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a review of *One Nation Under God?: Religion and American Culture* (1999), edited by Marjorie Garber and Rebecca L. Walkowitz. (New York: Routledge, 1999); \$16.00 and *Para/Inquiry: Postmodern Religion and Culture*, by Victor Taylor. (New York: Routledge, 2000); \$25.00.

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During the 1980s and 1990s, Americans saw their country torn apart over issues of 'political correctness,' the right-wing rhetorical hot button used to discredit a more liberal appreciation of our nation's multiculturalism.' The so-called culture wars of the last two decades made evident the deep ideological divides that exist in this country over issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.' Two recent books, both published by Routledge, examine the way in which religion and spirituality has been part of the fray.' *One Nation Under God?: Religion and American Culture* (1999), edited by Marjorie Garber and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, investigates, in fifteen separate but complementary essays, the practical effects of these culture wars on religion.' The theoretical implications of a decidedly postmodern outlook on religion and culture are examined in Victor Taylor's *Para/Inquiry: Postmodern Religion and Culture* (2000).

3. The vocabulary that emerged from the conservative right during the Reagan and Bush administrations has since become part of the vernacular.' The Republic Revolution, as Newt Gingrich dubbed it, attacked the 'cultural elite,' labeling its multicultural project and attendant causes as 'political correctness' or PC.' Rush Limbaugh cheered on angry white males who themselves assailed newly-empowered women as 'feminazis.' For their part, pro-life anti-abortion rights activists labeled their pro-choice opponents as 'pro-death.' Then, as if to forget their own point, the more extreme elements added bombs to their message, killing and injuring physicians and nurses at family planning clinics.'
4. Rhetoric and imagery married to violence compromised the fulfillment of the kindler, gentler nation envisioned by George Bush.' As a nation, we sat bleary-eyed as we watched George Holliday's videotape of the beating of Rodney King by L.A. police officers in March of 1991.' The officers' acquittal in April of 1992 caused the worst race riots in recent memory.' Since then, terrible events continue to occur.' White supremacist radicals in Jasper, Texas, dragged a black man to his death.' African American churches have been bombed.' The innocent question of Rodney King' 'Can't we all just get along?' 'still rings in our ears.'
5. Eventually, the battle lines were redrawn, given the bully pulpit afforded liberals by the election of a Democrat to the White House in 1992.' Something different was clearly taking place on January 20, 1993, when Maya Angelou delivered her poem 'On the Pulse of Morning' at William Jefferson Clinton's inauguration as the nation's forty-second president.' Angelou declared this to be an historic opportunity.' 'The horizon leans forward,' she said, 'Offering you space to place new steps of change.' Angelou's words'and Clinton's choice of Angelou as inaugural poet'marked a clarion call in the battle over differing cultural ideologies that had been waging for some time.' Suddenly, both message and messenger were different.
6. Garber and Walkowitz' *One Nation Under God?* documents how religious conflict has been imbricated in all those other conflicts of our culture wars these past two decades, under both

conservative and liberal leadership.' The broad scope of the collection can be seen in three representative essays.

