In this thesis, I examine composition scholarship on the intersections of religious faith and writing pedagogy over the past twenty years, tracing the origins of compositionists' discomfort with religion and focusing on pedagogical approaches for working with religiously-committed students. In particular, I emphasize the way in which these approaches are productive primarily insomuch as they create a conceptual and pedagogical spaces in which the “modern schism” between faith and learning is broken down or blurred. I ultimately conclude that the most productive directions for future research on this topic include further complicating compositionists' understanding of religious students and religion itself in relation to writing pedagogy.
Religion in the Writing Classroom: Toward a Pedagogy of Possibility

by

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Conference Presentations on Intersections of Religious Faith and Writing Pedagogy at Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) conventions between 2004 and 2009.
I dedicate this thesis to Deb, who put our life together on hold for two-plus years while I went off to live in Corvallis and work on this degree, and who consistently and cheerfully supported me throughout this process.
Religion in the Writing Classroom: Toward a Pedagogy of Possibility

FOREWORD
A Sign of Changing Times

As I was drafting this thesis, I received a review copy of a new composition reader in the mail. Everything about this reader was familiar: its apparatus of introductions, questions for rhetorical analysis, and writing prompts. But I soon realized this reader is actually groundbreaking. Edited by Jonathan S. Cullick, entitled Religion in the Twenty-First Century (2009), and part of the Longman’s Topics series, it is the first composition reader marketed to secular institutions ever to be devoted to the topic of religion, even ever to devote much space at all to religion. Two other religion-themed composition readers have been published: In the World: Reading and Writing as a Christian (1987) and Encounters: Connecting, Creating, Composing (1994). But both these anthologies are aimed at students at Christian institutions and thus include only works that interact favorably with Christianity.

Thus, the publication of this reader is noteworthy. By presenting religion as a topic as pedagogically profitable as gender, sports, ethics, and popular culture, Longman is actually breaking with a long tradition among composition textbook publishers. For, as Mark Browning argues in “Your Logos Against Mine,” not only has no religion-themed reader ever before been published for the secular market, but composition texts have long “ghettoized” religion (9). Browning cites The St. Martin’s Guide to Writing, Joseph Trimmer’s Writing with a Purpose, Donald Hall and D.L. Emblem’s A Writer’s Reader, Gilbert Muller’s The McGraw-Hill Reader, and Anthony Winkler and Jo Ray McCuen’s Readings for Writers all as either including no writing at all informed by religious perspectives or including only “losing my faith” essays “unbalanced by an alternative view or even by probing editorial comments” (8). Even Anna Joy’s multicultural reader, We Are America, while it includes a diverse collection from America’s peoples, includes only two student-written pieces on religion (both of which are negative): “Hypocrisy,” in which a student generalizes about all religion based on her mother’s behavior, and “Baptism,” in which a student describes a Pentecostal church service in which he was frightened into faking being “slain in the spirit” (9). Cullick’s reader, on the other hand, presents religiously informed writing as rhetorically, pedagogically, and intellectually significant.
But the publication of this reader also indicates that the new composition research on religion in the writing classroom (the topic of this thesis) is beginning to make its way into the ground-level of the profession — into a reader for classroom use. For Cullick explicitly depends on this scholarship to help him provide a theoretical foundation for his reader. He provides instructors and students with four ground rules, an explorers’ toolkit, as it were, for stepping foot on this relatively uncharted discourse territory. Appealing to both intellectual and commonly-shared spiritual values, Cullick encourages students using this book to “Be Respectful,” to “Be Curious,” to “Be Mindful” (of discourse differences), and to “Be Amazed” (because the best college writing comes from “things that amaze you” [xxv]). In his description of the principle “Be Curious,” Cullick explicitly depends on distinctions Douglas Downs developed to help students with strong religious identities negotiate academic discourse: i.e., to distinguish between discourses of inquiry (i.e., skeptical academic inquiry) and discourses of affirmation (i.e., those which support a sense of community and familiarity). In his description of the principle “Be Mindful,” Cullick explicitly depends on Shannon Carter’s concept of “rhetorical dexterity,” a concept which Carter proposes to help students learn to negotiate between faith-based and inquiry-based discourse.

Cullick is thus depending on the work of two scholars (among many others) I discuss in this thesis. The new research that Downs and Carter in particular have contributed to is still fairly inchoate, being as yet still particularly diverse, and thus not yet having coalesced (except in one area) into a full-fledged scholarly project. But as both the publication of a religion-themed composition reader and the emergence of this new scholarship as a whole suggests, compositionists are beginning to take a keen interest in the various intersections between religion and the teaching of writing. In this thesis, I seek to contribute to that work. I hope to offer other scholars a map or a way in, as it were, to this scholarly development. This scholarship began in the late 1980s, gained some momentum after the events of September 11, 2001, and is now beginning to make its way into composition textbooks. The time appears to be ripe for such an analysis.
CHAPTER ONE
An Introduction to Religion in the Writing Classroom

The purpose of this thesis is to map and analyze a recent body of composition research on religion in the writing classroom. Over the last twenty years, compositionists have built up a fairly significant body of work on the many intersections of religious faith and the teaching of writing, a body of work which many teachers and scholars of writing are either unaware of or unaware of its breadth and diversity. Even those who are aware of it, if they become interested in benefiting from or contributing to it, are likely to experience difficulty accessing it. This is because this research is particularly diverse. The scholars working on it are asking a large array of research questions, applying an equally large array of theoretical models. Most significantly, even though a few articles are recently starting to make their way into the field's most prestigious journals, the majority of this research continues to be done by individual scholars working in isolation from other scholars. The state of this new scholarship today is roughly analogous to the state of the field of composition as a whole in 1971 when James Kinneavy, paraphrasing Thomas Kuhn, observed that “Each person begins his work anew from different foundations, the same ground is covered again and again with inconclusive results, [and] there is no way to discriminate among research ‘accidents’ and ‘essential novelties’” (3).

In 2002, for example, in a Master’s thesis on this topic completed at Purdue University, Karl Stolley admits that his research revealed “remarkably little” composition theory on the topic of religion (30). He suspects that there are two reasons for this scarcity: one, composition research had as yet not significantly addressed the topic of religion, and two, his own research methods, he thinks, were a bit “crude” (31). He had, after all, gotten only sixteen hits when he tried the keyword “religion” on CompPile database [compile.org] and he had ended up finding most of his sources “by looking through the tables of contents of composition journals” (30-31). It is somewhat true, as Stolley suspects, that composition research in 2002 was only beginning to significantly address intersections of religion and composition theory. But, even so, probably the main cause of Stolley’s frustration was not the scarcity of treatments of this topic, but much more the lack of some form of introductory apparati (introductions, reviews of the literature, bibliographies) – apparati which were virtually non-existent on this topic in 2002.
Fortunately, since Stolley completed his thesis in 2002, some initial work has been done to assemble – if not yet to analyze – this body of work. In *Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom*, Bonnie Lenore Kyburz and Elizabeth Vander Lei present the work of fourteen scholars on this topic and briefly introduce the research as a whole. In their introduction, they provide a sense of the cultural and historical background of the field’s discomfort with religion (as I do as well, in more depth, in chapter two of this thesis) and they frame the questions being asked. Like the publication of Cullick’s religion-focused reader, *Religion in the 21st Century*, the publication of Kyburz and Vander Lei’s collection represents a turning point in the development of this scholarship. They do not categorize or analyze the research as a whole, but by introducing scholars to this topic, and especially by articulating some of the questions, they provide a much needed introduction to the research.

Others are beginning to assemble bibliographies online. Leah Zuidema at Michigan State University has published an annotated bibliography devoted to “Christian Rhetoric Theory & Composition Pedagogy” – though, unfortunately, her bibliography includes only twenty-eight entries and does not include any work published since 2002 (when the site was last updated). The Symposium on Rhetoric and Christian Tradition, sponsored by Calvin College, on the other hand, has compiled an extensive annotated bibliography, including a section on “Composition Teaching and Christian Tradition” which includes scholarship published as late as 2006.

But, in other ways, the lack of introductory apparatus in 2002 when Stolley was doing his research is similar to the situation today. No mention of this research has as yet made it into the field’s mainstream introductions and bibliographies – not in *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing* (Reynolds et al), for instance. Even those scholars working on this topic have provided only limited reviews of the literature. This is partly because, of course, scholars tend to limit their analysis to the slice of the research they are particularly interested in. But it has been frustrating that this has been the case even with theses and dissertations published on this topic. Vail McGuire, in his 2007 dissertation “Unlikely Connections: The Intersection of Composition, Rhetoric, and Christian Theology,” reviews only those scholars who exemplify the way in which compositionists are negatively constructing Christianity, Christians, and religious students in general. This is because he is concerned to create a conceptual space for the fruitful interaction of Christian theology and Composition theory. Karl Stolley, in the 2002 master’s thesis I mentioned above reviews only those compositionists
who specifically address conservative Christianity or Christian fundamentalism and develop an extended theoretical (i.e., not a case-study) approach. This is because he is concerned to argue that ideological differences between postmodernism and fundamentalism are best understood through the lens of discourse differences. Stolley thus excludes works such as Chris Anderson’s “The Description of an Embarrassment” and Robert Yagelski’s “Religion and Conformity in the Writing Classroom” because he views them as case studies, and thus not sufficiently theoretically developed.

In other cases, scholars are simply not providing such analyses. In some cases, I suspect this is due to these scholars’ lack of awareness of the depth and breadth of this research. Joseph Wagner, for example, in his 2007 dissertation “Faith in the Composition Class: A Pragmatic Approach to Common Ground,” provides no review of the literature. He adduces the views of Amy Goodburn, Maxine Hairston, Patricia Bizzell, and John Groppe to help him make his point that compositionists ought to pay equal or greater attention to religion as they do to other social concerns and forms of identity such as race, class, gender, etc. But even though in his dissertation he provides a theoretically sophisticated and pedagogically innovative method for bringing issues relating to religious belief into the composition classroom (i.e., using Deweyan pragmatism), Wagner makes no mention of the work of other scholars who have sought to answer the same research question. He does not explain this lack, but I suspect that somewhere along the line, due perhaps partly to the lack of introductory apparati, he may have assumed he was one of the first to address this issue. In any case, clearly, the need remains for scholarship which introduces other scholars to this diverse and untapped research.

Just as Joseph Wagner may have assumed that the scholarship on this topic is not yet significant, nothing in my coursework or experience had suggested to me either that a fairly significant body of work had built up on the intersections of religion and the teaching of writing. But I had suspected – and, it turns out, correctly – that due to the field’s emphasis on student-centered pedagogy, writing teachers and scholars have not failed to recognize the potential (and possible pitfalls) of considering the role of religious faith in the teaching and learning of writing. Thus, over the course of my research, I have been happily surprised to have compiled a bibliography of over one hundred sources, spanning the last twenty years, the majority of which specifically and explicitly treat questions relating to writing pedagogy and religion.
For purposes of this thesis, I purposefully excluded only non-published conference presentations (though I provide a bibliography of them in an appendix). At the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), a Special Interest Group (S.I.G.) has formed around “Rhetoric and Christian Tradition.” But I made this exclusion primarily because I wanted to keep my research goals achievable in the time allotted, but also because, based on their titles, these presentations seemed to be primarily addressing the problems of ideological and rhetorical conflict between teachers and conservative and/or fundamentalist students, problems which the published literature addresses fairly extensively as well. Finally, I also limited my research to religious faith in the secular composition classroom. In other words, I did not include in my analysis research on intersections of religious faith and the work of writing centers or on religious faith in non-secular composition classrooms (i.e., of religious colleges and universities). I have limited myself to presenting only that part of this research which has begun to coalesce into a scholarly discussion – the part in which scholars are addressing the most productive ways of working with religious students. I have not, for instance, presented other, even more inchoate, scholarship which focuses, for example, on re-thinking critical pedagogy in light of this increased attention to religion (Ferry, Stenberg), on developing pedagogy based on a religious or spiritual worldview (Schiller, O’Reilley, Puccio, Daniell), on intersections of Composition theory and postmodern theology (McGuire, Anderson), or on whether and how to view religion as an aspect of cultural identity in relation to other aspects such as race, gender, class, etc (Perkins, McGuire, Wagner).

