

Milgrom's contribution to the study of Leviticus cannot be overestimated. His hundreds of individual studies have finally been brought together in this *magnum opus* of one of Old Testament Studies' greatest contemporary scholars. While not everyone will agree with every conclusion Milgrom puts forth in his commentary, Milgram's fascination with and passion for the text is manifest and contagious. Students of Leviticus will need to consult this work carefully or risk being considered superfluous or careless. May Milgrom continue to produce and contribute to ongoing research of the fascinating conceptual world of ritual, law, and narrative in Leviticus and the rest of the Torah.

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Taylor, Mark Lewis. *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001. 208 pp. Paper, \$16.00.

Christianity's challenge, according to Søren Kierkegaard, is to forge a balance between being a religion of "cognitive revelation" and being a religion of "concrete revelation." The work of Mark Taylor, who teaches Theology and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary, may be read as a contemporary theologian's response to that challenge. Like his earlier projects, *Remembering Esperanza* and *Beyond Explanation*, which combined sober analysis of classical theological symbols with a sophisticated grasp of current anthropological theory, *The Executed God* is a journey into the soul of America.

According to Taylor, Christ was killed because he opposed the terror-ridden logic of an empire that brought social and spiritual death to its victims. With regard to contemporary American culture, Taylor highlights the ways in which idolatrous lifestyles, the search for respectability, rigid nationalism, uncritical patriotism, and empire consolidation subtly conspire to produce a society in which certain identities are routinely and systematically blamed, victimized, imprisoned, and even executed. These repressed identities constitute a sacrificial population within a culture that views the scapegoating of this group as justified and its punishment as warranted. This approach is reproduced by xenophobic attitudes and reinforced by uneven social and juridical codes that often legitimate the tendency to view dark skin color as an index of evil.

The Executed God is divided into two parts. In the first part, Taylor argues that contemporary American culture is pervaded by a lockdown mentality, in which the security of its individuals and institutions is defined less in terms of social responsibility and trust and more by a festering anxiety toward difference and otherness. The inevitable social consequence is a culture of terror buttressed by a fortress mentality that typically masks its fears by projecting them onto an unwanted population. For Taylor, "Lockdown America" is a society perpetually imprisoned by its own creation, a reptilian culture of fear constantly biting off its own tail in order to survive.

According to Taylor, as an economy of domination based upon gender, racial, and economic hierarchies, those who benefit from prevailing arrangements legitimize the perpetuity of the system and thus their own prosperity by utilizing the sanitized language of freedom and security (the rhetoric of law and order),

while concealing the ritualized violence upon which the system is based and through which it “re-presents” and “re-faces” its own legitimacy. This ritual violence is legalized within the framework of religious and cultural representations that confer legitimacy upon the dominant economies, values, and practices utilizing Christian logic and language to justify and disguise systemic violence, thus undergirding the predatory character of the system. In this way, religion functions as a handmaid for cultural repression.

In the second part of the book, Taylor skillfully poses the theatrics of counter-terror, a specta-critical campaign that creatively and strategically enacts dramatic presentations designed to transgress the theatrics of terror and pave the way to freedom and wholeness. Thus, Taylor’s theatrics of counter-terror is prophetic in content and oppositional in character. It has three crucial dimensions: “adversarial,” “mimetic,” “kinetic.”

First, it affirms a theology of the cross in which the “adversarial” and antityrannical dimension of the crucifixion (which Taylor reads as execution) event is revealed and utilized as a means to mobilize victims of society.

Second, theatrics of counter-terror is also “mimetic,” i.e. artistic and symbolic. As such it develops and defends actions and activities that arrest social psychologies in order to mobilize public prophetic consciousness *en route* to purge institutional logics of terror. Its chief importance rests in its capacity to link liberating public spectacles with the creative and courageous practices of subaltern peoples. In this way, excluded identities are empowered to “steal the show.” Taylor calls a crucial third element of theatrics of counter-terror “kinetic,” i.e., the dynamic quality of a people on the move toward freedom.

Taylor’s stress on the critical agency and emancipatory possibilities of popular movements is to be affirmed. Yet in real terms, what such a movement of resistance will amount to remains unclear. The central issue confronting American popular movements—Labor, Feminist, Eco-feminist, African-American, and Spanish-speaking American struggles—has been how to mold divergent interests, multiple agendas, and highly irreconcilable symbolic orientations into a cohesive counter-force without sacrificing or diluting the profound moral claims of each movement. However, due to the taming of progressive and prophetic practices (most often through a combined process of militarization and commercialization) under the present circumstances of North America’s heightened policy of global surveillance, options seem narrow. With regard to this precarious though hopeful situation, progressive social movements will most likely move in one of three directions: be co-opted by the market powers that over-determine the nature of cultural and knowledge production; undergo pacification—owing to the fear of cultural backlash, governmental surveillance, and deepening xenophobia—thus severely circumscribing criticism of injustices; or become critically and strategically transformed through the creation of global institutional space, the building of forums of critical exchange, and the launching of informed boycotts, struggles, and protest marches as in Seattle, Washington DC, and Rome. Such visionary movements will become multifaceted, international, and cosmopolitan in outlook. This may often mean the surrender of controversial or confusing religious (or ideological) dogmatism for the sake of ecumenical coalition building.

Perhaps the major limitation of Taylor's remarkable text is where and how he locates the source of evil in today's world. One must ask whether in an increasingly volatile and conflict-ridden globe with previously subordinated and/or colonized groups vying for ideological space the struggle is solely against the logic of empire. Recent texts such as Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, Benjamin Barber's *Jihad versus McWorld*, Mark Jürgensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God*, Robert Jay Lipton's *Destroying the World to Save It*, Lee Griffiths' *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God*, and the recent events circa September 11, point to a broad and variegated stream of corporate and systemic evils around the world, most of them tied to religious systems. As the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr and the history of the twentieth century reveal, no cultural, ethnic, or political identity is exempt from expressions of will-to-power that so easily contravene the insecurity and estrangement that so readily pervade group consciousness. The best we can hope for is the creation of context and problem-specific public discursive and dialogic spaces across the new global landscape.

What is refreshing about Taylor's work is not simply his potent critique of interlocking systems of global domination, his exposure of the moral pretentiousness of mainstream Christians, his strident observations of the grinding inertia within Christendom, and his disdain for the obscurantist politics of revolutionaries. Rather, it is his perceptiveness in accenting the movement of God on the margins of society within the forgotten interstices of "civilization." Such work reflects a growing willingness among North American religious scholars to highlight the active spirituality of religious identities and not simply their creedal postulates. By developing a praxis-oriented theology *within* history and *through* culture, Taylor develops a mode of discourse that critically affirms and appreciates the cultural and spiritual capital of subaltern identities as they form communities of reform and resistance. This makes his work a healthy example of the attempt to forge a balance for Christianity between its cognitive ideals and its myriad concrete expressions, a worthy response to Kierkegaard.

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Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean. *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. x+228 pp. Paper, \$14.00.

While teaching students how to write from an academic perspective in any field is never easy, it can be especially difficult in the field of Religious Studies because the neophyte must learn to write from a nonconfessional perspective. This has been an almost annual challenge at the University of North Carolina with freshmen who enroll in the Religious Studies Link through the Writing Across the Curriculum Program—a dual enrollment in English Composition 12 and Introduction to New Testament Literature. The goal of the composition section of the link is to help students take what they have learned in their NT course and write specifically for religious studies. Fortunately, this year's pedagogical task was made much easier with the publication of Vyhmeister's book *Quality Research Papers*, which was the required text for the twenty-three freshmen enrolled in my