

The Anthropology
of Christianity

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Fenella Cannell

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...Introduction...

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Fenella Cannell

*Just because something is "well-known," it does
not always follow that it is known.*—G. W. F. Hegel

What difference does Christianity make? What difference does it make to how people at different times and in different places understand themselves and the world? And what difference does it make to the kinds of questions we are able to ask about social process?

Anthropology and Christianity

Propositions about the difference made by Christianity played a critical role in the fashioning of the broad comparativist theories of society that founded sociology and anthropology. For Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Max Weber, each in their different ways, the characterization of the new social sciences as distinctively secular never precluded a clear recognition of the importance of Christianity. Mauss ([1938] 1985) considered Christianity decisive in the formation of modern Western understandings of the self. For Durkheim, Judeo-Christian religions constituted one important stage in the development and progressive abstraction of the "conscience collective," before the humanist values he predicted would emerge in later modernity. For Weber ([1930] 1992), while all world religions involved features of systematization and innovative thinking that might promote social change, the "elective affinity" between capitalism and Calvinist Christianity in Europe had produced Western modernity's distinctive forms.

Durkheim and his nephew Mauss were, of course, both nonpracticing and agnostic members of originally Jewish families, within a French culture divided between Catholicism and secularist republicanism that still contained powerful anti-Semitic tendencies.¹ Weber was an agnostic of Christian background, teaching and writing in Weimar Germany. For all three of them, it seems, the world in which they lived appeared to be becoming less religiously observant, and yet religious practice as the norm also seemed a recent, almost tangible memory. This modernist sense of being just "after" religion marks the tone of all three in some way, while Durkheim and Mauss were obviously doubly outside conventional Christianity.²

It is now commonplace to observe that each of these writers was a social evolutionist, at least in the loose sense of speaking of one form of society giving rise to another, more complex and less "primitive" form, over time.³ Criticism of the evaluative aspect of social evolutionism, which ranks one person or community as more "advanced" than another, has been a constant feature of anthropological writing for many years. It is also widely understood that such models are teleological, in that they assume that societies are all tending toward the goal of some singular civilization.

It is certainly true that each of these writers invoked a sense of the development of history through successive stages; indeed, each one proposed that Christianity played a key role in the creation of a series of complex but definite one-way changes in social process. It is also well recognized, however, that all three of these writers were skeptical about the advantages of modernity; Mauss's most famous work, *The Gift* ([1924] 1990), in particular is best read as a critique of capitalist ideology (see Parry 1986), while Weber's prose is darkly evocative of the "iron cage" of contemporary work practices and bureaucratic systems that have lost sight of the values they were intended to serve. They were not, therefore, teleologists in the sense of assuming that society was tending toward some straightforwardly "higher" goal. Moreover Weber was explicit in insisting that the patterns of historical development followed by European modernization would not necessarily be replicated in other parts of the world.

This makes it somewhat ironic, therefore, that anthropological and sociological approaches to Christianity have long tended to become mired in a highly teleological reading of the foundational anthropologists, and in particular certain kinds of readings of Weber. The prevailing orthodoxy

for several decades has been a focus on the seeming inevitability of secularization and of the advance of global modernity, while Christianity has been identified as, above all, a kind of secondary or contributory aspect of such changes. In the process, there has often been a tendency to assume that Christianity is an “obvious” or “known” phenomenon that does not require fresh and constantly renewed examination.

Alongside the general preoccupation with charting processes of modernization, there has been a widespread although not total disciplinary bias within anthropology in favor of the claim to be exercising a completely secular analytical approach. As the theologian John Milbank has succinctly noted, this claim is a fiction: “Once there was no ‘secular’ . . . The secular as a domain had to be instituted or *imagined*” (1990: 9). This invention was given a distinctive form in the modern social sciences. While this idea of a secular anthropology and sociology certainly does derive from Durkheim, again it is ironic that the treatment of religious topics in foundational anthropology was on the whole much less hostile than has been the case in some later writing.⁴ As a significant minority of commentators have noted (Bowie 2002; E. Turner 1992; Engelke 2002), anthropology sometimes seems exaggeratedly resistant to the possibility of taking seriously the religious experiences of others. Religious phenomena in anthropology may be described in detail, but must be explained on the basis that they have no foundation in reality, but are epiphenomena of “real” underlying sociological, political, economic, or other material causes. It is not necessary to be a believer in any faith, or to abandon an interest in sociological enquiry, to wonder why the discipline has needed to protest quite so much about such widely distributed aspects of human experience.

In the context of this disciplinary nervousness about religious experience in general, the topic of Christianity has provoked more anxiety than most other religious topics. It has seemed at once the most tediously familiar and the most threatening of the religious traditions for a social science that has developed within contexts in which the heritage of European philosophy, and therefore of Christianity, tends to predominate. Unease about the political affiliations of some types of Christian practice, especially in the United States in the period after the rise of the Moral Majority, has produced the kind of situation described by Susan Harding (1991) in her accounts of Jerry Falwell’s church, as the problem of studying liberal anthropology’s “repugnant social other.” In addition, the understandable desire to acknowledge the complex part played in Euro-

pean and American history by Jewish, Islamic, and other religious traditions has sometimes resulted in blanket suspicion of all intellectual interest in Christianity and the variety of Christian practice around the world. As I found when I embarked on some recent research on Mormonism in the United States, it is surprising how many colleagues assume that a research interest in a topic in Christianity implies that one must be a closet evangelist, or at least "in danger" of being converted—an assumption that would not be made about anthropologists working with most groups of people around the world.⁵

For these and other reasons, I would suggest that Christianity has functioned in some ways as "the repressed" of anthropology over the period of the formation of the discipline. And, as the repressed always does, it keeps on staging returns. The complexity of the relationship between Christianity and anthropology has in fact been pointed out early, well and repeatedly, if only by a few. It is noted, for example, by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1960), in a typically acute essay delivered to a religious audience after his conversion to Catholicism. Both Malcolm Ruel (1982) and Jean Pouillon (1982) analyzed the difficulties of employing the word *belief* in anthropology, given the specifically Christian theological freight of that term, which tends to distort many other kinds of religious reality. More recently, and again from the acknowledged perspective of a Catholic convert, Edith Turner (1992) has sought to develop an anthropological method which allows the possibility that religious phenomena might be real, while at the same time maintaining high standards of ethnographic accuracy. There have also, from the earliest period of anthropology, been some ethnographers who became fascinated by the "syncretic" and missionary Christianities they observed, and who analyzed these in important accounts.

The curious fact is, however, that these insights remained marginal to mainstream anthropology and sociology for a long period and indeed have come to be more widely read again only relatively recently. With a more recent wave of prestigious commentators, including most famously two brilliant contributions by Talal Asad (1993) and Marshall Sahlins (1996), the topic of Christianity has started to move to a more central place again on the disciplinary agenda. Asad, drawing on Foucault, has written of the genealogy of the idea of religion in anthropology, analyzing elements taken from the history of both Christianity and Islam. In an important article on the native anthropology of Western cosmology, Sahlins has observed the extent to which assumptions about the world

that inform the intellectual frameworks in which we operate are drawn from the Christian theology of human “fallenness” and its consequences, including a world that exists in a state of lack.

This book had its inception in teaching and collegiate workshops that took place at about the time that this new wave of writing on Christianity was beginning. The ideas presented here are not based directly on either Asad or Sahlins, although they share more common ground with the latter.

The book contains eleven original essays on localities in different parts of the world where people consider themselves to be Christians. It makes no claims to ethnographic completeness. We have, for example, no contribution solely devoted to continental Africa.⁶ It does, however, offer a significant contribution to the range of comparative material available explicitly addressing what it means for people to be Christian. The authors included here argue from diverse and sometimes opposed theoretical positions. They are united in taking the Christianity of their informants seriously as a cultural fact and in refusing to marginalize it in their accounts of the areas in which they work. This means setting aside the assumption that we know in advance what Christian experience, practice, or belief might be. We offer eleven fresh accounts of particular, local⁷ Christianities as they are lived, in all their imaginative force: a body-building Jesus, a nonimmortal God, a fetishized Bible, Scripture study as “normal science.” Together they begin to suggest ways anthropology might begin to renew its thinking about a religion whose very proximity has hitherto rendered it only imperfectly perceptible.

At the same time, this book makes a contribution to the questions asked by Milbank, Evans-Pritchard, and Sahlins, among others. How has anthropology’s attitude to Christianity—which we understand as both an attempt to separate from Christian metaphysics and a simultaneous assimilation of key ideas derived from those metaphysics—limited the development of the discipline? What in fact is the relationship between anthropology and Christianity?

In considering this question, it is necessary to reach some provisional working definition of the term *Christianity* itself. This is more difficult than it might first appear. Some theoretical discussion in the social sciences rests on the supposition that Christianity has clear, inherent properties leading to repeatable effects when it is introduced into other societies around the world. On the other hand, some anthropologists have reacted against strong predictive theories of the effects of the introduction of Christianity,

and might argue that most of the supposedly defining features of Christianity are chimerical, and can as well apply to many other sorts of religious practice, whether within the so-called world religions or not.

One among many possible examples of this kind of tension would be the diverse views taken on the effects of Christianization on attitudes to the dead. Meyer Fortes (1970, 1979), following an earlier article by Max Gluckman (1937), had placed much stress on the idea that ancestral religion stood in contrast to later world religions. In particular, ancestral religions should not be confused with cults of the dead. Ancestral religions were supposed to be distinguished by the focus of the ancestors on participation in the lives of their living descendants. There was little or no elaboration of ideas about where or how the ancestors went after death (in a way, they were still among the living).

This was contrasted with the situation in salvationist religions, where the fate of the dead person and their arrival in the afterlife was of key importance. In such situations, as in Catholic Europe, the living might pay attention to the dead, but with the main aim of changing the situation of the dead souls (e.g., getting them out of Purgatory by saying Mass) rather than changing the situation of the living.

It is not in doubt that the Christian church as it evolved introduced deliberate policies and practices designed to manage believers' attitudes to their dead, and these teachings changed over time, perhaps most famously with the elaboration of the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, and with the challenge to that doctrine at the time of the Protestant Reformation (see Le Goff 1986; Schmitt 2000). Some writers questioned the basis of the Fortesian comparison, by pointing out that the terminology of "belief" ill described what was central to African ancestor worship in particular (Kopitoff 1968). More recent writing in a cognitivist tradition has challenged the paradigm in a different way, suggesting that such differences may be less significant than underlying cognitive similarities. This work proposes that all humans consider the dead as gone or as having some kind of continued existence, depending on the eliciting context (see Bloch 2002). While in this example the two kinds of approach are not necessarily incompatible, it is clear that the cognitivist analysis allows for a much greater degree of skepticism about any homogeneous or automatic effects following from Christianization.

Many of the contributions to this volume balance these models of what Christianity does against the specificities of local interpretations, and they do so in diverse ways. My own approach in this introduction, as well as of

related work elsewhere (Cannell 2005b), is that Christianity is not an arbitrary construct, but that it is a historically complex one. It is *not* impossible to speak meaningfully about Christianity, but it *is* important to be as specific as possible about what kind of Christianity one means. Christianity—more perhaps even than other salvationist religions—is also a complex object in a different sense. This is because, as historians of the early church such as Peter Brown (1988), Caroline Walker-Bynum (1996), and Averil Cameron (1991) have clearly shown, part of its distinctive character is that it is essentially built on a paradox. The central doctrines of the Christian faith are the Incarnation (by which God became human flesh in Christ) and the Resurrection (by which, following Christ's redemptive death on the Cross, all Christians are promised physical resurrection at the Last Judgment). Although most writing on Christianity in the social sciences has focused on its ascetic aspects, on the ways in which Christian teaching tends to elevate the spirit above the flesh, Christian doctrine in fact always also has this other aspect, in which the flesh is an essential part of redemption. As Brown in particular shows, this ambivalence exists not just in theory, but as part of the lived practice and experience of Christians.

We will not be specifically concerned in this volume with institutional church history, since so much has already been written on this topic by those better qualified to do so. We will be concerned, however, to take up the insight of Brown and others, and to use it to question the ascetic stereotype of Christianity as it has become embedded in anthropology. I would moreover suggest that a recognition of the centrally paradoxical nature of Christian teaching allows us to move some way further in conceptualizing its historical development and, of special concern to anthropologists, local encounters with missionary Christianities.

The nature of this contradiction is such that even where particular Christian churches have, at given times and places, adopted certain theological positions as orthodox and policed them as such, the unorthodox position remains hanging in the air, readable between the lines in Scripture, and implied as the logical opposite of what is most insisted upon by the authorities. Hence the heretical is constantly reoccurring and being reinvented in new forms. Such recurring inventions may take place in the heartlands of Europe or America, or they may develop in fascinating and variable ways in quite different cultural contexts.