This research on religious faith began, perhaps not surprisingly, in the late 1980s at the height of the influence of the religious right. Then, a few compositionists, working alone, began to reflect on their experiences working with students whose religious faith manifested in some problematic way in the classroom. In what represents the first of this research published, Robert Yagelski writes about his experience in 1988 working with “David,” a born-again Christian whose “bombastic” and fundamentalist views alienated both Yagelski, his instructor, and the students in his in-class peer group. Yagelski reports that throughout the semester he had been trying to “tacitly … convince [David] that he was wrong, that the color of the world was my gray, not his black and white” (27). Observing that “[t]eaching conformity is easy, true tolerance is not” (28), Yagelski suggests that probably the most productive way writing instructors can best work with students like David is to be
completely honest with them about their radically differing views of the world. In an article published the following year (1989), Chris Anderson writes about a similar experience. One of Anderson’s Teaching Assistants – Anderson was Composition Director at Oregon State University at the time – came to him “angered and upset” because a student of hers, “Cathy,” had turned in an essay that was primarily a born-again testimonial. The language of the testimonial – e.g., “Christ died on the Cross for my sins” – had offended the T.A., and she had wanted Anderson’s advice as to whether, in Anderson’s words, to “mount some kind of frontal attack or restrain herself” (12). Anderson reports that while he agreed with his T.A., that is, that he shared her discomfort with this student’s “foolishness that is unaware of itself” (12), he also wants 1) to point to the way in which social-epistemic rhetoric itself points to the need for teachers of writing and literature, just as much for students like “Cathy,” to recognize the way in which we are all susceptible to being “absolute in our absolutism,” to being uncritical, unself-aware, and dogmatic in our biases (13); and 2) to suggest that “an ideal way” to help foster the critical awareness so valued by social-epistemic theorists is to invite composition students to study religious rhetoric and to reflect on their own religious background and experience through the critical lens of social-epistemology.

Yagelski’s and Anderson’s early articles together represent one of the exceptions as well as one of the rules this early research on this topic. For, on the one hand, Anderson’s article received significant scholarly attention. His article, in fact, is one of the few to be cited by several other scholars over the last twenty years. It is the certainly the only one from the early period of this scholarship to receive such attention. Yagelski’s article, on the other hand – as far as my research showed – was never cited by another scholar. This difference in reception might be explained by the type of analysis each scholar provides. For while both Anderson and Yagelski provide significant theoretical reflection, and while each challenges the way compositionists have been handling religion in the writing classroom, Anderson’s analysis challenges the field of composition at a much deeper theoretical level. He points out the discrepancy involved, on the one hand, when the field emphasizes social-epistemic rhetoric and, on the other hand, when it marginalizes religious rhetoric. If all language is situational, then social-epistemic rhetoric “must, by definition, be open to the possibility of religious discourse” (13). Additionally, thereby, Anderson also challenges the field’s absolutism – too many compositionists are, he says, “absolute in their antiabsolutism, blind […] to their own bias” (13). Yagelski also points out one of the field’s blind spots, but not so
much about religion per se, but about its willingness to use conformity as a tool, in general, i.e., even when working toward liberal ends. Anderson, then, challenges the field more at the level of theory, while Yagelski challenges the field more at the level of behavior. It has been Anderson’s type of critique – i.e., that of problematizing an inconsistency in the field’s application of its own ideals – that has characterized a great deal of the discussion since Anderson’s article was published.

Unfortunately, the attention Anderson’s article has received is an exception, since the vast majority of this scholarship has received scant attention from other scholars. Only in the last few years, when articles have begun to be published in the field’s more prestigious journals (College English and Teaching English in the Two-Year College), has some of the research gained moderate attention. The only notable exceptions to this trend were two symposia, published in 1994 and 1999 respectively: “Interchanges: Spiritual Sites of Composing” (Berthoff et al), published in College English, which included papers presented at a session at the 1993 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and “Symposium on Teaching in the Whirlwind: When Religion Becomes Visible in the Classroom” (Browning et al) published in by Dialogue: A Journal For Writing Specialists. But even in these symposia, the scholars are not so much responding to each other as presenting papers on similar topics.

But, in other ways, Yagelski’s and Anderson’s articles typify by far the most popular research method in this scholarship: bringing rich theoretical resources to bear on specific encounters with students. Over the period of the last twenty years, between the publication of Yagelski’s reflection on his experience with “David” in 1988 in Radical Teacher, and the publication of, for instance, Shannon Carter’s reflection on her work with students in the Bible belt in 2007 in College English, these compositionists have continued to depend on the case study for this research. These later case studies have perhaps become slightly more theoretically developed than the earlier attempts, but primarily the only difference between them and the earlier work is that the latter are beginning to benefit from interaction with other scholars.

Secondly, Yagelski’s and Anderson’s articles also serve to point to the only area in which this scholarship has begun to coalesce into a full-fledge scholarly conversation: on the question of what pedagogical approaches are most productive for working with students whose religious faith – virtually always some form of conservative or fundamentalist faith – seems to inhibit their ability to adapt to academic inquiry-based discourse. While on the
broader topic of religion and the teaching of writing, these scholars are addressing a fairly large number of other questions – from how to reform critical pedagogy so that it better benefits religious students (Stenberg, Ferry) to the institutional and ideological causes of our field’s discomfort with religion (Vander Lei and Fitzgerald), the underlying impetus behind these other questions seems to have been this original or core problem: the problem of ideological and pedagogical friction between more liberal secular teachers and more conservative religious students. Thus Yagelski’s recommendation that teachers maintain honest and respectful relationships with these students and Anderson’s suggestion that these students study religious rhetoric represent only the first two in a long line of attempts to wrestle with this issue.

Thus I devote chapter two of this thesis to an analysis of the nature and causes of this underlying friction. I suggest that, while the causes of this friction will probably be as varied as the classroom experiences that engender them, ultimately it results from deeper historical and cultural causes, more specifically from the “modern schism,” as historian George Marsden puts it, between rationality and religious faith. Similarly, I devote chapter three to an analysis of the ways in which compositionists are coming to terms with and beginning to attempt to “bridge,” as it were, this schism. I provide an analysis and a conceptual map of the ways these compositionists are defining the pedagogical problems they perceive religious students bringing into the writing classroom and of the pedagogical approaches themselves that these compositionists are proposing to address these problems. Finally, in my conclusion, I review my key findings and suggest directions for future research.

1 Throughout this thesis, I use the phrase “religious students” often to refer specifically to those students whose religious faith seems in some way to present pedagogical problems in the composition classroom. I do not mean to imply of course that all religious students thus present those problems.
“Jesus, Save Me from Your Followers”

Why are compositionists, and in fact secular academics as a whole, so uncomfortable with religious perspectives in the classroom? If compositionists embrace a postmodern worldview and recognize thereby the inherent equality and situatedness of all knowledge claims, why do we still sense that religious perspectives represent a kind of exception, the one kind of perspective, in other words, that is too touchy and/or too troublesome to be allowed voice in the writing classroom?

Priscilla Perkins points out, for example, that conservative Christian students “are one of the only cultural groups openly and comfortably disparaged by many otherwise sensitive writing teachers in the country” (586). Similarly, Juanita Smart observes that “More often than not, faith talk from students elicits a derisive and pejorative response like the bumper sticker glued to a colleague’s door: ‘Jesus, Save Me from Your Followers’” (14). And Bronwyn Williams, while he concedes that “Few teachers would utterly ban religious thought and sources,” is concerned that “even in this apparent openness, teachers’ actions and attitudes communicate clearly that such material is suspect at best and offensive at worst” (9).

Joonna Trapp describes even her own experiences as a student. In a graduate-level course on Milton, Trapp’s professor had asked members of the class to raise their hands if they had actually read the Genesis creation account.

My lone hand nervously reached into the air. The professor, from that moment forward, used every opportunity to attempt to shake me loose from the “confines” of my faith. On one occasion, she distributed a very poorly argued essay. After we read and discussed the work, she informed us that this was typical writing from Christians in the field. She looked at me and said, “You see how impossible it is to be both a scholar and a Christian.” Out of my shock, I managed to mutter, “That would have been a surprise to John Milton.” The lecture to the class which followed my meek challenge effectively silenced me for the rest of the semester. (14)

And Mary Louise Buley-Meissner et al, editors of The Academy and the Possibility of Belief: Essays on the Intellectual and Spiritual Life, seem to confirm Trapp’s report when they agree that

Many students in undergraduate and graduate programs have been embarrassed, scorned, or shamed when they have acknowledged in class their
religious backgrounds or faith traditions. The implicit (sometimes explicit) message from their teachers has been clear: To be educated means to be educated out of beliefs affirmed by church, temple, synagogue, or sacred circle. (2)

Fortunately, compositionists are beginning to problematize this marginalization of religious perspectives. In fact, I suspect that this new discussion represents the kind of thinking and reflecting that many teachers of writing have been doing individually and in casual conversation with colleagues, but which is only now making its way into scholarly discussion. But while compositionists have certainly accomplished the initial task of beginning to break some conceptual ground on this problem, and two scholars (Sheri Stenberg and Vail McGuire) have begun to dig deeper into the historical causes of the discomfort, as a whole compositionists have as yet focused almost exclusively on contemporary factors contributing to our discomfort. Stenberg and McGuire cite the work of historian George Marsden on the origins of the “modern schism” between faith and learning and argue that this divide is negatively impacting the field’s theoretical and pedagogical effectiveness – Sheri Stenberg arguing that critical pedagogy will continue to experience particular difficulty with religious students unless and until it reunites politics and faith (as Paulo Freire did himself) and Vail McGuire arguing that compositionists won’t be able to take advantage of the potentially fruitful intersections between Christian theology and composition theory until they begin to see religious and intellectual pursuits as complementary.

Other compositionists, as I said above, highlight contemporary factors such as the current political and cultural climate of distrust between secular liberals and religious conservatives (Perkins), the lack of a conceptual language for writing about religion and composition (Wagner, Gere), teachers’ individual personal experiences with religion (Smart, Worth), and the field as a whole’s unexamined assumptions about religion (Vander Lei and Fitzgerald). Anne Ruggles Gere does draws attention to the way in which western culture tends to associate religion with the feminine and speculates that the devaluing of religion may therefore be inherently related to the devaluing of the feminine. This insight turns out to be corroborated by George Marsden as well, specifically in his contention that in spite of the influence of postmodernism since the latter half of the twentieth century, the “the essential structures and impulses shaping academia preserved continuity with the past” (Outrageous 18).
i.e., the past in which scientific rationalism and liberal (and mainly white male) Protestantism were dominant.

What I’d like to provide in this chapter, then, is an overview of this nascent discussion among compositionists as well as a deeper examination of both the historical causes of compositionists’ discomfort with religion and of the contemporary cultural climate that has resulted in part from those deeper historical factors. Ultimately the cause of each writing teacher’s discomfort with religion will be as complex and indeterminable as the varied classroom experiences and personal experiences that generated it. But clearly something is going on. This discomfort is so widespread and ingrained, deeper underlying causes must be involved.

The Modern Schism

It’s not only compositionists who are researching the question of how religion and the secular academy came to be so divided. Scholars in other fields are also tracing the historical developments which led to this divide and, most of them, challenging the wisdom of allowing this split to continue. This body of work includes Mark Schwehn’s Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America and Page Smith’s Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America. George Marsden’s work is found mainly in his The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief which he summarized in “The Soul of the American University: A Historical Overview” and in The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship.

Marsden, a historian of American religion, has written extensively on the relationship between Christianity and American culture. In The Soul of the American University, he details the technological, cultural, and ideological developments which led to the removal of religious perspectives from U.S. higher education. More specifically, he draws attention to the way in which faith and learning have had a very long history together in the United States and argues that the current separation between them is mainly the result of vestiges of Enlightenment rationalism remaining in higher education, including in humanities departments. In other words, humanities departments which espouse postmodernism continue to perceive religion as part and parcel of the cultural hegemony that needs to be disrupted, when in fact it is secular humanism that has become the accepted norm. Marsden argues that over the last 150 years, U.S. society has over-corrected one cultural hegemony (Christianity) by replacing it with another (secular humanism) (Outrageous 24).
Marsden’s account is worth considering in some depth for the way in which it explains much of compositionists’ discomfort with religion in general as well as with traditional religion in particular. Marsden focuses his account on the period between 1860 and 1960, a period in which scientific rationalism and liberal Protestantism, the two reigning cultural and intellectual powers of the period, partnered to work toward the mutual goals of economic, social, and technological progress. As part of their contribution to this progress, liberal Protestants, as Marsden points out, founded virtually all of the “pace-setting” American universities (Outrageous 14). The University of Southern California (USC), for instance, was affiliated with the Methodist church from its founding in 1880 up until 1952. But unlike the even older universities like Harvard and Yale, which were founded on more specifically religious goals and ideals, institutions like USC were founded on the ideal of academic freedom and scientific inquiry.

But it’s important to note, as Marsden explains, that this academic freedom did not mean freedom from religion. Academic freedom did not mean that religious perspectives were excluded or marginalized. Instead, it meant freedom specifically from church dogma, from appeals to supernatural authority, and from the influence specifically of the Roman Catholic church (Outrageous 14). Religion wasn’t the problem. Religious cultural and/or institutional hegemony was the problem. Thus, as American universities began to focus more and more on industrial, professional, and scientific goals, these liberal Protestants encouraged this material progress and academic freedom. Such progress, in their view, would serve Protestant spiritual goals, after all. Marsden quotes Harvard Professor Frederic Henry Hedge as early as 1866 even saying that “The secularization of the College is no violation of its motto, “Christo et Ecclesiae.” For, as I interpret those sacred ideas, the cause of Christ and the Church is advanced by whatever liberalizes and enriches and enlarges the mind” (“The Soul” 9).

