because these "cultural and material practices are already interpretations," and this type of reading "involves *interpretations of interpretations*" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 57) My profession as a teacher is not simply what I do, it is what I am. Both within and outside of the profession of education, teachers exist in a discourse that "constitutes the field of the object." That is why it is possible—for those both within and outside of the teaching profession—to make statements such as "Good teachers do this," "He doesn't know how to teach," or "A teacher is like...pick your comparison." In America, in the South, in this present time there exists a somewhat uniform concept of what a teacher should and should not be—we have become an "an object of knowledge" (Foucault, 1996, p. 52). We are knowable subjects. Wrapped up in that knowledge are power relations that are "a technique, a form of power...that makes individuals subjects" (Foucault,1982/2000, p. 331). Although these power relations are fluid and unstable, they do produce somewhat stable subjects; furthermore

> This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and have others recognize in him. (Foucault, 1982/2000, p. 331)

The title of educator categorizes and marks me; it is attached to me with all its freedoms and limitations. My words can carry the weight of authority with them, but that same weight is a yoke that burdens and guides me. But is that burden oppression? Is that guidance control?

Some scholars have claimed that Foucault has argued against the possibility of freedom. Seaumas (1990), attempting to expound on Foucault's writing about the subject, states

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oppression and control--and that, too, is correct. Those under a king's rule are his subjects. Etymologically it can be understood as being brought under a yoke--a tool that controls cattle.

> the subject is constituted by the rules of discourse in the same way in which the pawn is constituted by the rules of chess, and one has (allegedly) fully described the subject when one has elaborated the rules of discourse just as one has fully described the pawn when one has elaborated the rules of chess." (Seumas, p. 116)

Seaumas's comparison of humans as chess pieces and discourse as chess rules is a superficial and incorrect reading of Foucault. Power is fluid, knowledge is evolving, and discourse is layered—this complexity seems to exist in the larger concept of freedom "because there is freedom everywhere" (Foucault, 1984/1997, p. 293). But what does Foucault mean by freedom? On one extreme, individuals have complete control over all aspects of their lives: their thoughts and actions are effectively and independently their own. This rings false—we all live within a discourse that shapes our thinking and actions. However, the idea that we are simply chess pawns with no agency rings equally false, particularly in light of Foucault's later work on ethics and resistance where individual choice is foundational. Furthermore, there is the inescapable reality that individuals within the same discourse make different decisions, but even that axiom needs to be troubled. As power and knowledge connect, disconnect, overlap, and clash, can any two people truly exist in the same discourse?

If discourse produces subjects, and a diversity of subjects exist, it follows that there exists a variety of discourses. The idea that there could be an overarching, transcendent Discourse is baffling in the light of Lyotard's (1978/1984) "incredulity towards metanarratives" (p. xxiv). Varying discourses are not simply made up of different knowledges but different ways of knowing. Distinctive ways of naming, describing, designating, analyzing, recounting, and metaphorizing combine to create competing discourses. Furthermore, differing discourses have varying levels of accessibility:

> To be more precise: not all the regions of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some of them are largely forbidden (they are differentiated and differentiating), while others seem to be open to all winds and put at the disposal of every speaking subject, without prior restrictions. (Foucault, 1981/1970, p. 62)

So, these "regions of discourse" are not only productive, they can confine and restrict which is also production of a kind. Additionally, these discourses can compete, combine, accept, or ignore one another. They may also exist in a hierarchy of sorts, but that is too simple:

> we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (Foucault, 1978, p. 100)

So far, these varying discourses have been called "regions of discourse" and "discursive elements" In other writing, Foucault at times called them "discursive regime[s]" or even "regime[s] of power" ((Foucault, 1977/1980, p. 112,113). Building on the work of Weedon (1997), Jackson and Mazzei (2012) call them "discursive fields," a term I find most accessible and useful. Equally helpful are Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) contention that "competing discourses emerge within discursive fields, and the language and practices of these discourses give rise to an individual's conflicting subjectivities" (p. 50). Central to this research is the subject and how it is produced. Now, I would like to bring some of these ideas out of the stratosphere of theory into the ways discourse can work in three arenas, each more narrow in scope than the last: First, in the ubiquitous "science versus religion" debate in America where one scholar attempts to negotiate several competing discourses; second, in public schools more

specifically, where underlying religious discourses engage with more secular academic discourse, and finally, in the competing discourses that work in Nash more precisely.

Religion, Science, and Politics--Broken Words

It is doubtless that in American history, religion and science have had a complex, and often, contentious relationship. From the 1925 Scopes Trial to current debates about evolution and creationism, science and American Evangelicalism have often seemed incompatible. To say that the two disciplines, religion and science, speak different languages would be simplistic and trite, but it wouldn't be quite wrong, either. However, this may no longer be the case, and some scholarship questions the validity of this "conflict paradigm" (Ecklund & Park, 2009, p. 276) in current scientific research. Furthermore, much current scholarship troubles this religion/science "conflict thesis" in our historic narrative because it "relies on essentialist definitions of science and religion" (Weldon, 2002). Even the above religion/science binary is deeply problematic: Why is religion first? How would it change if science became the "winning term" (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 617)? Is this binary itself a "violent structure" (p. 617), and what would be mean to disregard the structure in its entirety? Or open it up? Perhaps the politics of our day make this type of discussion difficult, but the thinking of Jonathon Dudley in his book *Broken Words* (2011) offers some possibilities.

Dudley, who has a BS in biology from Calvin College, an MA in religion from Yale University's Divinity School, and an MD from John Hopkins, is interestingly positioned to think about the issues around science and religion in America. He grew up in the Evangelical movement where he was taught "that abortion is murder; homosexuality, a sin; evolution, nonsense; and environmentalism, a farce" (Dudley, 2011, p. 11). In his fundamentalist world, these were not up for debate. But, over time, Dudley has debated them and reconciled his

religious beliefs—he self-identifies as a Christian—with his scientific knowledge through the lens of the four above mentioned "litmus test[s] for true belief" (Dudley, 2011, p. 149): abortion, homosexuality, evolution, and environmentalism. To further complicate his work, Dudley focuses not only on science and religion, but also the political ramifications of them. Now, the specifics of these topics—though fascinating—are not my focus here. I am interested in the way Dudley is produced through "a multiplicity of discourses and power relations that occur simultaneously and operate through complex networks" ((Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 61). I believe this individual journey can give a window into the ways varying discourses can interact.

Foucault (1981/1970) argues that "discourse must be treated as discontinuous practices, which cross each other, are sometimes juxtaposed with one another, but can just as well exclude or be unaware of each other" (p. 67). It seems to me that Dudley takes discourses that are often juxtaposed and/or cross each other and, instead, layers them upon one another. In my initial reading of his work, I was impressed by how deftly he handled Scripture, how clearly he explained science, and how critically he examined politics. My second reading, however, revealed something different: Scripture always bent to the will of science, and political views informed by religious views were consistently treated harshly. What am I to make of this? So, instead of combining discourses to create something new, Dudley has (again) layered them in a hierarchy with science on top, politics on the bottom, and religion uneasily sandwiched in between. Furthermore, encompassing all of this is an academic discourse that truly illuminates Dudley's thinking: though truly a scholar of religion, he derides "pop-culture evangelical beliefs" (Dudley, 2011, p. 18) and bemoans the fact that "culture still cares more about its celebrities than its scholars" (p. 150). In attempting to create a new discourse, Dudley has revealed his own dominant discourse, the academic discourse of the university. Why is this

significant? Jackson and Mazzei (2012) argue that "competing discourses emerge within discursive fields…[and] give rise to an individual's conflicting subjectivities" (p. 50). Amongst competing discourses, Dudley seems to have arranged his conflicting subjectivities in a hierarchical structure of sorts. But that is only one possibility amongst many.

The Jeremiad as Discourse

Focusing more specifically on discourse within public schools, Burke and van Kessel (2020) explore the "clash of epistemological frames" (p. 2) that take place in educational debates as "people are arguing past each other" (p. 2). To make sense of this, it is first essential to acknowledge the religious sedimentation present in public education, the "larger discourses rooted in underconsidered religious traditions" (Burke & van Kessel, 2020, p. 1). Furthermore, it is necessary to begin to define the discourse these traditions produce; Burke and van Kessel (2020) focus on the religious impulse to convert others to your beliefs along with the tendency to label those with differing views as evil. The Hebrew prophetic tradition of the Jeremiad is used to exemplify this. Based on the Christian Old Testament book that is his namesake, Jeremiah was a prophet whose purpose was to call his people into repentance, i.e., to turn from evil back to good. The Jeremiad is defined by a rhetorical strategy of calling out evil harshly, warning of impending judgement, and repeatedly offering a chance to escape that judgement; it was the common format of early American Puritan sermons a la Jonathon Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," and still deeply affects American religious and political discourse. What is essential about this genre is that it is not about argumentation, it is not a conversation, it is a proclamation and "because this is both a legalistic and moral discourse…[it] assumes moral clarity, in support of the common good" (Burke & van Kessel, 2020, p. 6). In short, it is about converting others to what the speaker understands as morally absolute. This particular discourse

is not only based on the Christian tradition in America, it is embedded in our politics, and by extension, exists in our school systems as well.

