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Introduction

The last decade has seen a remarkable growth of interest in Christianity among scholars in the social sciences and humanities and among public intellectuals. This surge in scholarly attention to Christianity has followed on the recent increase in its numbers of practitioners, especially in the global South, and its expanding public political role in many parts of the world. The primary object of this issue of *SAQ* is to initiate a dialogue between two emerging intellectual discourses that have been important to the new prominence of Christianity as a topic of scholarly discussion. One of these discourses is being constructed primarily by historians, anthropologists, theologians, and popular Christian writers and has taken shape around notions such as “world Christianity” and “global Christianity.” This discourse holds that while Christianity has always been global in its ambitions and self-conceptions, there is something about its recent growth, particularly in the global South, that is transforming it in important ways. Scholars who develop this line of thought, whatever normative arguments they might also proffer, see themselves as making important empirical claims about the changing nature of contempo-

rary Christianity. The second discourse is primarily philosophical and has moved to make Christian categories and materials central to its projects of philosophical and cultural critique—projects once thought to be firmly rooted in secularist (and largely atheist) assumptions. The most prominent thinkers connected with this discourse are Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, Jacques Derrida, Gianni Vattimo, and Slavoj Žižek.¹ The philosophers (and some theologians) who participate in the second discourse often disregard the discussions of existing forms of Christianity carried out by those participating in the first. At the same time, those who study Christians around the world often set aside the kinds of broad arguments about the social and political import of the Christian heritage laid out by the philosophers and those in dialogue with them. Our contention is that these parallel emerging discourses could benefit from some cross-fertilization. “Global Christianity, Global Critique” is an attempt to start a conversation toward this end, bringing together essays by social scientists (here represented by anthropologists) who study existing Christian communities with those by theologians, philosophers, and historians of religion who have been reconsidering the critical potential of Christianity.

A recent interview with the Radical Orthodox theologians Graham Ward and John Milbank nicely lays out the kind of observation that has driven our efforts here. Ward and Milbank are asked if they think the new visibility of religion and the associated rise of young people studying theology will continue, or if they believe that instead the phenomena will turn out to have been “just a blip in the history of secularism.”² Ward argues that the new public presence of religion and the interest in theology will continue, and secularism will turn out to have been the “blip.” Milbank follows up:

I agree, because I think we’ve got two phenomena at the moment. In Europe, we’ve got this return of interest in religion and theology among educated elites and especially youthful elites. In fact, it’s happening in Europe still more than in the United States. . . . So, you’ve got this intellectual resurgence of religion in Europe, but, then, in the whole of the globe the extension of Christianity is much more a popular phenomenon, particularly in Asia. It seems to me that already these two things are coming together. . . . If these two things continue to do so, then I don’t think the new visibility of religion is going to go away in a hurry.³

Unfortunately, because Milbank’s comment ends the interview, we do not find out precisely how he conceptualizes the links between European schol-

arly interest in Christianity and the rise in its globally diffused practice or what he thinks these links should be. But the notion that there could or should be some connection between the new scholarly visibility of religion and its recent global growth is one that we share, and one that we think invites further reflection.

In relation to philosophy, the authors to whom our contributors attend are principally the three Continental philosophers who have recently written on Paul: Agamben, Badiou, and Žižek. All three share an interest in reading Paul as offering a model of a subject committed to radical change and in drawing from Paul's story nondeterminist models of how such change can come about. Peter Sloterdijk has these philosophers in mind when he writes of Paul as "an idol for lovers of abstract militancy to this day. . . . The first Puritan, the first Jacobin and the first Leninist all rolled into one."⁴ Together, these philosophers—along with others such as Derrida and Vattimo—have put Christian and in Derrida's case sometimes Jewish categories back at the center of debates over how to think about society and its potential transformation.⁵ Although their relationship to the truth claims of Christianity are varied, they have made it possible for philosophers and other kinds of critical thinkers not just to think *about* religion but also in important respects to think *with* it, or at least with some of its conceptual and sometimes its narrative resources.

