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# Homo Religiosus? Religion and Immigrant Subjectivities

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## Abstract

Once ignored in national and international public policy, religion has made a comeback as policymakers have noticed the significance of the resurgence of religion, especially due to migration flows. While laudatory of these developments, this chapter specifies the need for a theological reading of the migrant religious practitioner as homo religiosus. First, we describe the social geographies of immigrant religion in an international context, drawing attention to the vibrancy of religious devotion, especially Christianity from the global south, among migrant groups. Second, we re-conceptualise religious belief through the theoretical work of John Milbank and Charles Taylor as they recuperate a theological reading of religion that is cautious in imposing secular categories on religious phenomena. Third, we perform an interpretive experiment on immigrant churches through Victor Turner's hermeneutics of the stranger, arguing that a theological interpretation of migrant religions, including those of some social and economic means, demonstrates that they often comprise a liminal 'church of the poor'. We contribute to the geography of religion with a call to conceptualise religious belief and practice by ways that draw out the inner logics of such phenomena instead of imposing foreign theoretical categories on them.

*An earlier draft of this chapter was prepared by Ley as the keynote address to the Geography of Religion and Belief Systems Specialty Group at the Association of American Geographers conference in Washington, DC in April 2010. This version benefited from lively discussion at the GORABS session and a critical reading by Reinhard Henkel. It also includes significant additions by Justin Tse.*

## Introduction

In everyday life, as in the social sciences, there is an ever greater demand for a hermeneutics of the stranger (Beck 2010: 179).

I was a stranger and you invited me in. (Matthew 25: 35)

It is surely the best of times to be a geographer of religion and belief systems. We have moved from the blasé end of everything era—the so-called end of history with the termination of the Cold War, the imputed end of geography with globalisation's level playing fields and the putative end of religion with the seemingly irrepressible advance of secularisation—to a period that is both politically and culturally charged in its preoccupation with religious difference and intellectually reawakened to critical questions of faith and interfaith relations in national and global society. No less important, the geography of religion has itself undergone transformation from an exercise largely of description and classification to a more ambitious programme of interpretation and explanation (Kong 2001; Duncan 2004; Yorgason and della Dora 2009).

Our approach to the geography of religion here will come from an interest in the place of religion in international migration and from the viewpoint of authors who are sympathetic to religious worldviews. The argument will be developed on the basis of the religion we know best, Christianity as it has evolved in Euro-America. While this vantage point is selective in its subject matter, it is broad enough to generate significant questions, especially in light of recent migration trends and consequences.<sup>1</sup>

The transformation in the significance of religion in practice as well as in theory is by now a familiar thesis and may be illustrated by the following events we witnessed. In 1996, a large research proposal was submitted to the government of Canada to establish an immigration research centre in Vancouver as part of a larger national network. Each proposal was to recognise and selectively incorporate from around 100 items of immigration policy of interest to government. Not a single item among the 100, *not one*, addressed immigrant religion. In 2002, a second submission was required for funding renewal for an additional research term. Again, there was a government prospectus identifying policy fields for recognition; among these bulleted items, the topic of immigrant religion was now prominent.

This is simply one indicator of a broader trend highlighted by Kong (2010) who counted eight different journals in human geography and related fields that had recently run special issues on religion. The geography of religion has moved to front stage in such fields as population and immigration studies (Bramadat and Koenig 2009), social and cultural geography (Yorgason and della Dora 2009) and not least geopolitics (Agnew 2006). Implicit in this transformation has been a longer-term shift from description to explanation and from the classification of landscape forms and distribution maps to a more challenging intellectual agenda of interpretation and explanation (cf. Henkel 2005). But that step into process and meaning requires, we will argue, an interrogation of the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of religious phenomena as social facts.<sup>2</sup>

National and international political anxieties may be one driver of this new agenda, but more basic conceptual work is also going on. In this chapter, after first reviewing the changing social geography of immigrant religions, we discuss contributions to conceptual innovation and in particular two significant and demanding books challenging the social science of religion from the perspectives of theology and religious philosophy. Finally, we experiment in an interpretation of immigrant subjectivity and religious adherence that tries to project the thinking of these two books from the position they advocate—that is, a position that argues for a theological reading of the migrant. We specify the separate existence of *homo religiosus* (Eliade 1959), the shy cousin of that better-known extrovert, *homo economicus*. From an understanding of the immigrant lifeworld and following the prompting of theological knowledge, we aim to account for the vitality of the immigrant church. In response to Ulrich Beck's (2010) challenge, this task will aim to provide a *religious* hermeneutics of the immigrant as stranger.