How does a discourse built on absolutes with the explicit goal of conversion compete with an academic discourse built around debate and change? To address this, I will quote Burke and van Kessel (2020) at length:

> If we're rooted, historically in a prophetic discourse, then ethical dialogue is vital and even seeks to convert through jeremiadic engagement, then, prima facia, dialogue is futile and even harmful. In this space, it's possible for both sides to argue, convincingly to their in-group members, that their position is endowed by a universal morality that isn't recognized universally. The rest, in the end, is just shouting imprecations across a chasm of inhumanity and misunderstanding. (p. 7)

Burke and van Kessel (2020) posit that one of the reasons so many issues in education (funding curriculum, training, etc.) remain unresolved "isn't the disagreement, but the epistemological frame in which the discussion occurs" (p. 7). It is, essentially, the difference between arguing to get at an answer and arguing to win, i.e., convert. It seems in this context that competing discourses reach an impasse of sorts, and though possible solutions to that "clash of epistemological frames" (p. 8) are presented, the impasse remains. Of further interest is the probability that each discourse is simply unaware that the other exists; accordingly, the "religious assumption at the root of schooling isn't, of itself, problematic" (Burke & van Kessell, 2020, p. 8). The problem, if you will, is that these differences often remain unacknowledged. So again, in dealing with competing discourses, it is possible to create a boundary of sorts between them or to simply fail to acknowledge that opposing discourses exist. That being said, the Jeremiad itself contains its own complexities that warrant examination.

The Jeremiad is a rhetorical strategy; it is a literary genre; it is a "discursive instrument" (Burke & van Kessel, 2020, p. 6); it is also rooted in a specific text. *Jeremiah* is the longest book in the canon of Scripture and is organized in a non-linear pattern with both narrative and prophetic passages. The narrative passages provide context; the prophetic passages—essentially the Jeremiads—provide God's word to His people. This organization works well with the traditional understanding of the Jeremiad, but there is complexity within this framework that can add a deeper understanding to the Jeremiad as a discourse. Interspersed within the text are six interludes that are not narrative nor are they prophetic—they are Jeremiah speaking directly to God. Historically, these have been called Jeremiah's complaints, but more recent scholars have softened the word complaint to confession. Theologically, these complaints are both interesting and concerning: if a prophet's calling is to speak God's word, what does it mean for a prophet to step out of that role and speak his own words? Do Jeremiah's words—a discourse within a discourse—contradict his prophetic proclamation? In a word, yes; however, the juxtaposition of the prophetic and personal serve to deepen the text and complicate our understanding of the Jeremiad, and by extension, the discourse attached to it. Jeremiah's six complaints follow a consistent pattern: Jeremiah's anger over his treatment by the people and a call for God's immediate judgement on them: "I did not know that they had devised plots against me...Let me see your vengeance on them" (Jeremiah 11:19-20). These complaints, though perhaps "real" within the text, also serve the rhetorical purpose of showing the patience of God in light of Jeremiah's impatience. So, even though it can be rightly argued that the Jeremiad is "really about conversion rather than conversation" (p. 7), within that discursive instrument exists competing discourses that both deepen and complicate….well, the conversation.

Nash and Discursive Fields—"I Had To"

If the tension between religious and scientific discourse can produce a layered hierarchy and the religious discourse embedded in public schools can create an impasse, Nash has combined these possibilities and produced himself as an incredibly complex subject. As my interview with Nash progressed, it became evident that he had thought deeply about what it means to have strong religious convictions within what he perceived to be a strictly secular space: "I struggled for a long time with what does it mean to be a Christian on a job where it feels the law is specifically telling you better be quiet about your faith at least the words you say." Fear of the legal repercussions, fear of alienating his students and co-workers, fear of inconveniencing the school's leadership—these all temper Nash's expression of his firmly held religious beliefs. However, he still perceives his profession as an educator as deeply religious in nature. Speaking specifically about working with his special education students, he states, "working in the resource classes and working one-on-one a lot with kids…I just feel like I do better work for the Lord here than I do anywhere else." This is a man who preaches in front of churches, leads worship music, gives out Bibles on the street, but sees simply teaching a struggling student math skills as his greatest ministry. Again, as Nash and I spoke, it became evident to me that he had deeply considered many of the ideas that this research is exploring—to the point where it challenged and clarified much of my thinking about the role of educators who self identify as religious in public schools. When I pointed this out to him, he replied simply, "I had to."

I had to.

I had to. That phrase has haunted my thinking about Nash and his role as an educator because...he *didn't* have to. He is protected by the privilege his identity gives him: an older white, heterosexual, protestant male; he is protected by his professional reputation: he is a

department head, certified in several areas, and was recently named the school's Teacher of the Year; he is protected by his place: a rural school deep in the Bible Belt with a department and administration sympathetic to his religious beliefs. The border he has attempted to construct between his religious and professional life is both untenable and—more or less in this context—unnecessary. But it is there. He had to. Interestingly, Nash has felt pressure from his church to express his faith more explicitly in the perceived "mission field" of public schools. Pastors have explicitly accused him of "compromising" in his faith. The very fact that he is a public school teacher is troubling to some members of his church where homeschooling—for explicitly religious reasons—is embraced and promoted. So, I want to simplify things in order to later complicate them: Nash explicitly acknowledges his multiple subjectivities and the discourses which produce them, and while attempting to separate them—he wants to see a clear divide between Church and State—, these two ways of being often overlap.

Resistance within Church Discourse

For Nash, the discursive field of church is one both fraught with problems yet incredibly comforting to him:

> I tend to go to small congregations, I tend to be kind of fundamentalist in the way I view the Bible, so I end up at those churches...well, there's a whole (deep sigh) load of other stuff that shows up: a hate of public schools...just trashing us and (laughs) for a while I felt like I'd stay at one place till I just couldn't take that anymore and I'd move to another place.

This confession was shocking to me: a man who had devoted his life to education was willing to voluntarily attend, support, and participate in an organization that actively "trashed" his profession. In my experience, there is an anti-intellectual streak that runs through much of the

Evangelical Movement, and Nash has experienced this as well. Specifically, he feels the need to downplay his own education: "I don't talk about that I have college degrees" because "as it [my college education] did get brought up, I'd be treated differently." Nash's experience echoes that of Dudley's (2011) where secular education can be seen as in opposition to divine revelation; furthermore, the demonization of public education strengthens Burke and van Kessel's observation that religious discourse has a tendency to view those with differing beliefs as evil. Unfortunately, if external knowledge is suspect and heterodox beliefs are evil, invariably boundaries to thought and action—explicit or implicit—are constructed. Built into many of these small congregations with fundamentalist views there seems to exist a strong tendency to control its members. This tendency can be seen in something as simple yet central as using the appropriate Bible translation.

Bible translations are both an academic and political endeavor, and to understand this, some background is necessary. Briefly, in the Protestant tradition, English Bible translations fall into three philosophical categories: formal equivalent, dynamic equivalent, and functional equivalent. Put simply, formal equivalence is a word-for-word translation; dynamic equivalence is a phrase-for-phrase translation; functional equivalence is a thought-for-thought translation. Each type professes varying degrees of accuracy and readability. Historically, the most popular formal equivalent English biblical translation has been the King James Version (KJV) first published in 1611. Since then, the Scofield Reference Bible (1917) has become the most iconic and bestselling KJV Bible in the United States. This is significant in light of the King James Only Movement that began in the early 1900s—this group argued that the KJV was not only the most accurate English translation, but that other, newer translations were inaccurate, immoral, and even demonic. I personally have sat in church services in which the pastor has asked the

congregation to turn to a specific biblical text then given the page number if you have the "right" Bible. It was not until years later that I learned what the "right" Bible was—the "1611 Scofield." This bias is so ingrained in some traditionally minded churches that when the Oxford Press published a revised version of the Scofield in 1967, it was quickly forced to republish the earlier version as *The Old Scofield Study Bible*. Nash attends one of these traditionally minded churches, but concerning the KJV, he unequivocally states, "I'm not one of those people." At services of the church he currently attends, Nash carries his *Scofield*, but also brings an IPad with newer translations—specifically the formal equivalent English Standard Version (EVS)—that he uses during the service: "When I go to my church I bring my good old Scofield and my Ipad and then I take the Ipad out and I'm reading the English Standard Version (laughs)" This resistance within the power network of his church is no small feat, nor is it without risk: "If people knew I was reading that [the ESV], I would be ostracized." However, this act of private dissent helps produce DP as a free subject able to undermine the discourse in which he exists. This undermining has the potential to create a counter-narrative, a new discourse.