This introduction explores the range of issues briefly anticipated here, under several headings. First, I review in more detail some of the contexts

in which Christianity was for many years marginalized in the ethnographic account. Second, we contribute to the debate on the relationship between anthropology and Christianity when we consider carefully the proposition, central to all dominant anthropological views of Christianity, that transcendence is at the center of the religion, and suggest a link between this idea of transcendence, and the idea of Christianity as a religion of radical discontinuity. Third, we review the diversity of Christian practice described in the contributions to this book, which challenge both the notion that Christianity is a merely arbitrary category, and the notion that it is a completely homogeneous phenomenon. Fourth, we consider and reevaluate the defining place that ideas about orthodoxy and conversion hold in the ethnography of Christianity. Fifth, we consider the problems inherent in defining Christianity through theories that prioritize narratives of modernity. Finally, we ask whether it is possible to draw on anthropology's origins to formulate a revived understanding of the relation between the discipline and Christianity and also ask whether we should move beyond the paradigm of Christianity as the "impossible religion."

Ethnography without Christianity

Perhaps surprisingly, Christianity was the last major area of religious activity to be explored in ethnographic writing. Since Durkheim, if not before, the attention of anthropologists has been directed as much to the supposed elementary forms of the religious life as to the supposed underlying structures of kinship, and with a similar assumption: that by examining what was prior to and other than our own society, we would uncover simultaneously what was universal in the composition of human interaction and what was distinctive about both the worlds of both the examined and the examiners. So much is familiar. Less often remarked, however, is the way in which the investigation of Christianity was pushed to the margins of this inquiry. While anthropology proceeded from the examination of "primitive" religions to the analysis of world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, the study of Christian areas of the world was, generally, considered the least urgent object of study.

Two kinds of enquiry were theoretically open to anthropologists of religion. They might have examined Christian practice at home, especially in various European or American contexts. Or they could have worked on the Christianization of colonial populations in other conti-

nents. Different limiting factors seem to have been at work in each case. An instructive instance of the disincentives to focusing on Christianity at home is offered by the beginnings of interest in Mediterranean ethnography in the late 1950s and early 1960s (e.g., Campbell 1964). When young ethnographers began to imagine that interesting fieldwork sites could lie closer to home than the Trobriand Islands, they felt obliged to justify their choice by emphasizing the difference and distinctiveness of the apparently more familiar cultures they were studying—an imperative that probably also influenced the choice of a relatively remote pastoral culture for Campbell's groundbreaking study. In the resulting paradigm of the Mediterranean, this cultural distinctiveness came to be guaranteed by reference to so-called shame and honor behaviors, and to the rigid gender divisions through which these were supposed to operate. Perhaps in part because men were seen as the active enforcers of this culture, women were at first thought of as having less to say. When Ernestine Friedl first went to the field (Friedl 1962), she was assured by her supervisors that Greek women would have nothing "cultural" to tell her.⁸ These culturally unmarked women were usually associated with specifically Christian activities. In Julian Pitt-Rivers's innovative *People of the Sierra*, which in 1954 dealt seriously for almost the first time with Spanish small town ethnography, cultural activities are strongly gendered as male, while women are regarded as those to whom society has assigned the role of appeasing the church by a demonstration of orthodox religious observance. A kind of functional division is assumed between the sexes. The black-clad, rosary-telling women of these Mediterranean ethnographies are figures of conformity rather than of local "cultural" autonomy and resistance. Of course such ethnographies reflected in part a real gendering of roles within some Catholic communities in Europe, in which women may often have adopted a role of greater observance and piety, while men (especially in peasant communities) indulged in a flamboyant anticlericalism in which the priest was set up as the butt of jokes from "real males" (Pina-Cabral 1986: 117). But it is also clearly true that this is not always a predictable or sufficient account of Catholic practice in such communities; compare the accounts of male religious enthusiasm in Christian 1972, for example. In advancing the well-known division between male culture and female domesticity, some of these early ethnographers also made a less widely noticed assignment of Christian practice to the female and therefore implicitly noncultural sphere.

A complementary deficit in the consideration of Christian experience

can be found even in that feminist scholarship which helped to correct the assumption that women had nothing to say. Marina Warner (1976) argued that women in Catholic countries through different historical periods were oppressed through the church's romance with the figure of Mary. Because Mary was unique in being both virgin and mother, she necessarily made women aware of their own failure to emulate her. Catholic women were thus said to understand themselves, at the instruction of the church, as being centrally and inevitably failures. Certainly, Christian theologians have reproduced over long historical periods both an emphasis on the value of female virginity, which can easily produce a somewhat punitive form of asceticism (Brown 1988), and an attitude to the superior spiritual authority of men that, while not without space for alternative interpretations, might reasonably be called patriarchal. However, it is now clear that women's experience of Mary and Christ is historically and regionally variable (Walker-Bynum 1987); that the appeal of Mary for some Catholics may lie instead in a differently constructed notion of her mediatory, almost mediumlike powers (Bloch 1994); and that Catholic women may invert the notion of Mary as model, choosing instead to understand Mary as a woman whose experiences are modeled on their own, most human, experiences of maternal love and grief (Cannell 1991, 1999). Warner tends to identify the whole of Catholic religious experience (women's or men's) with the policies of the church, as though the pronouncements of the Vatican could perfectly determine the experience of Catholics. This has a curious result. The view that women are entirely subject to formation by the church ends by replicating a view of female Catholic experience worthy of the most austere of the Desert Fathers.

Some exceptional anthropologists gradually began to give illuminating accounts of European Catholicism (e.g., Christian 1972; Catedra 1992). These, though, have been mainly focused on rural and peasant communities in the south that could be seen as sufficiently distant from the industrial northwest to allow for an analytic distance from the academy. Protestant Europe and the United States have proved even more difficult for anthropologists to tackle. Both Weber's legacy and modern folk theory tend to lead to the assumption that late market capitalism is formed by Protestantism at the most profound, if secularized, level. But with the return of Protestant groups to the center of the political stage in the American New Right of the 1980s, some anthropologists began seriously to address these issues (Ginsburg 1989; Harding 1981, 1984). This

kind of work is now beginning to be published at length (Harding 2000; Coleman 2000; McDannell 1995) and represents a crucial development, but such writers are still few in number. For many anthropologists, it seems that, unless special circumstances bring it into view, Christianity is still an occluded object.

The treatment of Christianity away from home developed slightly differently. For the British Africanists of the mid-twentieth century, for instance, the dominant models of lineage, tribe, and ancestor worship tended to focus attention away from the issues of Christian missionization, as the notion of honor cultures had eclipsed interest in Mediterranean Christianity. Nevertheless, there were astute and distinguished ethnographers of that period, such as Monica Wilson, whose interest in Christian conversion and social change led to an important early publication (M. Wilson 1971). Wilson tended to view Christianity in terms of its role in social transformation, but James Fernandez (1982) provided an example of the exploration of a distinctive African Christian imaginary in his richly detailed study of Fang syncretic Pentecostalism.

However, in mainstream anthropological circles the most influential view of African Christianity has probably been that provided by Jean and John Comaroff. And it is arguable that this major body of work, despite its valuable accounts of the reception of missionization in South Africa, ultimately subordinates the exploration of Christianity to the narrative of modernization.

Anthropological interest in colonialisms and postcolonialisms has of course both stimulated and required a nuanced view of local Christianities. Yet Christianity often took on a curious relation to that catchword of Marxist-influenced anthropology in the 1980s, "resistance." Jean Comaroff's earlier work (Comaroff 1985), for instance, explores some of the resonances of Tshidi Pentecostalist practice. She offers an illuminating discussion of the combination of Tshidi and U.S. Pentecostalist spatial symbolisms. Yet it is clear that what mainly interests her is the way in which (by, for example, recapitulating the color symbolism of precolonial Tshidi initiation rites) Tshidi Pentecostalist ritual resists incorporation into an "orthodox" Christian practice. Pentecostalism's role in resistance from the margin to the processes of nineteenth-century U.S. industrialization makes it an appropriate signifier for black experience in South Africa. As other Christian experience in Tshidi regions is not easily construed as a vehicle for "resistance," it remains unexplored. The religion of Tshidi Wesleyans is associated with a direct capitulation to the values of the

white, colonialist, and industrializing state under apartheid. The Comaroffs' more recent historical works on South African Christianity draw attention to the particularity of Christian agents as they meet forms of local understanding (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). But despite the value of this work and its wealth of illuminating historical detail, Christianity is nevertheless primarily identified with colonial agency and the compulsory imposition of modernity. A number of other questions, including the question of whether there are intrinsic dynamics of change and transformation within Christian theology itself, are thereby somewhat sidelined, and the association between Christian experience and subjugated orthodoxies—in this case the orthodoxies of modernity—is maintained. Many anthropologists who become interested in Christianity, then, do so almost against their will, initially seeing it as a kind of secondary phenomenon or top coat that has been applied by external forces to the cultures they are studying. This is particularly and understandably true when Christianity has been forced upon people by the actions of the state or of colonial missionaries. With honorable exceptions, anthropology has tended to come at the problem of the significance of Christianity rather simplistically, and has even tended to view it as a homogeneous thing, often covered by the label "the church," whose main distinguishing feature is taken to be its hostility to local patterns of understanding and behavior.

One key body of work for a different kind of anthropology of Christianity, then, may be work by historians on the early church, as it defined itself first as a quasi-millenarian sect within the Roman Empire, and then became at much-debated times and by a series of strange, uneven transformations the official religion of the empire itself. Peter Brown's work on Romano-Christian burials (1981), to take only one of the most famous examples, has subtly and convincingly demonstrated how the relationship of Roman citizens to their ancestors was transformed into the origins of the first Christian saint cults. Both Brown and Averil Cameron are among those historians who have begun to build up a concrete picture of how such shifts in social imagination actually came about (Brown 1988; Cameron 1991). Historians have focused on some of the central dilemmas of Christianity as it created itself as a changing social force—what for instance, could replace the cult of the first Christian martyrs as Christians ceased to be persecuted; how would those strands of Christianity whose millenarian, otherworldly tone most stressed the repudiation of existing kinship ties be reconciled with the continuity of Christian communities

that actually emerged? How could it be that Christianity was inevitably thought through the concepts and intellectual methods of late Classical education, and by those who had been educated in it, but yet developed something new to say? How did the essential paradox of Christianity—its elevation of death to triumph—work to prevent the total assimilation of an evolving Christian theology to secular Roman modes of thinking after Constantine?

Such work forces us to acknowledge the extreme complexity of the questions being asked. The notion of transcendence usually taken to be characteristic of Christianity, for instance, can certainly be traced not only to Christianity but also to the Platonic philosophies of the Greeks and Romans, and perhaps also the Stoic philosophies of Rome, each of which in different ways argued for the existence of a set of abstract moral principles (Justice, etc.) that stood above social obligations, might come into conflict with them, and might require a man to choose them above such social obligations. The demand that a human being cultivate an internal barometer of such matters—that he create his own view of himself in terms of his relation to a form of conscience separable from social rules and obligations—certainly foreshadowed the development of the subjectivity that has usually been presented as distinctively Christian. Insofar as influential early Christian converts of the Roman Empire were themselves steeped in such teachings, they can also be said to have made Christianity in crucial ways. Similarly, the influence of the contemporary Judaism out of which early Christianity grew, and the relationship between Jewish, Latin, and Hellenistic strands in the early church, is itself a complex and intensely debated field in theological and historical scholarship (Ehrman 2000, 613–16).

As Cameron (1991) has pointed out, therefore, the questions which anthropologists, if they are at all alert, ought to be asking themselves—what, in any situation is Christianity, and how can one possibly discern its lineaments from that of the social context in which it lives—are not only the questions of historical colleagues, they are also the questions of Christian thinkers, teachers and officials at all periods in the history of the church. Therefore, the writings of the early fathers on heresy, and of the officials of the Inquisition not only in its later flamboyant stages but also in the centuries of gradual development in the Middle Ages, can all be read as the pursuit of an answer to this question from different points of view. Moreover, as Averil Cameron has noted (albeit with reference to a Kuhnian notion of paradigm shift, rather than an anthropological notion

of social transformation), the evolution of the early church is one of the most important potential areas on which historians, like many anthropologists, are working on the dynamics of what used to be called "culture contact" (Cameron 1991).