## **Description: Geographies of Immigrant Religion**

For a cultural field where we might expect tradition and stability to dominate, the social geographies of religion are shifting with surprising speed. As older Christian denominations in the global north founder in membership, newer streams of Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism are advancing on the world stage, incorporating conservative theology with contemporary expressive worship and sometimes significant forms of public discipleship, both in Catholic as well as Protestant traditions. These newer movements are concentrated in the global south (Jenkins 2006). Among the broadly defined family of global Pentecostals, for example, estimated at 250 million, while 20 million are in the United States, the largest grouping is the estimated 72 million Pentecostals in China (Martin 2002; Thomas 2009), a portentous statistic whose implications we have scarcely considered.

Indeed, the momentum in global Christianity is now concentrated in the emerging societies of the developing world. The renewal of Catholicism in Latin America depends on charismatic and liberation theology movements engaged in service delivery and justice and righteousness initiatives among the church of the poor (Olson 2006; Holden and Jacobson 2009). It is Latin American and Southeast Asian candidates who increasingly fill the seminaries and the pulpits of the Catholic Church in North America. In global Anglicanism, numerical primacy has also shifted to the global south. Nigeria has more members of the denomination than any other country, while in terms of religious attendance, there are more regular churchgoing Anglicans in the small nation of Uganda than in England.

Global immigration flows are carrying those effervescent religious beliefs and practices into the spiritually more somnolent countries of the north. Working against the conceptual grain of godless Europe, the historian Philip Jenkins (2007), in his book *God's Continent*, has many illustrations of the renewal of congregational life in Europe as a result of immigration from the global south. Evangelicals, charismatics and Pentecostals doubled in number in Europe from 1970 to 2000. In part, these groups represent home-grown renewal efforts: in west central London, for example, the two evangelical power houses of All Souls, Langham Place and Holy Trinity Brompton are Anglican mother churches with satellite congregations and a surprisingly broad range of social as well as spiritual ministries. Holy Trinity Brompton pioneered the Alpha course, an out-of-church programme introducing the foundations of Christianity to a society with limited religious literacy. Alpha has now diffused to millions of participants through Europe and the English-speaking world and has been described by the archbishop of Paris as one of Protestantism's two biggest gifts to Catholicism.

Despite such evidence of indigenous renewal, Jenkins (2007) suggests that the strongest infusion of Christian spiritual energy has come from immigrants. He notes that Africans lead four of the ten largest churches in Britain, typically with a charismatic or Pentecostal style of worship. The English Church Census of 2005 showed that non-white church attendance was growing, exceeding its share of the population by two or three times; 44% of churchgoers in London were Black; and a further 14% were other non-white worshippers (Evangelical Alliance 2006). Even among Evangelicals and Pentecostals, growth is occurring primarily among non-white groups. This is not just an English phenomenon. Throughout Europe, immigrants, sometimes students, have founded transnational churches that have grown rapidly. In Hamburg, a Ghanaian started a church in 1992 that now has a dozen offshoots elsewhere in Germany and some 60 plants back in Ghana, all in little more than a decade; in Ukraine, a congregation established by a Nigerian student in 1994 has planted 150 daughter congregations, spreading to Russia and other European countries (Jenkins 2007).

It is a similar story in the United States, although the mainstream culture is certainly more supportive of religious expression. While there is considerable variation in the religious experience of new immigrants (Levitt 2007), old truths are being reworked. The *Religion and the New Immigrants* project funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts has chronicled the transformative impact of diverse immigrant religions in seven principal gateway cities (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Miller et al. 2001; Foley and Hoge 2007). Immigration is redefining in particular the profile of American Catholicism. Despite our stereotype of the Irish and Italian basis of an American Catholicism marginalised by an Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority (Hauerwas 1990), a large survey in 2007 estimated that close to half of adult American Catholics aged 18–40 are now Latino and

that this growing ethnic population over time is diluting the Protestant ascendancy in the United States (Pew 2008). Moreover, more than half of Catholic Latinos describe themselves as charismatic, introducing spontaneity and more expressive spirituality to formal liturgies and providing social services to their congregations.<sup>3</sup> While immigrants are also the major adherents of non-western religions, the survey indicated that three-quarters of immigrants to the USA are Christian, a figure only slightly below that of the native-born and a proportion that has been steady for 30 years.

Canadian data also show the transformative effects of immigrant religions (Bramadat and Koenig 2009). In recent years, immigrants with Christian affiliations have fallen to less than half of total landings, while non-western religions are claimed by a third of new Canadians, and this share has been steadily rising (Kunz 2009). Among the native-born in contrast, non-western religions account for only about 5% of the population. But a clear transition is underway; Catholic affiliation, primed by immigration, rose slightly between 1991 and 2001, while Protestant numbers fell, and non-western religions grew between 80 and 130% during the decade, fastest among Muslims.