7. The collection's opening piece, Diana L. Eck's 'The Multireligious Public Square,' sets the stage brilliantly.' What does a country that prides itself on free expression and separation of church and state do when push comes to shove, when its multitudes demand, explicitly or implicitly, their right to worship freely?' 'Whether diversity is a source of division or strength,' Eck concludes, 'is one of the crucial questions in the controversies of the public square as racial, cultural, and religious differences are negotiated' (5). Why? Because religious expression is so visible.' 'When a new Hindu temple is constructed, when an Islamic school applies for permission to build, when a Sikh wearing a turban appears for a job interview, or when a Muslim woman wearing a hijab goes to a grocery store,' Eck observes, 'the striking visibility of a religious culture unfamiliar to many Americans may be the catalyst of suspicious and fearful response' (7). In the language of current criticism, WASP hegemony' and its racial, ethnic, and religious prerogatives' fuels this suspicion and fear, potentially leading to hostility.
8. This is Eck's larger point: 'Incidents of violence and vandalism make clear that race and religion are different yet inseparable markers of identity.' Many attacks on religious institutions also have racist overtones' (10-11)' For instance, she continues, 'the arson of a black church is not directed against Christianity, but against the buildings that visibly represent the life of the African-American community' (11). In short, religious strife in America is generally racially and ethnically motivated.' Fortunately, Eck recounts, there are 'numerous' countervailing stories not of violence, but of growing understanding and cooperation between and among religious communities in the United States' despite the fact that this 'new deliberate era of interreligious relationship does not usually make it into the newspapers' (11).
9. What should and does make it into newspapers occasionally are positive public expressions at the highest levels which suggest that diversity is our strength.' Eck points to the example of Hillary Rodham Clinton receiving American Muslims at the White House in 1996.' 'The significance of the event itself is amplified by the photographic icons that display a new image of what America looks like: the American flag and the Great Seal of the Presidency frame the First Lady receiving American Muslims.' In a culture saturated with print media and television,' Eck adds, hitting on the importance of rhetoric and imagery, 'these iconic representations convey, above all, the public record an extraordinary historic occasion' (16). Thus, the horizon, to gloss Angelou, does seem to be leaning forward.
10. Another interesting essay, Robert Kiely's 'From Monticello to Graceland: Jefferson and Elvis as American Icons,' steps back to examine the function of iconic representation in America.' Kiely asks, is there anything that we, as Americans, irrespective of our differences, hold as sacred?' He posits that America's lack of a 'state religion' causes us 'to transfer our need for a unifying faith, a shareable reverence, onto the landscape or onto secular places and especially buildings associated with persons or events that we can all claim as our own' (208). He does not suggest that Graceland, the gaudy tribute to Elvis Presley, the late 'King' of rock-and-roll, has replaced the splendor of Jefferson's Monticello; rather, Kiely suggests per force how they exist side-by-side, each taking on their own sacred character.' As Kiely puts it, what's remarkable about the American experience is that our sense of unity and division simultaneously define what we view as sacred.' 'St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City can never compete with the Mississippi River or the Empire State Building as American shrines,' Kiely concludes, 'precisely because they are denominational

and therefore signs of our differences rather than our unity' (208).

11. This is Kiely's fundamental point, then: there are those universal, traditional elements of the sacred found when we revel in our denominational difference while sitting in our churches, synagogues, and temples.' Then, there are those moments when we revel in our sameness while standing before the majesty of, say, the Grand Canyon.
12. The collection's concluding essay, Marjorie Garber's 'Two-Point Conversion,' addresses the curious marriage in this country between sports and evangelical Christianity.' This piece is a must read for liberal-minded, academic sports fans everywhere.' It has become a commonplace nowadays for athletes, when interviewed after the big game in which they made the deciding play, to give thanks to God for their victory.' The logic of this strikes many as strange.' Does God really favor one team over the other?' One player over another?' It's all a part of the phenomenon known as 'sports evangelism,' exemplified best, perhaps, in the person of former Green Bay Packer Reggie White and his so-called God Squad.' While White's popularity may seem to challenge WASP hegemony, it falls short.' After all, Garber muses, how well received would Reggie White's evangelism be if he was a Muslim, or if the Promise Keepers promoted Judaism? 'Ultimately, Garber concludes, 'The high visibility of evangelical and salvific Christianity in sports, and its close ties with a competitive rhetoric of patriotism and Americanism, suggest that this may be the moment to call for a time out on proclamations of holiness in the huddle'time to rethink the troubling implications of public prayer on the field and organized team prayers in the locker room' (307).' She provides numerous examples of just why such a separation of church and sports is necessary.
13. Essays by The Reverend Dorothy A. Austin, Michael Eric Dyson, Barbara Claire Freeman, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, William R. Handley, Peter S. Hawkins, Azizah al-Hibri, Janet R. Jakobsen & Ann Pellegrini, David Lyle Jeffrey, David Kennedy, Deborah E. Lipstadt, Stephen Prothero, and a Foreword by Cornel West, complete the collection.' The interdisciplinary nature of the book only adds to its broad appeal.
14. Victor Taylor's *Para/Inquiry* moves in a different direction.' At first glance, given the book's structure, *Para/Inquiry* reads like Roland Barthes' *S/Z*, employing as it does something like the *lexias* and *divagations* contained in Barthes' inventive essay.' Like Barthes' work, this book forges new paths given its interdisciplinary lines of inquiry.' Taylor moves deftly from philosophy to religion, art, and literature.' Divided into eight chapters'framed by a ponderous opening titled 'Posting' and a brief glossary'the text attempts to push the traditional boundaries of how we understand and articulate the sacred within the postmodern condition.'
15. The task is formidable.' After all, we live more and more in the shadow, the 'post-,' of those daunting nineteenth century declarations about the death of God.' Of course, the startling notion included in these provocative statements by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Friedrich Nietzsche is that we ourselves killed God.' It took Harvard University several decades until it warmed up to Emerson's startling message to its 1838 divinity graduates.' His goal, like that of Walt Whitman, was for individuals to become their own ministers, priests, and rabbis, achieving a kind of religious and spiritual self-reliance.' *Para/Inquiry* examines where we are left theoretically in a world of multi-religious pluralism and in the wake of the death of god and of the transcendent.
16. The outline of Jean-Fran'ois Lyotard's later philosophical project underlies much of Taylor's work, primarily Lyotard's thesis regarding the inadequacy of metanarratives, those stories