Foucault argues that "maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" (Foucault,1982/2000, p. 336). When Nash states that "I'm not one of those people," he is speaking about one specific topic—Bible translation; however, in a larger sense, he is defining himself outside of a larger discourse. He is refusing what he is. Foucault (1976/1978) argues that "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it, renders it possible to thwart it" (p. 101). In light of that, it becomes clear Nash's use of a text that can be seen—quite literally—as an attempt to thwart the "authorized text," is a point of resistance in the larger power network. It is important to understand that "the power relationship and freedom's refusal to submit cannot therefore be separated" (Foucault,1982/2000,

p. 342). In Foucault's thinking, resistance doesn't destroy power, nor does it amplify it; resistance is an inevitable aspect of any power matrix and can be a key to better understand it. Similarly, by looking at Nash's resistance to a norm that—in his thinking—is nonsensical, insight into his own subjectivity can be gained. To be clear, Nash's use of the English Standard Version (EVS) of the Bible is only one of a "plurality of resistances, each of them a special case" (Foucault, 1976/1978, p. 96). Nash still teaches in a public school, his children attend a public school, and he has actively pushed back against any racist or hateful speech he encounters among members of his church. It is important to understand that Nash is still producing himself as a subject: repeatedly during our interview, he used the phrase "along the way" to describe his journey thus far. The use of the ESV has only happened in the last year. Also, his reaction to the not-too-subtle questions about the behavior, status, and language skills of his Hispanic students is relatively new—though Nash is non-confrontational by nature, he will not allow others to speak poorly of his students. In his thinking, this intolerance towards hate is not a rebuke of his faith, but a completion of it. However, he is still learning along the way.

At some point, the question must be asked: why does Nash continue in a church—In churches—that cause him so much disquiet? I asked and his answer was illuminating:

> I need people I trust...and so like sixteen years under [his wife's] dad because I trusted him. He said and did things, things...oh, I'd shake my head, but I trusted him. And then where I'm at this guy [his current pastor] when my mom was dying, when my dad was dying, he spent hours and hours with me...that's somebody you can rely on. There's a lot of rough edges...and it tends, there's some times it tends towards hate. I don't know.

Trust, dependability, consistency—these are attributes that Nash values in his personal relationships and requires of his church leadership. Perhaps, these relationships allow him to see

past the rough edges to find the good; perhaps the same faith that guides him as a teacher to see the good in his students also allows him to see the good in the members of his church; perhaps, he is still learning along the way.

Talking Church as Subjugated Knowledge

Dispositionally, Nash seems to be open to new ideas—he is a voracious reader of both religious and secular texts. He attended the University of Georgia—viewed by many in his religious sphere as the antithesis of church: secular, liberal, godless—because "I wanted to be open-minded—and [ask] how do you view things?" He generally experiences school as a place of openness and honesty: when I offered to meet him at his church for this interview, he explicitly stated that he felt he could be more honest—specifically about the topic of religion—at school. He understands this openness as central to his longevity as an educator: "You can't be narrow-minded and stay in this job for a long time." Yet, within that place of open-mindedness and honesty, Nash does confess a space that he does not feel comfortable going into at school: "I don't talk church around here." Within the religious discourse of church, it seems that Nash's language is policed by external forces; at school, any policing seems to come from within. Why is that?

Nash perceives school as particularly closed to religion. Even though most of his colleagues attend church, he doesn't often engage in conversations about his faith with them. This avoidance seems based on the fear that he might offend. Furthermore, he avoids those types of conversations with students. In the past, he would share with them that he was a preacher, but he doesn't any longer, nor can he give a precise reason for this change. When topics about religion do come up in his class—particularly ones that he perceives as controversial—he uses the fact that this is a math class to avoid them. However, this troubles him, and he calls it "a cop

out, a straight out cop out." One incident in particular can illuminate this. Towards the end of class one day, some of his students were trying to understand a piece of music they were learning in chorus class. On the white board in front of the class, Nash walked these students through the shape notes to explain how they worked. As class ended, he realized that the piece of music he had chosen to explain this concept was the well-known hymn "Amazing Grace." Even though only the musical notations had been discussed—none of the lyrics—Nash was haunted by this and wondered if he had crossed some sort of legal or ethical line. This perplexed me: Nash is passionate about his Christian faith and his profession as an educator, and those two parts of himself inevitably interact in interesting and powerful ways, but when his profession explicitly interacts with his faith or vice versa, he finds this interaction disconcerting. Again, Foucault helps me to think about this.

Though Foucault does not describe any specific procedures for his work, he does provide certain ways of knowing, certain points of view, certain things for which to look. Among them is Foucault's goal of finding "something that is not a part of knowledge, but deserves to be" (Foucault, 1996, p. 133). Foucault (1977/1980) calls these "subjugated knowledges" (p. 81). By subjugated knowledge, Foucault means two things: First, subjugated knowledges are "those blocs of historical knowledge which were both present but disguised" (p. 82). It is knowledge that is hidden within "the established regimes of thought" (Foucault, 1977/1980, p. 81). Second, subjugated knowledges are those that "have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated" (p. 82). Though minimally acknowledged, these disqualified knowledges exist on the bottom of "the hierarchy of knowledges and sciences" (p. 82). The knowledge that is produced by those labeled mentally ill, sexual deviant, delinquents, and others marginalized by society is the starting point for much of Foucault's work: It is the "theoretical

production" of knowledge whose "validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought" (p. 81). But understanding these knowledges is not the final goal of Foucault's work.

Foucault's inquiry focuses on the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (p. 81). This insurrection can be understood in two forms, in two directions of sorts: the claims of a "unitary body of theory" (p. 83) against subjugated knowledges and subjugated knowledges' resistance to those claims. The first involves the ways in which the established regimes of thought attempt to destroy, hide, or annex subjugated knowledges. Perhaps it is refusing to sell the albums of a controversial rock band to show disapproval for a personal decision. Perhaps it is labeling a popular preacher as a heretic to silence him. Perhaps it is understanding your secular profession as a religious ministry. These all work to disqualify knowledges that threaten power hierarchies. The second involves the ways in which subjugated knowledges resist these attempts. Returning to discourse, an often "invisible thing," can give insight into how subjugated knowledges might resist. Though often subtle and implicit, discourse must label a thing, name it, produce a narrative. When that occurs, it is possible to refuse that label, rename that thing, produce a counter-narrative. In his *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1976/1978) uses sexual orientation as an example of this: When homosexuality was labeled "perverse" and "unnatural," it made possible a "reverse" discourse. "Homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (p.101). Foucault (1977/1980) calls this resistance an "*insurrection of subjugated knowledge*s" (p. 81); his genealogies are concerned with this "*historical knowledge of struggles*" (p. 83). They ask the question: which "subjects of

experience and knowledge" will be diminished and which will be enthroned (p. 85)? It is an important question.

What does this have to do with teachers, schools, and religion? Public schools—both generally and specifically—are particular discursive fields. They are their own regimes of thought. Within these regimes of thought, which knowledges are elevated, are part of the "unitary body of theory," and which are subjugated knowledges? Why might this be occurring? How might it be occurring? And, perhaps most interesting, what types of struggles occur between these differing types of knowledge? It seems to me that Nash views religious knowledge, religious power, religious discourse as a subjugated knowledge within the discursive field of school, and what he perceives as acts of insurrection are a space in which he feels uncomfortable. It is not the ethical or legal concerns that are at the root of this discomfort, but the transgressive nature of these acts. Nash is a self-proclaimed "rule follower": part of Nash's attraction to math is that it "tends to be hard and fast [in] areas, right or wrong, and life is not like that. I mean, I want it to be...like I've tried to study systematic theology...you know, fit things in a viewpoint." So, Nash is left with a desire for a sort of mathematical order while acknowledging that "life is not like that." He attempts to study systematic theology—with its attempts to create topical order out of the literary chaos of scripture—but finds it unsatisfying. And he attempts to reconcile Curtis's (2016) assertion that "the production of religious freedom creates divided selves" (p. 6) with Bell's (2013) contention that "Jesus doesn't divide the world up into common and the sacred; he gives us eyes to see the sacred in the common" (p. 184).

