

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

CARCERAL CHRISTIANIZATION AS A RELIGIOUS PROBLEM OF
GENERATIONS: THEORIZING CULTURAL MISEDUCATION FROM A
GENDER-SENSITIVE STUDY OF ORAL LIFE HISTORIES

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

ROBIN MITCHELL STROUD


Norman, Oklahoma

2015

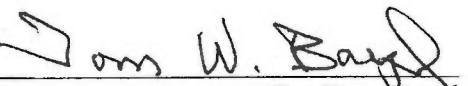
CARCERAL CHRISTIANIZATION AS A RELIGIOUS PROBLEM OF
GENERATIONS: THEORIZING CULTURAL MISEDUCATION FROM A
GENDER-SENSITIVE STUDY OF ORAL LIFE HISTORIES

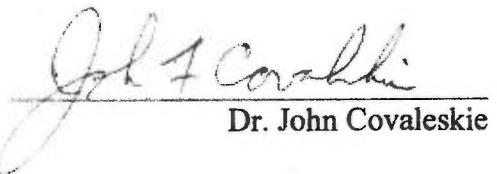
A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

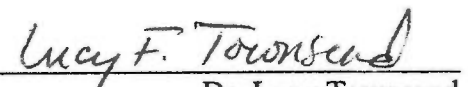

Dr. Susan Laird, Chair


Dr. Jill Irvine


Dr. Tom Boyd


Dr. John Covaleskie


Dr. Joan Smith


Dr. Lucy Townsend

© Copyright by ROBIN MITCHELL STROUD 2015
All Rights Reserved.

There are years that ask questions and years that answer.

—Zora Neale Hurston

To my husband Clarke

And our children McKenna and Callahan

For loving and supporting me in the years that have answered.

And

To my sister Kari

Who has been with me for both.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the members of my dissertation committee – Susan Laird, Joan Smith, John Covaleskie, Tom Boyd, Lucy Townsend, and Jill Irvine – for their steadfast guidance throughout the development of this work, as well as to my friends and colleagues at the University of Oklahoma for their unfailing support throughout this doctoral journey.

Suffice it to say, this undertaking would not have been as rich if not for the individuals who volunteered to share their stories with me. I am thankful for their courage and willingness to lend their voices to this project.

I am also beholden to Debra Levy Martinelli and Matthew Mackintosh for their close readings of my chapters and am especially grateful for their extraordinary editing skills.

Most of all, I am deeply indebted to my family for their unflappable support and encouragement, and especially to Clarke for giving me guilt-free time and space to work, and McKenna and Callahan for understanding when “Mom needs to write.”

Finally, I want to acknowledge many others who lifted me during this journey that are not included here for fear of leaving someone off. Please know how very grateful I am to each of you.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	VII
CHAPTER 1: CARCERAL CHRISTIANIZATION AS RELIGIOUS MISEDUCATION	1
Introduction	4
Carceral Christianization	14
Carceralites	31
CHAPTER 2: PANOPTIC DISCIPLINE	41
Discipline	42
Panoptic Discipline	44
Punitive Discipline	88
Rebuking Discipline	97
CHAPTER 3: COMPULSORY CHRISTIAN CURRICULUM	108
Compulsory Orthodoxies and Orthopraxes	110
Compulsory Teaching Activities	141
CHAPTER 4: SCARS AND BARS, OR LIABILITIES OF CARCERAL LEARNING	162
Inner Scars and Restraints of Carceral Learning	166
Outer Bars and Constraints of Carceral Learning	189
Degrees of Internalization and Varieties of Response	204

CHAPTER 5: CARCERAL CHRISTIANIZATION AS A RELIGIOUS PROBLEM OF GENERATIONS	225
Outer Liabilities of Carceral Religious Learning	236
Inner Liabilities of Carceral Religious Learning	258
Toward a Theory of Transcendent Religious Learning	283
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	286

Abstract

Religion is one of the most influential agents of moral education in both private and public domains, and its educational values and practices vary profoundly from one tradition to another. With that recognition, this empirical-conceptual and “gender-sensitive” (Martin, 1981) qualitative inquiry into the “dark side of Christianity” (Harris and Milam, 1994) utilizes narratives from fourteen oral life histories alongside other textual and cultural data to formulate an original pedagogical theory for religious miseducation. I have named this theory *Carceral Christianization* (henceforth CC) and have bestowed the identity of *Carceralites* on its adherents. As an excessively dogmatic and sometimes abusive religious approach to rearing and educating children, CC, however well meaning, metaphorically (Scheffler, 1960) imprisons (Foucault, 1975; Frye, 1983) adherents’ coming of age and what I call *coming of conscience*. As such, it qualifies as “cultural miseducation” and poses a complex ethical “educational problem of generations” (Martin, 2002) with regard to religious education. The goal of this study is to help people recognize and understand some of the painful and problematic effects of growing up in CC, not only for individuals but also for communities. Given that Christianity is the predominant religious tradition in the U.S. and is influential in many public spheres (Pew Forum, 2014), and in light of recent growing worldwide apprehension over religious

extremism (Pew Research Center, 2014), the topic represents a central concern for educational inquiry.