The trick was that while liberal Protestantism encouraged progressive values, it did so in the name of its own version of those values, a version which meant thereby the marginalization of more traditional (i.e., presumably less progressive) forms of religion. So, gradually, sectarian or traditional beliefs began to be seen, in fact, as counter to democratic ideals. But, as Marsden explains, progressive Protestant hegemony’s move to marginalize traditional religion eventually backfired. Liberal Protestantism itself gradually came to be itself marginalized. Because liberal Protestantism enjoyed such over-arching cultural hegemony during this period, gradually it began to lose its distinctiveness, ending up blurring
its identity with mainstream culture so that there was, as Marsden puts it, “little to distinguish [liberal Protestants] from other respectable Americans.” Fundamentalist Protestant and Roman Catholic intellectuals, on the other hand, during this period were “sharpening their identity over against culture” (“The Soul” 31). By the mid-twentieth century, what had been the partnership of liberal Protestantism and scientific rationalism became instead the dominance of scientific rationalism alone, a dominance which, in its turn, gradually marginalized all forms of religion, even progressive religion.

But, as many compositionists would point out, surely since the sixties, universities and colleges have greatly increased the cultural diversity of their student bodies and faculties. By now, then – that is, well into the twenty-first century – scientific rationalism, especially in humanities departments, is much less dominant. Surely, it is the postmodern critique of rationalism which is more dominant there. But, as Marsden argues, even after the increase of diversity on college campuses, “the essential structures and impulses shaping academia preserved continuity with the past” (Outrageous 18). Thus if Marsden’s claim is accurate, these continuing “structures and impulses” toward rationalism might represent at least one explanation for the irony involved when postmodernists, recognizing that no perspective can accurate make universal truth claims, purport to welcome all perspectives into the conversation, but to a large extent, rule religion exempt from that privilege because religion doesn’t meet the rationalistic requirements for academic truth claims. But, as Marsden points out, even into the 1980s, this rejection of religious perspectives continued. As Marsden explains,

Despite the attacks on scientific objectivity, and despite increased tolerance for some ideological perspectives, the prejudices against traditional religious perspectives were stronger than ever. Old secular liberals and postmoderns, despite their differences, typically agreed that acceptable theories about humans or reality must begin with the premise that the universe is a self-contained entity. As always there were significant exceptions, but for many academics the idea of Christian perspectives seemed hopelessly old-fashioned or even bizarre. (Outrageous 18)

Thus even though religious traditions (even fundamentalism) can be as critical of culture as they can be conservative of culture, much of academia still views religion as falling outside the bounds of intellectual legitimacy. A deeper marginalization of religion has been ingrained in the academy’s collective psyches for approximately a century, and thereby has
created a seedbed for the other reasons many feel that religion and academia, as much as oil and water, just don’t mix.

In the end, the salient point in Marsden’s account for compositionists is that despite attempts to disrupt cultural hegemony once and for all, one hegemony has ended up replacing another. Between 1860 and 1960 the centuries-old hegemony of traditional Christianity was undermined, only to be replaced in many universities by liberal Protestantism, which itself was eventually replaced by scientific rationalism and secular humanism. Liberal Protestantism had admirably sought to provide for freedom of thought, but its efforts were doomed from the start due to the fact that this establishment of freedom of thought was dependent on liberal Protestantism itself remaining dominant, as a sort of paternal watchdog of the process of modernization. Today, Marsden argues, the problem of hegemony remains. It’s just that it is scientific rationalism and secular humanism which dominates (“The Soul” 40–41). By this, Marsden doesn’t mean that significant progress has not been made to increase diversity on campuses. He means, rather, that the latest form of hegemony – that of scientific rationalism – keeps this diversity within certain bounds, bounds which in subtle ways still encourage even postmodernists to exclude religious perspectives on grounds that they are not “rational.”

Compositionists’ Views

Clearly, this is not the kind of problem compositionists can “fix,” ingrained as it is in the larger culture and academy. But they have in the last several years succeeded, as I said above, in beginning to problematize it, and thus in turn to begin to consciously contest it.

Juanita Smart and Jan Worth reflect on the way in which their own negative experiences with religion can affect the way they react to students’ religious perspectives in the classroom. Smart in particular reflects on the way in which her own life as a lesbian and as an ex-Evangelical Christian affected her reactions to a student’s paper. She had assigned her students to write an analysis of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. In response, this student had attempted to suggest parallels between Frankenstein and Jesus Christ, parallels which, as Smart points out, did succeed in suggesting some fruitful conceptual possibilities. But the tenor of the paper as a whole had leaned pretty heavily, as Smart says, toward “stereotypical scapegoating” and “fundamentalist moralizing” (12). Smart admits that the tone and attitude of this essay triggered in her simultaneous emotions of familiarity and alienation (15). It
reminded her of her own evangelical background (in which she herself had made a similar “stand for Jesus”) and her life as a feminist and a lesbian (in which she had had to endure yet another kind of “stand for Jesus” in the form of painful anti-gay rhetoric from a preacher at her graduate school campus (16)).

Jan Worth similarly reflects on the way in which her upbringing affects her reactions to religious rhetoric in her students’ papers. She describes herself, as a teenager, rebelling against and leaving her fundamentalist minister father and her years afterward “provoking and picking on my family” (23). As a teacher, Worth now admits that her personal background and prejudices intersect in “troubling ways” with religious expression in her classroom: “Faith-based topics uncomfortably ignite my pedagogical hot spots” (22). Worth’s and Smart’s essays are groundbreaking for the way in which they begin to complicate our subject positions as teachers. This new scholarship as a whole, perhaps not surprisingly at this early stage, is still heavily focused on the subject position of students, having as yet not turned its gaze significantly to the way in which we ourselves are constructing our perception of these students.

Anne Ruggles Gere, as I noted above, breaks some conceptual ground on this question by reflecting also on personal factors – in her case, on her struggles to write a personal narrative about her own and her daughter’s religious experiences. As a scholar, Gere was not prevented or discouraged, like some religious students in composition classrooms, from writing about her religious experiences. But she did struggle psychologically and linguistically while writing. She struggled to find the language to write about her religious experiences. Because of this difficulty, Gere became curious as to the source of the disconnect she experienced between her religious experiences and her ability to write about them. She speculates that the divide between academic or intellectual discourse and faith-based expression may be traceable back to academia’s insistence on a faith/learning binary. She admits that the causes of this separation are complicated, but feels confident that “gender plays a role” (47). Citing scholarship which has already begun to trace the “feminization of American religion” over the last one hundred and fifty years, Gere posits that the “equation of the feminine and religious has […] legitimized and energized the academy’s deprecation of things religious” (47). As I noted above, Gere’s insight, though undeveloped, is interestingly corroborated by George Marsden when he argues that U.S. universities, in the process of separating themselves from the control of various Christian denominations at the turn of the
last century, replaced one hegemony (these specific denominational authorities) for another (the broader cultural hegemony of white male Protestantism).

Anne Ruggles Gere, in fact, points specifically to the way in which composition as a field is as yet simply unaccustomed to discussing religion – in our scholarship, in our own writing, or with our students – having as yet not developed a conceptual language for its relationship with composition. Gere supposes that since discussions of religion “have been essentially off-limits in higher education, we have failed to develop sophisticated and nuanced theoretical discourse to articulate spirituality” (47). When scholars themselves wish to write about religion, she continues, they “lack the highly complex and compelling language” that has been developed for, say, queer theory (47). Gere has a point here, at least so far as she points to the fact that when compositionists begin to do research on religious belief, or write about their own religious experience, they are on new conceptual ground. It’s very possible that this unfamiliarity itself could well be hampering teachers and scholars of writing in their attempts to negotiate religious faith in the classroom.

Finally, some scholars are pointing out that some compositionists are making unexamined assumptions and slipping into some false dichotomies. Bronwyn T. Williams, for example, begins his essay on religious identity in writing classes by admitting that while he had grown up with parents who were both active religious believers (his father a Quaker “whose faith informed his views of work and politics,” his mother a Presbyterian “who has been active in her church in almost every position available to a layperson” (514)), and while his own Quaker faith is vital to him, he had still always assumed that faith was a private matter. Describing his long-time intuition about religion and learning, Williams says, “It just doesn’t feel like [religion] belongs in school” (514).

Elizabeth Vander Lei and Lauren Fitzgerald call attention to this same problem in their recent article, “What in God’s Name? Administering the Conflicts of Religious Belief in Writing Programs.” They write out of concern that compositionists were assuming some unhelpful dichotomies which they describe as “three secular ideologies of religion” (186). Toward complicating our understanding of the issue of religious belief in the writing classroom, therefore, they discuss these false binaries: church and state, intellect and belief, and public and private (186). Regarding concerns about the separation of church and state, they point out that legally it is both the church that is protected from the state as well as the state that is protected from the church, and that the Establishment Clause of the First
Amendment is generally considered not to include the free speech of individuals. It would be one thing, in other words, to restrict one student from imposing their religion on others, and quite another thing to restrict that student from merely expressing that faith. In this regard, Vander Lei and Fitzgerald worry that “Troublingly, when we misinterpret the Establishment Clause, we enforce a silence of submission…” (187). Regarding the assumption that intellect and belief are inherently opposed, Vander Lei and Fitzgerald draw on the research of three contributors to this new scholarship who argue that this faith/reason opposition is simply false (Douglas Downs), that academic values such as critical inquiry can thrive in the context of religious traditions (Sheri Stenberg), and that the opportunity to research or express one’s religious faith can provide students powerful motivation toward learning (Virginia Chappell) (189). Finally, regarding the assumption that religion is a private matter and ought to be kept separate from all public discussions, Vander Lei and Fitzgerald point out that if we treat religious faith as private, we give religious students little reason to value writing and education in general as something important in their lives. Additionally, we don’t give them any reason or opportunity to reflect on or analyze their beliefs. Finally, Vander Lei and Fitzgerald continue, if we treat religious faith as private, we fail to help prepare all students to analyze public religious discourse (190).

“Addressing religious belief in our writing programs is complex business,” conclude Vander Lei and Fitzgerald, “made all the more complex by the false binaries […] that limit our thinking” (192). Vander Lei and Fitzgerald of course do not mean to suggest that religious faith cannot sometimes interfere with or even inhibit learning. But their insistence that compositionists begin to uncover their unexamined assumptions does point to another probable cause of their discomfort with religious faith in the classroom. If in fact many compositionists are unconsciously depending on these kinds of binaries to guide their thinking, it would be difficult not to experience discomfort when students’ religious faith manifests itself in some form in the classroom.

**Critical Pedagogy**

Interestingly, Worth’s and Smart’s essays, described earlier in this chapter, also serve to draw attention to the socio-political dimensions of the discomfort with religion. Juanita Smart’s uneasiness with a religiously-themed essay was triggered in part by her own prior discomfort as a lesbian having had to endure anti-gay preaching. And it is precisely this aspect
of much of religion – its undeniable tendency toward socially-conservative ideology at best and rigid, narrow, even bigoted beliefs at worst – that has drawn the most attention from compositionists. Because compositionists, especially those in secular institutions, tend to be socially liberal, and many (though certainly not all) devoutly religious students tend to be more socially-conservative, compositionists face a particularly entrenched and difficult ideological divide between themselves and their religiously committed students. Not surprisingly, this conflict is even more evident when teachers use the methods of critical pedagogy\(^2\) in their classrooms. Priscilla Perkins, for instance, in writing about her experiences with conservative Christian students in Oklahoma, speaks for many compositionists as well as critical pedagogues when she says that

Teachers respond negatively to students who do not tolerate viewpoints or modes of living different from their own, and they do not know how to teach critical thinking and argumentation to students whose approach to textual authority runs so counter to mainstream cultural literacies. Teacher prejudice, then, is not an irrational reaction to cultural difference, but a simultaneously political and intellectual distrust with tangible causes. (586)

The “approach to textual authority” Perkins is referring to here is the stricture, among some conservative Christian communities, against “independent interpretation,” i.e., the rule that lay persons ought to abide by established and authoritative doctrines and not venture their own analyses. But it is when Perkins refers to students who do not “ tolerate viewpoints or modes of living different from their own” that she is pointing to the difficulty critical pedagogues in particular encounter with socially-conservative religious students. In general, the more authoritarian and/or socially-conservative a religious tradition is, the more likely students from that tradition will resist or have difficulty adapting to critical pedagogical goals. Certainly, in much the same way that Juanita Smart felt discomfort when reading her student’s “Frankenstein and Jesus Christ” essay, so critical pedagogues in general not surprisingly feel an equal discomfort with students who resist pedagogical goals which emphasize diversity or multiculturalism. But while teacher discomfort with religion in general certainly includes an affective and personal dimension, i.e., as Worth and Smart have

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\(^2\) For readers not familiar with critical pedagogy, it is an approach which emphasizes enabling students to develop a “critical consciousness” or ability to identify and question anything within a culture which serves to dominate. Because religion, especially Christian religion, has long been culturally dominant in the west, critical pedagogy has come to view religion and religious identity as something to be subverted rather than built upon.
shown, Perkins is making an important point when she asserts that teacher discomfort with some forms of religious belief is based on “tangible,” and very immediate, causes.

