The mystical body:

Religion, postmodernity and nostalgia

Amy Hollywood

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION and the human body is not clear or straightforward, least of all as it appears in the writings of postmodern theorists. For some, perhaps, there was a golden age of premodernity, when the body was not separate from the subject, and had religion's meaning inscribed in its flesh and actions. But in the writings of other postmodernists, the body's relationship to mystical experience is more nuanced than this nostalgic model allows. By considering the example of George Bataille's treatment of Angela of Foligno, this article argues that the relationships between religion, the body, modernity and post-modernity are complex and elusive.

Nostalgia for the religious body

In a recent essay on religion and postmodernism, Françoise Meltzer argues that postmodernism is marked by a 'secular nostalgia' for a premodern religious world in which there is 'a seamlessness between body and idea'.[1] She reads the French structuralists Louis Althusser and Roland Barthes as examples of a peculiarly postmodern nostalgia[2] for the body in which the body is idealized as a totality and as the site of epistemological and ontological certainty.[3] Althusser in particular associates the body with religion and implicitly relegates religion to the realm of the premodern. As Meltzer demonstrates, for Althusser the inscription of religious certainty in and on the body becomes 'a metaphor to express secular conviction'.[4] Just as early Christian discourses and practices of virginity posit the time before the fall as an era of lost plenitude in which the (embodied) self is fully transparent to itself, to others, and to God, Meltzer contends, so 'postmodernism has its own prelapsarian era: before the Enlightenment'.[5] This understanding of premodern religion posits it as a realm in which conviction is literally embodied and so is immediately accessible to the experiencing subject and to those around him or her. Early Christian martyrs, for example, who enact their belief through the bodily performance of self-sacrificial suffering and death, make the body a transparent and 'pure vehicle for expressing *caritas*' – and, presumably, for experiencing it.[6]

Ultimately, what attracts the postmodernist to the bodies of premodern Christians, Meltzer argues, is the latter's 'certainty' and 'an *engagement* (in the Sartrean sense) so encompassing, particularly from the perspective of the secular, that it dissolves the burdensome ubiquity of the very notion we labor relentlessly to undermine: subjectivity'.[7] In Meltzer's account, this certainty and engagement don't dissolve subjectivity itself; instead, the thorough conviction with which one inhabits one's (bodily) self makes modern metaphysical worries about subjectivity unnecessary. For Meltzer, early Christian saints, martyrs, and ascetics – those 'forbidding presences' she sees depicted by historians like Peter Brown[8] – are so sure of themselves and of their God, so transparent to themselves and to the divine, and so thoroughly forged, body and soul, with that which they believe, that there is no room for the self-consciousness of modern subjectivity. It is this certainty, transparency and unity between body and soul, Meltzer argues, that postmodernism desires. The postmodern rejection of Cartesian subjectivity is a refusal, not of its totalizing promises, but of its sceptical hesitancy with regard to the possibility of their achievement. Despite their more overt philosophical agendas, Meltzer suggests, at least some postmodern thinkers are troubled not by the apparent certainties of the Cartesian *cogito* but by the corrosive scepticism out of which it emerges and to which it remains permanently subject.

Emblematic of postmodern desire, for Meltzer, is Althusser's explicit comparison of himself to 'saint Thomas of the Gospels, who wants to touch in order to believe'.[9] Even the Marxist claim that one must not only touch, but also work on and transform reality in order fully to know it does little to undermine Meltzer's reading of this passage in terms of a nostalgia for the body, religion and the premodern, all seen as sites of certainty and transparency. Her account of Althusser (together with her less elaborated readings of Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin and Julia Kristeva) usefully articulates one of the ways in which postmodernists position themselves in relationship to the premodern and the religious. Yet despite the force of Meltzer's argument, I hesitate to move too quickly from these examples to a general claim about the relationship between postmodernism and religion.[10] Reading this relationship in terms of a putative postmodern nostalgia for the supposed plenitude and certainty of pre-Enlightenment Christianity leaves unquestioned a whole series of assumptions about the body, history, religion and subjectivity that other postmodern encounters with and appeals to religion strongly contest. If

we follow Althusser and read pre-Enlightenment Christianity as evincing forms of bodily subjectivity and transparent self-certainty inevitably eroded by the forces of modernity and secularization, moreover, we implicitly accept an interpretation of modern religious subjectivities as recalcitrant and irrational remnants of an earlier era.[11] Nostalgia implies a desire for that to which we cannot return. For the many Christians who inhabit the modern and/or postmodern world, Althusser's nostalgia for religion and/as the premodern will seem misplaced.