Chapter 1:

Carceral Christianization as Religious Miseducation

God loved birds and created trees.

Man loved birds and invented cages.

—Jacques Deval

There is a dark side to Christianity... Well-meaning people condemn, manipulate, or hurt others because of the destructive nature of their Christian beliefs. Parents abuse their children, churches abuse their followers, families withdraw love and support, individuals are depressed, angry, fearful, anxious, withdrawn, upset, perfectionist, and are dysfunctional in a myriad of practices commonly found in Christianity. These concepts are being preached and "pounded into"... these abused individuals by their well-meaning parents and by well-meaning, but nonetheless dysfunctional preachers and Sunday school teachers.¹

—Jerry Harris and Melody Milam, *Serpents in the Manger*

Novelist Toni Morrison said, "If there's a book you really want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it."² My dissertation—an empirical-conceptual and "gender-sensitive"³ qualitative inquiry into the dark side of Christianity, as described above by mental health professionals Jerry Harris and Melody Milam—is such a book. Utilizing narratives from fourteen oral life histories alongside other textual and cultural data,⁴ I have formulated an original theory of religious miseducation, which I call *Carceral Christianization* (henceforth CC), and have bestowed the identity of *Carceralites* on its adherents. As an excessively dogmatic and sometimes abusive religious

¹ Jerry L. Harris and Melody J. Milam, *Serpents in the Manger: Overcoming Abusive Christianity* (New York: Barricade Books, 1994), 24-25.

² "Toni Morrison," *Wikiquote*, accessed December 23, 2013, http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Toni_Morrison.

³ John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, (Indianapolis, IN: Kappa Delta Pi, 1938; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1997); Jane Roland Martin, "The Ideal of the Educated Person," *Educational Theory* 31, no. 2 (1981), 97-109.

⁴ D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

approach to rearing and educating children, I hold that CC, however well-meaning, metaphorically⁵ imprisons adherents' coming of age and what I call *coming of conscience*. As such, it qualifies for what philosopher and educational theorist Jane Roland Martin has recognized as *cultural miseducation* and contributes to what she has termed *the educational problem of generations*.⁶ My hope is that this study will help people recognize and understand some of the painful and problematic effects of growing up in CC, not only for individuals but also for communities. Given that Christianity is the predominant religious tradition in the U.S. and is influential in many spheres,⁷ and in light of recent growing worldwide apprehension over religious extremism, especially violent religious extremism, the topic represents a central concern for educational inquiry.

⁵ Israel Scheffler, "Educational Metaphors," chap. 3 in *The Language of Education* (Springfield, IL: Thomas Publishing, 1960), 47-59.

⁶ Jane Roland Martin, *Cultural Miseducation: In Search of a Democratic Solution* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002); Martin, "The Educational Problem of Generations," chap. 3 in *Cultural Miseducation*, 62-86.

⁷ "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey," *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, accessed August 16, 2014, <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports/>; Frank Bruni, "The G.O.P.'s Assertive God Squad: Republicans, Evangelicals, Gays and Abortion," *New York Times*, February 25, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/25/opinion/frank-bruni-republicans-evangelicals-gays-and-abortion.html>.

Introduction

Christianity undoubtedly lays claim to many praiseworthy values and qualities. It is true, for example, that Christianity has inspired the ideas and works of great leaders, thinkers, and humanitarians. Its canon has fostered a sense of wonder at the universe, nature, and the human race. Its traditions have been a creative influence for some of the world's great architectural, artistic, and musical works. Additionally, many Christian-identified charities and organizations have reached around the globe to bring education and health care to communities in need.

Christianity has also helped communities flourish by supporting important social-solidarity functions that provide people with a vital sense of belonging in the world. Its organization around common beliefs and practices, alongside regular gatherings and activities, has reinforced shared ties that bind individuals into families, families into groups, and groups into communities. Christianity has also helped many meet their fundamental social needs. Christian communities, for example, lend strength and comfort in times of personal or communal crisis and consecrate such important life happenings as birth, marriage, suffering, and death.