Perkins herself does not dig deeper into the question of the cause of this discomfort, beyond pointing to “political and intellectual distrust” (586). But Amy Goodburn, in her article “It’s a Question of Faith: Discourses of Fundamentalism and Critical Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom,” sheds significant light on the differences and – and, indeed, the similarities – between the two discourses. Goodburn’s study (which I will discuss in more detail in chapter three) provides teachers and scholars of writing with practical pedagogical insights, but it also, perhaps more importantly, points to the fact that the discomfort and frustration of critical pedagogues, as well as the discomfort and resistance of socially conservative religious students, results primarily from a deep difference in worldview. As Goodburn says of Luke, the student who resisted her critical pedagogical goals, “if I had understood more clearly the nature of our different world views, we might have at least come to a mutual understanding of each others’ positions..., a respect for the different discourses which define who we are and how we read others” (351). In other words, while this radical worldview difference is not the only factor in critical pedagogues’ discomfort with religion – literacy practices of course also playing a part – it is undeniably the most significant factor.

The Contemporary Political and Cultural Climate

Certainly critical pedagogues are not alone in their discomfort with more conservative forms of religious faith. While the United States has long been an unusually religious place (at least, as compared to other western industrialized nations), it has often been a fairly anti-religious place as well. In the last forty to fifty years, atheist and anti-religious voices in the larger U.S. society have grown more and more often impatient and vocal. Beginning during the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s, many Americans began to resist the reigning Protestant cultural and moral hegemony as well as the influence of religion in society in general. Later, the rise of the religious right in the 1980s led to a similar response. It’s probably not coincidental that, for example, this recent composition scholarship on religious belief began in the late 1980s with Robert Yagelski and Chris Anderson writing about their uncomfortable experiences with conservative Christian students. It is also probably not coincidental that it has been in the seven or eight years since the events of September 11, 2001 that this recent scholarship has begun to coalesce into a more full-fledged
discussion (as evidenced, in part, by the increasing number of its studies being published in the field’s prestigious journals). Since September 2001, the role of religion in public life has of course become an urgent and inescapable topic for many Americans, compositionists among them.

And in the same way that the counter-culture of the 1960s resisted traditional Christian moral norms, in the last seven or eight years a new anti-religious movement has emerged – though, as yet, nothing as wide-spread as the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s – in particular in the form of a group of best-selling authors called the “new atheists.” These atheists are “new” in the sense that they are particularly outspoken and vehement in their anti-religious stance. And they are speaking out in a way that has earned the ear of at least their book-buying audience. In the two years between 2005 and 2007, five books written by new atheists Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, and Christopher Hitchens, with titles such as *The End of Faith*, *Breaking the Spell*, and *The God Delusion*, became *New York Times* bestsellers. As Ronald Aronson, writing for *The Nation*, describes these authors’ impatience and intensity,

Harris excoriates religious moderates, accusing them of providing cover for fundamentalists at home and abroad by refusing to contest the extremists’ premises – because they share them. More upbeat, Dennett is devoted to creating the intellectual conditions for future discussions, in which religion will be treated as just another “natural” phenomenon and accordingly subjected to critical scrutiny. Dawkins bulldozes his way through every major argument for religious belief, and a great many minor ones. And Hitchens endlessly catalogues religion’s crimes and absurdities. Each man is at war, writing as if no others had preceded him, and with a passion that can only be described as political.

Clearly, these thinkers, and the thousands who are buying their books, are frustrated not only with more conservative forms of religion, but with religion in any form, including progressive religion.

**Rationality and Religion: Oil and Water?**

But Aronson brings this frustration closer to the field of composition studies and to George Marsden’s thesis when he argues that probably the main reason these new atheists’

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3 Similarly, another new term, “antitheism,” has arisen to describe this kind of atheism more generally, i.e., the kind which not only posits a naturalistic worldview but also the need to be actively anti-religious as well.
books are so popular is because, while the U.S. population as a whole may or may not be fed up with the role of religion in public life, the more educated among us are very likely to be. Aronson reasons that since book-buyers tend to be more educated than non-book-buyers, and that since studies show that the likelihood that an American will disavow belief in God increases two-fold with an advanced degree, even more with a professorship, even more with a position at a research university, finally capping out at ninety-three percent among members of the National Academy of Sciences, that the popularity of the “new atheists” has ignited embers already burning among well-educated Americans and academics in general. Aronson’s analysis thus supports Marsden’s argument that even though since the 1960s much of higher education has diversified its populations and its attention to diverse perspectives, the “essential structures and impulses shaping academia [have] preserved continuity with the past” (Outrageous 18). In other words, even though many compositionists espouse the postmodern critique of Enlightenment rationality, the underlying intellectual structure of U.S. higher education continues to normalize rationalism. Thus, while compositionists who are postmodernists consciously welcome varying perspectives, not privileging one over the other, they often marginalize religious perspectives almost unconsciously, in some cases—because, Marsden argues, that is simply the culture of academia. Again, there are other contemporary factors playing into this discomfort with religion—the contemporary political climate, for example. But Marsden’s argument is that the deeper underlying reason for this discomfort is more that academia has long been and continues to be structured to normalize scientific or empirical rationality.

In fact, the assumption that the intellectual life must necessarily be a rationalistic life, is everywhere in U.S. society. While I was drafting this chapter, I found an example of this assumption while reading the blog of The Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies (I.E.E.T.). The title of one post had caught my attention: “Religious Education – And Other Oxymorons.” Its author, Mike Treder, raises many valid concerns about negative societal effects associated with religion (e.g., high rates of illiteracy and human rights violations against women in Islamic theocracies). But Treder clearly bases his remarks on the presupposition that scientific rationality is the only valid arbiter of reality. He asserts, for instance, that “teaching kids that prayer works—when all evidence suggests otherwise” serves to disadvantage them. The evidence to which Treder links is a 2006 scientific study on the effects of intercessory prayer on cardiac surgery patients. The study found that prayer had
no scientifically observable affects on patients. But whether the study had or had not suggested an efficacy of intercessory prayer, what’s significant is that Treder assumes that such clinical studies would have the last word on the question.

Fortunately, with the exception of a few compositionists who either assume that religious thinking is likely to be simplistic and/or dualistic, my research revealed no compositionists who, like Aronson and Treder, argued explicitly for or presupposed a lack of (scientific) rationality among religious composition students. This is because compositionists tend to recognize the limitations and situatedness of all knowledge claims, adhering to a more postmodern rather than scientific epistemology. The main thrust of this new scholarship on religion in the writing classroom, in fact, often reflects a desire to put any such assumptions to rest. Unfortunately, this scholarship also provides indirect evidence that this kind of thinking is nevertheless going on in the profession as a whole. Janice Neuleib, for example, describes the reaction of a group of Advanced Placement Exam readers to students’ religiously-informed essays. The prompt had read

The first chapter of Ecclesiastes, a book of the Bible, concludes with these words: ‘For in much wisdom is much grief, and increase of knowledge is increase of sorrow.’ Write a carefully reasoned, persuasive essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies this assertion. Use evidence from your observation, experience, or reading to develop your position. (41)

Not surprisingly, some of the students who happened to be familiar with this passage and the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole wrote confidently about the issues of suffering it raised and their position on those issues. Also not surprisingly – and especially since the prompt had asked students to use their own experience – some of the religious writers took advantage of their previous personal insight into the passage and wrote “eagerly and passionately” (42). Unfortunately, even though many of these essays deserved in Neuleib’s estimation “middle or high scores” (42), the A.P. exam readers wanted to give many of these essays low scores for “lack of reasoning ability” (42). As Neuleib explains, the religiosity of the essays (both in tone and word choice) had led the readers to want to assign low scores because they perceived these essays to therefore lack “objective” discourse, i.e., discourse which, like the samples provided to the A.P. readers, was more distanced and cool. Clearly, the readers had encountered students employing different discourse values. But if Neuleib’s analysis is accurate, what also happened was that the exam readers mistook a difference in discourse for a lack of reasoning ability. Religious discourse can certainly tend to be more emotive and of
course to use different language than traditional academic discourse. But so do many other non-academic discourses which these readers would probably have not faulted for standard reasoning ability.

Conclusion

Clearly, the causes of compositionists’ discomfort with religion are multifaceted and inter-related, including as they do individual personal experiences, the contemporary cultural and political distrust between secular liberals and religious conservatives, and compositionists’ simple lack of experience talking formally about religion or about the religious perspectives of our students. But, in the end, as I hope this exploration shows, it’s very possible that these more recent causes are in fact effects of the deeper historical cause George Marsden outlines – i.e., that the underlying assumption and structures within academia continue, since the late nineteenth century, to normalize scientific rationalism, and to marginalize religious perspectives in particular as non-rational. In other words, many compositionists may well welcome other non-rational perspectives (such as those which sometimes emerge from individuals’ experiences of racism, sexism, etc). But since those perspectives, unlike religious perspectives, have never been associated with a cultural hegemony in U.S. society, understandably, there never has been any impulse within academia to normalize their marginalization. On the other hand, as Marsden shows, religious perspectives have certainly been dominant in the universities and in U.S. culture in general throughout U.S. history – traditional religion, in the form of denominational authority, held sway in the founding and governing of schools like Harvard and Yale, and progressive religion, in the form of a kind of non-denominational white, male Protestantism, held sway up until and beyond the 1960s. Therefore religious perspectives, due to their history of cultural hegemony in the U.S. as well as to the continuing hegemony of scientific rationalism, may well have become the one kind of perspective that is often consciously marginalized and/or devalued in intellectual contexts.

The bias against religious perspectives in the larger public arena will probably not subside any time soon. But, as I will show in the next chapter, compositionists are not only beginning to problematize their discomfort with religion, they are also beginning to recognize that as a field they can no longer allow any distrust toward politically powerful religious conservatives to be extended to the individual religious students in their classrooms. They are
developing pedagogical approaches that openly address the issues that religious students bring into the classroom. Of course, inviting religious perspectives to join the chorus of other voices in the writing classroom will not be easy. In fact, it surely opens up clusters of obstacles and opportunities. But compositionists are beginning to address issues related to religion in the writing classroom much more explicitly and deliberately – both by problematizing their own discomfort with religion as well as by problematizing the particular pedagogical issues that religious students often bring with them into the writing classroom. In the end, of course, compositionists alone cannot counteract such a culturally ingrained divide between faith and learning, nor can they ultimately do much to disrupt the continuing dominance of scientific rationalism. But they can – and are beginning to work toward also bridging, as it were, the schism created over the last 150 years between the intellectual and religious life.
CHAPTER THREE
Bridging the Modern Schism:
Pedagogical Approaches for Religious Students

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a conceptual map, as it were, of an emerging area of scholarship devoted to pedagogical approaches for religious students. As I said in my introduction, even though this scholarship has recently begun to coalesce into a full-fledged scholarly discussion, no one has as yet provided a review of this literature or any kind of introduction to it. Thus, in this chapter, I first identify the cluster of problems these compositionists are associating with religious students. Then I analyze the various approaches, categorizing them primarily into two major methods: one which focuses on discourse- or audience-awareness and one which focuses on inquiry. As I do so, I also argue, almost implicitly, that the primary reason these two approaches are productive is due to the way in which they bridge the modern schism. They blur, as it were, the sharp boundaries so often constructed between faith and reason, between sacred and secular, and thus between students’ religious identities and their academic work.

THE PROBLEMS WITH RELIGIOUS FAITH IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

As with this discussion as a whole, as yet no scholar has teased out those pedagogical problems particularly associated with religious students. Therefore, before I analyze the pedagogical approaches being developed to address these problems, I first identify the three types of problems themselves which compositionists are addressing in these approaches. Each of these problems falls into one or more of three types: students’ lack of discourse-awareness, lack of complex thinking, and/or ideological conflict with their instructors.

By identifying that it is in fact these and only these particular problems which compositionists are associating with religious students, it is possible to see that these problems are not particularly unusual. Except perhaps for the problem of ideological resistance, the problem of lack of complex thinking and lack of discourse-awareness, of course, are the kind of problems that writing instructors encounter daily among all kinds of students. Even the problem of ideological resistance is of course not limited to ideological differences due to one’s religion, but also due to one’s politics. Thus, as I implicitly argue, because these problems are fairly common in themselves, it is the ability of the approaches I
describe in this chapter to breakdown the wall of separation, as it were, between faith and learning that is most significant about them.

“Like Trying to Play Hockey in a Swimming Pool” (The Problem of Lack of Discourse Awareness)

The first type of problem occurs when students make choices which betray a lack of awareness of, or lack of ability to negotiate, the conventions of academic discourse. This problem manifests probably most obviously when students inappropriately use some form of faith-based or “churchy” language in their writing. Chris Anderson, for example, describes “Cathy,” who had filled her essay with the kind of “Christ died on the Cross for my sins” expressions that Anderson describes as “the language of the fundamentalist, of the testimonial, of Guideposts magazine and Sunday morning television” (12). This kind of “witnessing talk,” as Lizabeth Rand calls it, which is usually considered inappropriate and even unwelcome in secular higher education, is ultimately, as this new scholarship recognizes, a problem of simply failing to conform to academic conventions, not one of a lack of reasoning (which some have supposed).

