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## UNLEARNING VIOLENCE WITH CONTEMPORIZED TEXTS

At times, biblical texts have been used to create distance between disparate groups. Differences of race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, economic status, etc. have been heightened and justified by the establishment's reading of the text which lessens the presence for the power-holders of the "other" in the text. Texts are fashioned to become comfortable and tend to reinforce existing power structures rather than offering a challenge to the establishment's perspective. These same texts then may be used or refashioned to justify exclusion and even violence against the "other."

Contemporized texts often present a reading of the biblical narrative or instruction that results in a confrontation between the reader and the text. Familiar, comfortable stories may become disquieting encounters with other understandings or perspectives which have been excluded from consideration.

After introducing a sampling of contemporized texts this paper will provide an analysis of those texts with a variety of approaches including Anglo-American postmodernity as well as selected Continental philosophies.

### 1. Defining "Contemporized Texts"

For the purpose of this research, "contemporized texts" are identified as biblical versions, including both translations and paraphrases that set the narrative in an alternative setting than the setting presented in the original text. This usually involves moving the biblical text to a familiar setting for the reader. Examples include Clarence Jordan's *Cottonpatch Gospel* which moves portions of the New Testament to Georgia during the Civil Rights movement and Carl F. Burke's *God is for Real, Man* which situates biblical passages in the language and setting of street gangs in Buffalo, New York in the late 1960's.

### 2. Exploring the nature of Contemporized Texts

Contemporized texts provide a contrast to traditional translations and paraphrases which do not attempt a significant re-situating of the biblical texts. Contemporized texts may be used to make a familiar, but comfortable, reading appear less familiar and less comfortable or to make an uncomfortable, unrelated text feel more comfortable and relevant. Contemporized texts may broaden the reading to include marginalized groups and individuals whose absence from the traditional text may provide opportunity to exclude them from consideration. At times, a contemporized text makes the familiar seem unfamiliar to the power-holder, while, at other times, it may make the unfamiliar seem familiar to the marginalized. Both events provide an opportunity for "unlearning" violence emerging from the text.

3. How do Contemporized Texts function and what do they do

Contemporized texts broaden the reading to create space for those marginalized by readings and interpretations of traditional versions of the biblical text. Creating space counters violence that may be justified by the previous reading which was more limited.

4. How do Contemporized Texts introduce the “other” to the reading.

The use of contemporized texts will be examined and assessed through a variety of philosophical approaches including Anglo-American postmodern thought and Continental philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. Literary understanding of contemporized texts will address the nature of the “other” encountered in those texts and the issue of violence as it relates to these texts.

Methodology for addressing the topic: Literature based

Sources grounding the presentation:

Jordan, Clarence. *Cotton Patch Gospel: The Complete Collection*. Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2012.

Burke, Carl F. *God Is For Real Man*. New York: Association Press, 1966.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Ethics and Infinity*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985.

Caputo, John D. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1997.

Murphy, Nancey. *Anglo-American Postmodernity*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997.

Smith, James K. A. *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? (The Church and Postmodern Culture): Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006.