

Reflections on Knowledge, Criticism, and the Intellectual

Jason Craige Harris

“Intellectual work can itself be a gesture of political activism if it challenges us to know in ways that counter and oppose existing epistemologies (ways of knowing) that keep us colonized, subjugated, etc. Intellectual work has that potential only if the individual is committed to a progressive political vision of social change.” – bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*

“Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult.”—Michel Foucault, “Practice Criticism”

This essay proceeds not as a traditionally structured argument, but as a brief yet winding reflective journey on which will be engaged questions regarding justice-seeking formations of knowledge, criticism, and intellectual life. Works of a number of authors will be addressed in an attempt to highlight the multifaceted nature of my nascent educational ministry deeply indebted to postcolonial and liberationist Christian criticism. These diverse authors have shaped me and their ideas reshaped by me, enabling me to be a more faithful witness to education as the practice of freedom, as Paulo Freire and bell hooks have defined it. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler reminds us that the act of reading—consuming the ideas of others—helps to constitute the subject; we are formed by the enigmatic traces of others and therefore who we are and who we are going to be is yet unfolding (46). What is more, my intersectional identities as a U.S. working-class black male, progressive charismatic evangelical scholar-practitioner, who lives on the margins of hegemonic masculinity, shapes my stance as a knowing subject. It no doubt attunes me to the moral consequences of knowing—of what, how, when, who, and why we know. Describing what she terms “an ethics of knowing,” emilie m. townes writes in her response to Marcella Althaus-Reid’s *Indecent Theology* featured in *Feminist Theology*: “i see that all epistemologies lead us to ethical issues/ because knowing is, itself, an act that has consequences/ for the knowing subject/ for the community.” Knowing is never a neutral act. For example, I have experienced the tragedy induced by forms of knowledge that sustain domination,

even as I have experienced degrees of liberation engendered by knowledge that refuses caricatures and gross stereotypical assessments of my being.

There is beauty in the composite, mosaic-like character of the subject, as well as in that of epistemology. Any exercise in knowledge production, if it is to significantly assist us in plumbing the depths of wisdom and expanding the contours of any understanding of freedom we currently have, has to take account of the multiple epistemic modes that together bring us closer to wholeness. No discipline on its own has what it takes to enlarge our collective way of being; injustice has drawn on a variety of disciplines to shore itself up and therefore justice cannot be expected to do any less. As a budding Christian social ethicist who, like emilie m. townes, uses an interdisciplinary framework as part of my method, I will attend to insights emerging from disciplines and fields such as theology, critical social theory, history, and ethics. Living into my feminist sensibilities, I will weave personal experiences throughout this reflection for primarily two reasons. Firstly, I actively resist the notion that any knowledge automatically has universal or objective status, since every knower is situated and therefore her knowledge is steeped in particularity. As Letty Russell reminds us in *Just Hospitality*, there is not one dominant truth even if there are truths rendered dominant (82). This is not something to be lamented, but embraced and even celebrated, as each of our views challenges the parochialism of the other's. Simply put, we need each other for *iron sharpens iron*.

Further, this theory of knowledge gives recourse to people often viewed as only capable of generating situated knowledge, an idea that empowers elites to view themselves as inherently capable of evading what are intrinsic limitations to human cognition. Feminist standpoint theory invests in critical refusal—a refusal to allow Anglo-patriarchal perspectives to masquerade as universal or to mask themselves as “knowledge” over against “experience”—the experiences of

the subaltern. This is not to say that knowledge does not have any cross-cultural currency; rather, it is to name all knowledge formations as socio-historical productions, a notion which in itself is situated and yet lays claim to the universal in a critical fashion. Secondly, attending to personal experiences enables us to appreciate the wisdom they embody, disclosing the experiential resources of the epistemically marginalized as revelatory of reality.

In addition, I see myself as a multi-site educator who tries to move skillfully, if not seamlessly, between contexts as diverse as the academy, the church, urban communities, and the public. I see my role in each of these spaces as largely continuous yet contextually manifested. As an advocate of robust conceptions of justice, prophetic social ministry—speaking truth to power and resisting oppression in contextually responsive ways—shapes all that I do (Ekblad, *A New Christian Manifesto*). More specifically, I see the work I do as a scholar and academic lecturer as a form of ministry and that which I do as a Christian minister a kind of critical educational enterprise. It is important to note here that I understand my overall vocation as a call to help foster spaces of critically informed dissent that engage human agents fully in working toward an expansive notion of liberation. This notion must necessitate participation in a revolutionary praxis to which self-care and “other-care,” as my dear friend and colleague Kimberly George terms it, are integral.