Students also fail to negotiate the current conventions of academic discourse when they try to base claims either solely or primarily on faith-related evidence. Samuel Cohen, for example, describes an orthodox Jewish student who wanted to argue from the Bible that Zionism is the solution for the Palestinian “problem.” And Jan Worth describes two Christian students, one who wanted to argue that faith in Jesus Christ is the solution for all human ills and another who wanted to argue from the Bible and from first century documents that the resurrection of Jesus must have occurred due to its observable effects on the apostles. But, as Worth explains to the first student in an email,

[Y]ou're putting me in an awkward position here, in which I have to remind you that you're confusing the purpose of this class and its goals. As I've attempted to convey in previous conversations, this is not a faith-based class, nor a faith-based setting, and your audience is not a faith-based audience. While as you know I have a hearty respect for the importance of your belief, this class is a place to practice logical skills. I trust that you'll develop your beliefs on your own; give me six more weeks to teach you about logic and empirical evidence. This said, the topic above will not work for our class. (28)

Since academic arguments use “objective, non-proselytizing sources,” this student’s faith-based argument would simply be inappropriate in a secular academic setting (28). In
addition, Worth explains to her student, trying to do so would be “like trying to play hockey in a swimming pool. Or like presenting a poem for a math exam” (28). Setting aside for the moment the way in which in the last part of this email Worth seems to assume a faith/reason binary (i.e., when she implies that the student will have to set aside his religious belief in order to be able to focus on logic), the primary thrust of her explanation does nicely nail down the crux of problem – the secular academy simply does not consider faith-related language or evidence as valid.4

“I Checked With My Minister” (The Problem of Lack of Complex Thinking)

The second type of problem lies less with lack of discourse awareness than with the way in which religious faith sometimes seems to influence even students’ reasoning itself. (I say “seems” here because of course it is possible that there is no causal correlation between religious faith and lack of complex thinking. For, after all, such dualistic thinking is also often a characteristic of inexperienced college writers in general.) Compositionists describe three clusters of problems relating to religious students’ reasoning: 1) dualistic or simplistic thinking, 2) polemic or rigid thinking, and/or 3) thinking dependent on authority figures. As an example of the first type, Gregory Shafer describes his student, Danielle, who in conversations with him about the progress of her research would defer to her pastor’s authority, telling Shafer, for example, “I checked with my minister and he pointed to these passages in the Bible” (320). As an example of the second type, Robert Yagelski describes his student David’s particularly rigid thinking. David’s first three essays – each on faith-related topics – Yagelski described as “marred by his acerbic and condescending tone” (26). Yagelski is later forced to warn David that unless he ceases calling his in-class readers “sinners” and “degenerates,” he is unlikely to get a hearing from them (27). Similarly, Joy Ritchie describes Brad, a conservative Catholic whose “authoritarian” essays exhibited “a confused blend of

4 As I’ll discuss below, though, some compositionists are discussing ways in which these topics actually can be adapted to secular academic contexts. Often students who want to make arguments such as these are unaware of the difficulty of doing so in a secular academic context. But for those who are aware of the difficulty and are willing to accept the challenge, Gregory Shafer and others show that with specific coaching and guidelines (such as requiring students to make their presuppositions explicit), almost any topic may be productively attempted. The more faith-based the topic and the more secular or resistant the student’s audience, the more difficult will be the rhetorical task, but also the more likely the topic will concern and motivate the student.
dualistic thinking and dogmatic style” (130). In Brad’s own words, his goal had been to “[present] a series of logically related facts that are vital to the validity of a church,” as part of his goal to prove that “there is one truth” (130). Not completely surprisingly, his peer response group perceived this claim as so “unduly theoretical” and “dogmatic” that they began to show less and less interest in providing him with helpful feedback. Brad had, in Ritchie’s words, “violated the norms for writerly behavior” for in-class groups (130).

This particular problem of religious students exhibiting dualistic or dogmatic thinking appears to be, or at least to have been at one time, so associated with religious thought in the minds of compositionists that Ronda Leathers Dively devoted her 1994 dissertation to a quantitative study of the correlation. She had assumed, she admitted later, that “a considerable majority” of the religiously-themed drafts in her sample would exhibit simplistic or dualistic thinking. The results of her study, though, revealed that “approximately half of the fifty” drafts “clearly disproved [her] hypothesis” (“Censoring” 59). Fortunately, while Dively found that dualistic thinking and religious rhetoric are not as closely correlated as she had thought, she continued her research into the – even if now only a loose – correlation and came up with some insights into a possible factor in the development of dualistic thinking.

Basing her thinking on Gayatri Spivak’s theory of the “subaltern subject self,” Dively theorizes that dualistic thought is one result of a person’s belief in “the myth of the unified, self-regulating subject” (“Religious” 95). This kind of ultra-individualism, in Spivak’s view, is often accompanied by a lack of awareness of other complicating (such as socio-cultural and material) factors affecting one’s perceptions, and leads one thereby to over-simplify one’s view of reality. As to what would cause someone to assume herself to be a “unified, self-regulating subject,” Dively posits that a primary cause could be the conditioning that results from significant exposure to authoritarian discourse. The more one’s upbringing or community is characterized by authoritarian discourse, the more one may be thereby conditioned to perceive one’s self as essentially “self-regulating.” Dively surmises that the authoritarian discourse often found, for example, within fundamentalist communities fits the description of such conditioning. This fundamentalist conditioning, in turn, if her line of thinking is correct, would incline its members toward dualistic thinking. Dively does not explain exactly how such conditioning would have this effect, but one well could imagine that an effort to control
a group of people necessarily implies the need to keep their choices limited and their perceptions simple. Thus Dively’s theory is plausible.

**Differing Webs of Reality (The Problem of Ideological Difference)**

In the last category, compositionists describe students who in some way resist the pedagogical goals of their instructors – namely, when a more religiously conservative student resists the goals of a more secularly liberal teacher. These students may or may not also exhibit characteristics of the first two categories (faith-based language or evidence, rigid or simplistic thinking). In many cases, in fact, these are students who are otherwise fairly confident and sophisticated academic writers. For example, Mark Montesano describes Charles, a conservative Christian, who had been discussing his plans with Montesano to write a critique of Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of faith. But when the in-class discussion turned to a letter from a gay Christian man describing abuse by members of the man’s church, Montesano reports in dismay that “[s]omewhere during the discussion, Charles walked out” (91) and was never seen again.

Similarly, Amy Goodburn describes Luke, an otherwise successful English major who resisted the critical pedagogical goals she employed in her “English 300: The American Experience” class. For this course, which fulfilled the diversity requirement at her “large state university” (334), she had assigned essays and poems which she expected would enable students to enter into some of the experiences of women and which as a collection would provide students with enough intertextuality to highlight contemporary issues of gender. Goodburn assigned, for instance, Kristine Beatty’s “Lot’s Wife,” a poem which re-tells the biblical story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom from the point of view of Lot’s wife, a point of view significantly different from that found in the Bible. Luke, who identified himself as a conservative Christian, resisted the poet’s version of the story. He pointed to what he believed was the more critical, and thus in his mind more appropriate, method for interpreting the story. The biblical text, he wrote, “can only be understood within the context it was written” (339), and therefore when Beatty views the biblical events through a twentieth century lens, she is being naïve and anachronistic. Thus Luke did not fail to make a legitimate academic argument. Based on his presuppositions that objective reality is knowable, his argument was valid. It is just that his teacher, in taking a critical pedagogical and postmodernist approach, wanted him to allow for, if not embrace, the validity of all perspectives.
Still, as Goodburn explains, it’s not that fundamentalists (or other more conservative Christians) do not recognize that all interpretations are situated. It is rather that they believe that some perspectives are better situated than others. In their view, one’s biblically based, and thereby “higher,” perspective gives one a clearer view of reality than does a secular, and thereby necessarily restricted, perspective. So while critical pedagogues explain differences in perception as deriving from one’s social and material position (one’s gender, race, class, etc), fundamentalists explain those differences as deriving instead from whether one sees through sacred or a secular lenses. Interestingly, this sacred perspective depends on the same kind of Enlightenment-style epistemology (with its emphasis on objective logic and reason) which, ironically, is the very epistemology that has often been used, as Marsden points out, by the secular academy to rule out faith-based perspectives on the grounds that religious faith is not logical or rational. In Luke’s mind, therefore, it was Kristine Beatty, the poet, and Amy Goodburn, his teacher, who were uncritical. He was the one being logical.

Clearly, therefore, the ideological and epistemological divide between more conservative religious discourses and secular academic discourses is deep, seemingly insurmountable. In fact, the more Goodburn researched these differences, the more she came to the conclusion that critical pedagogues are generally unprepared to work productively with fundamentalist (or any more conservative religious) students. Each discourse assumes such radically different worldviews, or “webs of reality” (349), that Goodburn concludes her essay by wondering aloud whether it is even “possible to enact a critical pedagogy in a classroom where students do not view knowledge as partial and situated” (348).

So what pedagogical approaches have compositionists taken in response to these problems? By far, the two most common approaches have been to rely either on a cluster of approaches related to discourse- and audience-awareness or on one related to critical inquiry. Thus, in the balance of this chapter, I analyze these two approaches. As I hope this analysis shows, the primary way in which these approaches are both pedagogically and conceptually productive is in the way in which they begin to break down the wall of separation, as it were, between students’ faith and their learning.

IN SEARCH OF AN “ACADEMIC / RELIGIOUS LINGUA FRANCA”

Recalling historian George Marsden’s insights into the way in which faith and learning have long been separated in public higher education, it’s not surprising that
compositionists’ first pedagogical instinct has been to focus on ways to find a common language with which to integrate this “otherness” into secular academic discourse. Duane Roen, for example, calls the classroom a contact zone where religious and secular cultures meet (92). And Priscilla Perkins speaks of the need to “aim for an academic/religious lingua franca” (596). Compositionists have found, therefore, that the concept of discourse community has been a singularly helpful conceptual tool for integrating religious perspectives into the composition classroom. Such an approach supplies a language – the language of “discourse community” – which serves not only as a “lingua franca,” a common language between secular and religious discourses, but as a concept which enables teachers and students to talk to each other not only about each others’ language use, epistemology, and methods, but also each others’ interests, ideology, and culture.

**Coaching Toward “Rhetorical Dexterity”**

Shannon Carter, Douglas Downs, and Gregory Shafer each focus on using a rhetorical or discourse-oriented approach to help religious students bridge secular academic discourse(s) and the faith-based discourses they are more familiar with. The impetus for Downs’ research had been his dissatisfaction with the way he had reacted to the arguments of a Mormon student named Keith. As Downs explains, “Most of my students would confirm I don’t yell at them on paper, but Keith got a Howler” (40). “Congratulations!” he complained to Keith. “You’ve just written the most indoctrinated, close-minded, uncritical, simplistically reasoned paper I’ve ever read!” (39). In an effort to develop a response which would work better in the future, Downs researched the characteristics of Mormon discourse and epistemology. Based on that information, he suggests four ways teachers can help students like Keith to “write from and to their life-worlds so as to build learning on private knowledge” (48). They can be a guide (for example, pointing out how Keith’s audience would probably respond negatively to his narrow definition of family), a translator (identifying common ground between the discourses), a mentor (creating a “safe, understanding space for students and serve as a positive role model of Inquiry” [50]), and a coach (“kicking butt on occasion” [52]).

But what is probably even more helpful to teachers of writing is the simple yet helpful conceptual framework which Downs uses to categorize faith-based discourses and academic-based discourses. Downs places Mormon discourse, and all faith-based discourse, in the larger
framework of “discourses of Affirmation” and empirical- or academic-based discourses in the larger framework of “discourses of Inquiry.” In this way, Downs’ framework complicates compositionists’ understanding of these discourse areas in at least two ways. One, it shows that it is the goal of each discourse, not its methods or presuppositions, which is the most significant feature of each – one working toward the goal of affirming, celebrating and building community on already-established beliefs and the other working toward the goal of critiquing, evaluating, and analyzing already-held assumptions. Thus each discourse type is valid in its own context. Two, this framework reveals that these discourses thus are not isolated or monolithic constructs. One person could, therefore, authentically enact both types of discourse. One could be a “true believer,” a “real scholar,” or, in fact, a “real true believing scholar” (45). Thus Downs’ conceptual framework is so productive because it recognizes the values of each discourse in its own context and because it blurs the overly sharp boundaries so often constructed between faith and learning.

Like Downs, Shannon Carter also emphasizes the pedagogical value of helping religious students build new learning based on pre-existing faith-based knowledge, in Downs’ words, to “cast their nets on the other side” (52). Carter uses the term “community of practice,” explaining that “[i]n any given community of practice – be it factory work or fishing, Xerox repair or midwifery, evangelism [sic] or the field of composition studies – some activities will be understood as appropriate and others as largely in appropriate…” (580). But while Downs’ approach places most of the pedagogical burden on the teacher to provide real-time responses (as guide, translator, mentor, and coach), Carter’s approach imbeds that work in the assignments themselves. Her approach, which she calls encouraging “rhetorical dexterity,” aims at teaching students “to effectively read, understand, manipulate, and negotiate the cultural and linguistic codes of a new community of practice […] based on a relatively accurate assessment of another, more familiar one” (574).