The difficulties facing such a renewal of attention, however, are serious indeed. Christianity's comparative invisibility as an interpretative problem for contemporary ethnography, a problem with its own contours, not identical with those of modernity, is by no means a problem of recent origin. It has tangled and still strong roots in the long emergence of social science and social theory themselves out of deist, and then Enlightenment, critique of religion. Social science takes some of its earliest and most important steps toward a separate disciplinary identity by means of a unilateral declaration of independence from metaphysics, including Christian theology⁹—a declaration which, however, it has proved easier to make than to fulfill. I now turn briefly to consider some aspects of that prehistory which had particular consequences for current anthropological thinking about Christianity.

Christianity as Radical Discontinuity

The idea that Christianity constructs, through the Incarnation, an absolutely new relation between man and the world might be said to be the central proposition of the religion. This proposition has itself had a fateful influence upon critical conceptions of Christianity. One of the most powerful—as well as influential, albeit diffusely—formulations of the thesis of Christianity's qualitative distinctiveness is found in the work of the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel. Hegel's interest in the history of religion developed out of a structural contrast between classical, especially Greek, religion¹⁰ and the Judeo-Christian tradition. The many aspects of this contrast turned on the difference between a form of religion in which the divine was present in the world and one in which the divine was essentially thought of as belonging to a world transcending, superior to, and radically incommensurable with the world of time and space. Thus while in Greek religion as Hegel imagined it there could be no statue of (say) Pallas Athena, in which Athena was not in some way actually present, in Christianity a statue of the Virgin Mary is intended in essence as a representation of what is not there—an evocation of the divine beyond this world, and a means to approach it that is necessary precisely because of the distance separating mortals from an ineffable God:

"The divine" in Christianity is supposed to be present in consciousness only, never in life. This is true of the ecstatic unifications of the dreamer who renounces all multiplicity of life . . . and who is conscious of God alone and so could shake off the opposition between his own personality [and God] only in death. It is equally true later. . . . This is either the felt opposition in all actions and expressions of life which purchase their righteousness with the sense of the servitude and the nullity of their opposition, as happened in the Catholic church, or the opposition of God [to the fate of the world] in mere more or less pious thoughts, as happens in the Protestant church; either the opposition between a hating God and life, which is thus taken as either a disgrace or a crime, as in some Protestant sects, or the opposition between a benevolent God and life, with its joys, which are thus merely something received. (Hegel [1807] 1975: 301)

Leaving aside the details of Hegel's chronology and typology of various Christian formations for the moment, we can see here the kernel of much later thinking about the difference Christianity makes. The separation of man from the divine—the origin of the "unhappy consciousness" that recognizes this loss—sets up problems to which anthropologists and historians have recurred again and again in accounts of Christian thinking, including the need for mediation with this distant God, the centrality of a salvationist emphasis in which death (the only place in which man and God can be reunited) becomes the crucial defining moment of life, the setting up of a hierarchy between life and afterlife, with crucial implications for ideas about economy and exchange, and the creation of a new notion of interiority that has its origins in the need of the Christian to consider the fate of his or her own soul.¹¹

Hegel's influence spread in many diffuse ways in nineteenth-century thought, and it is often powerfully evident even in the work of those who had read little or nothing of his writing, or who are not known as Hegelian thinkers. We could observe, for instance, how closely Durkheim's account of Christianity, within his own argument about the development from mechanical to organic social solidarity, appears to follow the logic elaborated by Hegel.

Like Hegel, Durkheim in *The Division of Labour in Society* ([1893] 1997) makes a strong contrast between Christianity and Greek and Roman religions, which, again in an explicitly developmental framework that we will find in all these models, he thought of as intermediate between animism and Christianity. "Gradually," according to Durkheim,

"the religious forces became detached from the things of which they were at first only the attributes." Over history, he thinks, people stopped worshipping the divine element in rocks and other features of the natural world and started worshipping spirits on their own "but still present in space and near to us." For the Greeks, the gods had moved further away to Olympus and only rarely intervened in human life, but were still present and accessible in their temples and statues. "But," he writes, "it is only with Christianity that God finally goes beyond space; his kingdom is no longer of this world. The dissociation of nature and the divine becomes so complete that it even degenerates into hostility. At the same time, the nature of divinity becomes more general and abstract, for it is formed not from sensation as it was in the beginning, but from ideas. The God of humanity is necessarily not so comprehensible as those of a city or clan" (230-31).

Although it refers explicitly neither to Hegel nor to Durkheim, the continuity of this line of thought can be seen, for instance, in the important 1972 essay by Edmund Leach on the dynamics of Christianity in social process, "Melchisedech and the Emperor: Icons of Subversion and Orthodoxy." Leach begins this essay¹² by claiming that "the origin of Christianity lay in a wide-ranging cultural situation rather than in any single event" (Leach [1972] 1983: 68). The "wide-ranging cultural situation" is that of a continuous "oscillation" in Christian practice between the cropping up of small, democratic and radical cults (some of which we might call millennial), which challenge the authority of the church, and which he claims share certain structural features with the original Christian community in its earliest form, and the establishment out of and against these cults, of a more hierarchical and institutional church structure, which can be closely linked with rather authoritarian state forms beginning with the Roman Empire, to which it may lend legitimation. Leach links this political "oscillation" to an essential ambiguity in the structure of Christian thought. Like Hegel and Durkheim, Leach argues that Christianity's radical separation between man and God lies behind this oscillation. Two extreme, opposed positions were logically possible within the doctrine of the Incarnation:

At one extreme, it was held that Christ was always God and his human form only an appearance; at the other, the human Christ and the divine Logos, though housed in one fleshly body, were separate rather than fused. . . . doctrines of the latter kind . . . imply that any inspired human prophet who

feels himself to be possessed by the Holy Spirit is really no different, in kind, from Christ himself. Hence the Incarnation ceases to be a unique historical event in the past; it becomes a perpetually repeatable event belonging to the present. (Leach [1972] 1983: 75)

Such dilemmas were, thinks Leach, central to many of the arguments about the Arian "doctrine" (later heresy), which the Council of Nicaea firmly established as what one recent historian has called Christianity's "archetypal heresy" (R. Williams 1987).¹³ For Leach, the argument that each person of the Trinity was eternally and equally God reinforced the nonrepeatability of the Incarnation. Since no man could rival Christ's union with the divine, God's power was to be channeled through established intermediaries, especially through the priesthood and the emperors who could be consecrated only by them. Yet the possibility of direct union with the divine could be repressed only partially and is continually liable to revive in, for example, inspirational Protestantism (Leach [1972] 1983: 88).

Whatever the accuracy of Leach's account of historical Arianism, we may for now simply note the influence of his general line of thinking, traceable back to Hegel; the struggle over the mediation of divine power is one of the aspects of local Christianities that has been best documented in ethnographic writing. The pioneering work of William Christian on Spanish Catholicism and other writing on saints' cults in Catholicism, on alternative forms of priests, and on struggles to achieve church endorsement for locally chosen mediators has highlighted the extent to which struggles for control of mediation may be taking place not episodically, but continuously (Pina-Cabral 1986; Catedra 1992; Christian 1972, 1992; Ladurie 1981; P. Brown 1988; Cannell 1999). The work of Pina-Cabral, in particular, lucidly formulates a particular kind of insight into European popular Christianity. Pina-Cabral describes for the Portuguese Alto Minho region the characteristic cults of the "incorrupt bodies" (local people popularly declared saints because their bodies are found not to have decayed after burial), the "noneaters" (local people said to subsist on the Communion wafer alone), and other connected practices. He declares, "The Portuguese peasant, like all Christians, lives in a fallen world, one of hardship and despair, permanently threatened by impending death. Yet he believes that there is a state of perennial life which can already be achieved in this world. To overcome this contradiction, he has recourse to entities which, because they are not clearly classifiable as dead or alive, can be used as mediators" (Pina-Cabral 1986: 235).¹⁴

The mediation of the power of a God withdrawn from the world of mortal men thus becomes a key trope in the anthropology of Christianity. The same perception also drives most anthropological treatments of ascetic practices in Christianity; because God has withdrawn from the world, spirit and matter have become opposites that can never again be fully reconciled. Moreover, spirit may be perceived as "beyond" and "better than" flesh, since spirit is that of which God is made.¹⁵ This becomes the reason for fasting and other forms of self-mortification, in which the person limits the claims of the flesh in order to increase the space in himself that is given to the spirit, and thus come a little closer to the divine ideal. And the irreconcilable divergence between spirit and flesh, or spirit and matter, becomes in turn, it is argued, the basis for many other kinds of dualistic opposition in which one element is thought of as "beyond" the other, including symbolic oppositions between the genders.

However important this focus on mediation and asceticism has become, however, the definition of Christianity as determined by transcendence in Hegel's sense was also taken up in a range of connected propositions about changes in human understanding of the universe and of the self. At this point we need to remind ourselves of one such aspect, which is perhaps best known to anthropologists through the work of Mauss on the concept of the person (1938), but more recently discussed in the important volume edited by Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes (1985), *The Category of the Person*. Mauss was particularly interested in the effects of Christianity in creating a new concept of the socially defined self or, in Mauss's terms, "person." Here, as in *The Gift*, Mauss relied (like the early kinship theorists) on material drawn from comparative law and contracts. Working from the evidence of the "rules" of a society, he claimed, it would be possible to extrapolate its values, and to trace the development of the definition of what constituted the person, legally and ethically understood. His essay is therefore concerned with the movement from the *personnage* of tribal society, who is no less a self, but simply a different kind of self, to the birth of conscience as a sense of interiority connected with morality. While, like a number of other commentators both ancient and modern, Mauss saw this shift as being in several ways foreshadowed in Greek Platonic and Roman philosophy, he was also like them in attributing the most important change to the influence to Christianity: "It is Christians who have made a metaphysical entity of the 'moral person' (*personne morale*) after they become aware of its religious power. Our own notion of the human person is still basically the Christian one" (358).

So obvious was the truth of this argument to Mauss that he dealt with the Christian person in a page and a half, remarking that he could here do no better than to rely on long labors already undertaken by the theologians (Mauss [1938] 1985: 358). He notes, however, the importance of the Trinitarian controversy. In it the concept of the person passed through a crucial stage: "Unity of the three persons—of the Trinity—unity of the two natures of Christ. It is from the notion of the 'one' that the notion of the 'person' (*personne*) was created—I believe that it will long remain so—for the divine person, but at the same time for the human person, substance and mode, body and soul, consciousness and act" (20). From this, all later Western philosophy on the development of the person as "psychological being" has taken its starting point (361).

As N. J. Allen (1985: 41) points out, Mauss's much-criticized (and easily criticized) evolutionist framework for the comparison of societies is not a reason to discard all the observations of his essay. Much of what he suggests about the West is translatable into the terms of historical investigation, rather than a priori assertion. It is worth comparing the thesis with Foucault's account of the growth of the "*scientia sexualis*" in *The History of Sexuality* (1976). While Mauss proposes a developmental paradigm of societies, which perhaps still implicitly retains some notion of the progressive movement of history, for Foucault the history of the self can be excavated only archaeologically, by means of the examination of the discontinuously successive forms of knowledge-power that have produced it. Nevertheless, Foucault's excavations still place Christianity in a crucial position in the creation of the modern self, a position that it occupies for him in part because he sees it as producing a form of interiority that foreshadows and enables the growth of modern psychological and psychoanalytic regimes. "The confession," says Foucault, "became one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth . . . Western man has become a confessing animal" (60). The contemporary belief in sexuality as the key and hidden foundational truth about identity grows for Foucault out of the Christian sacrament of confession, which teaches people to believe in the reality of something hidden, inaccessible at first not only to their interrogator, but also to themselves, which must be brought slowly into the light of day as a form of offering (61–79).¹⁶

Like the philosophers who preceded him (but of course unlike Mauss and Durkheim), Foucault is in fact discussing the history of Western "power/knowledge," and not undertaking a comparative exercise across

cultures.¹⁷ Here we should note that we have moved from the original notion of transcendence as the "unhappy consciousness" to theories (both before and after Foucault) in which what unfolds from that is the notion of personal interiority.

Whether considered as a fact or as an illusion, this notion of interiority has been applied especially to the analysis of Protestant, and particularly Calvinist, thought and cultures. And these, in turn, have been widely considered at least since Weber ([1930] 1992) to have been formative in the creation of the modern Western person under capitalism. Weber's thesis is, of course, that it was the ironic fate of seventeenth-century European Puritanism finally to run its course as a religion and become absorbed in the development of capitalist process. Once-religious concepts, such as the "calling," are uncannily transformed in secular capitalism, he argues, so that they retain much of their power as tools of self-fashioning, while being emptied of the otherworldly impulse which previously gave them real meaning.

