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Editorial

Multiple Masculinities: Religion, Gender and Men[1]

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> In general, I chose to write about what other scholars were not writing about and to write about texts that were not saying what other texts of their time were saying, about authors who were out of step with their times as I am often out of step with mine, who shared my desire to go against the grain.
>
> (Doniger 2014, xiv)

A glance through 1980s issues of *Religious Studies and Theology* or other religious studies journals of similar date reveals an academic world whose examination of gender was rarely undertaken the way we would approach it now. The study of women and their relationships with various religions had burgeoned along with other forms of women's history, providing an intriguing exception to the usual hermeneutic of suspicion concerning the academic study of religious topics. William Cantwell Smith had observed in 1995 that since the late nineteenth century the academy has been preoccupied with demonstrating "that religion is false" (7). Perhaps studying religion through a feminist lens created sufficient critical distance to allow secular scholars to feel more comfortable, providing politically acceptable tongs with which to pick up and examine religion. For scholars interested in reviving and transforming their own faith practices and those of others, feminism provided a platform for both scholarship and action.

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Feminist authors highlighted the marginalization of women and femininity from the major world religions. They also presumed, usually without discussion, that the relationship between men, masculinity and religion was somehow already understood. This is "what other scholars were not writing about" when Wendy Doniger and others began thinking more deeply about *gender* and religion. For all its confident revisionism, postcolonial theory was not much help, at least at first. Although it prompted a thorough critique of second-generation feminist theory, especially where a presumed universal, transracial sisterhood was concerned, it was surprisingly gender-blind. Joan Scott observed that "The litany of class, race, and gender suggests a parity for each term" but this was misleading because "In its simplest recent usage, 'gender' is a synonym for 'women'" (30). She declared that "We need a refusal of the fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition, a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference" (41).

Thanks to the impact of queer theory, and to the widespread media coverage of debates concerning the relationship between human rights, religion and sexual orientation, scholars began to explore the relationship between gender and religion, and to pay greater attention to the presence of multiple, often contested masculinities and male sexualities in religious texts and practices. Following Michel Foucault *inter alia* in theorizing the body as an historical and cultural site of inquiry, some historians of early Christianities were keen to examine the body/religion connection for both men and women.[2] There was a curious reticence, however, about later time periods, or other faiths. In their recent collection *Men, Masculinities and Religious Change in Post-Christian Britain*, Lucy Delap and Sue Morgan critique the longstanding and essentially Victorian assumption that modern masculinity and religion are incompatible. Instead, they and their contributors find that "femininity is neither universally nor solely the bearer of modern religious identity; masculinities, too, can be sites of religious struggle and performance" (3).

The impact of postcolonial theory also helped to draw the academy's attention to the fledgling topic of masculinity and religion, albeit in an indirect way. Feminist scholarship has been raising similar questions for a generation about the male voice and male gaze; now race and place joined the set of

2. An early example was Peter Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. 1988. New York: Columbia University Press. However, work often concentrated on exceptional or (to the modern eye) bizarre forms of embodied manhood, for example Mathew Kuefler. 2001. *The Manly Eunuch. Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press and Kathryn Ringrose. 2003. *The Perfect Servant. Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. A curious silence persisted concerning modern male bodies, sexualities, and religious understandings of manhood.

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subjectivities under scrutiny. This further eroded the privileged position of universalisms concerning the Other, whether that Other was female, non-white, non-Christian, or all of the above. However, the powerful lens of post-colonial theory created universalisms of its own: the "white, Western male" who was presumed to belong to a monolithic and eternally colonizing group. A pioneering move right into the late twentieth century, was made in a collection edited by Stephen B. Boyd *et al.* in 1996. *Redeeming Men* acknowledged the inspiration of two groups of colleagues in the American Academy of Religion: the Men's Studies in Religion Group and the Gay Men's Issues Group. Things had certainly changed since the 1980s: "Twenty years ago a book like this would have been unthinkable" (xiii). This was because, in addition to essays on ancient and medieval Christianities, or on the well-known Victorian debate about religion and effeminacy, work was now being done on topics like Malcolm X, interwar Germany, current Native American constructions of masculine spirituality, Jewish manhood, and the impact of HIV/AIDS on male religious and social identities. "Where do we go from here?" asked the collection's editors, identifying key categories of theology, ethics and myth/ritual for further analysis. I would observe that an emerging interfaith context for such questions was also inviting further exploration.