The ruptured and dissolving body

Appeals to the body as the site of certain forms of religious – and specifically Christian – practice do not, I will argue, necessarily point to a desire for the kind of epistemological and ontological certainty Meltzer finds in Althusser. Instead, if we look at Georges Bataille's critical appropriation and miming of mediaeval Christian mysticism, we find an understanding of the body as site of ambivalence, loss and lack. Whereas mysticism might appear to be the place within the Christian tradition in which Althusser's desire to touch Christ is most fully realized, Bataille suggests that the encounter with the body of the other, especially in experiences of extreme suffering and bodily dissolution, gives rise to an ecstatic rupturing and dissolution of the self in which full self-presence is rendered impossible. For Bataille, mystical ecstasy is literally a standing outside of oneself in apprehension of the bodily dissolution of the other.

Bataille comes to these insights at least in part through his careful reading of the thirteenth-century Umbrian mystic, Angela of Foligno. Although writing during World War II, Bataille's emphasis on transgression, laceration and the dissolution of subjectivity have been read as crucial harbingers of peculiarly postmodern forms of thinking.[12] If this is so, his wartime writings, indebted as they are to Angela of Foligno, suggest that there are other ways in which the postmodern and the premodern converge than those outlined by Meltzer in her reading of Althusser. Rather than a nostalgic attempt to return to a lost site of plenitude, Bataille's engagement with the mediaeval and the mystical marks an attempt to bypass or subvert preoccupations with secularity, autonomy and totality arguably constitutive of modernity.[13] Here I will sketch out the reading of Angela and Bataille that would justify these claims and briefly suggest why the postmodern might be marked – as is mysticism itself – by this

double and seemingly contradictory desire for lost wholeness and for self-laceration.

Mystical ecstasy in Angela of Foligno and Georges Bataille

Angela and her experiences of abjection and ecstasy before Christ's cross stand at the centre of Bataille's wartime writings. *Inner experience* (1943) contains two 'digressions' on ecstasy – 'First digression on ecstasy before an object: the point' and 'Second digression on ecstasy in the void' – that are crucially indebted to Angela, particularly to a distinction that emerges in her account of the soul's twenty-sixth transformation. Angela there discusses the centrality of suffering to her experience – a suffering grounded in her desire to imitate Christ's passion. This christological experience becomes the basis for her immersion in a darkness in which she becomes abyssal non-love.[14]

> When I am in that darkness I do not remember anything about anything human, or the God-man, or anything which has a form. Nevertheless, I see all and I see nothing. As what I have spoken of withdraws and stays with me, I see the God-man. He draws my soul with great gentleness and he sometimes says to me; 'You are I and I am you.' I see, then, those eyes and that face so gracious and attractive as he leans to embrace me. In short, what proceeds from those eyes and that face is what I said that I saw in that previous darkness that comes from within, and that delights me so that I can say nothing of it. When I am in the God-man my soul is alive. And I am in the God-man much more than in the other vision of seeing God with darkness. The soul is alive in that vision concerning the God-man. The vision with darkness, however, draws me so much more that there is no comparison.[15]

The darkness of the abyss emerges out of the eyes of the God-man, suggesting a causal connection between desirous meditation on and identification with Christ and the dissolution of the self in that 'vision with darkness'.