This famous text is often remembered in the social sciences as a *locus classicus* for Weber as a prophet of universal secular modernity. This view traduces both Weber's careful historicism and his genuine interest in religious experience. We should also remember, however, another aspect of Weber's argument, which is that it, too, assumes the logic of asceticism in Christianity. That is, in Weber a Protestant variant of Catholic ascetic practice becomes the work ethic, and a Protestant transformation of the Catholic ascetic religious vocation becomes the calling in Protestant, and later secular, daily professional life.

An interesting inversion of Weber's secularization argument has been offered by Louis Dumont (1985: 93–122) in an essay inspired by Mauss's essay on the person. Some elements of Dumont's argument are familiar. He again traces the notion of the person as an interior, reflexive self back to Platonism and Stoicism, via Christian conceptions of the soul under the early church controversies. The Calvinist reading of God as Will, most clearly shown in the doctrine of predestination, completes the creation of the capitalist individual. The Calvinist person has internalized the duty to imitate God thus conceived of as Divine Will and must therefore act on himself in continual self-fashioning, in order to show forth a reflection of the Almighty.

If Weber's is a secularization theory of modernity, Dumont's can thus be said to be in a sense a Christianization theory. Certainly, both point to the internalization of asceticism and its accommodation with the world:

Weber's worldly ascetic and Dumont's *homo economicus* share much of their genealogy. Yet there is also a key difference of emphasis. For Dumont, the modern state is "a transformed church." With Calvinist theology, a model of the individual that was originally developed in the context of asceticism and orientation to the life beyond becomes the central type of the modern person. The Calvinist vision of God as above all Will produces the notion of the Christian as necessarily imitating God through a process of the constant exercise of the will in the processes of self-fashioning. These theoretically equal individuals, the *homo aequalis* to a South Asian *homo hierarchicus*, are increasingly imagined as the basis of the state. For Dumont, the foundation of the modern state in individualism is precisely what most deeply attests to its fundamentally ecclesial character.

One of the most important explicit attempts to define the question of the relationship between the ideology of capitalism and the ideology of Christianity (although here subsumed within the general category of "salvationist religions") is offered in Parry 1986. In this article, Jonathan Parry offers a rereading of Mauss that draws attention to Mauss's insistence on the notion of gift versus commodity as an artifact of contemporary Western ideology. In Parry's reading, Mauss's work on the Maori and other famous examples is really intended to demonstrate not that gift societies preceded commodity societies, but rather that an absolute gift-commodity opposition had little purchase in precapitalist societies and is an artifact of capitalism.

Parry proposes that there is a link between the contrast between altruism and business and the introduction of an economy of salvation. (His 1994 work on Hinduism makes it clear that this is not confined to Christianity, but also readable in other "world religions.") The idea of salvation is correlated with a realm of exchange that is superior to (and transcendent of) ordinary, earthly exchange, and whose distinguishing feature is that it is premised on unidirectional transactions, in which gifts pass out of the worldly frame and into the beyond. Such gifts are therefore not in any ordinary sense reciprocated, although the believer may hope that the reward for altruism will be salvation in the next life; that his gift will, as it were, be converted from one economy to the other on the condition that he acts in the spirit of the heavenly economy while still on earth. But Parry (1986) suggests that, like the mutually dependent gift and commodity identified by Mauss, such an unearthly economy can exist only in opposition to a still-acknowledged worldly economy in which

ordinary reciprocation and sociality play a much greater part. Parry's punctilious style of argument enables us to isolate what in many other works is somewhat blurred over—that is, the complexity of the suggested connections between Christianity and the late capitalism of which this bifurcated ideology is typical.

This suggestion is of course in some ways consonant with the Weberian story of capitalism and the rise of Protestantism. But while Weber's is essentially a trajectory of modernization, in which Christianity plays an ironic if intimate part that ultimately leads toward the disenchantment of the world, theses like Parry's and Dumont's suggest a more complex and active role for Christian thought and Christian institutions.

Diverse Christianities

Fundamental to any understanding of Christianity's diversity today is the opposition between broadly Protestant and Catholic Christianities. Four of the essays included here concern parts of the world that are predominantly Roman Catholic, and seven concern areas that are predominantly Protestant. All are committed to a historically particular understanding of Christianity. Anthropologists writing on Catholicisms have long had available the example of William Christian's work, which has shown that popular Catholicism cannot be described without an integrated account not only of the impact of changes in Vatican policy and teaching at the local level, but also of the distinct histories of the different religious orders and their varied relationships to forms of religious practice.

Among these, the nineteenth-century Jesuits were central actors in the construction of local practice in Tamil South India, as described by David Mosse in this volume. Mosse argues that South Indian Catholic personhood had been and still is widely enacted in dramatic rituals of possession and exorcism, in which Hindu demons are expelled by Catholic saints. These saints are themselves governed by a nonviolent Christ within a hierarchical model of Christian divinity reminiscent of caste, and Mosse associates this pattern with the accommodationist policies of the Jesuits who converted this area in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but who were eventually disgraced and expelled. When reformed French Jesuits returned to Tamil South India in the nineteenth century, it was as the agents of the new orthodoxy of personal agency and personal responsibility, which took an austere attitude to both saints and spirits. These priests demanded that local Catholics replace explanations of personal

suffering centered on demonic possession, with those in which the sin or folly of the individual was the cause, and confession was central to the cure. Exorcism remained an area of tension within this form of Catholicism, as while resisting local demand as largely frivolous, the Jesuits were never able to divorce themselves entirely from the possibility of a "legitimate" need for exorcism, since this of course continues to be acknowledged in contemporary Catholic doctrine.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart found ubiquitously in Catholic fishing households in Kerala, as described by Cecilia Busby, apparently carried with it few such orthodoxies of an interiorized Catholic practice. The area seems to have retained the relatively relaxed attitude to religious accommodation that characterized its first Portuguese Jesuit priests in the sixteenth century. Indeed, Busby describes the logic of the Keralan Sacred Heart as being driven by an idea of renewable, material power. She further argues that the Sacred Heart is not construed just in terms of local Hindu ideas of religious power (*shakti*), but also in terms of local (Dravidian) kinship, best understood as a processual flow of gendered substance.

By contrast with these essays from South Asia, Olivia Harris and I both write on areas originally converted and predominantly organized by Franciscans as part of the late-sixteenth-century expansion of the Spanish Empire. The particular interest of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation Franciscans in a structuring of time into the ages of the Father, Son, and (in millennial time) Holy Ghost has been studied by historians including Phelan (1959, 1970). What has most often been said of the Catholic practice both of the Laymi area and of historic Bicol is that given the relative shortage of priests, native or syncretic concepts have survived in the absence of complete institutional control. However, this kind of statement reveals very little of the logic of such interactions or of the ways in which local peoples were responding to specifically Franciscan ideas. Both the Laymi preoccupation with successive epochs and the Bicolano reference to ages of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost clearly demonstrate this interaction, but time has been construed differently in each area. For the Laymi, epochal time is central to their understanding of their own Christianity; in Bicol, it is a more marginal concept, evoked most often in discussions of the decline of virilocal marriage and associated kinship forms, not of religious conduct (Cannell 1999: 52–54). Franciscan doctrine features in the Bicol ethnography primarily as a message evaded; while eighteenth-century Franciscan sermons stressed the risen Christ (as

Danilo Gerona explained to me) and the nineteenth-century reformers stressed the transcendent God, I argue here and elsewhere (Cannell 1999: 133–200) that Bicol Catholics are deeply devoted to a “dead Christ” and are little concerned with the economy of salvation.

If Catholicism is diverse despite the central control of the Vatican, the multiplicity of Protestant churches is even more so. Most of the mainstream Protestantisms that figure in this volume are either Lutheran or Calvinist (rather than Anglican or Episcopalian). Two of them are directly historically linked: both Danilyn Rutherford and Webb Keane discuss areas of the former New Order Indonesia, which were colonized by the Dutch and converted by Dutch and German missionaries. Harvey Whitehouse’s discussion of Papua New Guinea is also mainly centered on mainstream Protestant practice. The Fijians discussed by Christina Toren are strong Methodists, the Malagasy described by Eva Keller are Seventh-Day Adventists, the Piro of Peter Gow’s essay were converted by the secretive Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), whose public and non-missionary arm is the Wycliffe Society, which works on the translation of Bibles into native languages, and the Swedish arm of the Word of Life group (described by Simon Coleman) is one of a proliferating number of charismatic Faith churches, based in the United States.

All these churches define themselves against Catholicism, and they share a good deal of theological common ground. But they have also diverged widely from each other. Methodists follow the emphases of the English brothers John and Charles Wesley, whose eighteenth-century movement stressed the need for revival of both spiritual experience and social conscience in Christian practice, and whose view of the need for Christians to work all their lives at “perfecting” themselves in Christlike conduct softened the teaching on salvation through grace alone. Seventh-Day Adventism, often regarded by other Protestant churches as a cult, is one of a group of churches that emerged around modern-day prophets in the religious revivals of East Coast mid-nineteenth-century America. The SIL, although in many ways *sui generis*, especially in how little is known of its teachings, belongs to the aggressive American Protestant missionization of third world countries. It is clearly linked to a nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics in the United States both ambitious of global influence and deeply suspicious of and competitive with Roman Catholicism, especially when the latter is apparently connected with socialist or Communist regimes. The Faith movement of which the Word of Life Church forms a part, on the other hand, is a form of religious

revivalism that is part of America's religious discourse with itself as much as with outsiders. As Coleman points out, it aims to address the dissatisfactions many people have with religious experience within the mainstream churches and deliberately proposes a different view of the relationship of faith and the physical world.

It is also important to bear in mind that Roman Catholicism and Protestantism did not cease to oppose and mutually define each other at the time of the Reformation. Indeed, much that is central about the tone of religious teachings in any given period is a product of the relationship between the two, especially because the Catholic Church has at times sought to disarm its Protestant critics by selective imitation. The asceticism and (relative) rationalism of the nineteenth-century French Jesuits described by Mosse in this volume, for example, in many ways evoke stereotypical mainstream Protestantism of the period. One could also look at instances of innovation in church policy. The Catholic Church of the twentieth century became increasingly concerned that it was losing ground to Protestant missionaries in Latin America and other traditional Catholic strongholds. This perception influenced moves around the period of Vatican II away from hierarchical and conservative styles of pastoral authority at local level and the replacement of the Latin Mass with services in local languages. All the Christians in this volume are indirectly linked together through the complex shared histories of the churches to which they belong.

Orthodoxy and Conversion

Anthropologists and sociologists looking at Christianity have often expressed the inherent difficulty of deciding whether nonstandard Christian practice is or isn't really Christian. On the one hand, they are aware that Christianity is a changeable phenomenon; on the other, it seems somehow unsatisfactory to class together all sorts of practices and beliefs that have little resemblance to each other, or to metropolitan or theological Christianity. This problem has been particularly acute in the study of convert populations, a domain of special interest to anthropology. Robert Hefner concludes that conversion is best defined as "not a deeply systematic reorganization of personal meanings" but a "new locus of self-identification" (1993: 17), while Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (1994: 2) tackle the issue by proposing a reclamation of the term *syncretism* from its pejorative connotations to describe religious synthesis and

urging alertness to the ways in which political capital can be claimed through the construction of either mixed or pure identities.

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This amended, nonpejorative language of syncretism points in useful directions, for example by reminding us that the Catholic Church has always had its own theory of syncretism and its acceptable limits, currently known as inculturation theory. Inculturation theory presents quite a sophisticated attitude to local culture, claiming that local forms of approaching God may all be acceptable, and even necessary, as long as the presence of a transcendent deity presiding over all is acknowledged.¹⁸ This definition would cover many of the cases presented in this volume, but it would not cover all of them. As I show in my essay on the Philippines, Bicolano Catholics have only a very muted and ambiguous interest in the economy of salvation, and in most contexts they do not focus on the transcendent idea of God.¹⁹ Yet given their profound devotional engagement with Christ and the Catholic saints, it would make no sense to say that they are not Christians. I shall argue that while the idea of transcendence usually defines the limits of Christianity's own self-definition, not all local Christianities are Christian in this way (nor do they all put together all the elements that have been identified as belonging to transcendence). Indeed, while most of the exported Christianities have historically been transcendent Christianities, Christian thinking has always carried other selves within it.