The construction of a discourse of "world" or "global" Christianity is a more diffuse project than its philosophical re-engagement, lacking the firm connection with a few major figures. Instead, ideas that derive from and contribute to this discourse appear by now in numerous writings both scholarly and popular. But the scholar who has had the most success in harnessing the energy of this discourse into a single coherent narrative is the historian Philip Jenkins.⁶ In his widely read book *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Jenkins, who has a knack for making dramatic demographic arguments and an eye for the telling vignette, crafts a story of Christianity as a religion whose greatest growth still lies ahead.⁷ This growth will, however, not be in its traditional European heartland but rather in the global South. Southern Christians tend, on Jenkins's account, to be far more theologically and socially conservative than Northern Christians and certainly more conservative than the kinds of liberal Christians who until recently have been so central to elite theological debate in the West. This means that as the center of Christianity moves south, so, too, will its dominant ideas and expressions become more conservative, leaving many Northern Christians to reckon with a kind of global marginality they

would never have predicted for themselves even several decades ago. The current crisis over issues of homosexuality in the Anglican communion—a crisis in which conservative African bishops are playing a key role—is taken by those who follow Jenkins as paradigmatic of the kinds of strains that will beset Christianity more generally as its power centers move south.

It is not hard to complicate Jenkins's story, and the kinds of sweeping claims it generates have been subject to criticism by social scientists and theologians who worry about the ways it elides the multitude of projects and practices that give shape to Christian communities around the world,⁸ as well as the extent to which its endorsement of "the global" reflects explicitly Western idioms and concerns.⁹ Indeed, none of the contributors to this issue relies on Jenkins's grand narrative in any important way, and many eschew talk of "global" or "world" Christianity in any strong sense (Elizabeth A. Castelli, Matthew Engelke, C. J. C. Pickstock, and Birgit Meyer) or question it altogether (Brian Goldstone and Stanley Hauerwas), preferring instead a close focus on particular communities, organizations, or streams of the Christian faith (Jon Bialecki, Engelke, Goldstone and Hauerwas, Joel Robbins, and James K. A. Smith). But the speed with which the global Christianity narrative has caught on—and the profile it enjoys in the popular press¹⁰—indicates the extent to which there is interest in telling a new kind of story about the global nature and dynamics of Christianity today. A key question that motivates this volume is thus not so much how best to tell such a grand story as how particular cases (such as the lives of contemporary Pentecostals or nineteenth-century British evangelicals) or problematics (such as sensuality or religious transformation) can be read productively both in relation to and against the global frame.

Whereas it is largely historians, theologians, and social scientists who contribute to and argue over the discourse of global Christianity, philosophers, for their part, seem relatively out of touch with what Bialecki has elsewhere called "actually existing Christianity," global or otherwise.¹¹ It is for this reason that many of our contributors approach the philosophers they discuss with at least as much critical intent as they do those who proffer the discourse of global Christianity. While this is less true of Bialecki, Robbins, and Smith, for others the positions of the philosophers appear as at best suspect and at worst irrelevant (Castelli and Simon Coleman offer the most strongly elaborated criticisms, but skeptical reflections also appear in Engelke, Goldstone and Hauerwas, and Pickstock). And yet—critical to our enterprise—all the essays collected here do in one way or another bring

these philosophical debates into dialogue with how actual Christians have lived in the past, live today, or, in the more theologically oriented contributions (Goldstone and Hauerwas, Pickstock, Smith), perhaps *ought* to live.

A common assumption in reading the work of Agamben, Badiou, and Žižek is that with the erosion of the Continental European Left's traditional foundation new sources of inspiration have been needed to ground political action. Paul, many imagine, has provided this: faithful, uncompromising, militant, universalist. Sloterdijk's observation follows very much in this vein. Yet for us it is worth asking if the shift to Paul is only contingently related to what is happening among religious Christians both inside and outside the West or whether—and to what extent—the global Christian discourse makes the philosophical one seem important or plausible. Is it the currently very evident global reach of Christianity that makes it a reasonable candidate to provide the foundation of what we gloss in our title as the philosophical effort at “global critique”? When we reflect on the role of Christian activism in undoing apartheid, or, more recently, on the ways in which some Pentecostal churches are taking on (in both senses of the term) the functions of the state in parts of the global South, or on the rapidly changing nature of North American evangelical politics as younger believers take up political positions on social justice and the environment once shunned by their parents, a strong case can be made for bringing the “intellectual” and “popular” together in the same frame at the present moment. And yet while such socioreligious action can provide some examples with which to imagine more abstract philosophical projects, we must also acknowledge that these left-leaning instantiations of faith are not necessarily the dominant ones. The individualism foregrounded in many strains of evangelical Christianity (including Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity) around the world, for example, can be at odds with the antiliberalism of, on the one hand, critical theological programs such as Radical Orthodoxy and, on the other, the political visions of Badiou and Žižek (though see Smith, in this issue, for some ways of complicating this observation).