that presumed to speak in a continuous and comprehensive manner.’ This is exactly what Lyotard was referring to when he declared ‘Let us wage a war on totality’ at the end of his essay ‘Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?’ That essay echoes through Taylor’s book as a whole, offering a complementary question: ‘What is the Postmodern sacred?’

17. Defining his terms in the first chapter, Taylor writes that ‘The sacred, a well-worn and much abandoned concept today, is generally invoked as that archaic foundation which has been lost or forfeited by collective humanity to a thoroughly (post)modern secular world’ (14).’ Resisting nostalgia, he then adds, ‘The sacred, with its archaic foundation, its promise, its secret, cannot be restored to its former grandeur.’ Instead, ‘it [the sacred] must be substituted for, and that substitution is always non-transcendent, inadequate, infinite and necessary’ (15).’ For Taylor, this sacred substitution demands going beyond (*para-*) the archaic.’ This makes his lines of inquiry post-modern and decidedly non-linear.’ ‘The question which drives this writing,’ Taylor makes clear at the end of chapter one, is this: ‘What was inquiry before it found its rules?’ (17).’ While this question may be unanswerable, it is all the more valuable.’ It demands that we think prior to foundations, transcendence, and origins, all the while investigating their limits.
18. Chapters two and three consider this exigency through numerous visual and narrative artists, primarily Elihu Vedder and Andr’ Malraux.’ Postmodern artists are key participants in parainquiry, Taylor writes, because they ‘continually pay tribute to Nietzsche’s thought by addressing the heterogeneity and ultimate inaccessibility of origin and end’ (22).’ Again, Lyotard circulates through the text, specifically his references to the unrepresentable.’ ‘It is our business not to supply reality,’ Lyotard writes in ‘What is Postmodernism?’, ‘but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be represented.’ By the end of chapter four, referencing the religious philosopher Marcel Eliade, Taylor concludes that ‘The sacred power, the ultimate’ can reside ‘anywhere’ (69).’ This reformulation of the sacred as *parasacred* is key in Taylor’s book, attentive as it is to allusive and ubiquitous character of the unrepresentable.
19. Postmodern thought is often criticized as being apolitical and nihilistic.’ While a critic like Bill Readings has worked to dispel this myth in the example of Lyotard, Taylor implicitly addresses such a critique through his references to the Shoa in chapter five.’ Can or should any grand narrative be able to account for this tragic event that Paul Celan declared to have caused the end of poetic discourse?’ Consider the recent and remarkable comments by the Pope regarding Catholic complicity in the holocaust, altering as it did the continuity of one of Christianity’s grandest grand narratives.’ Did those comments gesture toward the *parasacred*?’ Certainly it seemed a more responsible acknowledgement, the result, no doubt of re-thinking the origins and ends of Catholic theology.’ Referencing Lyotard once again, it resisted supplying a flawed reality, preferring acknowledgment of what was inexcusable.’ Refiguring typical notions of the sacred is ultimately more ethical, Taylor suggests, adding a decidedly political bite to what Lyotard called ‘our business.’ After all, ‘anything (history, deity, class, race, gender, sexuality, etc.) can produce a grand narrative which can account, with equal proficiency, for the continuity of all events.’ Or, I would add, a grand narrative which remains silent.’ What must be recognized, however, is that ‘*nothing* can account for discontinuity’ (78).’ Parainquiry attends to such discontinuity.’ ‘The prefix *para*,’ Taylor says in reference to the key term in his book’s title, ‘indicates this complexity, this beyond, this extra, this alteration of the continuous line found in things such as subjectivity, ethics, politics, experience’ (79).
20. But is the *parasacred* always already unreachable, unrepresentable?’ If so, is death the best

reference we have to it?' In other words, how do we get 'there''to the beyond of the *para*'from here?'