Meditation on and imitation of Christ's passion is central to Angela's devotional life as she describes it throughout her *Book*. This meditational practice, centred on Christ's passion, becomes the sources both of her being 'in the God-man' and 'the other vision of seeing God with darkness'. The way to both forms of ecstasy lies in an exploration of the details of Christ's suffering flesh in tortuous and tortured detail:

> Once when I was meditating on the great suffering that Christ endured on the cross, I was considering the nails, which, I had heard, had driven a little bit of the flesh of his hands and feet into the wood. And I desired to see at least that small amount of Christ's flesh that the nails had driven into the wood. And then such was my sorrow over the pain that Christ had endured that I could no longer stand on my feet. I bent over and sat down; I stretched out my arms on the ground and inclined my head on them.[16]

Meditation on the fragments of Christ's body leads directly to Angela's adoption of a cruciform bodily stance, suggesting her complete identification with Christ's suffering flesh. Angela desires not only to share in Christ's pain, but to intensify it:

> then I would beg him to grant me this grace, namely, that since Christ had been crucified on the wood of the cross, that I be crucified in a gully, or in some very vile place, and by a very vile instrument. Moreover, since I did not desire to die as the saints had died, that he make me die a slower and even more vile death than theirs. I could not imagine a death vile enough to match my desire.[17]

This desire is answered, not on the bodily, but on the spiritual level, making Angela's suffering soul an object of contemplation for her readers.

> Concerning the torments of the soul that demons inflicted on her, she found herself incapable of finding any other comparison than that of a man hanged by the neck who, with his hands tied behind him and his eyes blindfolded, remains dangling on the gallows and yet lives, with no help, no support, no remedy, swinging in the empty air.[18]

These images, in which abjection and ecstasy, guilt and desire, and life and death are inextricably entwined, suggest the viability of Bataille's claim that images of Christ's suffering serve as an object point or projection through which Angela comes to experience her own dissolution. Yet, as Angela suggests, it is a dissolution that remains always incomplete, for the soul, like the hanged man, remains alive despite its absolute desolation.

Bataille similarly seeks a double ecstasy, one before the object and the other before the void, and as in Angela's *Book* the two are linked. Bataille's object of meditation is not Christ, however, but a fellow human being.

> In any case, we can only project the object-point by drama. I had recourse to upsetting images. In particular, I would gaze at the photographic image – or sometimes the memory I have of it – of a Chinese man who must have been tortured in my lifetime. Of this torture, I had had in the past a series of successive representations. In the end, the patient writhed, his chest flayed, arms and legs cut off at the elbows and at the knees. His hair standing on end, hideous, haggard, striped with blood, beautiful as a wasp.[19]

The replacement of Christ by the torture victim suggests that for Bataille, what is crucial about Christ is not his divinity but his suffering. Through meditation on suffering human flesh Bataille, following Angela, comes to ecstatic self-dissolution. Meditation before the object is a form of dramatization in which one projects the self onto another and through that very projection, and the violence done to it, experiences one's own dissolution.

> The young and seductive Chinese man of whom I have spoken, left to the work of the executioner – I loved him with a love in which the sadistic instinct played no part: he communicated his pain to me or perhaps the excessive nature of his pain, and it was precisely that which I was seeking, not so as to take pleasure in it, but in order to ruin in me that which is opposed to ruin.[20]

This desire to 'ruin' in himself 'that which is opposed to ruin' becomes the key, Bataille suggests, to understanding Angela's practice as well as his own.

According to Meltzer, for Althusser and other postmodernists, premodern Christianity is a moment in which religious practice creates a 'seamlessness between body and idea'. Angela's identificatory meditation on and imitation of Christ's suffering body might seem to mark the highest realization of this unification. Yet both Angela and Bataille describe the lacerated body of the other as generating psychic dislocation and dissolution in the viewer. The gap between body and soul remains, neither is whole, and neither seamlessly reflects the other. Although Angela perhaps strives more fully than does Bataille for a literal imitation of the suffering other, even her bodily mimicking of that anguish posits the body, not as plenitude, but as lack.[21] Precisely this lack engenders her anguished ecstasy, as Bataille's twentieth-century re-articulation of her practice and her experience makes clear.