I take seriously Letty Russell’s insight in *Growth in Partnership* that as we partner with God for the restoration of creation to wholeness we begin to pull the future into the present in our living. Such a perspective, according to her, “produces a sense of dislocation associated with *advent shock*: maladjustment with the present because of the longed-for future” (33). It is this kind of theo-political restlessness, this refusal to conform to the status quo, that constitutes counter-hegemonic living, that perpetually calls into question the present in light of the in-

breaking future. What is at stake for me is nothing short of planetary emancipation and the potentiality of increased proximity to a utopia conditioned by the reign of God's compassionate justice. Like Lisa Sharon Harper in *Evangelical Does Not Equal Republican or Democrat*, I seek the abolition or re-ordering of all forces that seek to crush the image of God on earth. I long for the development of ever-growing, sustainable communities committed to shalom—that Hebraic conception of peace that follows on the heels of wholeness. To that end, I diligently work toward seeing the image of the Wholly Other in the faces of the other. After all, systems of injustice are rooted in forms of human blindness, as Audre Lorde reminds us, which demonize difference rather than celebrate it (*Sister Outsider*, 45). Justice, at least in part, is about seeing rightly.

Since one primary contribution I bring to the work of justice is that of an intellectual who engages critically with ideas that consciously and unconsciously shape our socio-political and religious practices both historically and contemporarily, it is only fitting that I should reflect normatively on what constitutes an intellectual and intellectual activity. I have taken on the term as both a marker of professional and non-professional proceedings. While the forthcoming binary is crude, it is instructive in helping us to think about two categories of intellectuals thus far instrumental to pushing communities around the world toward more just living. The professional category of intellectual is highlighted to honor the work of individuals who have devoted themselves to critical inquiry and the rigorous development of the mind (and heart) and who mainly operate and/or have been trained within traditional academic institutions. The second category of intellectuals are comprised by those who may or may not have traditional academic training, but who invest themselves in critical inquiry for the purpose of enriching and liberating the communities in which they are embedded. While this second category of intellectual is most often associated with Antonio Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual,

both categories can (or may not) consist of organic intellectuals who are “leaders and thinkers directly tied into a particular cultural group primarily by means of institutional affiliations. Organic intellectuals combine theory and action, and relate popular culture and religion to structural social change” (West, *Prophesy Deliverance*, 121). They do not pursue knowledge for its sake alone, as they reject epistemic and discursive idolatry. Rather, they pursue knowledge in the interest of the common good. While I am biased toward the humanities and social sciences, I do believe that any discipline rightly oriented can contribute and likely has contributed to the well-being of creation.

I seek to be an organic intellectual who is accountable to the people about whom he researches and writes. Accountability for me means taking into account how my academic work affects or does not the lives of those with whom I say I have positioned myself in solidarity—Jesus’ least of these, Fanon’s wretched of the earth, Thurman’s disinherited, Freire’s oppressed, Spivak’s subaltern, Enrique Dussel’s underside of modernity, and Thomas Glave’s disposables. I approach the task with humility yet knowing that critical scholarship has the potential to catalyze and advance societal transformation, even though the history of the ways academic knowledge has been complicit with social evils is detestable. We must never forget the many Enlightenment naturalists who involved themselves in a circular process of racist devastation. The Transatlantic slave trade furnished them with colonial laboratories in which to discover the mysteries of the other and thereby enabled them to generate knowledge that justified the selfsame trade (Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness*). We must also not forget the host of public intellectuals who helped to invent, pathologize, and virtually criminalize “homosexuality,” which fed popular resistance to perceived and actual non-heteronormative bodies/identities (Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*). Needless to say, I resist the all-too-easy assumption that any meaningful change primarily

emanates from cultural and intellectual elites as if they alone were the movers and shakers of history—not only because the social evil they produce vies for preeminence in their legacy, but also because non-elites have often been the most forceful forces for progressive change, if the labor, civil rights, and black power movements have anything to teach us.