Right Where I Need to Be

To be honest, my thinking about Nash and the competing discourses in which he exists and the differing subjectivities he holds in tension are not settled. His passion for his faith, his

connection to his church, his love for his profession, his loyalty to his school—all produce what I perceive to be a paradox: Nash disagrees with several of the beliefs of his church discourse and often feels uncomfortable there, but deeply trusts the relationships he has in that space; conversely, he embraces the ideas of education broadly and is quite comfortable within that space, but is less trusting of his co-workers when it comes to his religious beliefs. And the weight of that...that conflict seems unsustainable, but Nash has not only sustained it, but thrived in it. He is a leader at his church; he is a leader at his school; and he has found great joy in both spaces. Furthermore, though he attempts to separate these differing discourses, it is precisely where one spills into the other that much of that joy is found. When he uses his academic acumen to circumvent a translational bias, he finds an uneasy pleasure in that. When he understands the care he gives struggling students as "unto the Lord," it brings him a wary happiness. These are the places—the places where competing discourses overlap—that he is produced and producing himself as an ethical subject. The overlap is best expressed as our interview was ending: "You talk about being in a good service...why is it a good service? Because you feel something a certain way and I started realizing that I feel that way during my work day at certain points...I'm right where I need to be."

Lewis Staples

"I think back to the time when I wouldn't drink wine
And they taught me wrong and right and black and white"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1990, Track 4).

Lewis Staples (pseudonym used) is tall—very tall. At a slim 6'4' he towers over almost every teacher and student in the building; bearded and bald, he is difficult to miss. Although in his mid-50s, Lewis moves with the energy of those decades younger than him. Almost every day

he wears a polo shirt tucked into his khaki pants. This simple ensemble is consistently completed with a pair of Converse All-Stars that matches his shirt. Apparently, he has quite the collection of these shoes in an array of colors. So common is this uniform that Mr. Staples' students berate him when—on the rare occasion—he wears traditional loafers. It appears he breaks his own "dress code" to playfully antagonize them. They, on the other hand, are so enamored with his attire that last year his entire AP Stats class dressed like him: polos tucked into khakis and matching All-Stars along with a smattering of name tags, skull caps, and drawn-on beards.

Though generally soft-spoken, Lewis has been known to break out into his rendition of The Righteous Brother's "You've Lost that Loving Feeling" during class changes to help love struck couples to disentangle. In class, Lewis follows a traditional approach for math teachers: he leads the whole class in a specific skill or problem type, students are given the opportunity to practice in groups, and finally, students attempt to practice on their own. His class is organized; his teaching method, direct. Friday is almost always a quiz day, and—particularly in his Advanced Placement Classes—the shell-shocked appearance of his exiting students is the stuff of legend. Lewis is a valued part of our school and the math department: he is the only teacher with two different Advanced Placement Classes: AP Calculus and AP Statistics. With advanced degrees in mathematics and various College Board certifications, he is doubtlessly an expert in his field. He also has a degree in religious studies and is a licensed minister. Religion and mathematics might seem so distinct—especially when centered around their accompanying professions—that they could be kept separate; however, in Lewis' mind those distinctions are porous and perhaps even nonexistent. This seems to be deconstruction of a sort, where "our lives, our beliefs, and our practices are not destroyed but forced to reform and reconfigure--

which is risky business" (Caputo, 2007, p. 27). Much of Lewis' story is about the risky ways his faith and profession have reformed, reconfigured, and continue to do so. Again, his thinking about his faith as a Christian and his profession as an educator

> is what deconstruction is made of: not the mixture but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break. (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 6)

Lewis' thoughtful view of religion, deep concern for people, and devotion to his profession can all be understood through "the breach, the crevice through which previously unheard data will silently slip to disrupt and destabilize...impressions" (Mazzei, 2007, p. 14).

Bricks and Springs: The Deconstructibility of Religion

"Who are these people behind the stained glass window
Have they forgotten just what they came here for"
(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1989, Track 7)?

First, it is important to think about God and religion more largely.

It is precisely because God is not deconstructible that religion is; in fact, it is the undeconstructibility of God that creates what Caputo calls (2007) the "inner impulse" (p.29) of deconstruction within religion. I've made these proclamations with the force of certainty, but that same certainty makes me uneasy. Even Caputo (2007), when arguing "that...the church is 'deconstructible,' but the kingdom of God, if there is such a thing, is not" (p. 35) qualifies that statement with a tepid "if there is such a thing." To better understand this, we can analyze a parallel example: Derrida's and Caputo's work on justice. In Derrida's later writings, he opened up the idea of something that is not deconstructible. In fact, "not everything is deconstructible, or there would be no point to deconstruction" (Derrida & Caputo,1997, p. 131). This implies a

final goal, a perfectibility, that contradicts the premise of almost all postmodern thought; however, in deconstruction, everything is always to come, is always based on the "promise of something to come" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 164). There is not perfection, only perfection to come: it is the messianic framework built into deconstruction of a thing always coming but never to arrive. It is always justice to come, the gift to come, forgiveness to come, and perhaps to come full circle, the Messiah to come. It is notable that many of the topics Derrida wrote about—justice, gifts, forgiveness, the Messiah—are strongly connected to religion. Returning to justice: the law, hopefully, is designed in the pursuit of justice, but it is a malleable. Put simply, we made it up and we can just as easily make up something else. That "making something else" is a way to understand deconstruction. Indeed, the law should be deconstructed, desedimentized, reinvented to "improve" it; deconstruction, the hope of justice to come is what makes "the wheels of the law turn" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 131). Furthermore, "deconstruction turns on, is made possible by, and 'takes place in the interval between' the undeconstructibility of justice and the deconstructibility of the law, between something undeconstructible but without force and something forceful but deconstructible" (Caputo, 2007, p. 63). That interval between justice and the law could be called différance, "what deconstruction is all about" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 96). It would be prudent now to take another look at différance.

Early in his thinking, Derrida (1968/1973) called différance "the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general, is constituted 'historically' as a weave of differences" (p. 12). Building on this understanding, the law works as "any code, any system"; it exists "historically as a weave of differences." The law is codified and exists in a past or present; justice *to come* exists in a future; the "movement" between them is *différance*, "a quasi-condition of possibility, because it does not describe fixed boundaries that delimit what can

happen and what not" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 102). différance is not the law nor is it justice, it is the deferral of justice in the face of the law, "for while it has no truth or manifestness itself (indeed, it has no 'itself'), *différance* enables what is manifest to make a show" (Caputo, 1997, p. 7). In other words, différance allows for "the flowers of justice that grow up in the cracks of the law" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 132). So différance is not justice or democracy or hospitality or the gift or God. It is, however, the interval between God and religion, a God that allows religion to manifest, "to make a show." This show is one way to understand religion.

Caputo (2007) claims that religious people are searchers and lovers: searchers for truth and lovers of God. They possess St. Augustine's restless heart as they explore the mysteries of life; they love justice or beauty or goodness or a whole host of other "higher concepts." They are not realist nor antirealist, but something else altogether. They are not realist due to their dissatisfaction with the reality that surrounds them; they are not antirealist because they do not desire to create a false reality as a substitute. Caputo (2007) calls them "hyper-realists" who are "in search of the real beyond the real, the *hyper*, the *uber*, or *au-dela*, the beyond, in search of the event that stirs within things what will exceed our present horizons" (p. 39). Hyper-realism breaks open the real/unreal binary and creates something new with movement and possibility, fluidity and uncertainty, hope and doubt. This is postmodernism; this is deconstruction.

That being said, more often than not, religion becomes an institution built around humans, events, teachings, and traditions. Caputo (2013) calls these institutions "confessional religions" which at their best assist in this search for God, but are often a hindrance to it (p. 44). Though Caputo at times offers a harsh critique of confessional religions, he does not argue for their destruction, only their deconstruction by "calling on deconstruction to bring the good news of postmodern critique to the church" (Caputo, 2007, p. 96). In fact, he argues that "the great

religions of the world are important and without them we would quickly lose sight of religious categories and practices, which means that we would lose something basic" (Caputo, 2001, p. 9). These organized religious systems provide a framework within which to work, but systems—especially religious systems—often become rigid. This rigidity declares dissenters heretical even though the system itself was birthed by heretics. Unfortunately, "institutions tend to become the enemy of the very event they are supposed to embody, intent on preserving their own existence, even at the cost of the very purpose of their existence" (Caputo, 2007, p. 136). And the purpose of religion? The search for—the love of—God, a God who is love:

> God is more important than religion, as the ocean is more important than the raft, the latter bearing all the marks of being constituted by human beings. Religion, which is human practice, is always deconstructible in the light of the love of God, which is not deconstructible. (Caputo, 2001, p. 113)