Carter describes, for example, the work of James, one of her students. Writing about his experiences in his church community, James had mentioned his advancement from being

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5 Throughout her essay, Carter (or her College English editors) mistakenly uses the term “evangelism” when in fact she means “Evangelicalism.” The former refers to the act of evangelizing, while the latter refers to a tradition within Protestant Christianity. Priscilla Perkins makes the same mistake when she refers to “evangelists such as [Lesslie] Newbigin” (596). She means, rather, “Evangelicals such as [Lesslie] Newbigin.” Carter and Perkins each actually unwittingly fall into the same kind of lack of discourse-awareness that Carter is talking about here in relation to students (though, of course, on a smaller scale).
“a child that goes to church” to being a “churchly child” (575). Carter, admitting to James her illiteracy within the discourse of James’ church and asked him to explain it to her in a way she could understand. Thus by having students practice this kind of cross-cultural rhetorical exercise, Carter believes that students are more likely to become more aware of, and therefore more adept at, maintaining a vital connection to their own, and at negotiating new, discourses.

Finally, Gregory Shafer, like Downs and Carter, also emphasizes the pedagogical value of helping students maintain a connection to faith-based discourses as well as having students work to increase their rhetorical dexterity. But while Downs suggests teachers implement these principles by providing real-time responses to students like Keith, and Carter suggests having students practice a form of rhetorical code-switching, Gregory Shafer emphasizes the pedagogical advantage of doing something more pro-active. At least in the case of a student like Danielle, who struggled with her own sense of writerly authority, Shafer recommends that teachers do more than coach religious students toward conventional academic literacy or rhetorical awareness; teachers ought also to carve out for religious students a bit more academic breathing room. Shafer’s goal, then, was “not to undermine or trivialize [Danielle’s] beliefs but to animate them in a broader, more critical, more probing fashion” (325). This meant that Shafer did not enforce the normal conventions of academic discourse which would have required her to use only “objective, non-proselytizing sources” (as Jan Worth had told her student) in her research paper. Instead, Shafer allowed Danielle to use “luminaries from her church” as sources. Shafer does qualify his decision by explaining that he required Danielle to use only those “church luminaries” who qualified as experts and that both Shafer himself and Danielle’s classmates scrutinized “her notions of scholarship” (327). But he encouraged her to “celebrate and interrogate her ideals for herself and the class” (327). In the end, this effort to make space for faith-based reasoning within academic discourse helped Danielle begin to establish her authority as a writer and thinker. Over the course of the term, Danielle learned to “transcend the tenets of her church and rely on her own transactions with texts as a way to defend her own positions” (327-328). Even though Shafer makes no reference to Downs’ work, in essence, his approach supports Downs’ emphasis on the way in which a scholar, for example, can productively inhabit both the discourses of Affirmation and discourses of Inquiry. Downs had pointed out that while a person could be a “real scholar” or “true believer,” she could also be a “real true believing
scholar” (45). So, in this instance, Shafer actually implements Downs’ insight by creating a larger space for Danielle, one in which she does not have to submerge one of her identities (religious believer) in order to develop another one (academic writer).

Thus, in each of these cases, Downs, Carter, and Shafer are creating for students various types of bridges, as it were, using discourse-awareness between faith-based and secular academic discourses. Carter provides specific cross-cultural rhetorical exercises teachers can use to lead students toward “rhetorical dexterity,” Downs provides teachers with a conceptual framework (“discourses of affirmation” and “discourses of inquiry”) to help them affirm both discourses and thus to more productively help students negotiate the two, and Shafer shows the pedagogical value of broadening the boundaries of academic discourse so that students of faith may more productively inhabit that space. Shafer, as it were, creates a kind of hybrid space in which both (as Downs describes them) the “discourse of affirmation” as well as the “discourse of inquiry” can inform each other.

It is, in fact, the way in which these approaches build bridges between students’ religious worldviews and academic discourse which is probably their most significant feature. In these approaches, compositionists have gone beyond simply emphasizing audience-awareness. For encouraging students to be aware of their audience certainly helps students negotiate various discourse situations. But it wasn’t until compositionists took pedagogical advantage of the concept of discourse community that they began to develop these more sophisticated approaches for working with religious students.

“CASTING OUR NETS ON THE OTHER SIDE”

The second major way in which compositionists are developing pedagogical approaches for religious students is by focusing more directly on developing religious students’ inquiry and thinking skills. Chris Anderson, Lizabeth Rand, Samuel Cohen, and others suggest approaches which take pedagogical advantage of these students’ own religious faith in order to develop their critical thinking and inquiry skills. Anderson’s, Rand’s, and Cohen’s approaches aren’t as yet as developed as Downs’, Carter’s, and Shafer’s discourse-awareness approaches. But that is perhaps at least partly because, with the exception of Samuel Cohen, each of them is concerned not only to develop their approaches. Each exhibits a burden to argue for the intellectual and rhetorical value of students’ religious faith against its secular detractors, and only secondarily to suggest approaches which derive from those
arguments. For instance, while Chris Anderson suggests that teachers have students read analyses of religious rhetoric – like Hadden and Swann’s *Prime Time Preachers* – and ask students to analyze/reflect on their own religious experiences and community, his primary goal is to remind compositionists that secular academic as well as religious writers write from biases and that therefore compositionists ought to be careful not to be “absolutist in their antiabsolutism” (13). Lizabeth Rand suggests, similarly, that teachers ought to have students analyze / reflect on their own religious experience and culture, but she does so in the context of her larger and more pressing argument that Evangelical “witnessing talk” is not in fact the unsophisticated or simplistic thought many compositionists often think it is. Finally, Ronda Leathers Dively suggests teachers use intellectually sophisticated religious writing as models of complexity of thought, but she does so in the context of her argument that too many academics inaccurately assume that religious thought will be dualistic.

Thus, while Carter, Downs, and others, as I discussed in the section above, focus their approaches on creating a bridge between religious and secular academic discourse, Anderson, Rand, and others focus more directly on the pedagogical advantage of students’ religion itself. They, in effect, fulfill the ideal that Douglas Downs held up for his Mormon students: that they “[cast] their [pedagogical] nets on the other side” (52). They draw attention to various ways in which students’ religion itself – including students’ faith itself (Rand, Handelman), religious rhetoric in general (Anderson, Dively), and students’ individual religious experience and culture (Cohen, Rand, Anderson) – can bring with it its own rhetorical and intellectual advantages.

**Examining the Assumptions of All (Religious) Discourse**

Chris Anderson and John Groppe both emphasize the way in which religious rhetoric can help students become more aware of the underlying biases and premises of all rhetoric, and thereby can help them become more aware of the complexity in all language (Anderson) and/or to help them become better able to connect with their audience (Groppe).

Groppe wants, like Rand, to draw attention to the pedagogical value of religious students’ “witnessing talk.” Referring to it as “prophetic utterance” (6), Groppe argues that encouraging religious students to explore their religious traditions’ rich genres – e.g., manifestos, testimonies, prayers, autobiographies, lyrical meditations, songs, etc – would help enable them both to “get at [these genres’] origins and possibilities” (6) and to become more
adept at establishing connections with their audience. Because these genres represent a form of expressive discourse, and because in expressive discourse we find “the mother lode of premises,” these faith-based genres represent not something compositionists ought to devalue or avoid but something they ought to employ. Additionally, Groppe suggests that the very variety of these forms themselves provide a way in which teachers can help students “get a better grasp of their own experience and confidence” (9).

Anderson, similarly, proposes that teachers have students analyze religious rhetoric – more specifically, works like Hadden and Swann’s *Prime Time Preachers* which analyze religious rhetoric, and then use that rhetorical perspective to reflect on their own religious experience. Because, as Anderson points out, “[r]eligious rhetoric affords an ideal way of examining the assumptions of all discourse, an ideal test case, because in it the bias that is present in all language is especially evident because especially blatant” (13), studying it can do more than enable students to become more rhetorically aware. Because it helps them begin to see the underlying assumptions of claims and evidence (i.e., because those assumptions are particularly explicit), and thereby the subjectivity of all language and thought, it can also help them become more attentive to intellectual complexity. Anderson’s approach is similar to Dale Sullivan’s, in that Sullivan recommended having students analyze the rhetoric of their own and other “sects,” but Anderson’s approach goes beyond Sullivan’s in its recognition religious rhetoric’s particular ability to draw attention to underlying premises.

Encouraging Critical Faith

Lizabeth Rand and Susan Handelman go even further than Anderson and Groppe in emphasizing the pedagogical value of religious rhetoric, each arguing that religious rhetoric, even that exhibited by composition students, can reflect a skeptical and complex stance. Rand argues that students’ “witnessing talk” and the religious faith that it expresses, when “rightfully understood,” are, in fact, “a subversive force” (361). Witnessing talk “involve[s] a complex interrogation of the self” and “can, in fact, be thought-provoking” (363). In support of her claim, Rand points to some conceptual similarities between secular compositionists and Christians. For instance, while Christian apologist C.S. Lewis talks about the need to “die daily” to one’s self, compositionists talk also about the need for personal conversion.

Compositionists call for students to ‘lose’ the notion of a unified self (ultimately oppressed because it is distracted from cultivating greater critical
Compositionists, Rand continues, “act as witnesses hoping to convert others to the faith” (360). Similarly, while for fourth-century rhetorician and Christian theologian St. Augustine, evil is caused by a lack of free will which, in turn, results from the damage done by original sin, so, for many compositionists (building on the work of Paulo Freire), evil is caused by a lack of freedom or agency which, in turn, results from a lack of critical consciousness (361). For Augustine, spiritual salvation provides a person with both the ability to see the evil as well as a new power to work against it. So for many compositionists, critical literacy provides a person with both the ability to see the evil and a new to work against it.

Based on this insight, Rand believes that one of the best approaches teachers can take with Evangelical Christian students – at least, those who struggle with the expectations of academic discourse – is to help them tap into the inherently critical nature of their faith. More specifically, she suggests asking them to analyze and write about “how their resistance to mainstream values and culture has shaped their lives and how those outside their immediate faith communities respond to them” (363).

Similarly, Susan Handelman points to the ways in which religious faith, especially traditional Jewish faith, is “very complex” and “incorporates despair and questioning within itself” (95). In the Hebrew Bible, the word enumah, which is usually translated into English as “faith,” is not a “sentimental feeling” or blind, as Handelman explains, but more accurately refers to the ability to be “strong, firm, diligent,” and is thus a skill that needs to be trained and nurtured (86). Rabbis, when they interpret the Bible, reflect this sense of faith as strength and diligence. Jewish biblical commentary, or midrash meaning “to seek, search out, demand,” takes a very postmodern-like perspective on scripture, at least at first glance, regularly rearranging the flow of narrative, breaking up verses and words, collapsing time, and questioning God’s actions (or lack thereof).

Faith, therefore, is not at all necessarily opposed to skepticism. It is actually quite a searching, aggressive, and skeptical stance. Handelman tells the story of an Orthodox Jewish rabbi who had been raised by secular socialist parents. “When asked why he became religious, he answered, with a twinkle in his eye: “Because I was a skeptic.”” (87-88). On the other hand, Handelman wants to be careful not to overemphasize skepticism, pointing out that both absolute faith and absolute skepticism are destructive and unhelpful, and that even
the rabbinic commentary which is the most critical of God in the end relies on a deep confidence in God and in the creative spiritual and intellectual power of the biblical text. But, in the end, like Rand, Handelman wants to draw compositionists’ attention to the pedagogical and intellectual value of religious faith.

Exploring How (Religious) Culture Makes Us

Lastly, Samuel Cohen and Ronda Leathers Dively each suggest ways teachers can take pedagogical advantage of the complexity in students’ own religious experience and culture. “Religion is an especially fruitful area,” Cohen observes, “in which to explore the way the world makes us because it is a recognizable institution in which the social construction of ideology and perception and subjectivity can be examined” (32). Teaching at Baruch College in New York City among an “incredibly diverse” student body which includes many Orthodox Jews who struggle between “Old World religion and New World secularism” (32), Cohen, an atheist Jew himself, had found this particularly vibrant cultural milieu complicating not only his students’ but also his own understanding of Jewishness. He learned that “a Yevgeniy wearing a Metallica T-shirt and fat-soled skateboard sneakers can be an Orthodox Jew” (33). And Cohen’s students themselves learned that a teacher named Cohen is not necessarily a priest (as per the stereotype) and can in fact be an atheist.