If one goal of this volume is to get conversations going on actually existing Christianities and their philosophical filiations, another is to get them going between Christian intellectuals and their “secular” counterparts. The mix in this collection of theological with philosophical, anthropological, and religious historical perspectives is intentional. By drawing on recent debates over whether critique is secular, Smith's essay, for example, shows how theology and anthropology can be drawn together to produce

what he calls “prophetic critique.” The essay by Goldstone and Hauerwas offers another kind of synthesis: the anthropologist and theologian working together, as coauthors. For his part, Coleman uses Radical Orthodoxy to help articulate what he calls a “committed anthropology.” Not all the authors make such combinations central to the internal arguments of their own essays, but read in relation to one another the essays create many unexpected and productive juxtapositions in this way. Perhaps the best example of this comes from reading the theologian Pickstock and the anthropologist Meyer alongside each other. In this case, we see how two quite different traditions of scholarship can be applied to an effort to understand the sensual aspects of Christian thought and practice, and we also find hints of an argument for why these aspects come to the fore at moments like the present, when Christianity is spreading dramatically to new locales.

As with other volumes of this kind, in which a main goal is to bring different traditions of scholarship into new alignments, “Global Christianity, Global Critique” should not be taken as collecting a representative sample of relevant work. For readers familiar with religious studies and theology, it should be clear that we have chosen contributors from these fields who are already in strong dialogue with philosophy and social thought. Thus, in turning to Castelli, a member of the Bible and Culture Collective and a coeditor of *The Postmodern Bible*, we were keen to include the perspective of someone with expertise in, on the one hand, biblical studies and early Christianity and, on the other, contemporary critical theory. And on the theological side, we have leaned toward the inclusion of those aligned with the program of Radical Orthodoxy, most notable for its simultaneous rejection and reconfiguration of the Enlightenment and its secular settlement, a move underpinned by “the idea that every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective.”¹² Pickstock and Smith are most clearly situated within this tradition, with Pickstock being one of its founding figures in Britain and Smith one of its most engaged advocates in the United States. Hauerwas, though very much the author of his own socially astute theological program, has also been in dialogue with this movement and has been acknowledged as something of an inspiration for it.¹³ The choice to highlight such theological voices was made in part because many of the figures associated with Radical Orthodoxy have been actively engaged in debates with and critiques of the philosophers who have turned to Paul in recent years, and some of them have developed sophisticated if highly critical readings of the social science tradition. At the same time, however, Radical

Orthodox theologians have not devoted much attention to Christianity's current global situation. We therefore felt that an invitation to them to look in this direction might be well placed.

For readers familiar with the social sciences, it will be clear that we have been equally selective on that side. Our own backgrounds and those of our colleagues (Bialecki, Coleman, Goldstone, and Meyer) are in anthropology, and our contributions are for the most part situated within or in dialogue with work that has been grouped together under the rubric of the anthropology of Christianity. The anthropology of Christianity is itself quite new—dating only from the last fifteen years or so. Prior to the late 1990s, Christianity was almost a taboo topic of study in the discipline, for reasons that scholars have canvassed elsewhere.¹⁴ In the past several years, though, Christianity has become an increasingly popular focus, and there is more and more a recognition that it, too, deserves careful anthropological treatment.

The work produced by anthropologists of Christianity has provided a wealth of material on how Christianity is currently lived out in different places, and it has supplied detailed accounts of life in Christian communities in the global South that have been crucial to the development of the global Christianity discourse, even if those such as Jenkins who articulate that discourse have not picked up much of its conceptual armature.¹⁵ At the same time, there has been a growing awareness on the part of anthropologists who study Christianity that they need to engage the work of scholars from other disciplines, such as theology and philosophy, who also work with or in the Christian tradition.¹⁶ All the essays by anthropologists included here reach to other disciplines in this way, aiming to bring their knowledge of the lives of Christians from various parts of the globe into dialogue primarily with recent philosophical work, although in both Goldstone and Hauerwas's and Robbins's cases with work in theology and the history of Christianity as well.