21. The book's ante-penultimate chapter is a meditation on the link that death has with the parasacred.' 'Consecrated grounds,' such as cemeteries Taylor suggests, 'represent, figure, signify, and forge the links between the 'here' and the 'there,' life and death' (93).' In fact, 'The grave''as aporia''illustrates this tension between the here and the there.' ' The here and there, from either direction, meet at the site of the grave' (96).' They key phrase is 'illustrates this tension.' ' Death only marks a meeting point between the two, not a full and complete narrative about their relation.' This is why grave markers, whether sacred or profane, with images of folded hands, saints, or football players and cars, are parasacred, Taylor says later in chapter six, because 'they defer the totalization of the ultimate' (101).
22. The penultimate chapter continues this thought, musing on the way in which seemingly 'irreverent/iconoclastic' markers now commonly replace specifically religious ones.' 'If any and all representations are, in the end, inadequate, what makes a football player or fisherman less appropriate than Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, or John the Baptist?'' In relation one to the other, 'the irreverent/iconoclastic' marker, Taylor writes, 'is more pious than the overtly religious as it parodies and speaks directly of the inadequacy of the representation(s) of the aporia' of death (110).' Why?' Because 'death exceeds all gestures toward completion' (110).
23. Ultimately, we have no complete, adequate marker today to lead everyone from here to there.' Postmodernism, Taylor suggests in his last chapter, is still itself just one more inadequate marker.' After all, 'One cannot remove a foundation in the name of anti-foundationalism only to re-instate a foundation that is more pleasing to an array of ideological formations or neurotic styles.' ' Instead, 'Parainquiry in the age of postmodernism leaves us unable to think and live comfortably, with either the simple presence or absence of an ultimate concern' (117).
24. Is that good or bad?
25. Rainer Maria Rilke, that great spirit of existential pondering, offered a comment about questions and answers in 'Letters to a Young Poet' nearly one-hundred years ago that I think is relevant here.' 'Try to love *the questions themselves*,' Rilke says, and 'Do not seek the answers, that cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them.' ' What the ensuing culture wars have taught us is clear: conservatives like the answers, especially because they have such a clear sense of what the right answers are.' Of course, liberal-minded and postmodern folks are just the opposite.' They, like Rilke, prefer the questions, finding in their postmodern sensibility that the center really cannot hold, and that things have and will always fall apart.
26. As our nation becomes more successful at dealing with its diversity, it is a book like *One Nation Under God?* that helps us navigate the remaining religious and spiritual challenges to form our more perfect union.' For those caught up in the questions themselves, particularly in light of the sacred, it is a book like *Para/Inquiry* that prompts one's inquisitive nature.

Michael Strynick earned his Ph.D. in 1994 from SUNY Binghamton's Program in Philosophy, Literature, and the Theory of Criticism. He currently teaches in the Department of English at Wake Forest University, and has held previous appointments at Davidson College, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Kent State University, and Georgia Tech. His articles appear in journals such as *Cultural Critique*, *Romanic Review*, and *South Atlantic Review*, and he also contributed several entries to the forthcoming *Routledge*

Encyclopedia of Postmodernism. His essay "Emerson, Slavery, and the Evolution of Self-Reliance" will appear in *The Emerson Dilemma: Essays on Emerson and Social Reform*, ed. T. Gregory Garvey (Georgia, 2001), and "The American Postcolonial Condition: Decolonization in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" will appear in *Jailbreaks and Re-creations: Resentencing the Other in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse*, ed. J. A. Wainwright and Muhsin Jassim al-Mussawi. His own book, *The Politics of Community*, will be part of the Series on Critical Studies in the Humanities (Davies, 2001).

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