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In the history of epistemology, knowledge is related to the obtaining of power — the will to power. To Michel Foucault, the will to knowledge is the will to power. Western epistemology has been used to dominate human relationships. To know God is to receive the power of God. In ancient Egyptian culture, to know a god's name is to gain his/her power. The Western pursuit of religious knowledge may be to ask, as Moses did, the name of God to obtain divine power.

Using the name of God as the Almighty, some right-wing Christians have recently attempted to overpower progressive Christians and non-Christians as “others.” George Lakoff (2006) of UC–Berkeley examines the structure of the right-wing worldview and finds an intriguing metaphoric implication of family in it.

It is understood in the right-wing view that the world is evil and children are bad in nature and need disciplines. The Father ought to teach his children right from wrong. When disobeying, they should be disciplined with painful physical punishments. Punishment is required to make them docile (Foucault 1979).

The strict father as the moral authority demonstrates a natural moral order: “Those who are moral should be in power. The Moral Order legitimizes traditional power relations as being natural, determining a hierarchy of Moral Authority: God above Man; Man above Nature; Adults above Children; Western Culture above Non-Western Culture; America above other nations” (Rockridge Institute). Anything against this moral order is evil. Evil destroys this moral order. Punishment must be dispensed to maintain moral bookkeeping.

Furthermore, right-wing ideology treats the nation as a family since we owe its existence to our “Founding Fathers.” Applied to politics, the government metaphorically plays the role of the strict father. Just as in the family, the government must be an instrument of moral authority, upholding and extending policies that increase moral strength.

When this strict-father model is extended to the world, the United States is the father of all nations because it is the strongest. The United States cannot allow any child to surpass it economically and militarily.

The power of God legitimates and ratifies the will to power. Christianity is superior to other religions because the Christian God is more powerful than other gods. The West based on Christianity has been more powerful than the Orient, due to its omnipotent God.

In his book *Why I Am Not A Christian*, Bertrand Russell (1957) criticizes Christians because they worship power, not God. He considers people as like the savage willing to prostrate himself before his gods. He calls such a religion of power worship “the religion of Moloch.”

In Russell’s eyes, Christians are true idol worshipers and power-mongers because they worship the almightiness of God.

We do not know exactly what the almightiness of God means in human terms. By claiming God’s almightiness, we project ourselves mighty. By associating with such an almighty god, we think ourselves powerful.

Alternative Visions

How do we unlearn the ideology of the conquest mindset that attempts to dominate the Other with coercion? How do we deconstruct the right-wing ideology that threatens the justice and peace of the world?

Lakoff suggests that we replace the strict father family model with the Nurturant Parent family model of the progressive worldview to ensure the well-being of people. In the model, the task of parents is to nurture and raise their children to nurture others. Nurturance involves empathy and responsibility. He applies these values to politics, too. This model offers a practical way to treat the Other with respect and care.

By 1947, Emmanuel Levinas opposed the direction of the Western philosophy when he saw it preoccupied with issues about the nature of existence and knowledge. Levinas criticized Martin Buber for treating the relation of I and Thou as reciprocal and as a tool to assure my own being.

To him, knowing myself should not be the focus of epistemology, but the ethics of serving the Other should be. Thus, ethics precedes ontology (Levinas, 1969).

In contrast with Levinas, Anselm Min (2004) argues for the triple dialectic of totality, infinity, and solidarity. Unlike Levinas, who places the values of totality and infinity opposite, he bridges them with solidarity.

The Method of Dialectic Emptying

A dialectic emptying is to locate a true solidarity between I and the Other. It is dialectic because both I and the Other are dynamically and dialogically interactive through emptying. To transform our power-worship world, we need to empty our self and our images of the Other.

This dialectic emptying involves three movements.

First, "I" cannot be the source of truth, but I can empty myself to host truth. "I" cannot grasp truth in solidarity with the Other alone. Before solidarity, emptiness creates room for truth coming in and filling in the relationship between I and the Other. The Other within also finds room in I only

in the act of emptiness. The dialectic emptying is not only to pour out the agendas of “I,” but also to understand the agendas of the Other. The emptying self is different from I. This emptying self is not a substantial being, but a relational entity interacting with the divine Spirit. It is coming from “beyond,” not self-producing or self-inducing. The emptying self pours “I” off daily and relieves itself by receiving the divine Spirit. By opening the self to the Spirit, the emptying self emerges to empty I. Thus, emptying oneself is opening oneself. By opening myself to the Spirit, “I” open room for the Other. By relating to the Spirit, “I” begin to understand the Other. Understanding the Other does not aim at grasping the Other as an object and constructing one’s own knowledge.

Dialectic emptying also finds my true self in me. By removing all the internalized and projected images of myself, I can see who I am (existence) and who I ought to be (essence). For Kwok Pui Lan (2005), diasporic imagination recognizes the diverse experiences of Chinese in the world. Although there is no permanent essential self set before me, I strive to find my true emerging self through emptying myself in interaction with the Other.

Second, dialectical emptying means to negate the distorted image of the Other including God. We need to deconstruct the popular image of the Other as either superior or inferior to us. We measure up others into hierarchical categories as we meet them. In the popular mind, arising from a mindset of conquest, there is a hierarchical cosmic totem pole. Generally speaking, from its top are God, angels, white males, white females, white children, ethnic males, ethnic females, ethnic children, animal, plants, and soil. This mindset of hierarchical order discriminates against the weaker, as seen in the natural moral order of the right-wing worldview. Dialectic emptying means to negate the hierarchical rank of such a “natural” order.

Dialectic emptying also tears up the image of God as the all-powerful and all-controlling and as the Strict Father. If God in the highest is controlling all God’s creation, all of us come to emulate the controlling power of God. Knowing the name of such a god derives from the will to power over others. Radical emptying even eradicates such a desire to ask the name of an Absolutely Almighty God to possess “His” power.

Third, to empty our idea of the Almighty God as the Strict Father, we need to have the image of God as our Humbly Hospitable Companion. Abraham was called the friend of God. Treating God as our Companion, we come to know the Other as our company on our journey. God as our humble Companion deconstructs all other oppressive, exploitive, unjust, and judgmental authorities against the weaker and provides a new ground for mutuality, open communication, and fair relations. God as our Companion does not undermine our respect for God or the qualitative difference between Creator and the created, but increases our mutual trust, open

communication, and love. When God as the Other becomes our Companion, all others can be our friends because of such a hospitable God.

Such an image of God as the Courteous Companion never threatens “other” ideas of God in other religions. God as our Companion makes all relationships horizontal.

God as our Courteous Companion dismantles the image of a strict father, the president as a strict father, and God as the ultimate Strict Father. We in postcolonial Christianity need to empty ourselves to make room for the Other by emptying our idea of God as the Almighty Strict Father and by providing the image of God as our True Companion.

Conclusion

In this postcolonial world, we come to know, communicate with, and be in mutual penetration with the Other by emptying the self and the Other. This dialectic emptying invites God as our Companion to this life’s journey and debunks the subjugation of the Other through dismantling the idol of the Strict Father God and through building up the communities of openness, fairness, care, trust, freedom, and peace.

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Rockridge Institute. www.rockridgeinstitute.org/projects/strategic/nationasfamily . [Publisher's Note: The Rockridge Institute was dissolved in 2008 and the website was inactivated.]