I do believe, however, that many academic institutions provide temporal, spatial, and intellectual resources rarely collectively in abundance elsewhere to critique and reform the often-uninterrogated assumptions that underwrite our political and cultural practices. Obviously, academics, as a category of fallen humanity, do not always use their resources toward the end of expansive visions of justice. However, those academics—like Angela Davis, Andrea Smith, Joy James, and Cornel West—that have been committed to societal decolonization and planetary liberation have found necessary links between intellectual exploration, teaching, and progressive activism and organizing, and have sought to strengthen them. They usually have access to specialized training acquired in a rigorous and focused time of study that equips them with particular skills to anatomize ideological and discursive practices and genealogies that buttress systems of exploitation and dehumanization. Indeed, these kinds of intellectuals have invented the academic field of critical social theory, which, according to Patricia Hill Collins, “encompasses bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing groups of people differently placed in specific political, social, and historic contexts characterized by injustice.” What makes critical social theory “critical,” in her view, is “its commitment to justice, for one’s own group and/or for other groups” (*Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*, xiv). Clearly, intellectuals invested in critical social theory refuse the de-politicization and objectification of knowledge, and “disciplinary decadence” as Lewis Gordon so aptly terms it in his book by the same title.

These intellectuals do not only teach in the academy, however, as they are deeply committed to breaking down elitist barriers that restrict access to academic knowledge to the few *and* that assume that the masses do not also generate emancipatory wisdom. Similarly to them, the goal for me is to facilitate spaces in the church and academy in which critical conversations on oppression and justice-making will be regular occurrences. This will likely require translation and code switching to be integral to justice work, so that we do not reproduce by our method the very dynamics of injustice we say we seek to unsettle. It will also require us to disrupt the dichotomy between doing and knowing and mark it as antithetical to justice-making, as Joy James contends in *Resisting State Violence*. For James, as for Freire, “only when one acts on the material studied does one know it and so becomes Freire’s integrated person...who works...to act in the world to free up possibilities for change” (191). People who have less potential to be docilized by the dominant mode of western academic learning can hold academics and public intellectuals accountable to a definition of knowledge that already implicates progressive action. If the church and the academy are to be true formational sites of critical consciousness, a counter-hegemonic epistemology and pedagogy are necessary. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks bemoans racial integration for bringing her to a school in which “[k]nowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved. It was no longer connected to antiracist struggle” (3). Instead, hooks “celebrate[s] teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom” (12). I stand with hooks in my desire to produce in community oppositional knowledges that enable us to imagine *and* actively live into life beyond the status quo, what is known as “prefigurativism” (West, *Prophesy Deliverance*, 136). I seek to invite and to be invited into deeper analyses of reality that penetrate the confusion that so often

disables informed action. I take seriously Paulo Freire's point in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that "[a]ny situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence" (85).

Here is where I as a budding academic locate my potential contribution to the work of justice. I seek to serve as an embodied counter-memory, who through diligent study is able to offer informed encouragement to folks that current unjust arrangements of power are not rooted in nature despite their ideological naturalization (Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*). In others words, these arrangements have not always existed as such and therefore do and can change—the key is to change them for the better, since anti-progressive change is always possible as well. I endeavor to research, write, and teach materials that are in some way relevant to my being raised by a single, working-class, black Jamaican immigrant who has continually struggled for her survival and that of her children. Her living has been constricted by racist, sexist, and classist forces that refuse to see her as human and therefore as inherently valuable. I became invested in progressive politics and critical inquiry, in part, as a way to honor my mother's struggle, as a way to work toward the dismantling of those arrangements and representations that have sought to limit her life chances. For this reason, I continue to resist uncritical assimilation to the pretensions of upward social mobility so characteristic of (black) academia. Like bell hooks and Cornel West express in *Breaking Break: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life*, I want to remain committed to working-class people, particularly those of the African American variety who continue to experience the worst edges of economic globalization and multinational corporate growth. As I write this paper, I am sitting in a two-bedroom apartment located in an urban community in which my less-able-bodied mother conducts her in-home family daycare. This material context grounds my work. In *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*,

bell hooks cogently writes: “Black intellectuals who choose to do work that addresses the needs and concerns of black liberation struggle, of black folks seeking to decolonize their minds and imaginations, will find no separation has to exist between themselves and other black people from various class backgrounds” (234). My deep commitment to progressive change is inspired by my mother and therefore must never separate me from her.