Growing religious diversity has led to varying national responses by the state, from secular assimilationism in France to the attempt to accommodate religious diversity within a multicultural paradigm in Canada. In contrast to the recent Swiss referendum that banned the construction of minarets on mosques (Traynor 2009), one sign of a more conciliatory environment in Canada is the successful sitcom, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, now in its fourth season, which attempts to naturalise everyday Muslim family life in the apple pie context of the small prairie town. Learning perhaps from this pedagogy, Prince George, a small city in British Columbia, has approached construction of its first mosque as a place-marketing strategy to attract immigrant Muslims, notably professionals and entrepreneurs (Armstrong 2009). Elsewhere in Canada, however, relations between immigrant religious groups and a secular public sphere are less happy, describable in Quebec's language of 'reasonable accommodation' rather than the open-armed welcome promised in Prince George. Indeed, geographers have noted that Muslim migrants have sometimes experienced undue discrimination and struggle to express their identity in Canada (D'Addario et al. 2008), an experience common throughout western countries (see Dwyer 1999; Dunn 2004; Hopkins 2007).

Prince George has seemingly made a discovery emphasised by the sociologist of religion, Warner (2000: 273), that '*religion is typically salient for immigrants*'. We are reminded of interviews with immigrants in Vancouver where migration has sharpened a formerly misty or even opaque religious lens (Ley 2010). Mr. and Mrs. Yip told us:

And when we were leaving Hong Kong we were in the peak of our profession or business... That's why we were too busy and we find too little time giving to the family and the kids at that time. So when we came over to Canada, and we first get away from that fast living we maintain the family life. This is the first priority we need to have, otherwise it ruins the meaning of coming to Canada if we put all the time into working and still neglecting our kids. We find we can adjust so well here. This is what I think because God changed my point of value... (now) we have the religion, and have a change in mind what is the priority in life.

Writing of the same immigration wave in Toronto, Lee (1991) found that 'the number of new converts is phenomenal'. In the United States, too, immigrant Chinese conversion to Christianity is a substantial current trend (Yang 1998; Zhang 2006). Equally notable is the intensity of belief (Chen 2006). So is the conversion rate and depth of conviction of Korean immigrants (Kim and Kim 2001). Whereas 25% of Koreans profess Christianity in their homeland, 50% of migrants to North America are Christian, and once landed, that figure rises to 75% among the population resident in North America (Warner 2001; Min 2002).<sup>4</sup> As church historian Timothy Smith (1978) once observed, immigration is a 'theologizing experience', establishing a new map of meaning following uprooting and relocation.

This description of the growing significance of immigrant religion provides the backdrop against which we turn to recent conceptual thinking on religious subjectivities. The more abstract conceptual discussion will provide tools to return to the vitality of the immigrant church in the final section, moving beyond description to interpretation.

## Conceptualisation: Approaching Religious Belief

Of course, immigrant religion had not been ignored in earlier versions of the geography of religion. Landscape descriptions of ethnic churches, pilgrimage sites and even cemeteries were the remit of a cultural geography that saw its task to be the description, classification and mapping of material cultural forms. So, too, social geographers mapped religious adherence from the census and other data bases; particularly notable are the several atlases of religion published in the United States in recent years. Such atlases are significant achievements to be sure, but their maps offer an incomplete scholarly project (Ley 2002). The movement beyond pattern to process has been evident in human geography for several decades. An early advocate was the social geographer, Jones (1972), with his celebrated complaint that ‘atlases of social data are rather like cases of butterflies—very pretty and telling us something, but the butterflies are dead’. So too cultural landscapes are no longer regarded simply as the inert containers of unproblematised religious forms; they may also be a means of reproducing not only spiritual values but also, as Jim Duncan has shown, social and political hierarchies (Duncan 2004).

However, moving beyond form and distribution introduces the challenging task of interpretation and explanation. What categories are appropriate in making sense of religious meaning? Bailey et al. (2009) offer an important lesson as they reflexively ponder their interaction with a Methodist archive in the West of England.<sup>5</sup> The problem the authors recognise is that ‘we ourselves are figuratively, literally, theoretically and spiritually in motion through the archive that we have constructed’ (2009: 255). In an almost perfectly executed but fully unanticipated experiment, the authors looked at the Methodist archive of nineteenth-century religious practices from three different personal perspectives on Christian life and spirituality. These varying standpoints led to different selections and emphases in their use of the archive. In a significant conclusion, they acknowledge that collegial commentary on their own differences toward the archive led to a refining of the overall research product.

