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Vincent Wimbush and I began a *conversation* about this issue of *Spotlight* at the inaugural conference on “Theorizing Scriptures” held in February 2004 at the Claremont Graduate University to launch the Institute for Signifying Scriptures.

The conference brought together an eclectic mix of international scholars, practitioners, and performers to begin what Wimbush describes as an *excavation* — a critical-inquiry into the many practices by which scriptures are and have been signified both in and outside the academy.

His phrase “signifying (on) scripture” presses for a fresh *mentalité*, the thematics of which are sparked by the question: What work do we (scholars, practitioners, groups) make scriptures do as (a) religious, social, and cultural phenomena; and (b) sacred texts mastered in scholarly and

other discourses?

As guest editor, Wimbush chooses to structure this issue of *Spotlight* as a conversation between unlikely partners who practice different ways of signifying (on) scriptures. The potential frisson of multiple approaches is meant to encourage if not generate new frameworks for theorizing scripture.

The other side of the question of what work we make scriptures do is what, in turn, scriptures make us do through their production of social text(ure)s. These investigations therefore reach beyond philology, form criticism, and hermeneutics to focus as well on the sociology and political economy of signifying (on) scriptures.

For instance, biblical texts that promise liberation are *conjured up* (Aymer) in response to situations of oppression. Probing deeper into the social text(ure)s of darkneses in scriptures (Wimbush), however, pushes the analysis beyond the enchantment of being lifted up from the “darkness” of misery to excavate and reveal the darkneses (racial, political, etc.) that signifying (on) scriptures (re)creates.

Grey Gundaker underscores the betrayal of the practice of signifying (on) scriptures as books, which entitles peoples of the book, as well as their scholars and interpreters, to claim monopoly over meaning. Canons, classics, and scriptures prescribe and inscribe dominant social text(ures) such that vernacular material forms become “discredited knowledges.”

Similarly, the following conversation queries practices of signifying on materials and performances that act as gateways to scripture such as Kanye West’s *JesusWalks*. The readings of scripturally inspired songs, spirituals, and gospels as populist folklore bring to the foreground the “scandal” of class, and the exclusions and closure of scriptures.

These and other critical issues are taken up in the following pages within the contexts of classroom pedagogy.