Moreover, Christian teachings have provided religious foundations that kindle spiritual growth and a sense of purpose in individuals, and many of its teachers have encouraged others toward a peaceful, loving, joyful, and hopeful life. I even knew a man who attended a church near his home not because he believed as they believed, but “to be around good people,” as he explained it. Therefore, I want to make it clear that I regard certain Christian beliefs, practices, and teachers as profoundly positive sources for shaping a conscientious way of living and promoting a particular understanding of life. Having acknowledged that, I also believe that certain other kinds can be profoundly negative and misshaping—the “dark side” of Christianity emphasized by Harris and Milam.

It is with the *Christianization*—or religious education, actions, processes, and aims—and consequences of this darker side that my work grapples. The term “Christianization” is not new, though it typically refers to voluntary or imposed Christian conversions of people and places.⁸ My usage of the term, however, is intended to convey the educational means by and through which

⁸ “Christianization,” *Definitions.net*, accessed November 25, 2014, <http://www.definitions.net/definition/christianization>; “Definition of Christianization,” *Babylon*, accessed November 25, 2014, <http://dictionary.babylon.com/christianization/>.

Christian agents⁹ compel adherents over time to submit to a particular interpretation of Christianity – not just as a belief system but also as a system of ethical practice. These educational means need not include making an individual “Christian” in that sense, nor does it point to a particular sense of being Christian except insofar as being Christian has been or is excessively constraining or abusive to one’s developing mind, body, spirit, and conscience (henceforth *tetradeum*, Latin for “group of four”). If a primary goal of education is to “help individuals grow to the fullest humanness, to the greatest fulfillment and actualization of highest potentials, to the greatest possible stature,”¹⁰ as psychologist Abraham Maslow claimed, then CC not only does not facilitate movement toward this goal, but it also prevents the kind of transcendent learning, as I call it, that would nurture it.

To be clear, I am not concerned with particular denominational understandings within Christianity or with engaging in philosophical discussions of what it means to be Christian.¹¹ Rather, my aim is metaphorically

⁹ Martin, “Multiple Educational Agency,” chap. 2 in *Cultural Miseducation*, 32-61.

¹⁰ Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 49.

¹¹ Nor do I have sufficient space to address topics such as violent religious agents– Christians, for example, who blow up abortion clinics or kill doctors for performing them– or conduct historical analyses of ways in which religious

to enlighten the kind of education that CC demands, along with its consequences for Carceralites and communities, as examined through Martin's "cultural bookkeeping" method and conceptualized primarily through a blend of Harris and Milam's abusive Christian model, philosopher Michel Foucault's work on carcerality, and Martin's ideas of cultural miseducation.¹² I found cultural bookkeeping to be particularly helpful for examining religious education, as it calls for a rigorous tracking and analysis of cultural assets and liabilities to develop "full-blown portraits" of educational agents, which Martin defined as guardians of some portion of the cultural stock, and their transmission mechanisms.¹³ One purpose for developing such portraits is to hold guardians accountable for systems, beliefs, and practices that, intentionally or not, undermine and weaken cultural stock, which is, in this case, religious stock.

education and agents have changed across generations and eras. Both are worthy projects for another day.

¹² "Consequentialism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, May 20, 2003, substantially revised September 27, 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/>; Martin, "Minimizing the Liabilities," chap. 4 in *Cultural Miseducation*, 87-112; Harris and Milam, *Serpents in the Manger*, 10; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Martin, *Cultural Miseducation*.

¹³ Martin, *Cultural Miseducation*, 44, 89.

In addition to Harris and Milam's *Serpents in the Manger: Overcoming Abusive Christianity*, which detailed the connection between Christian beliefs and practices and deep psychological and social ills, other such bookkeeping projects that have helped to inform the current research include:

- *When Religion is an Addiction* by religious studies scholar Robert Minor, which applied contemporary understandings of addiction to right-wing Christian extremism.¹⁴
- *Righteous: Dispatches from the Evangelical Youth Movement* by journalist Lauren Sandler, which revealed growing subcultures of youth that are a mix of pop culture and "old-fashioned bible-beating fundamentalism," including strict gender dynamics.¹⁵
- *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the Love of God* by retired Episcopal bishop John Shelby Spong, which analyzed "terrible texts" of the Bible that are used to discriminate, oppress, or condemn people.¹⁶
- *The Woman's Bible* by suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton and committee, which traced and challenged biblical interpretations used to establish men's superiority over women and justify women's subservience to men.¹⁷

¹⁴ Robert N. Minor, *When Religion Is an Addiction* (St. Louis, MO: HumanityWorks!, 2007).

¹⁵ Lauren Sandler, *Righteous: Dispatches from the Evangelical Youth Movement* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2006).

¹⁶ John Shelby Spong, *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005).

¹⁷ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (1895–98; repr. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993).