The contributors to this special issue have eagerly taken up these challenges. Cristina Atanasiu examines the shifting discourses of masculinity in images of Buddhist bodhisattvas during the formative but under-documented first century BCE to third century CE. What she calls "shifting notions of exemplar masculinity" (125) marked a transition from monastic beginnings to later, lay identities. Using a sophisticated and multi-disciplinary analysis involving archaeological, epigraphic and literary evidence, Atanasiu reveals how the ideal bodhisattva had once been a solitary ascetic but later, after lay bodhisattvas became more common, the ideal characteristics were virile and valiant men only loosely connected with monasteries: "He looks and acts less as a monk, but more like a young prince" (134). An "inglorious coup" overthrowing ancient monastic ideals had ushered in a more individualistic notion of heroic Buddhist masculinity.

Robert Daum, writing about early Rabbinic narratives in "Captivity, Masculinity, and Degradation in an Early Rabbinic Tale," directly tackles a point I made earlier about hesitation concerning the study of erotic religious literature and masculinities, and about the need for more interfaith work in this area. Daum's meticulously researched, nuanced analysis shows us that such hesitations are nothing new. An originally erotic Rabbinic narrative about a young Judean boy captured and probably sexually assaulted by Romans was adjusted over time, appearing in early medieval manuscripts with a more masculinized captive and muted details about his captivity experiences.

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Daum demonstrates why: an anonymous captive, discussed in an early story with homoerotic details drawn from contemporary Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman narrative traditions, had become the medieval Rabbi Ishmael, a Talmudic authority. Scandalous sexual activity (however unwilling) could not have happened to such a pillar of tradition, changed were made to the original tale, and "Thus the story flows backwards in time" (153).

Also interested in the deep complexities of gendered, embodied identities in the medieval period, James White provides a deep and wideranging inquiry into the gendering of Catherine of Siena's extreme ascetic practices, notably the fasting which halted her menstrual cycle. Catherine's gender-bending self-understandings seem to have begun as a young girl when, already refusing to eat meat at the family table, her parents nicknamed her "Euphrosyne" after an early Christian transvestite saint who hid in a male monastery to avoid marriage. Using a broad range of sources from medieval hagiographical texts to current critical methodologies, White argues that Catherine was able to use her gaunt, de-feminized body as a gender-altered platform from which to mount a traditionally masculine career in public politics. She had once hoped to enter the Dominican order of mendicant preachers, an order confined then to men only. Later, by controlling her fasting and its impact on her body Catherine "created her own meaning from it: rather than adapting her eating practices solely to obtain holiness, she altered them to create agency" (165).

The critics of "patriarchy" are now legion, and in "The Promise Keepers Canada and Christian Relational Masculinities" Siphiwe Dube proposes that relationship and intersubjectivity are more fruitful analytical concepts. Drawing partly on psychological theory and partly on the sociology of North America's "culture wars," Dube investigates the evangelical Christian men's organizations Promise Keepers of America and Promise Keepers Canada (PKC). He finds multiple masculinities here, first of all in the promise-keepers' emphasis on the value of sexual chastity and domestic attentiveness, behaviours gendered as female in many attitudes past and present. He also analyses differences in the construction of religious masculinities between the Canadian and American contexts, proposing that a more prominent discourse of relationship in the PKC has muted its critics, whereas the PKA's militarized discourse about Christian warriors has aggravated its relationship with women's rights groups. He concludes with a puzzle that only further research can resolve: how can PKC emphasize relationship and intersubjectivity in its presentation of masculinity, yet privilege heteronormativity without question? Likewise Dube reminds us of the need for a fully postcolonial critique of "brotherhoods" that are often both heteronormative, and racially segregated, especially in the United States.