But their deliberations led to a deeper question than the positionality of individual researchers, important though this is. In their conclusion, the authors note that ‘Methodism, and religion more generally, broke out of our frames of reference, resisted the narratives we sought to impose, and forced us to look with fresh eyes’ (2009: 266). One researcher acknowledged that ‘for me, religion is always social’ and ‘no more special than that’ (2009: 260). But the translation of religious experience to social facts and no more imposes some categorical violence upon a religious experience claiming to be much more than social. The three co-authors wisely consider this, wondering ‘whether it is possible, within the epistemological and methodological terms of social science, to study religious phenomena without subjecting them to reductionist arguments’ (2009: 257). Stump (2008: 370) is equally aware of these dangers, noting ‘reductionist interpretations that cast religious concerns purely in terms of material benefits miss [the] compelling character of religious belief as a factor in human behavior’.

These are powerful insights and they bring us to a door opened from the other side by theologians, who know more than a thing or two about hermeneutics from their long-standing focus on the meaning of religious texts. Here, we consider two major theological works that make a bold attempt to engage social science. Both are large, demanding books with ambitious objectives that proceed from a historically rooted Catholic tradition. *A Secular Age* is the bridge-building work of Taylor (2007), political philosopher, scholar of religion and recent winner of the Templeton Prize. Taylor’s objective is to trace and critique the *experience* of secularism in everyday life as it has evolved through the modern period. A more prophetic and provocative volume is *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* by theologian, Milbank (2006). Milbank offers an ambitious synthesis of different themes in the meeting of Christianity and secular social science in order to recuperate a *theological* reading of religious phenomena that escapes precisely those reductionist arguments identified by Bailey and his co-authors.<sup>6</sup>

Both authors write as social democrats in public policy. Taylor has run for parliament in Canada for the New Democratic Party, while Milbank is motivated by a desire to re-energise socialist hope against European neo-

liberalism, for he regards socialism as Christianity's 'modern child' (2006: xiv).<sup>7</sup> A progressive politics is important for both authors.

Each book argues for the historicism of social science as it engages Christian belief. The social science of religion is not some objective scientific view from nowhere debunking arbitrary and malleable religious phenomena as this relationship has sometimes been cast. From a genealogy of the origins of the sociology of religion, Milbank (2006: 4) provocatively suggests that 'theology encounters in sociology not only a theology, and indeed a church in disguise, but a theology and a church dedicated to promoting a certain secular consensus'. Taylor (2007: 428) also presses the point that secular social science is not a superior and neutral vantage point; any claim for neutrality in the treatment of religion in the academy is 'bogus', for suspicion of religion has been internalised in the taken-for-granted world of the academy (2007: 560). The lifeworld of scholarship is value-impregnated, and such embedded values as materialism and sceptical detachment are sufficiently naturalised that they only become visible in open discussion with other viewpoints—like the reflexive exchanges of the three authors who engaged each other's concealed presuppositions as they worked with the Methodist archive. Both Taylor and Milbank deconstruct a social science that regards religion as an exception, a residual presence of 'sacred archipelagos' in an ocean of secular normality (Wilford 2009). Milbank is characteristically vigorous in his rebuttal: 'all twentieth-century sociology of religion can be exposed as a secular policing of the sublime' (2006:106).

The authors take their discussion further than deconstructing a sociology of religion that takes its marching orders from materialist ideologies. Taylor (2007) rejects the critique of secularisation as a single, accomplished project. He observes what he calls the 'nova effect', the splintering and recombination of both religious and materialist world views into a postmodern bricolage. He notes too how religious renewal represents spiritual experience as a new charismatic movement displaces the sclerosis of institutional religion. The continuing cycle of religious renewal and forgetfulness repeats the historic story of Judaeo-Christian religion in the Bible, where in cycles sometimes lasting several centuries, a new awakening followed periods of spiritual backsliding and syncretism. So too the Reformation and Counter-Reformation achieved a fresh valuing of the immediacy of the divine, displacing the institutional mediation and hypocrisy of the medieval church. Is the age of secularisation, we might ask, merely another such period of lapsed religiosity to be succeeded by a new charismatic awakening? And might the Pentecostal-Evangelical movement provide the outline of that renewal?

Milbank (2006) squarely addresses appropriate categories for understanding religion. A typical social science model treats religion as a social fact to be explained by other social facts, but such a move abstracts religion from the theological context that gives it shape and meaning. Consider again those atlases of religion with their choropleth maps of religious affiliation. The exercise of mapping is an abstraction that removes church membership from any religious context, dumbing it down to homogenous responses that are counted and may then be correlated against other social facts, such as social class or regional location (Ley 2002). Here, Milbank's sharp critique gains traction, for the only conversion on view is the conversion of a religious act into a social fact. This is what he means when he speaks of the policing of religious life, the reduction of its mysteries to material visualisation, in our case to numbers and spatial distributions, with the search for covariances against other social facts.<sup>8</sup> He is arguing against such categorical violence, the imposition of modernity's iron cage over religious experience.