This space between religion and God is what drew Lewis into his profession as a pastor and eventually away from religion—at least organized religion. Over a decade ago, his father retired from pastoring a small church and Lewis stepped into that role temporarily then on a permanent basis. Earlier in our interview, he spoke of being "called" to teach, but when I asked him if he felt called to be a pastor, he hesitated: "It was very hard for me to separate the voice of God and the voice of my dad." This connection between faith and family is significant, and it is also helpful to know that Lewis' family tree is peppered with preachers (and teachers). With time, he came to the conclusion that his calling was real and God could speak to him through the voice of his father or his family lineage or both. That being said, over time, Lewis became somewhat disillusioned with church or at least with "professional Christianity." The huge expenditures needed simply to maintain a building troubled him, especially when extrapolated by

the number of churches in his community. Two years ago, he resigned his position at his church and now teaches full time. Furthermore, he and his family no longer attend church regularly and instead have what he calls "home church" where they all read and study together. Put succinctly Lewis explained that "my desire in life right now to not get paid to be a Christian." But it's more complicated than that: Lewis grew up in a community where—to quote Arthur Miller's (1953) *The Crucible,* "theology, sir, is a fortress; no crack in a fortress may be accounted small." (p. 64). He was encountering "cracks" of a sort—not in his faith in God, but in his trust in the institutions built around God. He didn't want his own doubts to cause those who valued his opinions to be harmed— "A minister should speak from a place of relative certainty."

Bell (2005) argues against a belief system that resembles a wall: a structure made of bricks, each dependent on the other. If one brick is removed, it can dismantle the entire structure. Instead, he embraces the metaphor of a trampoline: A structure that is made up of springs whose sole purpose is to help a person jump higher to...God, truth, knowledge, clarity—whatever an individual might want or need. He extends this metaphor even further by arguing that our beliefs can be like these trampoline springs. A belief is something we can "take...out and examine it. Discuss it, probe it. It flexes, and it stretches" (Bell, 2005, p. 7). Perhaps the best part of this analogy is the simple fact that even when we remove a spring, the trampoline still works. Much of Lewis's story is about him removing, examining, and sometimes, discarding these theological springs.

Religious Binaries

In high school, one of my literature teachers explain to the class that everything that was not poetry was prose. When asked what poetry *was*, he replied—not quite tongue in cheek—that it was everything that was not prose. In the thirty years since this discussion, I've read, studied,

and taught literature; this division of genre, though useful, is ultimately untenable, limiting, and at times, silly. It seems to echo Derrida's "both necessary and impossible" (Caputo, 1997, p. 54). The division between the religious and the secular is similar. Without a doubt, these labels are helpful in making initial decisions; however, when we become too attached to them—when they become the end of our thinking instead the beginning—they, too, become untenable, limiting, and even silly. Arguing from a political point of view, Asad (1992)states the attempt to separate the religious and secular "has been incomplete…[and] that even in Western liberal societies 'modernized religion' and 'secular culture' have supported each other in crucial, if often indirect, ways" (p. 3). This support may take the form of attacking, embracing or subsuming each other; it can involve actively ignoring or coexisting with each other to a point where the differences begin to dissipate. Speaking about public schools, Burke and Segall (2015) argue that "what was originally considered religious has, through millennia, become cultural and secular." Interestingly, Burke and Segall (2015) suggest that what is now considered secular "might be re-attached to its religious origin." Furthermore, "secularism as a political doctrine is very closely connected to the formation of religion itself" (Asad, 2008, p. 29). To explain, secularism exists only in response to religion—the religious produces the secular; additionally, the secularism (produced by religion) can reattach itself to that religion. Clearly, the divisions between the secular and religious are more than simply superficial or porous—upon thorough examination, they become insubstantial and unsustainable. To hone this down even further, it seems that the division doesn't (let's go ahead and say the word) deconstruct so much as secularism itself does.

Let's argue—and I'm on unstable ground here—that a secularism that solely attempts to oppose religion is impossible precisely because secularism requires religion, is indeed another branch of religion. That is why Caputo (2001) argues that he is "out to waylay the usual

distinction between religious and secular in the name of what I shall call the 'post-secular' or 'a religion without religion'" (Caputo, 2001, p. 2). Once secularism reattaches itself to religion, we exist in a post-secular space or secularism ironically becomes a religion without religion. One way to consider this is to say that secularism is Plan B, because "in deconstruction, *everything* is Plan B" (Caputo, 2007, p. 35). Secularism deconstructs itself. Again, Caputo (2007) helps us to understand this:

> In a deconstruction, things are made to tremble by their own inner impulse, by a force that will give them no rest, that keeps forcing itself to the surface, forcing itself out, making the thing restless. Deconstruction is organized around the idea that things contain a kind of uncontainable truth, that they contain what they cannot contain. Nobody has to come along and "deconstruct" things. Things are auto-deconstructed by the tendencies of their own inner truth. (p. 29)

Is the inner impulse of secularism to reattach itself to religion? Is the uncontainable truth of the secular actually the religious impulse? These are not new questions: the distrust for this division between religion and secularism, the spiritual and physical, even between Truth and truth has deep roots in Christianity (Bell, 2007). That being said, at times these labels are necessary for the sake of brevity and clarity. I am tempted to place them in quotations in order to—as Butler (1992) would argue—to "denaturalize the terms, to designate these signs as sites of political debate" (p. 19). Or perhaps to place them under erasure, "to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible)" (Spivak, 1979, p. xiv). At this point, I won't do either, but suffice it to say that these words remain—and will remain—in play, "that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite" (Derrida, 1966/1978, p. 289). .

Lewis' educational background and thinking reflect the problems and opportunities of both the apparent divide between religion and secularism and the breakdown of that boundary. He has pursued degrees in physics, math, education, religion, and youth ministry at colleges labeled both religious and secular. He has been a pastor of a church, and a youth minister; he has taught in private Christian schools, traditional public schools, and alternative night school programs. Though this might seem somewhat eclectic or disjointed, Lewis sees a unity here based on his religious views about people, work, and power.

"Lost" People

Lewis' religious beliefs ask of him to treat others with respect, kindness, and empathy: "The Gospel says we are equal in relation to God." According to him, social equality is central to his faith; furthermore, the Christian idea of love is not an emotional reaction but a rational, even political, decision. The idea that Christians are supposed to love everyone has become an almost nauseating cliché, especially when that love takes the form of a condescending attempt to marginalize people as the other, as the lesser, as—in the Christian idiom—the "lost." This lost/found dichotomy is one that needs to be unpacked in order to understand Lewis's view of others in general and his students specifically. First, it is important to understand that American Christianity—though not monolithic—does have its own "vocabulary of faith" (Merrit, 2018, p. 11), what Merrit (2018) calls "*Christianese*, a term that refers to common slang used inside Christian communities" (p. 21). Personally, I've bandied the word Christianese around in Sunday School classes and small groups then been surprised at how quickly those who share (a form of) my faith are made uneasy, even angry, by this. The subtext of this negative response is the idea that a particular form of Christianity is not *a* way of knowing the world but *the* way of knowing it; further, it is the responsibility of those outside of this knowledge to come into it. It

echo's Dudley's (2011) "litmus test for true belief" (p. 149), but instead of being based on social issues, these tests are linguistic. Words like sin, grace, and faith along with concepts like the Fall, salvation, or even confession "separate a lesser *them* from a better *us*" (Merrit, 2018, p. 26). Which brings us to "the lost."

When Lewis went to a secular college to study math then physics, he was surprised: not by the sinfulness of non-believing students and professors, but by their goodness. The drug-ridden orgies that his Evangelical community had warned him about never materialized, and instead, he developed strong friendships with students of varying beliefs and was mentored by caring professors who could diligently mentor him while dismissing, out of hand, the God he worshiped. These people, in the lexicon of his faith, were "lost," but it was impossible for him to view them as the lesser. And though his years as an undergraduate were "incredibly productive," he wasn't prepared for the scrutiny that his religious beliefs would undergo. Much of that scrutiny took the form of intellectual challenges to many of the scientific, moral, and philosophical beliefs he had taken for granted growing up in an evangelical community of faith. He admits going through "a time of examination for me of kind of pulling everything out on the table and building it back together again—kind of tore it down and built it back together again." In my experience, this is a common phenomenon of young people attending a secular college after being raised in a Fundamentalist community. What makes Lewis's experience more interesting is the way his view of people was challenged and changed. The notion of how people should be understood and valued within his dominant discourse evolved and was eventually transformed.