The collection as a whole aims at capturing several developments in *medias res* and probing their largely unspoken relationships to one another. In particular, we have argued that more explicit connections might be forged among the recent recognition on many sides that Christianity is a growing force in the world, the rise to academic and public intellectual prominence of philosophical and theological treatments of aspects of the Christian heritage, and the rapid development of work on Christianity in our own discipline of anthropology (and in the social sciences more gener-

ally). In this introduction, we have viewed these trends as coalescing into the two broad streams of a discourse of global Christianity and of what we might call a Christianizing critical thought. Our hunch has been that these two streams are related to each other in ways not yet fully explored by individuals situated in either one. The essays collected here do not settle the matter of their relationship definitively, but they do push its exploration forward in decisive ways, even as they represent important interventions in each discourse taken on its own terms.

Notes

- 1 The turn to addressing religious issues by philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls, and Richard Rorty is very much a part of the new interest in religion in philosophy. See Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward, introduction to *The New Visibility of Religion in Europe: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics*, ed. Graham Ward and Michael Hoelzl (London: Continuum, 2008), 4. But inasmuch as their projects address the question of how religious commitments might be accommodated within social democratic or liberal political frameworks, rather than how religious categories and materials might transform the philosophical project itself, they are not expressions of the discourse we are exploring here.
- 2 John Milbank and Graham Ward, “Radical Orthodoxy Ten Years On: The Return of Metaphysics,” in *New Visibility*, 151–69, 169.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Peter Sloterdijk, *God’s Zeal: The Battle of the Three Monotheisms* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 30.
- 5 Although there are good reasons to separate out Derrida from the other philosophers we have mentioned, he actually raises the question of the relationship between the global and the Christian in the most explicit way, through his “rather clumsy term” *globalatinization*: “Only Christianity has a concept of universality that has been elaborated into the form in which it today dominates both philosophy and international law.” Jacques Derrida, “Above All, No Journalists!” in *Religion and Media*, ed. Samuel Weber and Hent de Vries (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 74.
- 6 Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 34.
- 7 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 8 See Andy Crouch, “Transmission Routes: World Christianity and the American Church,” *Books and Culture: A Christian Review*, January/February 2010, 11–12; Miranda Katherine Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and Their African Allies Are Reshaping Anglicanism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith*.
- 9 Lamin Sanneh, in his book *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), is particularly critical of the term *global Christianity*, which he understands as an index of Western interests and idioms; Sanneh pre-

- fers *world Christianity*, which he argues “is not one thing, but a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective local idioms, but in any case without necessarily the European Enlightenment frame” (22). This term might also be questioned, however, since the idea of any religion being a “world” religion has its own Western pedigree. As Tomoko Masuzawa has discussed, the idea of world religions came to prominence in the 1930s, and the scholars who argued for it promoted a vision in which “the whole world is undergoing a profound transformation utterly unlike any other in history. At the same time, it is also implied that an adequate appreciation and comprehension of this transformation is only possible from a widely panoramic, indeed imperially global, perspective.” Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 38.
- 10 Jenkins summarized the main argument of his book in the *Atlantic Monthly* (“The Next Christianity,” *Atlantic Monthly*, October 2002), and there have been regular features in major news magazines over the last several years echoing his main points. See, for example, Kenneth L. Woodward, “The Changing Face of the Church,” *Newsweek*, April 16, 2001; and “Pentecostalism’s Rise,” *Economist*, December 19, 2006.
 - 11 Jon Bialecki, “Disjuncture, Continental Philosophy’s New ‘Political Paul,’ and the Question of Progressive Christianity in a Southern California Third Wave Church,” *American Ethnologist* 36.1 (2009): 110–23, 120.
 - 12 John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, “Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock (London: Routledge, 1999), 3.
 - 13 Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock, acknowledgments, in *Radical Orthodoxy*, xi.
 - 14 Jon Bialecki, Naomi Haynes, and Joel Robbins, “The Anthropology of Christianity,” *Religion Compass* 2.6 (2008): 1139–58; Fenella Cannell, ed., *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); and Joel Robbins, “What Is a Christian? Notes toward an Anthropology of Christianity,” *Religion* 33.3 (2003): 191–99.
 - 15 For an exception, see Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 185–86.
 - 16 Bialecki, “Disjuncture”; Fenella Cannell, “Introduction: The Anthropology of Christianity,” in *The Anthropology of Christianity*, 1–50; Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and Joel Robbins, “Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship?” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79.2 (2006): 285–94.