Milbank's argument resonates with Asad's (2003) critique of secular approaches to Islam, which contends that many western readings impose a nineteenth-century liberal Protestant view that reduces Islam to a belief system without taking into account Islamic theological praxis. Masuzawa (2005) argues that these impositions tend usually to be Eurocentric forms of Orientalism, creating fantasies about eastern religions (see also Milbank 2006: 88). What is being resisted in such critiques is the imperial colonisation of the sacred by the secular—or to put it in starker geographical terms, the continued colonisation of the religiously vibrant global south by the assumptions of the global north.

What is Milbank's solution? He argues that one cannot abstract religious life from its own belief system; personal and social religious life is embedded *within* the system of belief and practice, not outside it (2006: 90–1, 122). As Hauerwas (2000b) contends, categories for examining religious practice must therefore be

drawn from the theology in question because religion is practised by a community of believers. To abstract practice from a praxis-oriented community is to commit epistemic violence on the religion. This position is close to Roger Stump's assessment: 'If adherents themselves, reflexively or not, understand and legitimise their own thoughts and actions in relation to their religious system, additional models or assumptions seeking explanation from nonreligious factors may be neither necessary nor useful' (Stump 2008: 371). In the final part of this chapter, we will experiment with this approach, returning to the vitality of immigrant religious practice with an account not from sociological reasoning (cf. Warner 2000) but rather shaped in terms of religious language and categories. This may be unfamiliar to readers, but is it any different from an argument that might follow neoclassical, Marxist or Foucauldian language and categories? Indeed, perhaps what *is* odd is that such an exposition should be unusual in the first place, an indication of the marginalisation of religious culture and meanings that Taylor and Milbank identify in the social science canon.<sup>9</sup>

### **Interpretation: The Vitality of the Immigrant Church**

Milbank (2006) observes how the will to power is an influential position in some versions of contemporary social science, both as the voice of scientific authority and also in the preoccupation with power as a category. In contrast, he adds, Christianity expounds an ethic of weakness. Paradigmatically, Jesus, the Son of God, assumed the frailty of human form and was constantly in the company of the weak and the outcast, the sick, the poor and those marginalised by race, class, gender and age. But the rich and the powerful—including a worldly religious establishment—commonly opposed him, seeking to preserve their power and privilege. Their hubris blocked acceptance of his message of hope, discipleship and reconciliation with God. Even though each of us desires (in our own terms) what Taylor calls 'fullness' in life (2007: 769–70), the goals and standing of the rich and the powerful easily blind their spiritual vision and lead to their preoccupation with worldly goals. The Biblical parable of the rich fool is directed squarely against such a personality, so absorbed in material acquisition that he is blind to spiritual life (Luke 12: 15–21). This is a persistent theme in Jesus' teaching: 'The good news is preached to the poor' (Matthew 11:5); 'But many who are first will be last, and the last first' (Mark 10:31); unequivocally, 'Woe to you who are rich' (Luke 6:24); and in the famous analogy, 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' (Mark 10:25).<sup>10</sup>

So we would expect from a theological perspective to find the church to be primarily the church of the poor, and so it is in global terms, with the ascendancy of the global south and the erosion of religious faith in the richer global north. We would expect too in North America to find the church well represented among the marginalised.<sup>11</sup> And so it is. The black church like the Latino church is earnest in its mission, advancing both axes of the Cross, vertically, seeking the divine, and also horizontally, oriented to faith-based social justice (*Economist* 2009; Day 2001).

If the poor are marginalised from worldly gain, the immigrant confronts multidimensional marginality, palpable enough that care and hospitality for the foreigner or stranger is a frequent Biblical injunction (e.g. Matthew 25:35; Hebrews 13:2), for the stranger is disoriented and vulnerable in the new world in which she finds herself. Consider the phenomenological essay on the subjectivity of the stranger by Schuetz (1944), inspired by his own experience as a refugee in the United States after fleeing fascist Europe. For the stranger, social and cultural life are disorienting, experienced not 'as a protecting shelter at all but as a labyrinth in which he has lost all sense of his bearings' (507). In his radical disengagement from the space in which he finds himself, writes Schuetz, the immigrant 'is a man without a history' (1944:502), anticipating Oscar Handlin's (1951) characterisation a few years later of the European peasant in America as *The Uprooted*.