Academic work gave me the chance to sit with structural forms of violence—forces that deleteriously affected my family, my community members, and me—that presuppose and seek to instantiate the inferiority and inhumanity of black folk. It enabled me to sit with them in a way that precluded them from silencing the intellectual and emotional knowledges that told me another world is possible. It furnished me with a critical vocabulary through which to name and understand my experiences of injustice. I doubt that I would have come to such critical awareness without the resources that my particular undergraduate and graduate training afforded me. (I realize that the particular progressive educational experience I had does not always resonant with those of others and for that reason I am all the more committed to emancipatory education within and without traditional academic structures.) Here I am reminded of the critical theorist Joy James, whose students often encountered in her a relentless agitator who continually provoked them to take over her class as a way to help them break out of socialized docility into revolutionary dissent. I look forward to teaching and ministering in ways that invite participants to the table of critical inquiry and dissent, feasting on a delicious meal of possibility. Furthermore, academic work enabled me to address the forms of historical amnesia and stereotypical representation on which structural injustice relies for intellectual legitimacy. Domination must present itself as the only possible and true representation of reality—of the past, present, and future. Therefore, my work performs an intervention. It does not feign political

neutrality, but proudly embodies liberation theology's preferential option for the oppressed, which, as Ivan Petrella argues, ought not be restricted to the theological disciplines (Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic*).

Similarly, I have been shaped by the ethical priorities of ethnic studies, which was birthed as a response to the cultural, intellectual, economic, social, and political marginalization of people of color in U.S. American society. Ethnic studies resists the eurocentricity (and oftentimes the androcentrism and heteronormativity) of traditional disciplines that have historically produced knowledge that has fed into imperial and colonial projects. Sometimes these disciplines have acted as if they have not done so and other times they have announced their colonialist proclivities as wholly justifiable. The ideological justifications and rhetorical mechanisms of domination, then, occupy a central place in my intellectual explorations, as I see them as sites in which the political ambivalence of religion comes to the fore—religious modes of reasoning and meaning-making conspire against *and* work to secure democratic freedom, often simultaneously. I ask questions regarding how the human has been defined in hegemonic and dissident social formations and the complex relationship of religion to such processes. With Sylvia Wynter, I ask who is made to be sub- or non-human so that another can come to exclusively represent the human? As Anthony Bogues writes in *Black Heretics*, “For the black radical intellectual, ‘heresy’ means becoming human, not white nor imitative of the colonial, but overturning white/European normativity—in the words of Robert Marley, refusing ‘what you wanted us to be’” (13). For whose self-understanding have some people been made to inhabit the space of the unfree, other, unredeemable, and vanished? Whose deaths are continually unmarked by public mourning and whose lives are deemed unworthy of recognition? (Butler, *Precarious Life*) How do contemporary practices of violence achieve “intellectual legitimacy” and the status

of necessity in our culture? (West, *Prophesy Deliverance*, 61) To what forms of inequality have we become anesthetized and by what mechanisms and at what cost has our silence been secured? (Segrest, *Born to Belonging*)

I investigate the pregnant silences that sustain (neo)colonial programs in an effort to push us toward willful engagement in decolonizing activity. Toni Morrison keenly writes: “We can agree, I think, that invisible things are not necessarily ‘not-there’; that a void may be empty but not be a vacuum.” She continues, “certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose” (“Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” 136). Our collective silences in the face of creational suffering suggest that such suffering is not worthy of our words, that our silences somehow mean that we are not responsible for those acts of devastation carried out in our name. The role of critical education, in my view, is to continually bring to our attention those dimensions and sites of creational suffering that too quickly teeter on the edge of willful oblivion. Becoming conscientized is a process as much about the mind as it is about the heart, as much about what we say (or do not say) as it is about what we hear (or do not hear). It is a refusal “to believe that revolution is a one-time event, or something that happens around us rather than inside of us” (Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 141). Conscientization means breaking our silences—those conditioned by privilege and those rooted in fear. For Audre Lorde, it is silence above all that immobilizes us (44). We have a moral responsibility to transform silence into language and action, to seek out the words of those who have been forcibly (but never wholly) silenced by the brutal practices of repression (40-43). We have a responsibility to others and to ourselves—to others in ourselves and to ourselves in others—to locate and invent language that helps us to re-shape reality for the sake of freedom.