The question of how far one can go without ceasing to become a Christian has always been the subject of active and explicit debate in missionizing churches. The original function of the medieval Catholic Inquisition was to distinguish what was mere superstition in European folk practice from what was pernicious error, idolatry, or heresy. The Catholic Church has taken a relatively tolerant approach since Vatican II. Protestant churches have sometimes been less permissive about continuities in existing social customs. Much has depended in each case on what the church defines as religion and what it allows as culture in a particular locale. Yet this distinction, as a number of anthropologists have recognized, is problematic because it is in itself a characteristic of Christian thinking and tends to be meaningless in many other systems. Missionary decisions as to what custom could harmlessly remain and what must be abandoned have therefore tended to seem arbitrary from the point of view of the people they are serving, and have often, as in the case of the *korwar* described by Rutherford, or the Fijian funerals of Toren's

chapter, provided the opportunity for much greater continuities of thought than the missionaries had ever intended.

This volume joins this debate by supplying a comparative ethnography of orthodoxy itself. The contributors do not ask simply whether the people they describe are "orthodox" by mainstream Western standards; they also ask to what extent, if at all, different groups share the mainstream Christian interest in "orthodoxy" and boundary maintenance. For the Bicolano Catholics about whom I write, four centuries of Roman Catholicism have rendered familiar the idea of "religion" as a separate sphere of life. It is also well known that several commonly held ideas are not popular with the clergy, and this is a cause of some anxiety. Thus far, one could say that Bicolanos are interested in the orthodox.

On the other hand, these anxieties come into play only because people engage daily in activities on which the Catholic Church frowns—most notably, spirit mediumship and healing. For most people, dealing with the spirits is not undertaken in a mood of countercultural defiance toward the church and the priest; rather, there is constant discussion of how the two can actually be reconciled. Thus, while acknowledging that priests say that spirits are "demons," ordinary Catholic Bicolanos give a wide variety of reasons for continuing to treat with them. They will say, for instance, that while other spirit mediums may deal with evil spirits, they themselves deal only with good, Catholic ones. Or they may explain that although spirits are of a lower order of powers than Christ and the saints, they are "all under God" and that the efficacy they have in healing is in fact given to them by God himself (Cannell 1999: 134). Spirit mediums are in fact among the most regular devotees at saints' shrines and pilgrimage sites, although they, like most Bicolanos, may not flock so eagerly to confession and other activities directed by the priest, usually placing more importance on religious devotions carried out at home. Somewhat comparable situations seem to exist in both Kerala, as described by Busby, and Tamil South India, as described by Mosse, for in each of these places local Catholics are much less concerned than their priests to separate Catholic worship from local Hindu traditions and are in fact resistant to pressures toward increased exclusivity of worship.

On the closely associated point of whether or not local Christians are interested in the idea of conversion, we have two strongly contrasting examples in this volume. The Piro of Amazonian Peru demonstrate an impressive indifference to it, closely analyzed by Gow. From the point of

view of Christian missionaries, the Piro are a kind of ultimate challenge; they resisted several prolonged attempts to convert them, made by both Catholics and Protestants, before being suddenly and dramatically won over by the SIL. Gow explains that for the Piro, the idea of conversion had so little relevance that they immediately forgot it, claiming that they "have always been" Christians. The Piro do recall the advent of the SIL but describe it primarily as a reorganization of social relations—or rather, seen through a shamanic lens, a restoration of proper social and trade relations—with whites through which the Piro have gained access to goods and education earlier withheld from them by rubber plantation owners.

For the Bolivian Laymi, at the other extreme, the idea of conversion to Christianity is so compelling that they constantly dwell upon it, and particularly on the idea of its incompleteness. According to Harris, not only do Andean saints' shrines have to be periodically "charged" with the power of the Mass to prevent them turning against the community, but the Laymi doubt that they themselves can ever be absolutely proper Christians, a self-perception that seems to fill them with melancholia rather than with defiance. Laymi rituals play out again and again the problematic and unresolved relationship between a Christianity clearly understood as dominant and ancestral powers that nonetheless cannot be entirely abandoned. Christianity, then, does not always and equally convert people to the idea of conversion.

The difficulty of understanding the force of conversion and orthodoxy in particular ethnographic contexts is finely illustrated in Christina Toren's piece on Fijian Methodism. Toren's piece is important because the people with whom she worked are, by the standards of mainstream Methodism, highly observant and correct Methodists. Unlike many of the other groups of people discussed here, Fijian Methodists do not express understandings of Christian teaching that are in obvious tension with those of their church authorities, nor do they avoid church services or deliberately relocate religious activity away from those areas where ministers have close control. On the contrary, as Toren shows, they are regular churchgoers and encourage their children to attend Sunday school. Indeed, Fijian adults say that there is no contradiction between "the way according to the church" and "the way of the land," and they argue that their children are learning the two together. This is a case, then, not only of orthodoxy but also of orthopraxy. Yet Toren argues convincingly that Fijian Methodists' conception of God is ultimately

shaped after the pattern of Fijian chiefs, whose power is not otherworldly in origin but is dependent on the support, attendance, and compassion of their followers. For Toren, this equivalence is maintained through the attitude to kin learned in daily interaction, and in rituals such as funerals for dead relatives. These rituals are most emphatically not anti-Christian; they follow the Methodist liturgy and are directed toward the Christian God. However, Toren shows that a child gradually learns, as he or she grows up, a set of procedures for dealing with the immediate bereavement, the treatment of the body, the gathering of the mourners, and the conduct of the funeral. Through following these procedures, children learn the emotion of social compassion and share in the experience of attendance on God that is at the center of Fijian worship.

Toren's example illustrates possible shortcomings in some accounts of colonial Christian conversion as the "discipline of the body." The tendency of these (usually Foucauldian-leaning) accounts is to suggest that while Christian doctrine may fall on uncomprehending ears in non-Western milieus, profound changes in subjectivity can be and are wrought mainly through the drilling of convert bodies in Christian practices. Neither of these propositions seems to hold true in Fiji. First, here as in many Christian locales, doctrinal content is in fact of considerable interest to convert populations. Yet, second, neither the embracing of this doctrine nor the following of Christian bodily observances of all kinds has resulted in the Fijians having the same idea of divine power as Charles Wesley did. It might be objected, of course, that if disciplinary regimes were extended to Fijian kinship practices, we would see a more thoroughgoing change in outlook. The historical fact is, however, that this has not happened,²⁰ and that it seems that neither orthodoxy nor orthopraxy automatically produces such changes.

If Toren's piece directs us to consider that the meaning of orthodoxy is not self-evident, so too with perhaps even more force does Keller's account of pious and observant Seventh-Day Adventists in Madagascar. Keller's essay resonates with two of the central arguments of this book: first, that it is not sufficient to assume that we know in advance what Christian experience is—even when popular practice appears to be most highly conformist to the standards of the church concerned; second, that it is unhelpful to treat Christianity as simply a secondary phenomenon of underlying political or economic change. Keller argues against explanations of conversion to Adventism which claim that it is a reaction to slave status, an attempt to reestablish dislocated communities in conditions of

urban migration, or has some other clear socioeconomic cause. Indeed, her informants gain no particular advantage from conversion, and she argues that their continued adherence to their religion must therefore be explained in terms of the religious experience itself. Keller's ethnography of Adventist Scriptural study provides an illuminating sense of the intellectual excitement and satisfaction of Adventists engaged on the pursuit of truth.

Adventist worship emerges in this account as surprisingly cerebral; indeed, Keller notes that Adventists look down on what they view as the extreme emotionalism and drama of neighboring Malagasy Pentecostals. This draws our attention to a final connected point: religious engagement in Christianity can come in a wide variety of forms. The intense expressiveness that the analytical Adventists shun is precisely what attracts the members of the Word of Life Church, for whom the ideal worship form is speaking in tongues, which frees spiritual and ecstatic communication from the shackles of any single language or specific semantic content. The devotional intensity of Bicolano Catholics' relationship with the dead Christ is expressed in dreams, visions, stories, and the singing of the *Pasion*; the commitment of Mosse's South Indian Catholics is expressed through exorcism; Biak Protestants compose hymns on the model of traditional *wor*. Anthropology needs to develop further a comparative ethnography of devotional practice, without privileging some forms over others. In the existing literature, accounts of mainstream Protestant worship tend to be particularly flat. It may sometimes be true, as both Whitehouse and Keane argue here of Protestant services they describe, and as has also been claimed of mainstream Catholic liturgy, that public worship can at times be mechanical, drained of affect, and can become boring even to its participants. Such routinization may even be a deliberate policy on the part of church leaders, in the interests of member control. But we have also seen that these conformist appearances can be deceptive and that (as Keane has also shown) even where they are true, they do not necessarily exclude a deep engagement with questions of Christian faith; this is expressed in other contexts, including debate with missionaries and church leaders.

The Problem of Modernity

Like some other recent work, this is skeptical of the proposition that the modern world will see religions declining and religious faith ceding to

secularism. This dissenting opinion is not confined to students of fundamentalisms but has certainly been given support by the recent interest in Christian, Islamic, and Hindu movements thus classed together.

Susan Harding's important book on Jerry Falwell's Southern Baptists explores some of the ways in which these movements have been tied to explicit and politicized discourses on modernity. Agreeing with other authors that American Biblical Fundamentalists had been placed through most of the twentieth century in the symbolic position of the other of modern secularism, she explores in detail the attempt made by Falwell to break out of that position and occupy the widest possible terrain in American cultural and economic life, without making any change of doctrinal direction toward liberal secularism. For Harding, this attempt was made through a characteristic deployment of rhetorical language that functions through preaching and conversion, through moral campaigns, and through mass marketing and the creation of a "sacrificial economy": "*God does miracles because people give sacrificially*; because they obey God and act on faith" (Harding 2000: 124). Even the occasional doubts of Falwell's own congregation as to his financial probity worked to his advantage. They challenged believers to assert the faith, which would bring them blessings in return.

This area of literature, then, is concerned with what one might call the further adventures of the Protestant-capitalist nexus originally identified by Weber. Here we must be careful in our attributions. Weber himself certainly described "elective affinities" between Puritanism and its apparent converse, capitalism, and certainly also argued that the alliance between the two had led, strangely, toward secular modernity in the West. But Weber did not thereby commit himself to the view that modernity could take only this one possible form; nor did Weber regard the study of religion as of little interest except insofar as it contributed toward the study of secularization. Still less did Weber take a triumphalist view of the process of secularization; witness his melancholic account of the modern capitalist caught in the "iron cage" of asceticism without religion, a meaningless drive toward wealth-creation (Weber [1930] 1992: 182).

While some neo-Weberian commentators have retained the nuance and complexity of Weber's own attitude to social change, it is ironic that other forms of neo-Weberian analysis have appeared to lend weight to accounts of the inevitable spread of modernity and globalization, in which religion is treated as a topic clearly subsidiary to the processes of secularization, and where the claims of modernity as an ideology in itself are never

properly analyzed. Even for balanced and clear-minded commentators such as the sociologist Steve Bruce, the idea that secularism succeeds a religious outlook is understood as factually established beyond serious question, while attempts to qualify that idea are for Bruce simply revisionist tinkering (Bruce 1996: 6–7).²¹ Such tendencies appear even in work of considerable historical and ethnographic sophistication, such is the power of the notion that the key “meaning” of Christianity is that, like John the Baptist, it ushers in a mightier reality that will succeed it.²²

But a lesson we can derive from Harding’s material is that Weber’s ideas have themselves fed into a widely held folk theory in Europe and America. Harding’s ethnography is based on the fact that for many ordinary Americans, whether they practiced a faith or not, the idea that the world was becoming less religious as it became more modern was accepted as fact. So too, perhaps less explicitly, was the idea that mainstream religions were weakening in the contemporary world, and that Protestant churches were perhaps more liable to such draining of vigor than Catholic ones.²³ Thus, Falwell’s fundamentalism is pitted not only against a truly secular modernity, but also against more liberal and culturally mainstream Protestant churches—churches regularly described as progressive. The practice of one’s religion is always conceived of in contemporary America as in some way a defensive (if not offensive) reaction to the threatened erosions of the modern world. The ethnography Harding gives us therefore makes an important point for our purposes: all those concerned are acting as though some crude version of Weber’s theory of secularization were an absolute truth. They are enacting one particular myth about modernity; they all believe in the essential opposition of modernity to Christianity, or at least fear it might be true. So in considering the relation between the two, we have to reckon up not only how far it may be true that institutions and ideas have changed in the ways Weber predicted, in any given locality, but also how far it might be true that the people in these localities believed that this would be so and therefore to some extent enacted that belief as history. In that sense, ironically, Weber himself has been treated as a prophet.