The vulnerability of the immigrant goes beyond social and cultural illegibility, amplified by a failure to speak the dominant language. Economically, downward mobility is a common experience at least in the early years of settlement but sometimes for much longer. Such downgrading involves not only material assets but also status and reputation. The multiple stressors of immigrant life may also include isolation from family members, with transnational family fragmentation separating members across continental borders. It is this broader category of 'the poor', including status as well as material poverty, that theologian Green (1994)



discerns in his reading of allusions by Jesus to 'the poor'. So, too, poverty for international migrants in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is not simply material deprivation; it is also about the stripping away of status.

We are not speaking abstractly here about the immigrant condition, but from the evidence of interviews with immigrants who came to Canada from middle-class, even upper middle-class, backgrounds in East Asia in the 1980s and 1990s (Ley 2010). This overseas Chinese population landed in Canada and found themselves in scarcely anticipated conditions of vulnerability. Many spoke no English or very poor English, and the simplest everyday tasks became a demanding project. Economic failure is pervasive among a cohort whose visa depended on their economic success in their countries of origin. Consider these dire economic experiences:

I have been very depressed since we came here... We failed in everything we tried. We bought a commercial property, a retail store, but we were deceived. When we invested in a restaurant we lost the money... the business failed we lost all of our money. I invested \$100,000 but we lost it all in two years.

So too:

We had to adjust to the situation of being unemployed. We had to start our business from scratch. We could hardly face it... We just tried to make enough to cover our expenses... It's more stressful here... We really don't know what to do, we are kind of, at a loss, we are confused.

Or again:

Lots of my friends started business here in a new environment. But they don't know the rules of the game and use Hong Kong knowledge, and it doesn't work in this place. They have no local knowledge and most of their investments are failures.

This was an abiding outcome. When the instructor in an English class for overseas Chinese immigrants asked how many had lost significant sums of money in Canada, all 30 adults in the class raised their hands.

Economic failure blights family life, but the loss of face hits men worse. An insightful retired businessman shared his assessment of his cohort of Hong Kong and Taiwanese immigrants:

...95 % of male immigrants feel upset, feel embarrassed, feel very bad... around 35–50... men in this age usually feel upset because they have lost their self-confidence... their job, lost their respect.

A church elder confirmed that immigrant men 'feel ashamed that they have no real status in this society'. In such circumstances, it was very easy for men to return to East Asia, replenishing both their economic and symbolic capital in the business regime where they had previously known success. But family fragmentation, the dreaded condition of the astronaut family, brought fresh stresses to both the lone husband in East Asia and the exiled wife and children in Canada (Lam 1994; Waters 2002). Offshore wealth scarcely made good the costs of emotional separation: 'Don't tell me I have a big house', protested an astronaut husband briefly reunited with his family in Vancouver, 'this is a house of tears' (Ley 2010).

Reviewing the early years of this middle-class migration in Toronto, Lee (1991) had noted that 'immigration for most people approximates a real life crisis'. Our Vancouver interviews both with immigrants and the pastors and elders of Chinese and Korean churches amply confirmed this assessment (Ley 2008). Heightened isolation and pervasive anxieties shaped immigrant subjectivities. A pastor told us:

When they first arrive in Canada, they feel very much alone and scared. The Church offers a community that will embrace them where they are at, Christian or non-Christian. The church offers cooked meals, places to stay... advice on the educational system... The church becomes their home.

Counselling by the church, other voluntary organisations and medical practitioners is a critical service to address both chronic and acute stress. It is a skilled practice, for overseas Chinese culture typically denies

mental health problems like depression, and the counselling must be offered in culture-specific terms (Shen et al. 2006; Chen et al. 2010). One pastor told us:

Some [immigrants] are in real need because they contemplate suicide and come from broken families... There are many cases in which the fathers are being depressed or stressed because they can no longer properly be the head of the family household...

A distinctive phenomenology of place accompanied such everyday struggles. In interviews, the church was described as 'a home away from home', 'a safe place to grow and feel accepted', 'a non-threatening place' and 'a refuge', away from the daily trials outside, 'where many are lonely and stressed'. The sharpness of this emotional distinction between inside and outside was marked, providing a particular spatial profile to Beck's 'hermeneutics of the stranger'. Moreover, forced detachment from the world of mainstream Canada created a condition akin to the Biblical profile of Christian life as lived in creative tension with the world. The apostle Peter wrote that his readers in principle should be 'aliens and strangers in the world' (1 Peter 2:11), while elsewhere, we read that Christians have a citizenship in another country and thus are 'aliens and strangers on earth...looking for a country of their own' (Hebrews 11: 14). Such 'resident alien' detachment does not mean indifference or non-participation in society as is clear from the example of Jesus himself, but it does mean a different calculus of claims and accountability and a separate teleology of spiritual hopes and disciplines (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989). Here, we are drawing close to the Christian prototype of the pilgrim or spiritual traveller, exemplified in *Pilgrim's Progress*, where one is a stranger passing through the world, avoiding its enticing distractions, en route to a spiritual destination. While this ideal type is rarely lived out, the enforced separation of the immigrant from worldly convention and comfort comes much closer to such detachment than the experience of many non-migrants. So the early years of immigrant settlement serve as a transitional liminal period, a time of disrupted habits, 'betwixt and between' the comforts of living in 'normal' society (Turner 2002). Consider one respondent's acknowledgement of such liminality as a motive for spiritual growth (Tse 2011):