In a serendipitous response to the first of these questions, MeLinda Morton's paper "Bring Me ~~Men~~ Integrity: Religious Re-buttressing of Armed

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Masculinity at the United States Air Force Academy" explains how the Academy's gendered mythologies "are 'troubled' as diverse gender performatives proliferate, challenging and subverting the normative power of the Academy's foundational hypermasculinity" (196). Using Judith Butler's notion of the "performative," Mortan demonstrates how the rising number and profile of female cadets and debates about the "don't ask, don't tell" approach to homosexuality in the United States military have troubled the notion of an unproblematic, monolithic heterosexual norm at the Academy and elsewhere. Conservative evangelical Christianity has joined institutional military traditions in an attempt to ensure that "Expressions of gender 'otherness' are institutionally extinguished" (199) She notes that the Promise Keeper's image of the "tender warrior" has been co-opted into this overtly military context, allowing potentially disturbing "feminine" qualities to be reassuringly packaged as signs of manly ethics and responsibility. Morton includes examples of the iconic, uniformed images generated when otherness is extinguished in this way.

Brian Gold's piece takes us into the realms of non-western Christianity, and a further examination of Protestant masculinities, in "Ilhan New, Solder for the Modern Nation: Recovering a Protestant Martial Alternative to Korean Hegemonic Masculinity." Assumptions about the effeminacy of Confucianism had led early twentieth-century Korean nationalists to blame traditional masculinity for the loss of Korean independence. Looking elsewhere for alternatives, such as Roman Catholicism, they also turned to the martial, manly values espoused by businessman and nationalist Ilhan New. Neglected by scholars, New's struggle against the Japanese occupation sharpened his belief in "a Korean Protestant 'Enlightenment' martial masculinity where every male patriot was to be a professionarlly-trained, fit, pragmatic, and self-disciplined soldier" (210).

Rhonda Semple, too, is interested in the intersection between western Protestantism and non-Western masculinities. She gives us a detailed analysis of this process in action at a mission station in India in "Kumani Christians Contesting Masculinity and Belief in Modern Mission." Like Morton, Semple employs images (in this case photograph's from the mission's extensive archives) to assist her analysis of the various negotiations involved in the gendering of a new Christian Kumani identity. The traditional postcolonial critique writes itself: under pressure from a British mission and the British imperial state, indigenous masculinities were colonized by the unequal power relations. Semple is among a growing number of scholars interested in rescuing the complexities of the mission situation from this type of politically well-intentioned but intellectually crude analysis. She carefully documents the everyday practices of clothing, labour and domestic routine to

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demonstrate "glaring contradictions in the mission project itself" (229). For example, many Kumani Christian men joined the Indian Army under British command, gaining prestige and approval back at the mission station. Their families needed more immediate financial support, however, and their wives and children went to work. Likewise the Kumani Christian men employed by the mission as teachers or catechists were not paid as much as their European counterparts, and had to wait much longer for ordination. Once again, their wives and children went to work out of financial necessity. Idealized western gender relations and family organization were contradicted by realities on the ground, just as the idealization of neat and tidy gentlemanly dress was belied by the need for specialized non-Western travel gear and the acceptance of mud stains. Semple's photographs show us men doing the Lord's work in very much their own way.

When I persuaded my bemused but tolerant colleagues to let me build last year's Religious Studies conference around the theme of "Religion and Masculinities," my most immediate motivation had come from my current research project on masculinities and colonialism in the south Pacific mission field. By discovering and analysing scant historical sources concerning the first Melanesian Anglican priest, George Sarawia, I hope to contribute substantially to the deconstruction of the concept of "a male unisex order."[3] As it turned out, numerous academics and graduate students were interested in similar projects from a wide range of research areas; so many that we had to stretch beyond our usual one-day format to accommodate the best of all of the proposals we received. The topic had struck a chord, an impression confirmed by Wendy Doniger's willingness to give us two splendid keynote papers amid her hectic schedule. Both of Doniger's presentations (already promised to other presses) were directly on point: "The Third Nature: Gender Inversions in the Kama Sutra" and "Bisexuality and Transsexuality among the Hindu Gods." I had hoped to persuade her to write a foreward for this volume, but the well-known furore surrounding her recent book *The Hindus* was consuming all her energy. *Bon courage*, Wendy.

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