This returns us to a point close to that made by Mauss on capitalism and brilliantly explicated by Parry (1986): the most tightly tied bond between Christianity and modernity is at the level of the ideology of modernity. Thus, neo-Weberian arguments that proceed from the actual links between modernity and Christianity in the West to propose that the

same developments will proceed everywhere are flawed. This proposition is in fact part of the ideology of modernity itself.²⁴

Coleman's contribution to this volume considers a further development of this complex of ideas about Protestantism and modernity. The Faith Christians with whom he works constitute a church of more recent origin than the Southern Baptists, and they define some of their central understandings of divine power differently. While the separation of language from materiality is crucial to Harding's account of Falwell's church, Coleman argues that Word of Life Church members precisely elide the distinction between language and spirit and the body. Placing an emphasis on the spoken word, rather than the Bible text, Faith Christians conceive of language as objectified and corporeal; that is, language is not opposed to the physical world (cf. Cannell, Rutherford, Keller, and Keane in this volume). "To read and listen to inspired language is to fill the self with such language, even in a physical sense," Coleman writes. "To 'speak out' is to give an aspect of the stored self." Faith Christians conceive of both the media and the world of monetary exchange as arenas that can be dealienated by the extension into them of the self thus understood. Faith Christians regularly make gifts of alms, but these are ideally made to strangers and not to members of the church community who might be expected to return them. The gift instead stands as a token of one's spiritual growth, and its giving away is part of a contract with God. By this act of faith, the giver is insured that God will bless him with further accumulation, and that his self will therefore not be lost in the anonymous world of capital. Word of Life members are therefore refusing the central ideological opposition between gift and commodity that capitalism proposes. Significantly, they are doing so simply with the resources of capitalist Protestantism itself, and not (as in Pina-Cabral's argument) by engaging an alternative folk tradition that will supply the deficiencies of a transcendent Christianity's discourse on the body. Coleman's account shows how such Christians accept the economic structure of capitalism as inevitable, yet refuse to allow it to be an "impersonal" power, reconstructing it as ruled by a higher contract between God and Christians inserted within it. While conservative Protestants achieve similar outcomes without contesting the separation of spirit and matter, however, Faith Christians take a different route, asserting that money must in the end partake of the same nature as prayer, and thus cannot act independently of it.

The single issue over which the contributors in this volume most

diverge is that of the relationship between Christianity and modernity. These differences are, perhaps, partly accounted for by the areas in which they are working. Those who work in regions dominated by mainstream Protestantism—especially where it collaborated with a colonial regime like that of the Dutch in Indonesia—are probably especially inclined to focus on these questions. In doing so, they are responding both to the strong Weberian tradition of analysis, which of course traced the connection between Calvinism and the rise of the capitalist work ethic back to the seventeenth-century Netherlands, and to the stated intentions of the Dutch government and missionaries themselves. Moreover, many local informants will themselves discuss their Christianity in terms of “being modern,” especially when, as was the case in New Order Indonesia, the postcolonial government explicitly demanded that all its citizens should modernize themselves by acquiring a world religion. The link between Protestantism and discourses of modernity is, therefore, in some parts of the world a demonstrable historical fact.

I suggest that to say this is not, however, the same as claiming that disenchantment and modernization are proceeding everywhere and in similar ways where conversion takes place. Harvey Whitehouse takes up a position at one extreme on this question, arguing in relation to his Melanesian evidence that there is such a thing as a universal transformative effect of the introduction of Christianity, and that the introduction of Protestantism in Papua New Guinea supplies the paradigm. For Whitehouse, conversion to Protestantism introduced a new and distinct form of cognitive experience for Melanesians, centered around the learning and reproduction of text-based religious liturgies. Standardization and replicability enabled the rapid spread of these new forms, in an account highly reminiscent of Weberian rationalization. However, there are key differences in Whitehouse’s argument. For him, these new religious forms are defined primarily by their cognitive features. This is not simply a matter of institutional transformation, nor changes in the group identification of individual converts, but a literal acquisition of a new way of thinking by a population. However, this radical new form of religion or thought does not simply displace and replace preexistent forms. Older forms of Melanesian religion, exercised in rituals that evoke a different, more bodily and sensory based and less abstract kind of cognition, continue to exist alongside the new forms. Indeed, Whitehouse argues elsewhere (1995) that the new rationalized religion is itself inherently limited in its appeal because it cannot tap into these sensory and emotional forms of cognition.

Webb Keane also sees evidence in Sumba of the gradual intrusion of specifically Protestant formulations of interiority and agency, here supported by the demands of the Indonesian state. For Keane the transformation is by no means as sudden or wholesale as Whitehouse suggests it has been in Melanesia but is conducted through a complex series of renegotiations of meaning that, for both missionaries and Sumbanese Protestants, center on differing understandings of the power of words and other symbolic communication. Here and elsewhere (e.g., Keane 1998), Keane shows that Protestant anxieties focused on what they saw as native idolatry, which implied a confusion between God and images of gods, between spirit and matter. The Sumbanese, on the other hand, objected to the Protestant notion that God always hears our prayers; for them, this seemed to be placing an almost idolatrous reliance on words themselves rather than recognizing the uncertain nature of all communication with the divine. Keane further develops in this volume the insight that although distinctive Sumbanese understandings of the relationship of words, things, and agency still continue, many local people are being increasingly called on to enact attitudes, such as sincerity of speech and intention, that rely on Protestant notions of authenticity and moralized interiority. For Keane, this is occurring even though the absolute body/spirit distinction toward which the missionaries are striving is less realistic than the categories through which his Sumbanese informants view the world, and even though he thinks that modernity is a destination at which no one ever fully arrives.

It is perhaps Danilyn Rutherford's ethnography of Biak—poised between Indonesia and Melanesia—that offers some of the most serious obstacles to the narrative of Christianity as inevitably promoting modernity. Paying careful attention to the ways in which missionaries were addressing the Dutch faith revival back home as well as their immediate Biak audience, Rutherford outlines an evangelizing movement based equally on a belief in the working of the Word of God on the inner person and on the example of self-disciplined labor set by the missionaries in building houses and other appurtenances of civilization. While mass conversions in Biak apparently confirmed the success of this campaign, and while Biaks certainly entered with some willingness, even enthusiasm, into the disciplinary regimes of modernity—in some cases competing to send brothers to Jakarta to become government officials—the effects were not what the missionaries had anticipated. Rather than the Word of God doing its work as “a vehicle of meaning that would sink into the souls of

men everywhere," the Bible in Biak came to be treated as booty. The authority behind the Bible was understood by Biaks not as a single, omnipotent voice of God, but as a mysterious absence, an untranslatable potential. Power continued to be understood by Biaks, Rutherford writes, as "the lure of the ancestral . . . of kinship . . . and of the foreign"—something that had left Biak and gone missing, but which constantly promised to return in surprising forms, available for appropriation.

Here in fact is the crux of the matter for Rutherford. For the missionaries, conversion to Christianity was envisaged as a single, blazing revelation of a universal Truth. This Truth is expected to have a permanently transformative effect on men's minds, but "the surprise that leads to conversion should be the heathens' last," since once the Truth is known, nothing can surpass or supersede it. Biaks, however, refused to be surprised by surprise; given their understanding of how power works, that arrival of the new was exactly what they had learned to expect. Rather than disrupting the categories through which they understood the world, rather than appearing as something beyond local truth, the advent of Christianity suggested to the Biaks that they had been right all along.

This example is suggestive in a number of ways. One might briefly reflect on the nature of the Christian missionary encounter in general, from the point of view of the missionaries. Most Christian missionaries take with them as explicit theology the idea that they are the bearers of a unique Truth, knowledge about God, which is different in kind and potential to any other knowledge. Whatever their level of tolerance of local practices, most of them also believe that this Truth is communicable to all God's creatures, so that all of them may have access to the promise of Salvation. They also believe themselves in the power of conversion, perhaps on the Pauline model. Light enters the soul and nothing is ever the same again.

Missionaries often experienced discomfort and dislocation in areas where conversion was persistently declined, or where they feared it had been accepted for the wrong reasons. In discouragement, missionaries have generally taken refuge in two alternative conclusions. Either God is testing his servants, spiritually refining them by withholding success, or there are powerful forces working against them: the devil is struggling to keep souls out of heaven, perhaps. Sometimes, however, the confusion felt by missionaries is extreme. They may even abandon the perception (which, as Nicholas Thomas [1994] has pointed out, has often been an advantage of Christianity over secular colonialism) that people of all

racess are equally human under God and wrestle with the temptation to view their potential converts themselves as devils, or alternatively, as less than human, sullen, deanimated.

Encounters with cultures whose ontologies fit poorly with Christianity's most basic and unrecognized assumptions tend to trigger such destabilizing effects. We have already noted the attention anthropologists have paid to missionary misunderstandings. Missionaries in Madagascar rejoiced when the Merina abandoned their "idols" (*sampy*) without realizing that *sampy* are always disposable and renewable in Merina culture (Bloch 1986: 21). The narrow definition of religion that most Christian missionaries shared led them to disregard kinship practices in many parts of the world, although in fact these were integral aspects of local ideas of power, fertility and renewal, and so on. But in addition to these misunderstandings, one can see in some cases a process of more radical lack of fit between the unspoken ontology of Christianity and that of local systems of thought with which it comes into contact.

Christian missionaries have been relatively comfortable with systems that do not place value on the idea of a single, exclusive Truth; competition with other divinities has been a familiar problem for Christianity since its inception. But systems of thought that place no emphasis on moral interiority of the particular kind that Christians call the soul have been more confusing. Early Philippine missionaries rejoiced over the readiness of their Tagalog, Bikol, and Visayan converts to enter into the rituals and gestures of repentance, yet Vicente Rafael (1988: 100) has convincingly shown that they were soon bewildered and frustrated by their parishioners' refusal to understand the point of the sacrament of confession. Rafael has argued that a different set of understandings of the "inside" of a person and the ways in which someone entered into relations of exchange with others were persistently at work in the postconversion Christian Philippines, and I have argued in this volume that Rafael may even have understated his case in some respects. Against Keane's interesting account of how Protestant missionaries are working to encourage behaviors in their Sumbanese converts that produce in them the notion of "sincere" interiority, we can therefore place the example of the Philippines where the chain of connections soul-guilt-repentance-salvation/damnation does not appear to have been completed even in the course of more than four hundred years.

Most unsettling of all, perhaps, are those groups of people who, like the Piro and Biak discussed in this volume, accept Christianity but reject

that idea that in becoming Christian something both unprecedented and unrepeatable has occurred. Societies that recount conversion as part of a narrative of traumatic change—as is the case in many parts of the Andes—are much more readily comprehensible from a Christian perspective than those that “forget” it has happened, or which construe it as just one in a series of similar foreign arrivals in the past and the future.

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At work here, I would suggest, is an underrecognized link between Christian ideas of time and event and Christian ideas of transcendence. It is clear that the idea of the unique and irreversible event in many ways has to underlie the idea of transcendence. The dominant Christian ideas of personal conversion depend on a break in time. Conversion changes the individual, and however much he might backslide, the event itself cannot be undone.²⁵ We might say that the hierarchical relation of the “world beyond” and the “world of the here and now” established in a salvationist Christianity has a temporal dimension. Time following conversion is not just time after but time beyond. Even though he has not yet entered eternal time, the convert is thought to be touched by the transcendent and enter into its economy. But because it is less explicit in Christian doctrine than other ideas about time, such as the various eschatologies and end-time scenarios or the regeneration of the world at the crucifixion (Bloch and Parry 1982: 14) or other ideas about the implications of transcendence, such as the need not to mistake matter for spirit, this assumption of nonreversible event may be the most disturbing when it is contradicted. In Rutherford’s language, the “shock” of Christian revelation was intended for the Biak converts but rebounded instead on the missionaries.

Universal theories suffer from the difficulty that they need to be applicable in all cases. It should be clear from this section that I would not claim with Whitehouse (and the neo-Weberians) that Christianity is rightly seen as inevitably a modernizing force, even if in some parts of the Protestant world processes akin to what Weber described as “rationalization” are in progress. It seems to me in fact that the proposition is placed the wrong way around. It may be that the history of modernity is inextricably bound up with the history of Christianity, but this does not mean that the meaning of Christianity is sufficiently explained by the history of modernity. The potential for meaning contained in Christian doctrine is in fact demonstrably always in excess of any particular social situation to which it might be considered functional.

In the hunt for “a view of our origins”—that is, a glimpse of the

origins of capitalist thought—we may first ignore every other aspect of our own Christian history and then think of Christianities of conversion only in terms of the teleologies of modernity or global capitalism. Christian experience cannot be seen properly if it is tied exclusively to a supposedly destined trajectory of modernity, nor indeed to a postmodernity that so often tacitly repeats the logic of modernity (Osborne 1995: 3–4). Talal Asad's important 1993 study persuasively understands the category of religion as a product of Christian thinking that has entered anthropological theory. Yet might it not also be the case that the use of the term *modernity* itself has become superstitious in the social sciences?²⁶ Insofar as it implies an irreversible break with the past, after which the world is utterly transformed in mysterious ways, it is itself modeled on the Christian idea of conversion. Is it possible that anthropologists, as well as missionaries, find difficult the idea that one might encounter a transcendental Truth without becoming part of its logic?