Nostalgia and ecstasy: the doubleness of mysticism and postmodernity

Bataille's reading of Angela, then, suggests that nostalgia may not be the best way to characterize every postmodern evocation of the premodern and the religious.[22] In an essay exploring the relationship between his pentecostal boyhood and his current life as a queer literary critic and public intellectual, Michael Warner suggests another way to understand the appeal of ecstatic religiosity to those living in the modern and/or postmodern world. 'Religion', Warner argues,

> makes available a language of ecstasy, a horizon of significance within which transgressions against the normal order of the world and the boundaries of self *can be seen as good things* . . . In this way ecstatic religions can legitimate self-transgression, providing a meaningful framework for the sublime play of self-realization and self-dissolution.[23]

Although as a historian, my first impulse may be to stress the gap between late mediaeval mysticism and Bataille's inner experience, and of either to the ecstasies of American pentecostalism, both Bataille and Warner suggest the dangers of too readily assuming a definite break between them.[24]

The tendency to isolate premodern Christian practice and belief is in large part the result of what Warner aptly describes as 'a potent Enlightenment mythology that regards religion as a primitive remnant, a traditional superstition'.[25] Most accounts of modernity and of the postmodern depend on an equation of the modern and secularism. This often goes together with an understanding of religion as conservative and reactionary – either a holdover among those who have not been sufficiently rationalized and secularized, or an explicit and implicitly doomed refusal of modern values. As Warner shows, moreover, this equation of religion with the premodern and secularism with modernity is classed and gendered (and also, I would suggest, raced) in crucial ways; women and members of the lower middle classes are consistently associated with religion and denigrated as reactionary, nostalgic adherents of outmoded social and cultural values.[26] Yet Warner persuasively argues that women – and by implication the lower middle classes – are attracted to the ecstatic tradition of American pentecostalism not because it takes them back to the body and its putative certainties, but rather because its 'world cancelling gestures can also be a kind of social affirmation, in this case of a frequently despised

minority'.[27] Through certain forms of religion, minority groups set themselves in opposition to a larger social order that has little room for them. At the same time, the dissolution of painfully imposed minority identities is both made possible and legitimated through religious ecstasy.

This account is clearly inadequate to explain every instance of what is popularly understood as religious conservatism. Detailed historical study would be necessary in order to substantiate even the more limited claim that minority or marginalized groups are more likely to seek out ecstatic forms of religion.[28] Moreover the same or similar sets of religious practices and beliefs might mean very different things to and operate in very different ways for different practitioners. My intention here is not to make general claims on the basis of Warner's reflections, but merely to suggest that if modernity's relationship to religion is more complicated than its high theorists might have wished, certainly the same will be true for postmodernism.[29] More particularly, I think that postmodernism's relationship to religion and particularly to its more ecstatic, experiential, bodily and mystical forms is both nostalgic *and* ecstatic; the question then becomes how two apparently antithetical desires – for self-certainty and for self-dissolution – can emerge at the same site. In so far as modernity is characterized in terms of totality and the quest for certainty, moreover, we might also expect to see within it a pull toward ecstasy. The differences between modernity and post-modernity might then be re-construed as ones of emphasis rather than of absolute temporal rupture.

The doubleness of postmodern attitudes toward religion, particularly in its most embodied and excessive forms, is mirrored by a doubleness at the heart of the Christian mystical tradition itself. Although modern accounts of mysticism typically assert that in mystical experience one encounters a source of wholeness and plenitude in which the individual actively participates, Bataille insists that he finds in his own experience and in Angela's text another form of ecstasy, sparked by the realization that one is not and cannot be everything. Meditation on the cross of Christ or other instances of intense human bodily suffering are an encounter with radical contingency and the partialness of the human other that exposes the fragmentation and laceration of the viewer. According to Bataille, the desire for divine wholeness and plenitude, and the ecstatic anguish that emerges when one realizes one cannot be everything, stand side by side in Angela's text. If Bataille is right, as I think he is, then we need to explain the convergence of these two

seemingly antithetical desires. Postmodernism and mysticism, on this view, are haunted by the same paradoxical dilemmas.

I can here only gesture towards an answer to these questions, one grounded in the work of Bataille's long-time friend, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. According to Lacan, there are two tendencies in language. In the first, language users attempt to fix meaning by positing a transcendental signifier that is seamlessly united to its signified and thus assures the stability of language and of meaning. Yet the site of the transcendental signifier is always empty, and its putative claims to wholeness and fixity through the conjunction of signified and signifier an illusion. (Certain strands of the Christian mystical tradition might rephrase this in terms of the radical unknowability of God, language at times echoed by Lacan.) For Lacan, both the illusion and its uncovering are necessary to the operation of language, which depends both on the claim that signifier and signified are one and the reality of the gap between them. Mysticism, as a quest for the absolute that would ensure meaning, stability and being, encounters that which radically destabilizes meaning and subjectivity. The mystic seeks the transcendental signifier and discovers the paradoxical interplay of presence and absence through which signification becomes possible. Ecstasy occurs both in the quest for the absolute and the recognition of its impossibility (in what Lacan calls phallic jouissance and a jouissance that goes beyond, or a jouissance of, the body). As Lacan argues, this doesn't quite make for two gods – nor, I would add, for two religions or two mysticisms – and yet it also clearly doesn't make for one alone. Both the modern and the postmodern are haunted by these ineluctable, inescapable, uncanny doubles.