Among many Christians, the term *lost* refers to people "who aren't part of their religious tribe" (Merritt, 2018, p. 193). In the New Testament, the word is used around a dozen times and

never directly in reference to a person or people; it's opposite, *found* is used in the same space over fifty times, but again, seldom in reference to a person or people. Functionally, the word is synonymous with those who are saved, justified, or redeemed; again, words that have little meaning outside of *Christianese*. However, similar to the religious/secular binary, lost/found contains within it Caputo's (2007) auto-deconstructing tendency. Within the Gospel of Luke there is a trinity of parables concerning a lost coin, a lost sheep, and a lost, i.e. prodigal, son. Merritt (2018) argues that in all three cases that which is lost is not culpable, but instead, it is the woman, the shepherd, and the father respectively that are the primary culprits for these losses. What this interpretation does is to remove the blame for being lost or the credit for being found—the lost/found binary begins to deconstruct in light of the original text. Merritt (2018) concludes his exegesis:

> While we often use the term *lost* to refer to someone who needs to get her act together and start following the rules, in these stories, Jesus uses *lost* to mean loved, valuable, and worth pursuing. People who are "lost" are precious, not pitiful. (p. 197)

This theological outlook informs Lewis's treatment of others. If his goal is to become more like God, and "there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:11), then it follows that he shouldn't show partiality himself. If fact, Lewis referenced C.S. Lewis's (1949/1980) famous sermon, "The Weight of Glory" arguing that "there are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal" (p. 46). It seems that not only is the lost/found binary untenable, but as it deconstructs, it actually elevates both sides of the binary. Again, C.S. Lewis (1949/1980) helps to illuminate this type of thinking:

> It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. (p. 45)

Viewing people—all people—as possible gods or goddesses was a paradigm shift for Lewis which gave him a whole new spectrum of possible responses. A need to proselytize others waned; an aspiration to know others waxed; and the desire to help and serve others—already present—was amplified. It was at that point that a degree in mathematics began to evolve into math education and religious studies slowly turned into youth ministry. This shift from "knowing something to doing something" unfolded haltingly and the path was circuitous, but it had its roots in a somewhat specific way of understanding people.

Work

"I have a high regard for work."

This seemed like a simple statement from Lewis—one I've heard variations on for as long as I can remember. But as we spoke more about it, as I've thought more thoroughly on it, as my reading has circled around it, it became evident that Derrida's "reexamination of the familiar" (Spivak, 1979, p. xiii) was called for. Work means to do something, be it physical or mental or emotional or spiritual labor; it also refers to something complete, something good, as in a work of art. Even though in modern American culture, the idea of work often has negative associations, a *work* is positive: a work of literary genius, excellent student work, or even the complex works of a clock. What does Lewis mean when he says he has a high regard for work? Is it his work, the work of others, a work of art, the inner workings of a device? For a time, Lewis taught in a private Christian school. In many ways he felt that it was simply an extension of his previous work as a youth minister—he could have a positive influence eight hours a day,

five days a week as opposed to a few hours on Sundays and Wednesdays. Teaching his subject area, math, did not deduct from that time; instead, it was an essential part of it: "I teach math as a vehicle....but I also teach students." How did that change when he began to teach in a public school? Functionally, there was a definite shift away from explicit references to Christianity; however, implicitly, he felt little change in what he was doing because "all truth is God's truth. Why is mathematical truth different from moral truth?" Later, Lewis did walk this statement back a bit, but it does reveal an undercurrent of thought about secular and religious knowledge. To clarify, Lewis' view of work has two major components: he values work for specific religious reasons and views any division between secular and spiritual work with suspicion.

Lewis' high regard for work is rooted in both his understanding of Scripture and his cultural connection to the Puritan work ethic. When he says "at the end of the day, I want my work to be pleasing to God," Lewis is echoing the biblical exhortation that "whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men" (Colossians 3:23). In his thinking—in his theology—anything can be an act of worship if it is done worshipfully—in "spirit and truth" (John 4:23). This seems to concern both an internal response—spirit—and an internal attitude—truth. To clarify, if you believe in a God that values wisdom, learning can be worship; if you believe in a God that is a creator, building something can be worship, if you believe in a God that is the personification of love, caring for others can be worship. Again, Lewis's desire for his work to please God suggests that he wants to worship in this spirit and truth. He also specifically referenced the "good old Puritan work ethic." He did this almost as an afterthought, but this idea is undoubtedly present in his thinking. Weber (1905/2002)—who most probably coined the phrase "Protestant work ethic," a variation on the "Puritan work ethic"—argued that this concept gave birth to capitalism; importantly, King believed that it was implicitly racist (The Martin

Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Change), and Ryken (1979) wrote that it is often used to "cover a whole range of current ills: the workaholic syndrome, drudgery, competitiveness, worship of success, materialism, and the cult of the self-made person" (p. 15). So it is important to understand that the Puritan work ethic contains within it more complexities than a high school history book would suggest. Regardless, this idea of hard work being pleasing to God seems deeply embedded in American history and in Lewis's thinking. Also, upon closer examination, the writings of Puritans about work are echoed by his in his belief that "everybody's job is a ministry"

William Tyndale (1527/2017), a leader of the Protestant Reformation who had a profound influence on Puritan thinking argued that "there is difference betwixt washing of dishes, and preaching of the word of God; but as touching to please God, none at all" (p. 91). Five hundred years have passed since Tyndale wrote this, but the sentiment—even its language—remains as Lewis wants his work to be pleasing to God. Clearly, "*the Puritans declared the sanctity of all honorable work.* In doing so, they rejected a centuries-old division of callings into 'sacred' and 'secular'" (Ryken, 1979, p. 16). Again, it is significant to point out that Lewis felt a spiritual calling to be a math teacher with as much—if not more—clarity than that to be a pastor. To parallel Tyndale, there is a difference between teaching math and preaching the Bible, but as touching to please God, none at all. Rifting off the general goodness of God, Bell (2005) clarifies this:

> That is why it is impossible for a Christian to have a secular job. If you follow Jesus and you are doing what you do in his name, then it is no longer secular work; it's sacred. You are there, God is there. The difference is our awareness. (Bell, 2005, p. 81)

Again, in Lewis' thinking, the divisions between religious and secular, lost and found, work and ministry have dissolved, are dissolving, and will—most probably—continue to dissolve.

Pastoral Power

Towards the end of our interview, Lewis and I began to talk about discipline problems we'd had with some seniors that we taught. Two of our female students had recently been assigned In-School Suspension for fighting, and before that one of those girls had been sent home for arguing with/screaming at another boy during the class change. These problems in the classroom seemed to stem from the fact that the boy was dating/sleeping with three girls in the same friend group at the same time. At times the participants in this polyamorous relationship were happy with the arrangement—and happy to share the details with any classmates that were willing to listen; however, more recently this group had started to fracture and the conflict was becoming a problem in both my, Lewis's, and several other teachers' classrooms. These students fought, argued, and refused to enter classes; they spent whole periods crying in the hall, bathrooms, or the Guidance Office. Parents, teachers, administrators, school counselors, and even the School Resource Officer (SRO) were involved. Exasperated, one administrator declared, "They just need to get their shit together—leave it outside our building!" And they did need to do just that. However, it seemed clear that the root of the problem lay—more or less-in personal decisions these students were making both within and outside of school. Somewhat exasperated himself, Lewis asked, "What right do we have to tell them that what they're doing is wrong...immoral, or even unwise?" What right, indeed?

Tilli (2019) argued that in his examination of power relations, Foucault distinguished three types:

> first, the legal system pertaining to the sovereign, territorial state; second, the disciplinary devices related to controlling the bodies of the subjects and put into practice via police, medical, and penitentiary techniques; and third, the apparatus of security pertaining to population and the practice...in which individuals are subjected to procedures of truth-telling" (p. 113-114).

This list (and their brief descriptions) is useful; however, the divisions between each type is not always easily demarcated; furthermore, the inescapable connection of power and knowledge—the power to decide what counts as knowledge, the knowledge to utilize power—is ever present and further complicates these divisions. That being said, Foucault's later thinking about pastoral power—which fits nicely into the third category—can help us address Lewis' question about addressing student's moral decisions. Though integrated into the modern Western state, pastoral power has its roots in Christian institutions (Foucault,1982/2000, p. 332). Foucault (1982/2000) summarizes the uniqueness of this power:

> This form of power is salvation-oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblative (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualizing (as opposed to legal power); it is coextensive and continuous with life; it is linked with a production of truth--the truth of the individual himself" (p. 333).

This is a power whose goal is to save, that is willing to sacrifice itself, looks to the individual as well as the larger community, and is exercised through knowledge of individual's mind, souls, inner being, etc...Siisiainen (2015) rightly describes it a "Christian, guiding-conducting power" and as "'benevolent' guidance" (p. 234).