Beyond the Impossible Religion

Most theories of Christianity and its effects consider it as a religion of transcendence, and for the greater part of this introduction this is what we have also been doing. God withdraws from man, and as a consequence man is left in a state of incompleteness that can be resolved only at death, when he will pass into the other world. From this view are derived those minority of arguments in recent anthropology that have asked about the character of Christian thinking as such, rather than its connection to modernity. Many of these arguments, such as those by Pina-Cabral, emphasize the inevitably dualistic character of Christianity (particularly its mind/body split) and propose that ascetic Christianity deals badly with issues related to bodily life: folk beliefs and figures of local power drawn from outside the Christian repertoire, such as ancestors, are then said to be called into service to supply the deficiency. Similar arguments have also been applied to situations in which Christianity is present together with another complex religious tradition (see, e.g., Stewart 1997: 204–31; Iletto 1979; and Rafael 1988).

Many of these arguments draw on Bloch and Parry's influential formulation of the significance of mortuary ritual (1982). In that collection, the editors propose that funerals are ritual mechanisms through which, symbolically and ideologically speaking, the continuity of the community is asserted over the disruption caused by the death of an individual

member of that community. Mortuary ritual enfolds a range of symbolic assertions that death is not incomprehensible and arbitrary, but is ordered, anticipated, or even chosen, and forms part of a wider whole of renewal. In the process, the authority structure of a society is legitimated, and the collection makes a very strong connection between the supernatural powers that a society venerates, and the sources of political power and—still more—political legitimacy.

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The primary objective of the Bloch and Parry volume is to look not at Christianity, but at universals in religious processes, which for the purposes of their argument are there defined almost entirely as ritual processes.²⁷ Nevertheless, a consideration of the approach taken in that work to Christianity is relevant here, not only because the book has been widely influential, but because it prompts a direct confrontation with some of the most difficult issues we have been attempting to raise in this introduction.

The central example given in the Bloch and Parry volume of a Christian context is Olivia Harris's rich essay on the Catholic Laymi (1982). Harris states that the Laymi maintain an "uneasy truce" between Laymi ancestors, who remain charged with important aspects of the reproduction of fertility, and the Catholic saints and deity (73). Thus far, the book seems to conform to the "impossible religion" model of Christianity we have already discussed. Elsewhere in Bloch's own work, Christianity features as a religion inimical to natural kinship and superimposes on it a logic of superior, church-authorized artificial kinship terms (Bloch and Guggenheim 1981). However, for Bloch this tendency in Christianity is only an instance of a tendency in almost all religious ritual; for him, almost all religion²⁸ is in this sense seen as impossible, since all ritual applies a transcendental logic whereby the value of a real life beyond this world is asserted at the expense of the immediate and mortal world.

Bloch's first two books, on the ethnography of the Merina of Madagascar (Bloch 1971, 1986) are in fact concerned with Christian populations, since the Merina have long been Protestant converts, while their former slaves mostly became Catholics. However, in some ways Bloch's account of the Merina suffers from the same indifference to the properties and significance of this Christian experience, as many of the other Marxist-influenced works cited in the early part of this introduction; indeed, for the most part, Malagasy Christianity is of interest to Bloch only insofar as it seems to him to have been entirely absorbed into the preexisting forms

of Merina social organization and ancestral religion, whose ideological resilience is one of his central topics.²⁹

Because of this characteristic lack of interest in local Christianity *per se*, it is in some ways difficult to assess Bloch's claims. Certainly, Bloch demonstrates a powerful transcendental logic in Merina religion, which repeatedly stresses that the ancestors are the only source of moral good and of the "real life"; however, he never explicitly discusses whether any of this transcendentalism is due to the influence of Christianity on Merina social logic, rather than vice versa. We might also ask whether he has fully recognized that the model of the transcendent which defines this analysis of ritual is itself a profoundly Christian model; in one sense, indeed, the work belongs to that long tradition of antireligious social science that incorporates Christian models by its refusal of them.³⁰

At the same time, the Bloch and Parry thesis that (in effect) transcendent logic is a property of ritual in general, rather than Christianity or "world religions" in particular (however much these might have their own forms of the transcendental), serves as an important counterbalance to the assumed contrast between "world religions" and "local religions" that follows from the kind of Christian exceptionalism we have traced back to the diffuse originary influence of Hegel.³¹ It may be that we need to reassess the notion that Christianity is so easily distinguished from other religions by its celebration of the impossible world beyond, and to think of the attitude that religions take to transcendence understood in this way as much more of a continuum.

If transcendence is not necessarily exclusively Christian, then it is even more clearly true to say that Christianity is not exclusively a religion of transcendence.

Once again, we may take our cue from historians of the early church, including Brown (1988), Cameron (1991) and others. For scholars of this period, while the Christian church was becoming established in the Roman Empire and in post-Rome Europe, there are of course intense debates about continuity of thought and tradition. But these debates tend to be less heavily burdened with the teleologies of modernity, and somewhat less inclined to blur the "Christian" and the "Western." Historians of this period see with clarity that Christian doctrine is not a monolith but a constantly evolving object, in which what is orthodox for one generation may come to be defined as heretical in the next, depending not only on the development of theological controversy but also on the history of

the struggle for authority within the emergent central authorities of the church.

The central dilemmas of Christian theology are clearly visible in the period in which the division between heresy and orthodoxy was first defined. The Trinitarian controversy; the problems over the nature and limitations of reason in Christian discourse; the sense of unspeakable mystery, with the consequent relativization of the role of verbal debate and the rise in the role of visual imagery and imagistic speech but its counterpart in the mystical notion of the Word—these sources of tension are already present in the late classical world Cameron describes. From these debates emerged the dominant paradigm of Christianity as the religion of transcendence, but this paradigm always carried with it, even if only as negation, the other possible visions of Christianity that existed in relationship to it. Some later heretical movements, like the Pyrrhenean Catharism described by Ladurie (1981), are said to have a direct historical connection with earlier heretical thinking (in this case, Manicheanism). But such genealogical connectedness was not necessary for the reemergence of similar problems. One might see the endless return of the problem of idolatry, from the iconoclastic controversies of Byzantium to the perplexities of Sumbanese Calvinists, as just one instance of Christian doctrine being haunted by its own expurgated other self.

Heresy—a term only ever applied as abuse—thus has a much more complex history than orthodox narratives would sometimes have us believe (Williams 1987; Wiles 1996). As Peter Brown has shown, the ambiguity of the Christian message could never be entirely eliminated. Even ascetic Christianity was never entirely hostile to the body; indeed, asceticism's intense focus on the body could convert it into a privileged site of spiritual struggle as well as of spiritual peril. Contemporary Christian movements, such as the Seventh-Day Adventism discussed in this volume by Keller, or American Mormonism (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints), on which I am currently conducting research, also propose, in different ways, a vision of the afterlife far less distant than that of mainstream Christianities. The Mormon Celestial Kingdom is unhesitatingly described by most ordinary Mormons as "very much like this world," only perfected, and Mormon doctrine states that it will literally be this world, renewed and transfigured at the final Resurrection. Moreover it is a unique and central teaching of Mormonism that kinship will be not abandoned but completed in the next world.

One response to such examples is to dismiss the Adventists and the

Latter-Day Saints as cults: their teachings can have no bearing on the essential nature of Christianity. Yet this assessment has little more analytical weight than does the label *heresy*. Although there are elements of innovation in both churches (based on the teachings of their respective prophets), however, there are also overwhelming elements of continuity with earlier Christian teaching. Indeed, all of Mormon teaching and prophecy is cast as a further revelation of the meaning of the Old and New Testaments and a restoration of parts of that meaning which have been lost. Mormonism therefore draws both on earlier forms of orthodox Christianity and, as John Brooke has argued (1996),³² also on those Christian traditions that were themselves marginalized and considered heretical in English and American Puritanism.

Even transcendent Christianity, therefore, was never unambiguously otherworldly, and even orthodox Christianity contained within it the shadows of its own alternative ways of thinking. Christianity is a complex historical object whose parameters are by no means arbitrary but which also cannot plausibly be described except as being in tension with itself. Thus, as Reynaldo Iletto (1979), for example, has elegantly demonstrated, Christianity's meaning is always underdetermined by any single historical, social, or ideological context in which it is deployed; its meaning inevitably exceeds such contexts, even if, as in the case Iletto gives us, it is deployed by power holders for the purposes of domination, and even if most of the potential interpretations of Christian doctrine inevitably remain unrealized in social action at any one time. Thus we must be cautious of anthropological paradigms of Christianity that present it as solely an ascetic tradition, rather than as a fundamentally paradoxical tradition, a fault of which even Sahlin's magnificent article "The Sadness of Sweetness" (1996) is partly guilty.³³

The implications for anthropological studies of non-Western Christianities are twofold. First, when a locality encounters Christianity, it is never obvious in advance what that "Christianity" is; it can be defined only in reference to its own historical development. Second, however unyieldingly orthodox the form of Christianity that may be visited on another culture, it can never contain only a single message with single possibilities of interpretation, because Christian doctrine is in itself paradoxical. Although anthropologists may recognize in theory that Christianity has this complex character, in practice, as we have seen, most anthropological writing tends to revert to a rather simplistic modeling. The concept of a distinctive formulation of the transcendent is powerful

in Christianity, and is a predominant, although always historically developing, idea in most forms of orthodox Christian thinking, including most colonial Christianities. It is therefore appropriately a central focus of anthropological discussion. However, encounters between Christianity and local cultures cannot in fact be adequately typified as encounters between transcendent and nontranscendent religious conceptions, both because the transcendent may not be the sole preserve of Christianity and other world religions, and because Christian thinking itself is never solely or unequivocally otherworldly.

One belief which all orthodox Christians, together with those they dismissed as heretics, held in common was a belief in Christian exceptionalism. Christianity, like Judaism, has taught that it is an unprecedented and a singular revelation of the truth, a "new song" sung to the Lord. It is when this vision of itself is met with indifference by another culture that Christian thinking seems to fall into most confusion. As anthropologists, we may in part have this expectation about Christianity embedded into our own theoretical expectations. Christianity always makes a difference, but that difference may not be as one-dimensional as we have supposed.

A central aspect of the tradition of Christian exceptionalism that we have been considering here is the transferal of that exceptionalism onto the trope of modernity. We saw that the model of the unrepeatable event in Christianity, after which the world is irreversibly changed, is key to the understanding of conversion as well as to Christian cosmology and eschatology.³⁴ I have argued that this notion of the event after which nothing is ever the same again has become annexed by the ideology of modernity. In anthropology, this has happened perhaps above all through the medium of neo-Weberian interpretations. Yet Weber himself was profoundly interested in religious experience and saw the ebbing away of religion in contemporary capitalism as by no means a cause for celebration. I have argued that what began as a critical hypothesis offered by Weber (that secularization paradoxically proceeds through Protestant ethics and institutions)—a hypothesis that certainly illuminates historical change in some places and times—has become confused with a widespread popular conviction that religion is inevitably inimical to modernity, and that for better or worse modernity is winning. This conviction, which ought to be regarded as an ethnographic datum about the ideology of the West, has instead become lodged in much sociological and anthropological writing as though it were established fact. That only a minority

of writers have been skeptical of these arguments must certainly be due to the peculiar relationship between anthropology and theology noted at the beginning of this introduction. Anthropology, as part of social science, defined itself in its origins as what theology was not; since the theology it was repudiating was specifically Christian theology, anthropological theory has always carried within it ideas profoundly shaped by that act of rejection, from which there can therefore never be a complete separation. Moreover, because of this uneasy relationship, anthropology has on the whole been less successful at considering Christianity as an ethnographic object than at considering any other religion in this way.