Amy Hollywood is Associate Professor of Religion at Dartmouth College. She is the author of *The soul as virgin wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame University Press, 1995) and *Sensible ecstasy: mysticism, sexual difference, and the demands of history* (University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2001).

NOTES

1 Françoise Meltzer, 'Re-embodying: virginity secularized' in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds), *God, the gift, and postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p 268.

2 On the history of nostalgia and the complexities of its deployment as a critical term, see Svetlana Boym, *The future of nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). Boym points to the inevitability of nostalgia in modernity even as she attempts to find ways to avoid the unreflectiveness that often makes nostalgia politically dangerous. Ultimately, she argues, 'survivors of the twentieth century, we are all nostalgic for a time when we were not nostalgic. But there seems to be no way back' (p 355). The point, for Boym, is to try and uncover (or perhaps recover) politically progressive forms of nostalgia. My use of the term here, because still caught in a particular critical mode, remains inadequate to the challenges of Boym's project in ways I hope to address in a future essay.

3 On the postmodern as the fruits of a theoretical enterprise grounded in lists of binary opposites (modern/postmodern, presence/absence, centring/dispersal, etc.), see John Frow, *Time and commodity culture: essays in cultural theory and postmodernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp 13–63. Like Frow, I hope to destabilize these binaries in ways that will better capture the complexities of historical reality.

4 Meltzer, 'Re-embodying', p 265.

5 *Ibid.*, p 266.

6 *Ibid.*, p 270.

7 *Ibid.*, p 271.

8 The phrase, cited by Meltzer, comes from Peter Brown's *The body and society: men, women, and ritual renunciation in early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp 446–47. Meltzer, 'Re-embodying', p 271.

9 Louis Althusser, *L'Avenir dure longtemps, suivi de les faits: autobiographies* (Paris: Stock/IMEC), p 207. Cited by Meltzer, p 263.

10 On the dangers of taking the part for the whole in characterizations of a culture's or a group's relationship to time, see Maurice Bloch, 'The past and the present in the present', in *Ritual, history and power: selected papers in anthropology* (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), pp 1–18; and Rita Felski, *Doing time: feminist theory and postmodern culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp 19-20. Felski cites the essay as it appears in 1977 in *Man*, but gives the title incorrectly.

11 Meltzer carefully delimits her analysis of postmodernism to texts 'that see themselves as outside religion', arguing that theological or religious texts will have different patterns of nostalgia for the premodern. Meltzer, 'Re-embodying', p 268.

12 For a history of the use of the term postmodernism (which predates Bataille's work, although arguably not in ways relevant to my argument here) and discussion of the debates about the use of postmodernity to mark a specific historical period, see Perry Anderson, *The origins of postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998). Fredric Jameson posits postmodernity as the 'logic of late capitalism', yet as John Frow argues following Mike Davis, Jameson 'dates the postmodern from around the 1960s' whereas the concept of '"late capitalism" extends through the postwar period and *ends* with the slump of 1974–75' (Frow, *Time and commodity culture*, p 29). Lyotard, another crucial figure in the theorization of postmodernism, ultimately argues that the modern is always haunted by the postmodern and vice versa. The issue is less one of chronological periodization than of mutually implicated and contestatory modes of thinking. The latter understanding fits best with my arguments here. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); Mike Davis, 'Urban renaissance and the spirit of postmodernism', *New Left Review* 151 (1985), p 107; Jean-François Lyotard, *The post-modern condition: a report on knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp 71–82; and Jean-François Lyotard, *The postmodern explained: correspondence 1982–85*, translated by Morgan Thomas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

13 Or at least of recent theoretical articulations of modernity. On this issue, see Frow, *Time and commodity culture*, pp 13–63.