Focusing on pastoral power in light of the Protestant Reformation, Tilli (2019) argues that there are three elements that make up pastoral power: First, "the common destiny…[and]

joint responsibility" (p. 115) of both the pastor and his congregation. That is, the pastor, i.e., the shepherd, is responsible for the safety/salvation of his congregation i.e., the sheep; these sheep are, in turn, responsible for submitting to the shepherd. There exists in this system a mutual cycle of accountability, a "subtle economy of merit and fault that...in the end it is decided by God" (p. 115). Self-examination is the second element and "the purpose is not self-awareness to assure self-mastery, but to unveil to the director the depths of the soul, the truth about oneself to ensure subordination" (p. 115). This self-examination often took the form of confession. Caputo (2016) elaborates on this:

> A pastor needs to know what is going on in individuals' hearts, to get inside their minds, to have them 'confess' their innermost secrets, in order to give spiritual direction. Pastoral power depends upon producing truth, the truth of truth, in order thereby to produce good Christians (p. 129).

This form of self-examination, again, is not about self-knowledge, but is about producing a particular subject; it is "a combination of productive and repressive power that produces individuals precisely in order to block off individuality" (Tilli, 2019, p. 115). The third element is self-renunciation. Once the subject has accepted the authority of the director through submission and revealed himself through self-examination, he must renounce himself to become someone new. This idea of self-mortification is found in the teachings of Christ: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). Self-denial is the key to personal transformation and, eventually, truth and salvation: "The truth is only given to the subject at the price that brings the subject's being into play. For as he is, the subject is not capable of truth" (Foucault, 2001/2005, p. 15). All of this culminates

in the production of a subject, and much of it has been codified through acts of penitence, repentance, confession, and self-examination.

Again, Foucault argues that pastoral power has been integrated in the modern Western state; I would argue that it is also embedded in American public education. Schools are not churches or cathedrals and teachers are not pastors or priests; however religion—specifically Christianity in the United States—"pervades educational practices and the lived curriculum of schools even when religion is not a topic taught in school" (Burke & Segall, 2011, p. 633). As a result, teachers often understand themselves as martyrs, missionaries, or saviors (Burke & Segall, 2015): martyrs who sacrifice their time, energy, and money; missionaries to bring the light of knowledge; saviors who rescue those in need. Students are central to this discourse and the utilization of pastoral power is embedded in the way schools—predominately through teachers—produce students as subjects. To better understand this, let's return to my and Lewis' troubled students. The apparatus of school is not simply concerned with them behaving within the four walls of the building in a form of sovereign power; our pastoral power asks of us that we fix them, that we save them. From what? Decisions we perceive as not only disruptive to school, but self-destructive. No discussion among teachers and administrators involved helping the student make their romantic/sexual relationship work—that is not what we wanted to produce. Echoing the idea of the teacher as martyr, it was made clear that we were willing to sacrifice time and energy to help these students; no reciprocal sacrifice was expected. It was also essential to understand these students as a community of seniors, as a class, even in their polyamorous group, and also individually; furthermore, our concern was not simply for the present, but also their future as graduation loomed. Lastly, a strong strand of self-examination and confession—that bordered on voyeurism—ran through the school's attempts to correct this

behavior. There seemed to be a need to understand not only why, but how, this relationship worked or didn't work. The impulse to rescue students from damaging environments, crushing ignorance, even themselves; the need for students to believe, to *know*, that schools care about them; the demand that teachers know each student specifically while caring for them collectively; and the desire to understand student's inner life—all of this is pastoral power manifested in public education.

The Things They Carry

Years ago, I read Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990). It had a profound impact on me. In the eponymous opening chapter, the narrator describes what various soldiers carried with them. These ranged from physical objects like compression bandages, canned rations, love letters and worn out pictures to things more immaterial such as the desire to go home, the distrust of others, and the fear of death. Despite the unfortunate metaphors that equate teaching with war—teachers are not "in the trenches" nor on "the front lines"; we are not "under fire" nor waging an "uphill battle" against the "powder kegs" that are our students—we do carry some things: Minnie carries with her a deep love for her students that, at times, forces her into a space of uncertainty, her ethical perhaps. Nash carries with him a passion for two places, two ways of being, that have produced him as something interesting, unique, and powerful. Lewis carries with him a distrust for simple structures and systems that allow him to open up closed places and produce something new.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

Limitations—Selah and Amen

"This is not the end of the road

it goes on for maybe miles and miles"

(Gaskill, Pinnick & Tabor, 1989, Track 10).

The Hebrew word *Selah* is used seventy-four times in the Old Testament; seventy-one of those are in the *Book of Psalms* which is essentially a collection of worship songs. Though its exact meaning is unclear, the word Selah seems to refer to an interlude in a piece of music or a break in poetry. Some linguists and theologians suggest that it is a term used to indicate the importance of a preceding passage, as in "stop and think about what was just said." The grammarian in me likes to think of it as a semicolon—the end of a thought with the promise of more connecting ideas. Corresponding to Selah is the Hebrew word *amen*. Functionally used in a similar fashion, the word amen is perhaps best translated as "so be it." It is often used as a concluding statement at the end of a prayer, liturgy, or creedal statement. Again, the grammarian in me thinks of this more as a period—the resolution of a thought or idea.

This is important.

I want this inquiry to be more of a Selah than an Amen.

Beginning a piece of writing is difficult; finishing one is even more so. As a high school composition teacher, instructing my students on how to construct conclusions—how to end a piece of writing—is as much art as science: maybe you could restate your thesis in a new and

interesting way; maybe you could summarize your main points; maybe you could answer the question your work addressed; maybe you could leave your audience with something new to think about; maybe you could redefine your terms; maybe, maybe, maybe...This word, "maybe," is a shortening of the late Middle English phrase *it may be* or *it may be that*. Often associated with uncertainty, it is also a word/phrase pregnant with possibility. It is about what could have been, what could possibly be, what might be in the future. It is a word awash with satisfaction and regret, hope and dread—regret/satisfaction about the past, hope/dread for the future. But I tried to write from the reparative position, so there is more satisfaction than regret; and I have tried to think under the influence of deconstruction, so there is more hope than dread.

But there are regrets.

No, not regrets—qualifications, clarifications, pauses in thought. Selahs

Qualitative in its design and poststructuralist in its viewpoint, this inquiry is limited. The small size of the participant pool is not the problem: I interviewed seven people and focused on only three of them in my analysis. These teachers were from a single rural school in Northeast Georgia who all lived within thirty miles of each other, but geography is not the problem. They are all white, all between the ages of 35-50, all from the Protestant Christian tradition—none of this is the problem. My participation is (and was and will always be) *the* problem. I selected these people—except for one outlier that was suggested by Nash King—based on my notions of what a religious person looked like. Furthermore, I focused on three participants. Why these three? I could argue that they were more complex, and that would be true. Minnie's, Nash's, and Lewis's interviews were rife with Spivak's "positive lever[s]," (Spivak, 1979, p. lxxv) places my theory could break into their thinking and language to produce something new. I could argue that talking with them was more interesting, and that would be true; to be honest, it was difficult

to relisten to and transcribe some interviews as participants fell into what I perceived as common clichés or performative religiosity. But as I really drilled down into it, when I read and reread, wrote and rewrote, I've come to a conclusion that shouldn't be surprising, but is—I focused on participants whose thinking most aligned with my own.

This gives me pause—selah.

Perhaps I misspoke (mis-wrote) above. When I say these participants' thinking aligned with my own, I am not referring to agreement with them. Instead, I am arguing that the theories with which I think "plug-into" their words and ideas more readily (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 4). Perhaps that is a distinction without a difference, but my analysis requires more than simply shared experiences or similar conclusions—it must be rooted in an articulated theoretical framework. However, if I am "steeped in poststructural theories—if they are in [my] bones" (St. Pierre, 2009, p. 232), it seems that any divisions between my subjective views and (attempted) objectivity as a researcher deconstructs from the inner truth inherent in that dichotomy. You see,

> in a deconstruction, things are made to tremble by their own inner impulse, by a force that will give them no rest, that keeps forcing itself to the surface, forcing itself out, making the thing restless. (Caputo, 2007, p. 29)

Let me be clear, I can no longer think outside of the theory that I've studied. My former students returning from college who've studied feminist theory or critical race theory can no longer unsee those things—they come back to me with new eyes. They tremble. I am no different—discourse is everywhere, subjugation is ever present, deconstruction is always happening, religion and God are bigger than I can conceive. These are forces that give no rest. These things with which I am supposed to think are—essentially—me. St. Pierre (1991) helps to understand this:

> Not only do people produce theory, but *theory produces people*. I remember how the concept shattered my world when I first came to grips with it. A different theory, a different discourse, different statements and questions about living, different grids of normalcy and regularity could produce *me* differently, for better or worse. (p. 142)

So, another limitation can be found in the theories themselves which are, of course, indistinguishable from me and are not themselves, but my interpretation of them. I attempted to think with Foucault's work on discourse and power with Butler helping me to think about the Subject; Derrida's deconstruction permeated everything even though I understand my grasp of his work was at times tenuous; Caputo's work—in my opinion—gives deconstruction a "religio-messianic twist... the right bend, that it well describes its proclivity and propensity, its tendency toward what is to come" (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 47). So my theory—poststructuralist, postmodern, perhaps post-secular—doesn't proffer a tidy answer to complex questions. It doesn't offer an amen. In fact, like Caputo (2011), "I doubt that there is something called 'The Answer' to this question, in caps, the only thing we can do is to *answer*" (p. 28).