I am particularly interested in religiously inflected silences in which it is assumed that God does not care about certain causes and by extension certain peoples. Figurations of divinity that sanctify homophobia, unchecked nationalism, white supremacy and racism, patriarchy and misogyny, capitalism, and militarism figure prominently in my work as constructions that require both analytical and constructive attention. How we think about God has ethical implications for our daily living. As Catherine Keller and Leonardo Boff have pointed out, in nations that seek to be omnipotent and dress themselves in hyper-masculine and capitalist drag, the omnipotent, capitalist Alpha Male God rules supreme. Critical analysis is necessary to uncover theology as a politically invested activity. Katie Cannon frames this process as the demystification of domination, a mode of unmasking those demonic powers that enshroud themselves in theological rhetoric as they wreak havoc on creation in the very name of God. Demystification thus construed involves unmasking evil, analyzing the established power relations that sustain it, and envisioning a future beyond it in which the well-being of all is embraced and pursued (*Katie's Cannon*, 138-142). I seek to expose religion's lack of innocence in social productions of evil, its claim to innocence as itself laced with wicked tendencies, but I also aim to highlight its disruptive qualities—the ways it can infuse progressive social criticism with cosmological significance, what some call the Jeremiad (Smith, *Disruptive Religion*). In this sense, I aim to use religion to recover and to produce insurgent knowledges that contain within them seeds for emancipatory living.

My research and writing are principally concerned with black life, Christianity, (post)colonialism, empire, violence, feminisms, critical social theory, and ultimately planetary flourishing. Concerns arising from the academic study of Africana religion, philosophy, and ethics especially inform my inquiries. Through an interdisciplinary framework informed by

Foucauldian discourse analysis, I probe the systems of values and (popular and elite forms of) moral discourses that undergird dominant epistemological, rhetorical, cultural, political, and religious forms to determine to what extent they impede the realization of robust conceptions of justice and freedom. With an eye toward contemporary social problems, I consider the religious strategies and visions that historically marginalized peoples have created to respond to conditions of living and being delimited by restrictive understandings of race, gender, religion, and nation. For example, I have recently been considering African American Pentecostal constructions of history and the extent to which they collude, perhaps inadvertently, with unchecked nationalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. I try to get at the anxieties that would provoke racially oppressed people to accept dominant renderings of history that suggest that their enslavement was a punishment executed by the divine because of the so-called heathenish ways of their ancestors.

If God vexed the heart of the “white man” against the “black man,” as Earl Carter argues in his 1997 *No Apology Necessary*, white folk are not responsible for their participation in the Transatlantic slave trade, since it was God’s plan for African redemption. Indeed, the Deuteronomic God—one strand of biblical construal of divinity—in black face selects African people as chosen. For Carter, the Emancipation Proclamation was a providential intervention that signaled that sufficient numbers of black folk had converted to Christianity as to satisfy the punitive impulse of the deity. He argues that symbolic apologies by whites for the enslavement of blacks only robs God of his power and thereby teeters over the edge into idolatry. In an ironic twist, this move seeks to sever the symbolic link between whiteness and omnipotence by narrating white people as mere pawns or automatons in a divine game of redemption. Carter even goes as far as to resist biological claims of African inferiority yet does so on culturally racist

grounds that regard contemporary African civilizations as steeped in depravation caused by their so-called departure from an ancient monotheism commensurate with the Judeo-Christian worldview. For him, the Christianization of blacks renders any continuation of racist oppression obsolete as it has already served its purifying purposes. If whites continue to institutionalize black subjugation divine punishment against whites is sure to come. While Carter sets forth a program of liberation that poses some threat to white power, he ultimately renders supreme Euro-American cultural values. In the end, this Afrocentric perspective stereotypically reduces Africa, African diasporan subjects, Christianity, and blackness in service of a limited framework of justice. Therefore, I try to understand and yet destabilize claims that confine black freedom to a narrow African American Christianity that ultimately works to reduce the complexity and diversity of black life and thereby disfigure it.