From being a powerful person, I became powerless... I looked back to see that God wanted me [to come] here. If I stayed in Hong Kong, I would be powerful, powerful, going up, but God wanted to make me powerless. I needed to be humble... I belong to God. He leads me. Good thing I have religion. If not, I would have gone mad.

Like Victor Turner's view of the liminality of pilgrimage, the immigrant's space and time apart facilitate an intensification of religious practice and commitment. Voluntary or involuntary non-incorporation into mainstream society provides opportunity for spiritual development.

The vitality of the immigrant church emerges in these conditions of liminality. Turner (2002) proposed that religious liminality is accompanied by such characteristics as a relative absence of property and status, simplicity, selflessness, homogeneity, *communitas* and a strong sense of the sacred and the spiritual. Here is a picture of the New Testament church community in its early years as it aimed to follow the radical prescriptions of Jesus' teaching. Totality is another of Turner's characteristics of the liminal period, and the church as the spatial expression of immigrant liminality has affinities with what Erving Goffman called a total institution. *Communitas* defines a period of intense development of bonding social capital. 'Birds of a feather', we were told in one Korean-Canadian church, 'don't just bond together, they stick together like crazy glue'.

Such traits of liminality are consistent with our interviews both of current Chinese and Korean churches of new immigrants (Ley 2008) and an earlier oral history of the young German immigrant churches in the 1950s and 1960s (Beattie and Ley 2003). *Communitas* was expressed in the warmth of the welcome to new members:

As a whole, the German community looked after each other and I think during the first ten years this was the great strength of the churches...[including] emotional needs, spiritual needs and physical needs..

This memory from the 1950s was repeated by a current leader in a Korean church:

The longer-established immigrants tend to help a lot of the recent immigrants. They show love and concern for the new immigrants.

Help is practical, addressing basic needs: housing, schooling, social services and sometimes employment.<sup>12</sup> ‘We are a walking yellow pages to them’, declared a Chinese-Canadian pastor. Mentoring for the practicalities of everyday life often occurs in weekly fellowship or care groups: ‘our members from a care group will advise them how to apply for the social insurance card, how to open a bank account, recommend them a family doctor, etc.’ Retired and longer-established immigrants are often prominent in volunteering, thereby building up the stock of social capital; in one Chinese-Canadian church, a retiree has prepared 50 different immigrants to take their driving test. Language services are another practical gift; one relatively small Chinese-Canadian congregation offers 16 h a week of English instruction.

There is a plethora of special interest events and activities to draw in the congregation several times a week (Ley 2008). In addition to Sunday worship are services:

like English conversation classes on weekday evenings. Bible studies are in almost every part of the city, in people’s homes of course. We also have programmes for the children, activities like sports, music and summer camps. There are areas like choirs and men and women’s groups that are open to anyone.

The attributes of a quasi-total institution are revealed in the expenditure not only of time and talents but also of personal finances. Considerable sacrifices were made for major church events, including a building programme. A German-Canadian deacon remembered how in the 1960s:

When the church was built, the people they stayed in basement suites, many of them instead of buying a home so that the church could be up... I spent eight months working on the church from the start...giving my job up for the construction of the church.

Similar commitment is being repeated as members of a Chinese-Canadian church are currently remortgaging their houses to raise money for a new church property.

The vitality of the immigrant church, then, is intensified through a period of liminality, its partial detachment, whether voluntary or involuntary, from the worldly pursuits of the society in which it is embedded. Reincorporation may well occur at a later date, as the assimilation of church members economically and socially moves them from an ontology of weakness and apartness to an ontology of strength and integration. Then like the New Testament church of Ephesus addressed in the Book of Revelation, they may face the charge that they have lost their first love (Revelation 2:4). Tse (2011), for example, found in an established Cantonese-speaking church in Vancouver that some migrants from Hong Kong in the 1990s saw themselves as superior to newer migrants from Mainland China 15 years later.<sup>13</sup> Habits that bred exclusivity, such as speaking Cantonese instead of Mandarin as well as constantly invoking their experience of religious education in Hong Kong, led those who were recently in a liminal status themselves to establish a Chinese church in which it was difficult for newer Mainland migrants to integrate. A Hongkonger man married to a woman from Guangzhou expressed his frustration at the situation:

Coming up is the Mandarin-speaking people. We need to work on that...But the church leaders have problems...I see quite a few people that speak Mandarin that they came and then left because they don’t have that kind of support...I put this subject to some of the council members and with some sharp force: they said it’s not easy to start Mandarin services because the people don’t commit, and it takes a long time to nurture them.