What answer, then, could we make to the question posed at the beginning of this introduction: What may we take from the legacy of the founders of the discipline? Durkheim, Mauss, and Weber all regarded the arrival of a transcendent Christianity as an irreversible moment of transformation, and each built this perspective in different ways into sociology: because this seemed to them to be well known and well established, because debates over the nature of Christianity were still politically sensitive ground, and because the thrust of their inquiring energies lay elsewhere. Yet they also shared a deep sense of the importance of understanding the history and theology of Christianity. Mauss read widely on the history of the Christian church; Durkheim debated issues in religion with Catholic friends such as Charles Péguy; Weber's immersion in nineteenth-century debates about the nature and history of Christian revelation is obvious. This sense of engagement has to an important extent been lost in recent anthropological writing. Anthropologists have in certain ways remembered the letter and forgotten this spirit of their mentors. This has tended to promote the inflexible attachment of the study of Christianity to a theory of modernity, and a downgrading of any serious engagement with what Christianity, in all its historical particularity, might mean. We might do well to recover some of the serious comedy of Marx's *German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1970). That text is not only a critique of religion but also a critique of the critique of religion. Marx, who lacked a paid position as an explainer of society, understood better than perhaps anyone else before or since the depth of the subterranean connections between Christianity and its ideological and sociological critics and investigators. If we can stop presupposing that Christianity changes everything forever, we may be able to begin to see the experiences of Christianity, in all their diversity, complexity, and singularity, for what they are.

Notes

- 1 As demonstrated by the Dreyfus affair, on which Durkheim wrote (1969).
- 2 This serves as a powerful reminder of the many ways in which Christianity is absolutely rooted in Judaism, both historically and theologically. For Mauss and Durkheim, interestingly, it sometimes seems as though the extensive analysis of such similarities is being lightly stepped around, in favor of an emphasis on the distinctive features of Christianity as such.
- 3 The dominant intellectual evolutionist model is Lamarkian and not strictly Darwinian.
- 4 One thinks here, for instance, of Weber's almost wistful remark that he had "no ear" for religion (Weber [1919] 1946), or of Mauss's doctoral thesis (published as Mauss 2004) on types of prayer.
- 5 Whenever I teach a course on the anthropology of Christianity, my students without fail are curious to know what my own religious position is; in the interests of transparency, it may be useful to the reader to know that I am not a member of, or a regular attender at, any church (although I have a Methodist family background), and that I would describe myself as a sympathetic agnostic who takes seriously the religious experiences of others and is open to the possibility that these might at some point occur even in my own life.
- 6 This particular omission is purely a matter of the contingent history of this volume. Our original contributors included the Africanist Maia Green, who has done fine work on Pogoro Catholic Christianity in Tanzania (e.g., Green 2003), but who was later unfortunately prevented from pursuing her contribution because of work commitments abroad. I will take this opportunity to acknowledge, in the absence of this essay, some of the other recent work written on Christian groups, particularly Pentecostals, in Africa, including Peel 2000, Meyer 1998, and Englund 2002.
- 7 That is, contributors are attentive both to local cultural practice and to the particular type of Christianity prevailing in the area they study. Clearly, one needs to know not only which church or religious order is involved, but also at what period and with what specific doctrinal and social emphases it arrived in a locality, as well as how these have evolved. For a concise and useful review of the long-standing general debates in the anthropology of world religions about the relationship between the global and the local, see Stewart and Shaw 1994: 13–17.
- 8 This tendency was of course part of the wider (and well-known) debate in the anthropology of the period about the theorization of gender and the independence or otherwise of women's perspectives in different cultures, which it is not the intention of this introduction to reproduce here.
- 9 Among other key references on this complex area, see Milbank 1990, which critically discusses the claims of social science to have freed itself from

religious thought. Some of the analysis offered here, although arising from a different impetus, coincides closely with some of Milbank's arguments, especially his reading of the influence of Weberian sociology. However, I would not wish to go as far as Milbank in a despairing dismissal of the social sciences tout court, or to share Milbank's conclusion that, because it is incompletely self-recognizing, all social science thinking is vacuous insofar as it differs from historical thinking. One element in Milbank's impatience with social science, it seems to me, is a lack of familiarity with those elements that are concerned with ethnographic empirical work, and their ability to generate relevant theoretical questions.

- 10 Hegel, like other authors since, proposed that Christian developments were partly anticipated by elements of later classical philosophy, especially Platonism (in relation to the idea of the soul) and Stoicism. However, the central point for our discussion is that Christianity is always perceived in these theories as a paradigm shift; it is not necessary to argue that none of its elements had existed in any previous system.
- 11 Of course, the whole notion of transcendence arguably applies to the wider Judeo-Christian tradition, and not just to Christianity. Interestingly enough, Judaism (and related topics, including anti-Semitism within the history of the discipline) have also been understudied within anthropology.
- 12 The essay appears to me to have provided continuing theoretical impetus behind much more recent collections, such as the important volume *Shamanism, History and the State* (Humphrey and Thomas 1994).
- 13 Rowan Williams (1987: 14) points out that Leach may himself have mis-recognized Arianism, and that Arius's own doctrine was different, and more conservative, than the Arian heresy, which was an artifact constructed post hoc by Arius's enemies. While historically important, this observation does not affect our argument here.
- 14 Like most other anthropologists writing in this area, Pina-Cabral does not explicitly refer to his debt to Hegel or, indeed, Leach, and he may not be aware of it; his immediate reference here is to the work of Maurice Bloch on death, funerals, and fertility (Pina-Cabral 1986: 224). The way in which Bloch's work of this period itself incorporates certain assumptions about transcendence is discussed below. Bloch's work in itself, however, in some ways demonstrates the influence of Leach's teaching on this point.
- 15 I say "may be" because it has long been clear from the scholarship that such extreme positions are taken only at certain times within Christianity, and that even in apparently dramatic ascetic practices there may be a significant symbolic space that is given to the flesh, and which revalidates it at least in some degree (Walker-Bynum 1987). See later in this chapter. The point is that after the inception of the unhappy consciousness there can supposedly never be a perfect reconciliation between flesh and spirit, and indeed, that the contrast between those two categories can never again be unthought.
- 16 For an outstanding account of the use of, and reaction to, the confessional as

- a colonial instrument intended to create a new, Christian interiority, see Rafael 1988, chapter 3. Rafael's argument is discussed in more detail in my essay in this volume.
- 17 Foucault does make occasional contrastive references to ancient Hindu traditions of attitudes to the body.
 - 18 Some Protestant churches have been less tolerant, although this is also highly variable.
 - 19 This argument takes off from Rafael's (1988) important account of the contracting of Catholic hierarchies of power in the Tagalog areas of conversion. See my essay in this volume for an account of Rafael's argument and the similarities and differences of my own interpretation of the Bicol region.
 - 20 It often appears to be the case that nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionary colonialism misrecognized the significance of local kinship rituals and underestimated the degree to which religious meaning was embedded in family practices, therefore placing people under less pressure to alter or abandon this kind of activity. However, in other instances, kinship ritual *has* become intensely targeted—for example, when it is linked to missionary concerns with sexual respectability, or to population control, and / or when it is identified as being linked to the rituals of the local state (see, e.g., Kendall 1996 and Pemberton 1994).
 - 21 Bruce (1996: 6) cites himself as a robust defender of the secularization theories of Talcott-Parsons, Peter Berger, and others, as well as of Weber—that is to say, of a particular reading of Weber. Much of his argument depends on developing a contrast between a historically earlier world of greater church participation and a modern world of increasingly individualistic beliefs. The argument thus bypasses the kind of examination being made in this volume. Bruce concedes that in some parts of the world, including America, religious participation remains high, but he argues that in fact American religion is increasingly concerned with the “mundane” (147). The idea that it is a simple matter to identify the mundane is one I and others would contest (see McDannell 1995).
 - 22 One recent example might be Albert Schrauwers's accomplished and scholarly account of To Pamaona Protestants, *Colonial “Reformation” in the Highlands of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia* (2000). The argument is driven by the notion of “the rationalization of a world religion in the periphery” (16), derived from Weber refracted through Foucault and others. The focus is on Christianity effectively understood as the Calvinist Church, its relationship to “pillarized” Dutch society, and its disciplinary and discourse-creating effects, all of which are understood as tending toward rationalized modernity. While Schrauwers is right to argue that new, often coercive, definitions of religion are generated in colonialism, this volume would want to make more analytic space for the potentially unexpected and underdetermined nature of such encounters, and for the importance of local interpretations of Christian teachings. Lorraine Aragon's *Fields of the Lord*, also on highland Sulawesi Protestants (Aragon 2000), provides an interesting comparison.

- 23 This kind of assessment could be viewed as the corollary of the Protestant (and Protestant-secular) perspective on Catholicism as superstition. It is as though the Protestant world fears that Catholicism might retain more power against modernity by dint of those very practices that Protestants have for centuries condemned as magical or idolatrous. Thus many Protestants appear at some level to have internalized Weber's theory that Protestantism leads to secularism. This move anticipates in some ways the secular world's classification of fundamentalisms and contemporary cults as irrational fanaticism.
- 24 In pursuit of a new perspective on Christianity in anthropology, we are again treading here in the difficult terrain of the actual historical relationship between Christianity, capitalism, and modernity. We might note that one answer to the question implied in Parry's brilliant 1986 rereading of Mauss discussed above—whether it is world religions or capitalism that introduces the dualistic split between the idea of the free gift and the idea of interested exchange—is that, at least in the West, it is both, simply because capitalism is never free of the language of Christianity, however far back in time you push capitalism. This is presumably one part of what Milbank (1990) means by calling capitalism a heretical deviation from what he defines as real (i.e., Augustinian) Christianity. (See also Jarvis 2000.) As I argue here, however, it does not follow that the whole history of Christianity can be adequately conveyed by the history of capitalism (or of modernity).
- 25 Of course, this is to some extent a simplification: most Christians recognize that the enlightenment produced by conversion needs to be cared for and can be lost sight of. Mormons, and perhaps other Christians, sometimes talk as though conversion were at least in theory a continuous process rather than a one-off event. Yet, these ruminations are mainly sidelights on the central Christian perception that conversion itself (like the Incarnation) is an irreversible event; nothing can undo the fact that it has happened.
- 26 Talal Asad (1993: 54) also concentrates his discussion on the transcendental and ascetic forms of Catholic Christianity. For Asad, to make this comment is precisely to miss the point of his argument, because he is attempting to establish that the category of religion itself (and Christianity as a generative example of it) is misconceived, in that religions are inserted in such different ways in relations of power, economics, and personhood in different places and periods as to have no meaningful connection with each other. I cannot ultimately see how the Foucauldian category of knowledge-power, which replaces other explanatory categories, itself escapes these objections. To this extent, I think, Asad's analysis ultimately shares some of the problems of the less subtle ways of reducing religion to power that we have already discussed. Nonetheless, Asad provides an attentive, highly original, and illuminating reading of various Christian formations and communities. For another interesting set of comments on the relationship between anthropology and Christianity that share some ground with the current discussion, see Robbins 2003.

- 27 Both these authors are of course perfectly well aware of fields of religious activity that do not fall within the usual definition of ritual. Yet for their arguments, especially as defined at the period of the 1982 volume here discussed, as well as in Bloch 1986 and elsewhere, ritual is really the most important problem in the analysis of religion, because it defines the intersection between religion and power.
- 28 An exception would be some religious practices in unusually egalitarian societies.
- 29 That is, topics of Merina kinship and state formation; Merina Protestant churches turn out to be structured by Merina kinship (endogamous demes). (Bloch 1971).
- 30 This is a particularly well-established tradition in France. Much of Pascal Boyer's 2001 work on religion as a dysfunctional by-product of forms of cognition certainly has this ancestry.
- 31 The tension between the idea that the transcendent is in some important sense brought into being with world religions, and the idea that it belongs to all ritual insofar as it describes the mystifying power of ritual, does not appear to have been much remarked upon by those who have used Bloch and Parry's work in ethnographies of Christian locales.
- 32 This book is very highly regarded academically but is considered by some devout members of the Latter-Day Saints Church to be anti-Mormon in tone. Critics point out, with some justification perhaps, that many of the elements Brooke points to as having their origins in hermeticism are in fact scripturally derived; to me, these two possibilities do not seem mutually exclusive.
- 33 Sahlins's arguments are often compatible with the line taken here. However, while the interdependent relationship between postlapsarian Augustinianism and unorthodox Christian theology is set aside in Sahlins's article, it is essential to the argument offered here. I also feel, as Sahlins seemingly does not, that it is impossible for anthropology to step outside its theological inheritance entirely, even in the process of critiquing it. See also Cannell 2005b.
- 34 Bloch and Parry in the same volume (1982) offer some interesting remarks comparing Christian symbols of death and regeneration (the crucifixion and resurrection) with Hindu cyclical cosmologies. These remarks bear the hallmarks of Parry's attentive work on Hindu asceticism. Although it is true that Christianity has its own symbolism of eternal cycles, to my mind this comparison omits a consideration of the equal importance in Christianity of the idea of the unalterable transformation in time (that is, with the advent of the Messiah).