I also aim to unsettle the troubling masculinist and nationalist politics that underwrite African American theo-political views in ways that likely marginalize me as a “race traitor” and mark me “unpatriotic.” My commitment to dismantling inter-structuring oppressions puts me squarely on the side of a feminism that works to end the very ideology of domination in the West rather than just particular manifestations of it (hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*). As Audre Lorde writes in *Sister Outsider*, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (138). Whenever I lecture, whether in classrooms or church basements, I do my best to describe a complex picture of social domination, so that hearers might come to understand that all of our pasts, presents, and futures are intertwined. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in “Letter from a Birmingham jail,” “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.” I resist any notion of

freedom that does not include the liberation of my sisters from sexist oppression and my queer siblings from homophobic violence. I reject visions of the beloved community and of altruism that are bound by national territories rather than made to include international terrains. A truly just hospitality would not wage a global war on terror that was not at once a war on our own terrorizing. A truly beloved community would stand in opposition to constructing any human and non-human inhabitant of our planet as simply expendable in our search for collective freedom. Holding onto a robust vision of freedom comes with its costs, as those invested in unfreedom or limited notions of freedom rarely let challenges to their power go unanswered.

When I became vocal about the horrors of sexist and homophobic violence, people in my home community began to marginalize and demonize me, threatening me with assaults on my Christian identity. Yet, it was my very Christian framework of justice and love, and my expanded understanding of self-interest, that sustained me. I have come to believe that in the end the gain truly exceeds the cost. That said, I do not mean to suggest self-righteously that I am somehow beyond the need for critical introspection through a decolonial lens or that I, informed by a misguided presumption of self-purity, can easily *other* people I perceive to be oppressive; rather, I believe that we all must do our own work lest we continue to enact violence on and distort each other and ourselves.

For me, as for Cornel West, intellectuals are those invested in the creative exploration and production of ideas in ways that expand human wisdom and freedom. The intellectual resists forms of dogmatism and idolatry that threaten to thwart that quest. For West, compassion and courage are essential components of this search (*Prophesy Deliverance*, 8-9). By this definition, some academics would find themselves wanting and plenty of non-academics would find themselves newly honored. Because the term “intellectual” is often associated with “academic,”

we forget the fissures between the two. I readily prioritize being an intellectual over an academic, but I am working to leverage the resources of the latter in service of the former. I see my task as helping people to live into the following Foucauldian imperative: “We must free ourselves from the sacralization of the social as the only reality and stop regarding as superfluous something so essential in human life and in human relations as thought” (“Practicing Criticism”). Similarly, Edward Said understands the intellectual to be “a spirit in opposition, rather than in accommodation, that grips me because the romance, the interest, the challenge of the intellectual life is to be found in dissent against the status quo at a time when the struggle on behalf of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups seems so unfairly weighted against them” (*Representations of the Intellectual*, xvii). Said’s conception pushes me to consider the prophetic functions of the intellectual as one who engages not in foretelling, but in forth-telling. Cornel West maintains a similar understanding of the intellectual, as he advocates a mode of advocacy and intellectual activity called prophesying deliverance. According to West, “To prophesy deliverance is not to call for some otherworldly paradise but rather to generate enough faith, hope, and love to sustain the human possibility for more freedom” (*Prophesy Deliverance*, 6). I take West not to be condemning the otherworldly impulse in Christianity, but to be re-orienting it by his pragmatist lights so that Christians (and others) do not find themselves so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. Otherworldliness, when properly oriented, can equip freedom fighters with alternative visions of reality that enable them never to settle, but always to agitate and critique, knowing that there is always a greater measure of freedom and justice beyond that which we experience in any present.

In conclusion, I return to my Christian commitment as the ground of my intellectual vocation. Ultimately, service to my neighbor constitutes service to Christ. When I seek justice

for the least of these, I am seeking justice for Christ. Intellectual exercise can be incarnational ministry if it provokes us to see, hear, and live in ways that reject the idolatry of domination and embrace the eschatological reality of New Creation.