This respondent is frustrated because church leaders—migrants themselves—seem to avoid caring for newer migrants because of cultural stereotypes that accompany the privileged Hongkonger dialect and educational pedigree.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have sought to establish the existence of, and provide a particular identity to, *homo religiosus*. In undertaking a geography of religion that moves beyond the description of cultural landscapes and spatial distributions to their interpretation, engagement with the everyday meanings and world views of faith communities is necessary, where we can learn the rules of action. We have taken the advice of Charles Taylor, John Milbank and also several geographers that conventional social science may be a difficult starting point for such enquiry because our positionality makes us querulous about the status of the spiritual, which we seek to convert to the social and then interpret through other social variables. Such reductionism, in Milbank's terms, polices and contains religious belief in inappropriate categories. Weber's iron cage of modernity has compressed and distorted the realm of spirituality. At the same time, Milbank's (possibly) rhetorical desire to marginalise secular social science in the study of religion seems excessive. Our own study, for example, has benefitted from Victor Turner's concept of liminality. What *is* required is a degree of humility in approaching the spiritual with the recognition that spiritual experience cannot be adequately reduced to social facts and that theological accounts need to be part of the interpretive frame.

Examining the resilient faith of immigrant congregations, we have suggested that the vitality and high levels of affiliation in immigrant churches are accountable by referring to the theological bases of their faith and in particular to the great reversal that proclaims the spiritual advantage of worldly weakness. Withdrawal from the blinders of worldly advantage aids spiritual development, and in the liminal experience of immigrant dispossession, conditions exist for an estrangement from worldly habits and desires and an efflorescence of religious practice. 'What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?' (Matthew 16:26). In losing much through displacement, the immigrant as stranger to the world is in a potentially favoured position to gain spiritual wealth.

## Footnotes

1. For a thoughtful consideration of the reflexive dimensions of religious research in terms of the author's own religious identity, see the argument (and references) in Olson (2009) and Bailey et al. (2009).
2. For a more philosophical approach to these issues, see Dewsbury and Cloke (2009).
3. One example among many of the new Catholicism is the Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland (California), where services are held in an equal mix of English, Vietnamese and Spanish.
4. For further examples of the vitality of immigrant religion, see Samers (2010: 284–5).
5. Such reflexivity was a central theme of the humanistic geography of the 1970s and 1980s; perhaps the first statement on reflexivity appeared in Anne Buttimer's *Values in Geography* (1974). Significantly, Buttimer was writing at that time from within the context of a Catholic order.
6. The books have a related, perhaps a common, project, although Taylor has a more accessible and conciliatory style. In the conclusion of *A Secular Age*, Taylor claims that his study is complementary to Milbank's. What he achieves for vernacular and everyday society, Milbank undertakes as an intellectual history.
7. His 'Radical Orthodoxy' school has formed a putative political party, the 'Red Tories', in the United Kingdom and Canada led by theologian Philip Blond (see Hauerwas 2000a). Red Tories marry a traditionalist emphasis on the family with a communitarian ethic that is socialist in economic policy.
8. Compare Grace Davie's (1994) criticism of the inadequacy of church membership data in assessing the prevalence of 'believing without belonging'.
9. 'Indeed, the exclusion/irrelevance of religion is often part of the unnoticed background of social science, history, philosophy, psychology' (Taylor 2007: 429). Stump makes a similar point from within the geography of religion: 'the influences of secularisation on social scientists themselves may have contributed as well to the de-emphasising of the study of religion' (Stump 2008: 369).
10. See Ringma (2009) for a brief review of key Biblical texts.
11. *The Guardian's* correspondent, Madeleine Bunting (2009), contrasts the poor immigrant Bible readers on her London bus with the middle-class movement to place anti-Christian advertisements on the same bus fleet.

12. See Huamei Han's detailed study of the deepening encounter of a Chinese immigrant couple with an evangelical Mandarin-language church in Toronto whose services met a wide range of their needs (Han 2009).
13. Compare the cultural divisions between Gentile and Jewish Christians that the apostle Paul sought energetically to suture in his Biblical letters.

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