Questions and Non-Answers

Here are the questions I started with almost three years ago: (1) How do power/knowledge relations produce educators who self-identify as religious within public education? (2) How do educators who self-identify as religious construct themselves within possibly competing religious and secular discourses? (3) How do educators who self-identify as religious perceive deconstruction taking place in the religiously brackish environment of public schools?

As I look at these questions, parts of them make me cringe: the clunkiness of "self-identify as religious" (although I'm not quite sure how I would change that even now). The

simple fact that I wanted to talk to "religious" people exclusively seems naive and limiting in retrospect. I think questions 1 & 2 should have been combined in some manner since both erupt from my thinking with and about Foucault. Question 3's phrase "perceive deconstruction taking place" further reveals my struggles with Deconstruction as a concept, theory, and methodology. But overarching all of this, is the thrice repeated "How?" Certainly, *how* is an important question, but with time the question became *who*? Who are these people who make their complex faith operate in an equally complex profession? Who are these people who make their complex profession operate with a complex faith? Who are these people with similar labels but who would define themselves so differently? Even within the limited scope of this inquiry--four theorists, three participants, one researcher—the topic seems too large, too unwieldy. In the end, what do I—what can I—know about them? Moreover, what should I know? What right do I have to know?

Caputo (1993), in writing about Foucault's work on madness, argues that the struggles that the label of madness (and other labels as well) create revolve around the question "Who are we?" (p. 250). However, instead of answering this question, Caputo (1993) argues that

> Foucault's idea is not only *not* to answer this question but to see to it that no one else is allowed to answer it either. He wants to keep this question open, and above all to block the administrators and professionals and managers of all sorts from answering this question, thereby closing us in on some constituted identity or another that represents a strictly historical, that is, contingent constraint. (p. 250).

I like that. It complicates and unsettles. It smacks of deconstruction's tendency to "disrupt and destabilize our impressions" (Mazzei, 2007, p. 14). It replaces the question *who are you?* with a less approachable, less answerable, less safe *who aren't you?* It echoes St. Pierre's (2011)

assertion that "postmodern theories disrupt the distinction between epistemology and ontology" (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 615). The division between what we know and who we are trembles under the weight of deconstruction. Perhaps what we cannot or will not know is imbricated with who we cannot or will not be. Saying who someone *is* can produce a predictive, reproducible narrative--it is safe; saying who someone *is not* can produce something else entirely: something unpredictable, something unscalable, something unsafe. This is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, Foucault (1997) argues "my point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do" (Foucault, 1997, p. 256). And what is that something to do? Perhaps it is to embrace the mystery. In some Christian theologies--particularly ones that accept a mystical slant--mystery is not what cannot be known, it is what can be known infinitely. It is something that exists beyond the horizon of our understanding. It exists in an apophatic discourse where everything is dangerous, even—especially—God.

Caputo (1997) writes of keeping God safe, and "the only way to keep God's alterity safe is to save Him from the cutting tips and incisions of the accusing *kategoria* of kataphatic theology, from ensnarement by some name" (p. 44). So, the safety and security of God is defined by His distinctiveness—God must be different in order to truly be God. In fact, to paraphrase Augustine, God must be incomprehensible in order to indeed be God. Does that necessitate that theology—literally, the study of God—is never ending, always incomplete? Yes, in light of the incomprehensibility of God, theology is an impossible science: Not only is it impossible to complete, it is perhaps impossible to even begin. That being said, negative theology offers a beginning of sorts: "In negative theology, one can only make 'apophatic'--meaning negative or denial--assertions: one can only say what God is *not.* Apophatic is opposed

to ‘kataphatic’ or affirmative discourse” (Caputo, 1997, p. 342)). When you make an assertion about who or what God is, you have immediately limited Him: “God is this and no more.” Augustine’s axiom negates this thinking. So my question becomes two-fold: What do I believe my participants are not and what am I confident that I cannot know about them? For this, I look to someone outside of my plan.

Further Research

Eve Gardener teaches math to Freshmen; she is in her late 20s and possesses the copious amounts of energy necessary to counterbalance their vitality. Tall and slender, she dresses with the comfortable ease common to coaches: loose khakis with either a polo shirt or long-sleeve pullover. In the classroom, she has a reputation as both a serious teacher and a strict disciplinarian; outside of the classroom, she is funny with a somewhat biting wit. In the vernacular of our students, “she’s got jokes.” Originally, Eve was not on my list of participants to be interviewed. To tell the truth, I didn’t know her that well. However, her name came up in both Nash King’s and later Lewis Staple’s interviews—they all teach in the same department. It was made clear that she was someone with whom I might want to speak. Why? The details were unclear, but apparently she had voiced some objections to faculty led prayers before meals on pre-planning and work days. To my knowledge, nothing came of her concerns, but it was fresh on the minds of some of her coworkers, so I made it a point to speak with her. It was not time wasted.

Immediately, Eve made it clear that she believes in a God, but she doesn’t “practice” religion: “I don’t need to go to church to believe there’s a God.” Nor does she feel the need to “put all her beliefs in a book.” Additionally, she does pray; however, “it’s not necessarily *talk* to God, but it’s just a slow down.” After a few minutes of this, it becomes apparent to me that Eve

is doing a dance—vacillating between a nebulous spiritual belief and some sort of strict rationalism. This is not a problem. Again, Bell (2013) argues that "faith and doubt are not opposites; they are, it turns out, excellent dance partners" (Bell, 2013, p. 92). With time, she becomes more comfortable with the tenor of the conversation and explicitly questions the validity of a God that allows war and famine or the blind faith of those who unquestioningly accept undeserved hardship. Once we get past this, her thoughts on her own profession are illuminating—they are not so far removed from other answers I've heard in this inquiry.

Like many first generation teachers, Eve became an educator because of a teacher with whom she felt a strong connection; she still occasionally speaks with Mrs. Prince, her high school Algebra II teacher. She was an economics major, but found no joy in those classes, so she shifted to math then math education: "I guess I had an internal or moral goal of this is what I want to do with my life [be a teacher]...me, myself, and I came up with this—it's not necessarily like an idea that came out of nowhere." She had (and has) an internal moral code that didn't come from nowhere. From where, then, did it come? Is this moral code religion of a sorts? Towards the end of our interview, Eve—saying that some of these ideas had been "marinating for a while"—declared "maybe the things that I think are my moral code are actually spiritual beliefs...but, I don't know." Maybe she was dancing again, but regardless, Eve's goals as a teacher smack of a near-religious devotion. Globally, she believes "we've got to do our part to fix it [the world]"; specifically, her "goal each day is to make the student a better person than when they walked in." I need to confess, my temptation here is to somehow make Eve religious—to bend her words and say "Aha! Look, we're all religious in different ways, and that's what makes great teachers." But it's a fleeting temptation. It won't bear the weight of my analysis. It won't say amen.

The truth is, my religious views both illuminate my world and narrow my vision. Lewis (1949/1990) wrote "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it, I see everything else" (p. 140). For years I read him to be arguing that through Christianity I could see everything, that my faith opened up infinite knowledge. Now I see it differently: my faith limits what I can see and know because I see everything *through* Christianity. It serves as both telescope and microscope, an elevated space to view the world offset by blinders to limit that same view, yet every (for lack of a better word) "theory" does that. I think through Foucault, Derrida, and Caputo, but I also think through Scripture, Lewis, and Bell—and the grammarian in me catches at that word *but*. If these two sets of three (and why did I choose three?) are in opposition as *but* implies, then I've missed the whole point, haven't I? However, the word *and* seems too simple and definitive. It feels too much like an amen.

So, what is my "further study"? What do we do? Simply put, we do the work—the hard messy work of analysis, of deconstruction, of opening up. Reading Asad helped me articulate the idea that religion exists and as such is worthy of serious consideration. God, spirituality, heaven, Nirvana—all of this may be hopeful mythology, but religion as an object of study and debate exists. To treat it as outside the scope of the academy is belittling; to treat it as somehow above scrutiny is dangerous.

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