To promote this kind of learning, Cohen created formal assignments which provided opportunities for his students and himself to ‘take apart’ Jewishness” (33). In class, they discussed Zionism and the Palestinian “problem” in the context of Patricia Nelson Limerick’s The Legacy of Conquest. As Cohen explains, Limerick’s contention is that the main reason for the tragic encounter between the Cayuse Indians and missionaries in the Pacific Northwest was “the widely divergent subjectivities of the natives and the missionaries, which lead them to interpret their contact in vastly different ways and then to act on these interpretations” (34). Having gotten students to think about the effects of “widely divergent subjectivities,” then, Cohen assigned his students to compare another encounter situation to the one Limerick talks about. Cohen reports that one of his students, Yevgeniy, who chose to discuss Zionists and non-Zionists encountering each other in the context of Israel’s Palestinian “problem,” failed to uncover aspects of the “culturally-given worldview” of either group (34). Yevgeniy exhibited a particular blind spot regarding the group he himself belonged to – Zionists. But it is perhaps this failure itself which argues for one advantage of having religious students
analyze their faith-based culture – that is where the seeing is most difficult as well as potentially most productive.

Finally, Ronda Leathers Dively similarly suggests having students read religious writing to model complexity of thought, and, more specifically, complexity of thought triggered by recognizing the complexities of one's own subjective experience. Following Chris Anderson, Dively recommends having students read Annie Dillard's “Singing with the Fundamentalists.” But while Anderson chose Dillard for the complexity of her thought (in particular, for example, her ability to avoid stereotyping the fundamentalists), Dively chose Dillard for the way she negotiates her “multiple interpellation[s]” – i.e., the way in which Dillard moves back and forth between two conflicting subjectivities: her identity as an “intellectual’ who has emphatically denounced religion and [her identity as a] spiritualist who is drawn to participate in religious experience” (98). Dively makes this recommendation in the context of her hypothesis that students who believe in the “myth of the unified, self-regulating subject” are most likely to exhibit dualistic or simplistic thinking. Dively posits therefore that one of the best ways to help religious students think complexly is to have them analyze religious rhetoric which demonstrates thinkers being faithful and intellectually sophisticated at the same time. To that end, she recommends students read also C.S. Lewis6, particularly for his description of what he calls “Christianity-and-water,” a simplistic but unfortunately common view of Christianity among Christian lay people, and feminist theologian Mary Daly for the way in which Daly negotiates her identities as theologian and feminist.

A Third Way

Finally, when we analyze these approaches in the context of the three pedagogical problems associated with religious students that I laid out at the beginning of this chapter, we can see that the discourse- and inquiry-based approaches each serve in their own way to bring religious perspectives into a pedagogically productive dialogue with other perspectives in the classroom. But these two approaches seem to address the first two problems (the problems of lack of discourse awareness and of complex thinking) much more directly than

6 Probably largely because C.S. Lewis, as Dively observes, “has managed to maintain some level of respect within the academy” (98), he is the religious thinker / writer most recommended as a model of religious writing. Dively recommends him, as does Gregory Shafer, Mark Montesano, and Duane Roen.
they do the third (the problem of ideological resistance). This third problem of ideological resistance clearly remains the most thorny problem related to religion in the writing classroom. The discourse-awareness approach does address it to a certain extent. The use of the concept of discourse community, which includes as it does attention to a discourse community’s presuppositions, interpretive methods, and epistemology, will certainly help enable teachers and students to learn to negotiate each other’s ideological differences in a more productive manner. And the inquiry approach, simply by beginning to recognize the intellectual value of religious discourse and thought, will certainly also help encourage ideological respect, as it were. But neither approach addresses ideological resistance directly.

But at least one scholar, Priscilla Perkins, has developed what in essence is a blending of these two approaches, a blending which itself seems to have to advantage of addressing the problem of ideological resistance more directly and productively. At bottom, Perkins’ approach allows students who hold to a different epistemology to hold to that epistemology in their effort to make meaning and think critically. She focuses her attention on conservative Christian students and describes the benefits of having students interpret texts “texts that seem to threaten them” (601) through the “generative lens” (using Freire’s principle) of the Bible (595).

She begins with the presupposition that any attempt to replace students’ faith-based approaches to texts or textual authority with more secular or liberal ones will not be pedagogically productive. Doing so, after all, could lead students to “lose their sense of themselves as faithful Christians,” and, if so, Perkins asks, “Could I respect my co-learners while I attempted to change them against their wills?” (589). She explains that conservative Christian students take textual interpretation very seriously, knowing as they do that how one reads a text can deeply affect one’s life (595).

She had students read, for example, Adrienne Rich’s “Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying” in this way. Normally, conservative Christian students would likely resist Rich’s homosexuality and thus never fully be able to engage Rich’s text. But when they read Rich’s insights into interpersonal honesty through the lens of John 4:9-26 (Jesus’ compassionate response to the divorced Samaritan woman’s honesty) and/or of Matthew 27:11-26 (Pontius Pilate’s cruel response to Jesus’ own honesty), as Perkins puts it,

their use of scripture enables them to confront Rich’s considerable relevance for their own communities; looking at her with “benevolent” eyes, they can begin to confront, for example, the feminine silence that sometimes
surrounds a church community’s knowledge of domestic abuse, as well as the kinds of agency they can exert as church women in these and other situations. (601)

Perkins reports that her approach has been productive (600). If so, she has found at least one way to significantly lessen students' ideological resistance to more socially liberal goals by allowing them some space to apply their own epistemological method (or ways of reading) – i.e., using the Bible as starting point and interpretive framework. Perkins even goes on to describe the way in which this approach has enabled her to help students, “once they were confident that there really was room for this book in their academic work,” to examine the Bible itself as text (591-592).

Basically, as do the discourse- and inquiry-based approaches, Perkins’ approach makes faith-based discourse valid and the study of faith-related culture and thought valid. But she is going beyond those approaches by also making faith-based epistemology and interpretive practices valid. As Perkins herself puts it, in this way, the Bible thus becomes for students a key with which they “can open the texts that seem to threaten them. With the Bible by their side, their worries about being corrupted by unfamiliar ways of thinking and living are lessened, and they become invested in the production of culturally relevant knowledge” (601). Perkins has thus created a space in which religious students are exploring the larger world and making meaning through the use of their own tool kit, as it were.

Conclusion

Thus, as this survey shows, compositionists over the last twenty years have begun to develop fairly sophisticated discourse-based and an inquiry-based approaches for working with religious students – i.e., those whose religious faith seems to present pedagogical problems. The discourse approach, especially, affords compositionists the most conceptual and pedagogical benefits. It supplies a framework through which compositionists themselves can understand faith-based discourses. It supplies a framework with which they can construct pedagogical bridges, as it were, between students' religious faith and their secular literacies. In essence, the concept of discourse communities, in the hands of writing teachers, serves to put religious perspectives on the same footing as other perspectives: on the common ground of rhetoric and discourse where it is the audience which determines the validity of one's presuppositions and evidence, not an appeal to objective rationality.
The inquiry approach is also productive, but not because it uses inquiry as such but because it encourages inquiry in relation to religious discourse and thought related to students' lives. To a certain extent, compositionists, by developing these approaches, are discovering the pedagogical benefits of the topic of religion – especially religious discourse and religious culture – not only for religious students but for students in general. For unlike other topics related to rhetoric or cultural studies, religious faith carries with it a distinctive worldview, associations with religious organizations and institutions, a discourse community, and an especially rich and diverse rhetorical and intellectual tradition. Thus, when compositionists turn students' attention to topics related to religion, they are turning them to an especially rich matrix of cultural, rhetorical, intellectual, institutional and personal meanings.

And, finally, Priscilla Perkins' approach supplies at least one example of a kind of third approach. By allowing students to begin with their own “way of knowing” to interpret texts and creating meaning, Perkins' approach builds on the discourse- and the inquiry-based approach. It takes students' discourse differences into account (by letting them use the Bible as interpretive guide and authority) as well as emphasizes inquiry and interpretation (by allowing for the Bible's authority in students' interpretation of texts). By virtue of blending these two approaches, it helps lessen students' resistance to instructor's goals. In so doing, it addresses all three pedagogical problems: lack of complex thinking, lack of discourse awareness, as well as ideological resistance.
CHAPTER FOUR
Conclusion:
Key Thoughts and Looking Forward

Religion, Rationality, Discourse, and Inquiry

As my analysis shows, the underlying dynamic throughout this scholarship is the long-ingrained tendency in U.S. higher education to separate faith and learning, a tendency exhibited with Composition Studies as much as within other fields. In other words, as I show in chapter two, other factors have certainly affected and continue to affect the relationship between writing instructors and religious students in the composition classroom (such as the contemporary climate of distrust between political liberals and conservatives). But it is very probable that the prime precipitating factor in compositionists’ discomfort with religion is what George Marsden describes as “the essential structures and impulses” of academia which “preserve continuity with the past” (Outrageous 18) – that is, the past in which the newly dominant structures of scientific rationalism and progressive materialism marginalized religious perspectives, until, over time, such marginalization became normalized.

But, as I show in chapter three, compositionists have also recently begun to counter this faith/learning dichotomy by developing two key pedagogical approaches for working with religious students. With the first approach – one emphasizing discourse-awareness – compositionists are in essence re-integrating religious perspectives into the classroom by treating them just as they would other perspectives and by teaching students to learn to communicate across discourse communities. In other words, in these approaches, how religious perspectives are received is dependent on their ability to appeal to and communicate across audiences rather than on their ability to meet some purportedly objective standard of rationality. Compositionists, of course, have long worked against the dominance of scientific rationality by emphasizing the importance of rhetorical sensitivity over a kind of right/wrong rationality. Now they are breaking significant ground in an effort to do that very thing for religious perspectives as well. With the second approach – one emphasizing inquiry into religious discourse, culture, and thought itself – compositionists are taking an even further step toward breaking down the faith/reason dichotomy. They are openly and formally discussing aspects of religious thought and discourse in the classroom. In this way, they are treating religion as valid a subject of inquiry as any other.
These two key approaches, moreover, as these compositionists report, are generally productive. One of the endearing characteristics of this scholarship is the way in which so many compositionists candidly describe their failures and flaws while working with religious students. But these compositionists also regularly describe the successes of their approaches. As is clear from my analysis, these approaches were productive due primarily to the fact that they, at their most basic conceptual level, worked to break down the dichotomy between faith and learning and thus to complicate compositionists’ understanding of pedagogical needs of religious students. Gregory Shafer’s work with his student, Danielle, serves as an example both of the successes of these approaches and the way in which they depend on a willingness to blur the sharp lines of the faith/learning dichotomy. Shafer worked from the presupposition that a sharp divide between a students’ faith and her learning is not going to be pedagogically productive. And that insight enabled him to think outside the box and to develop an approach which worked for Danielle.

**Directions for Future Research**

In the balance of this chapter I take up the question of directions for future research. But instead of focusing, for instance, on ways in which the particular discussions I have analyzed in this thesis may become more productive, I focus on emphasizing the foundational conceptual task which will more broadly benefit this research as a whole – i.e., the need to continue the work of breaking down the dichotomy between faith and learning. For it is evident, from my analysis in chapter three, that one cluster within this research has begun to develop significant insights and pedagogical approaches. But it is also evident, from my research in chapter two, that many within the field of Composition Studies continue to base much of their thinking about religion in the writing classroom and their interactions with religious students on the assumption of sharp separation between religious faith and perspectives and public education. Furthermore, even some scholars working on this topic themselves can tend to assume a split between religion and rationality. Jan Worth, for instance, as I discuss in chapter two, seemed to assume a fairly sharp separation between faith and learning when she told one of her students in an email:

> While as you know I have a hearty respect for the importance of your belief, this class is a place to practice logical skills. I trust that you’ll develop your beliefs on your own; give me six more weeks to teach you about logic and empirical evidence. (28)
The implicit assumption here seems to be that religion is not logical and thus not of sufficient intellectual quality to be discussed in a college classroom. While it is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss questions regarding the interplay of rationality and religious faith, the salient point here is that, as I show in chapter two, it is primarily due to this implicit presupposition that faith and reason are incompatible that compositionists continue to be uncomfortable with their students’ religious faith and thus likely continue to be less pedagogical productive in their work with them.

Of course, it is not surprising that this faith/reason dichotomy continues to obtain. This research on religion in the writing classroom has developed significant insights over the past twenty years, but it has not yet gained the kind of momentum which would enable it to greatly influence the field as a whole. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize the need for scholars primarily to continue to break down the faith/learning dichotomy. Without continued work in this foundational area, this scholarship will likely not develop much further.

Complicating Compositionists’ Understanding of Religious Students and Religion

How specifically ought compositionists to continue work in this area? One of the main ways to break down any dichotomy is, of course, to complicate one’s understanding of the persons and/or concepts involved. Because in the case of this research on religion the primary persons and/or concepts involved are religious students themselves and religious thought itself (as it relates to writing pedagogy), these are two primary areas in which compositionists can complicate their understanding of religious students and religion and thus begin to collapse the dichotomy between faith and learning. Some work has already been done to complicate compositionists’ understanding of students’ faith-based discourses and worldview. For instance, Douglas Downs has researched Mormon discourse and epistemology, and Amy Goodburn has researched Protestant Fundamentalist discourse and epistemology. Goodburn’s work especially provides compositionists with a deeper understanding of the underlying incompatibility of liberal and fundamentalist worldviews. But in addition to this kind of research into discourses and worldviews, more research is needed specifically on religious students themselves in the context of their learning to write. This research could consist of empirical studies which analyze religious students’ responses to assignments, for example, or of full-fledged ethnographies which take a more cultural
studies approach. Both of these types of studies would significantly deepen compositionists' understanding of the way in which religious faith can intersect with learning to write.