14 For the language of non-love, darkness, and the abyss, see Ludger Their and Abele Calufetti (eds), *Il libro della Beata Angela da Foligno* (Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1985), pp 354, 358; and Angela of Foligno, *Complete works*, translated by Paul Lachance (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), pp 202, 204.

15 *Il libro*, p 362; *Complete works*, p 205. I have used Lachance's translations although with some modifications here and elsewhere as specified.

16 *Il libro*, pp 192–194; *Complete works*, pp 145–46. For a similar obsession with the flesh displaced by the nails of the cross, in this case on the body of the saint marked by these wounds, see Thomas of Celano, *The first life of Saint Francis*, n 95, 113 in Marion A. Habig (ed), *St Francis of Assisi: writings and early biographies* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), pp 309–10, pp 326–27. Angela was deeply grounded in Franciscan traditions of meditation on Christ's passion. For discussion of the historical roots of these practices and their development, see Denise Despres, *Ghostly sights: visual meditation in late medieval literature* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1989); and Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin devotional literature and medieval society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp 26–95.

17 *Il libro*, p 144; *Complete works*, p 128. See also *Il libro*, pp 206–8; *Complete works*, pp 150–51.

18 *Il libro*, p 338; *Complete works*, p 197. Translation slightly modified. For other images of intense abjection, see *Il libro*, pp 144, 206–8, 242, 302–4; *Complete works*, pp 128, 150–51, 162–63, 184–85.

19 Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), vol 5, p 139; and Georges Bataille, *Inner experience*, translated by Leslie Anne Boldt (State University of New York Press, 1988), p 119. Translations, although indebted to Boldt, are my own.

20 Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes* 5, p 140; Bataille, *Inner experience*, p 120. I discuss the ethical problems of Bataille's aestheticization and eroticization of the torture victim in Amy Hollywood, *Sensible ecstasy: mysticism, sexual difference, and the demands of history* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming 2001), chs 2 and 3.

21 For more on the important dis-analogies between Bataille and Angela, ones Bataille himself tends to stress, see Hollywood, *Sensible ecstasy*, chs 2 and 3. Most important is Angela's continued recourse to salvific economies in which ultimately the gap endemic to human bodily subjectivity will be overcome. Yet her emphasis on degradation, abjection, and laceration as themselves the source of ecstasy pushes against this salvific narrative in crucial ways.

22 Although Bataille's postwar work often seems marked by this nostalgia and the historical claims on which it depends. See, for example, Georges Bataille, *Theory of religion*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

23 Michael Warner, 'Tongues untied: memoirs of a pentecostal boyhood', in Donald Morton (ed), *The material queer* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), p 43.

24 For discussion of early modern and modern 'enthusiasm' that suggests its close relationship to mysticism, see Ann Taves, *Fits, trances, and visions: experiencing religion and explaining experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp 16–17.

25 Warner sees even Bataille as sharing in this tendency, which at times he clearly does. Warner, 'Tongues untied', p 44.

26 See also Felski, *Doing time*, pp 33–54. Similarly, Europeans and North Americans often figure 'the East' as a premodern, religious or mystical realm in opposition to the secular, modern West. On this issue and the way in which attention to 'modernization' in India significantly problematizes the secularization thesis, see Peter van der Veer, *Imperial encounters: religion and modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

27 Warner, 'Tongues untied', p 43.

28 On pentecostalism, for example, see Cheryl Jeanne Sanders, *Saints in exile: the holiness-pentecostal experience in African American religion and culture* (Oxford: Univeristy Press, 1996); Andrew R. Chesnut, *Born again in Brazil: the pentecostal boom and the pathogens of poverty*

(New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); and Mike Davis, 'L.A.'s pentecostal earthquake', *Grand Street* 68 (1999), pp 97–101.

29 Leigh Schmidt recently warns that even if much contemporary American religion seems postmodern in its attempt to bypass or subvert central Enlightenment secularizing tendencies, 'Jefferson's oracle of reason still sounds as a cultural clarion – one that can never quite be escaped even by those who are most desirous of slipping its bonds'. Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing things: religion, illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p 247.