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In contrast to Grey Gundaker's, my field is the study of the New Testament, so "teaching scriptures" — "scriptures" here in the conventionally narrow sense given the canonical status of the New Testament — is what I am supposed to do in every course listed under my name. I would like to begin by raising some questions about "teaching scriptures," partly out of my own struggles as a New Testament professor, and partly in response to Grey's provocative comments.

My first question about "teaching scriptures" has more to do with the word "scriptures." While I generally do spend time in my courses talking about the process and the politics of canonization, I find it more and more necessary to begin to explore the process of "scripturalizing" as well as the definition of scriptures. After all, scriptures and canons are not the same thing, and there are traditions in which scriptures exist without necessarily any ideas of canon. This is where, I think, a focus on scrutinizing "scriptures" as a critical idea — in terms of both practice and process — is right on target. What do we really mean when we use the word "scriptures"? While I am completely in agreement about the need to go beyond a rigid and narrow understanding of "scriptures" (like the books or literary texts that are included in the Jewish or Christian Bible), I also find it important that we develop some parameters or concrete ideas on what makes some texts — literary and otherwise — "scriptures." Questioning the narrow understanding without developing some parameters would render the term meaningless, for "scriptures" may end up including anything and everything.

As I find myself agreeing with Gundaker, for instance, that “scriptures” should not and cannot be limited to “key religious texts of major religions ‘of the book,’” I also find myself wondering if she would actually consider the more general “four-eyes sign” and/or Lusane’s particular memorial a type of “scripture.” Human beings — even or especially “historically dominated peoples” — make meanings in many ways, with various forms, and for different purposes, but when and how do particular making of meanings become making of “scriptures”? If “scriptures” can be not only remade but also made — and if these can be done with and without an explicit use of the term “scripture” — then how do we know when and where “scripturalizing” — in the sense of making “scriptures” rather than making use of “scriptures” — has taken place? If we can agree that the conventional definition or understanding of “scriptures” is too narrow or rigid, can we agree on when an understanding of “scriptures” may have become too broad, vague, or undefined?

Gundaker’s interesting and multileveled reading of Lusane’s memorial also reminds me of one of the greatest difficulties that I have in teaching the New Testament. I am, in other words, moving now to problematize the first word in “teaching scriptures.” Here is my struggle: some or perhaps even most of my students actually seldom read and hence know little about the New Testament. A few of them may think they are familiar with the New Testament, but in fact they are not at all sure what is or is not in the New Testament, not to mention where and in what context a particular verse, episode, or passage may be found within the covers of “the Good Book.” In fact, one may say this very lack of familiarity with the actual texts is precisely how dominated persons or populations may intervene by “inventing” scriptures. The emphasis on social texture and the experiences and practices of historically dominated peoples thus enriches more than just the study of texts per se. African Americans who were not allowed to read the Bible for themselves during the time of slavery have, for instance, ended up freeing themselves from the constraints of the printed word, and were hence able to use scriptures imaginatively and inventively for their purposes of resistance.

That is, however, not the only way through which resistance can take place. Another potential way to resist is to be faithful to a fault. This is, for example, how the African-American writer Richard Wright won his “first triumph” over his “lawgiver” father. When Wright was five years old, a stray cat was keeping his father from sleeping. In frustration, his father barked that Wright should kill the cat. Intentionally literalizing his father’s remark, Wright lynched the cat. This is how Wright (1998) writes about what he did:

I had had my first triumph over my father. I had made him believe that I had taken his words literally. He could not punish me now without risking his authority. I was happy because I had at last found a way to throw my criticism of him into his face. I had made him feel that, if he whipped me for killing the kitten, I would never give serious weight to his words again.

In a way, as different scholars have proposed, one may go further and suggest that the tradition of Derridean deconstruction is nothing but a practice of close reading that capitalizes on a similar logic. That is to say, it is by an almost literalistic reading that deconstruction does its work of pulling the rug from under an author or a literary text. I am not advocating a literalistic practice of reading here, but only pointing to the need for and the value of reading closely and carefully for the purposes of problematizing and destabilizing, whether it is the politics of literalism or the text of the New Testament. I am speaking therefore of not only the significance of ISS's current project on the ethnologies of scriptural reading among communities of color that embrace scriptural inerrancy and/or authority, but also the importance of "teaching scriptures," especially in terms of close reading. Put differently, questioning the idea of "scriptures" as texts does not — in fact, should not — imply that teaching close reading of scriptures as texts is inevitably or inherently obsolete, conservative, or dispensable. Just as Gundaker correctly emphasizes the need to read nonliterary and noncanonical texts in multileveled ways, I would argue that it is equally important to teach and learn how to read a literary and canonical scripture like the New Testament closely, especially since close reading has become in many ways a lost art among today's students. The challenge is: how does one *teach* that?

I hope I will not be distracting too much from Gundaker's work here with my next question, because I do think that it is extremely important that we go beyond the conventional understanding of "scriptures." I do wonder, however, if her reading of Lusane's memorial may not also become a way to teach the text of the New Testament as scriptures in other textual ways. This desire on my part actually is related to the question "How should 'scriptures' as cross-cultural phenomena be taught in the classrooms of the twenty-first century?" Again, I am focusing here more on the idea of "teaching" than that of "scriptures." That is, how do I, as a New Testament teacher, teach the New Testament cross-culturally, especially as "scriptures" have become more and more identified with a literary text even when North American culture is arguably become less and less print based.

This question becomes even more complicated and perhaps compelling when one considers not only our shrinking globe, but also scholars' concern with "historically dominated peoples." I am thinking of peoples who, culturally speaking, have not learned and still do not learn by reading a literary text. As I alluded to earlier, this may well be an increasingly "global reality" with the so-called millennial generation of North America, even though I do not mean to collapse the very diverse experiences that different peoples and cultures have with texts and media that are not literary or print based. Given my conviction that knowledge and familiarity with New Testament contents are still important for cultural change and transformation, are there ways or strategies to teach the New Testament as one form of "scriptures" that involve levels of reading or seeing beyond the level of literal and literary reading? Are there pedagogically innovative ways to teach New Testament texts with art and/or artifacts, for example? Would doing so not also open up a space for us to learn and talk about how persons and peoples make use of "book scriptures" without necessarily reading or reading from a book?

Bibliography

Wright, Richard. *Black Boy*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998.