Literacy Studies scholars have already provided ethnographies on religious subcultures – for example, Shirley Brice Heath in her *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, Andrea Fishman in her *Amish Literacy: What and How it Means*, and Vicki Tolar Burton in her *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley’s Methodism: Reading, Writing, and Speaking to Believe*. But so far only one scholar has completed an ethnography of religious students specifically in the context of a college-level composition course. Marsha Penti’s dissertation “Religious Identities in the Composition Class: Learning from Students of Difference,” in addition to being the first ethnographic study of religious students in the context of a composition class, is also the first study of religious students outside the context of a negative pedagogical encounter. In other words, while the vast majority of this research was precipitated by an often-uncomfortable encounter between a writing instructor and a religious student, Penti initiated her research mainly out a desire to better understand these students. As a short overview of her study reveals, such an in-depth ethnography certainly provides insights relating especially to ideological resistance that make these kinds of studies worth the effort.

Penti studied five Finnish Apostolic Lutheran (F.A.L.) students at Michigan Technological University. Among many other insights, Penti’s studied revealed how these students tended to hide their religious identity (because they perceived that it was not welcome) as well as to quietly resist the more socially-liberal goals of their instructors. They would act the part or parrot a certain view in order to get a good grade. Penti describes Karen, an F.A.L. student who knew that her teacher expected her to take a feminist perspective. In writing an analysis of a laundry detergent ad, Karen did half-heartedly argue for societal change, but also found a way throughout the paper – at least once per paragraph, as Penti points out – to mention that “it is the traditional duty of women to do the laundry” (262). “Karen could not really adopt a feminist stance,” Penti points out, “but she knew she had to try to get a good grade” (263).

Finally, Penti’s ethnography also brings out the way in which F.A.L. students, especially the female students, even though they were preconditioned to be successful students, “each practiced a certain art of resistance to catering totally to the university” (285). The female students, thus, aimed to please their instructors, but found subtle ways to resist.
For example, Penti describes the way Mary, whom Penti worked with in the writing center, continued to use religious diction even after her instructor had marked such diction as “errors.” In her essay about marriage, Mary used “very sermonic like” language, primarily because, as Penti points out, “she sees dating and marriage as religious expressions” (252). But, interestingly, even though Mary’s teacher explicitly asked her to modify the essay’s religious language, and Mary in general was the kind of student who would readily comply with her teacher’s directions, in this case Mary complied only minimally. In fact, in each successive revision, as she added more details, Mary’s use of religious language actually increased. Penti observes that since for Mary marriage was a religious institution, “it is natural that she should write in religious terms despite concurrently making diction ‘errors’” (252). Thus Penti’s ethnography reveals significant insight especially for those scholars interested in directly addressing the problem of ideological resistance.

Another way compositionists may complicate their understanding of religious students and religion itself is by looking beyond the question of how to what pedagogical approaches to apply to religious students, by asking how compositionists might complicate their understanding of religion and/or religious thought itself. Again, as I have said, some initial work has been done in this area. Douglas Downs and Amy Goodburn have researched Mormon and Protestant fundamentalist discourses respectively. But these are the only two studies of their kind (that my research revealed), and they do not look into these discourses beyond the goal of sketching these discourses’ general characteristics. Sharon Crowley, in her Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism, goes into significant detail of the characteristics of Protestant fundamentalism, emphasizing especially the role of apocalypticism. She argues that in order for liberals and fundamentalists to better communicate with each other, and thus to better ensure a thriving democracy, liberals will have to take a more broadly rhetorical approach. They will have to appeal, in other words, to pathos as well as logos in their efforts to dialogue with fundamentalists. But Crowley’s study, of course, does not address composition pedagogy specifically.

Another compositionist, Chris Anderson, works against the faith/learning dichotomy in his book Teaching as Believing: Faith in the University. Anderson provides a model in which compositionists (and secular academics as a whole) can see faith and learning as thriving together and benefiting each other. He draws out the inherent connections between a more classically orthodox Christian faith – which is rich in mystery, humility, and complexity –
and the aims of a secular university. When faith and learning are thus allowed to mingle, there are “moments when the way of the university and the way of faith” aren’t at odds “but somehow, scandalously, in harmony” (10). Especially as expressed in multi-layered richness of scripture and classic Christian literature, this Christian faith serves and joins with the critical and analytical aims of a university. But Anderson’s model also maintains a creative tension between faith and learning. In addition to sharing the same goal and method (of humility and complexity) as secular learning, faith also points beyond learning, to the limitations of reason. As Anderson puts it, “The university shows the gaps to be filled, the church fills them. The university shows the process, the church moves through the process to its final stage. The university shows the options, the church chooses one” (148). Faith, like secular learning, is necessarily uncertain and situated. But unlike secular learning, faith risks trust in the transcendent and thereby is enabled to make choices and intellectual moves beyond what rationality could support. Anderson argues that because it makes such moves and choices, faith (and religious perspectives in general) must be allowed an equal place among the diversity of perspectives in the postmodern university. It must be what it is – a perspective and not merely a sterile object of study. Thus Anderson’s book richly develops not only a new vision of the complexity of religious faith, but also the productive ways in which faith and learning can thrive together. But, like Crowley’s book, Anderson’s focus is not specifically the teaching of writing, Crowley focusing on public discourse and Anderson focusing on academic discourse in more broad terms.

An example of the kind of study which would address religious discourse and thought in the context of Composition Studies is Vail McGuire’s dissertation “Unlikely Connections: The Intersection of Composition, Rhetoric, and Christian Theology.” Like Penti’s, McGuire’s study is the only one of its kind in this body of scholarship. Also like Penti’s, McGuire’s study reveals the kind of conceptual as well as pedagogical benefits such research can provide. McGuire’s primary goal is to show a few of the various ways in which composition theory can be informed by contemporary Christian theology. Toward this end, McGuire discusses in depth contemporary feminist theology, traditional Trinitarian doctrine, and even the concept of evangelism. Feminist theology, he points out, provides ways to conceptualize religion and composition in a way that avoids dualities and makes connections. Trinitarian doctrine, especially with its concept of *perichoresis* (or the “mutual indwelling” of the three Persons of the Trinity) and its openness to ambiguity and mystery, supplies a
fruitful model for exploring “issues of identity, subjectivity, self and the Other” (29). The concept of evangelism, he suggests, can actually help compositionists re-envision their role as teachers, with its emphasis on community, on conversion as a “multiple and diverse” process, and on social causes (83-85).

McGuire is familiar with the scholarship developing on religion in the writing classroom. Thus he makes explicit some of the ways in which his study into the conceptual connections between Christian theology and composition theory can inform classroom pedagogy. Interestingly, in one of the applications he discusses, McGuire suggests that the openness to mystery and ambiguity (as found in classic Trinitarian doctrine) could help “subvert the rigidity of conventional scholarly discourse” (97). While in this case, he means specifically encouraging students to “embrace mystery as part of their epistemologies” (97), this willingness to “embrace mystery” and expand the conventions of academic discourse sounds very much like Gregory Shafer’s work with his student Danielle. As I discuss in chapter three, Shafer provides Danielle with academic breathing room, as it were, by expanding the conventions of academic discourse to allow Danielle to cite “church luminaries” in her research paper. Thus the kind of pedagogical benefit which McGuire is talking about is already exemplified in Shafer’s work, just with a slightly different emphasis. In other words, while McGuire here suggests that the conceptual insights gained from Trinitarian doctrine could help teachers encourage students to “embrace mystery as part of their epistemologies,” Shafer’s work with Danielle shows how the same insight could also be used to help compositionists themselves similarly “embrace mystery [or, at least, a new openness to other ways of knowing] as part of their epistemologies” (emphasis mine) (97).

Thus, McGuire’s study of connections between Christian theology and Composition theory, like Penti’s study of Finnish Apostolic Lutheran composition students, reveals several conceptually and pedagogically fruitful insights. McGuire and Penti both begin with the presupposition that there is a growing urgency within composition scholarship to re-imagine the role of religious faith in the composition classroom. Both seek to complicate compositionists’ understanding of religious students and religious thought. Both are able to reveal fruitful insights. And both serve to represent fruitful directions for future research in relation to religion in the writing classroom.
In this thesis, then, I have aimed to provide the kind of conceptual map which will help make future research on this topic much more possible and productive. I have taken a group of studies that are generally not in conversation with each other and put them in conversation. The scholars I discuss are gradually constructing a wholly new area of study for composition theory. But it is a new area of study which is still at an inchoate, almost embryonic stage, as only in one area has it begun to coalesce into a full-fledged scholarly conversation. Therefore, at this early stage, it’s especially crucial for scholars working in this area to focus on establishing their knowledge-base (in the form of studies which complicate their understanding of religious students and religious thought) and on breaking down conceptual barriers (primarily the tendency among many in the field as a whole to dichotomize faith and learning). In these ways, compositionists will more be able in the future to envision and develop as yet unheard of (and perhaps as yet unimagined) conceptual and pedagogical insights derived from this investigation into the intersections of religion and writing pedagogy.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


APPENDIX:
Conference Presentations on intersections of religious faith and writing pedagogy at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) conventions between 2004-2009


Carroll, Laura. “Sacred Selections: Using Texts to Bridge Curricular and Institutional Goals.”


Ellis, Lindsay Ellis. “Mediating Conflicts of Worldview.”

Ingalls, Rebecca. “Faithful Centers of Invention in Postmodern Practice.”

Lamberton, Jill. “I Can't Grade This': Reading Faith in Students' Essays.”


Fifty-Sixth Annual Convention, *Conference on College Composition and Communication*, March 16–19, 2005, Moscone Center, San Francisco, California.

Bird, Barbara. “Inquiry and Christian Faith: Can the Two Become One?”

Braue, David. “‘Bad Faith’ to Good Faith: The Fiduciary Element in Critical Thinking.”

Breland, Mary Beth. “Writing Instruction at Baptist Colleges: Theories and Practices in Conservative Religious Environments.”

Hammond, Darin. “Responding to Religion: Facilitating a Spiritual Voice through Response and Revision in the Composition Classroom.”

Hebb, Judith. “Critical Thinking and Biblical Discernment.”


Newman, Georgia. “Listening to Political/Religious Text (and Context) in the Composition Classroom.”

Nieveen Phegley, Missy. “The Truth according to Whom?”

Payne, Michelle. “There's a Belief in My Text!: How Faith-centered Students Manage ‘Textual Belief Spaces' in Their Essays.”
Peele, Tom. “Belief Spaces and Basic Writing: Queer Space in the Contact Zone.”


Santos, Jennifer. “Religious Plotlines and Critical Thinking.”


Freeman, Traci. “Can I Get a Witness: Teaching Composition from Berkeley to the Bible Belt.”

Hart, Nicholas. “Sernary Rhetoric.”

Islam, Suhail. “Creating the ‘Middle Ground’: Understanding South Asian Islamic Literature and Media in a Context of ‘Civilizational Encounter.’”

LeCluyse, Christopher. “Communities of the Word: Writing Centers and Monastic Scriptoria.”

Mendelsohn, Sue. “Integrating Ignatius: Constructing a Jesuit Writing Center.”


Allbaugh, Thomas. “When the Identity is Religious: Faith Traditions as Sites for Rhetorical Invention in the Composition Classroom.”

Chodan, Ross. “In God We Trust: Contending with Religion and Conformity in the Composition Classroom.”


Driscoll, Jennifer. “A Stranger Among Us: Crossing the Borderlands of Faith in the Composition Classroom.”

Finn, Carrie. “Writing Beyond Belief: NPR Meets the Midwestern Community College Composition Classroom.”
McSpadden, Holly. “In Case of Rapture, Don’t Bother to Average My Grades: Meeting the Challenge of Radical Religionists in the Liberal Arts Classroom.”

Ringer, Jeffrey M. “Teaching is Believing: Augustine, Faith, and Critical Inquiry”

Orlijan, Kim. “Cross’ Identities: An Atheist Instructor at a Catholic University.”

Smith, Allison. “Resisting the Normative: The Religious as Possibility in the Composition Classroom.”


Cassity, Kathleen. “Exploring Religious Hybridity in the Writing Classroom.”

Thomson Bunn, Heather. “Are You There God? It’s me, a Writing Student.”


Coley, Toby. “Rhetorics of Restraint in the Professionalization of Evangelical Christian Graduate Students.”

Cullick, Jonathan. “When Students Make Waves: Religious Conflict in the Writing Classroom.”


Ringer, Jeffrey. “Revising Writing, Revising Self: An Evangelical Writes Academically.”
