

1-3 November
Holiday Inn International Airport
Toronto, Ontario

REA Annual Meeting 2019 Proceedings

coexistence in divided societies

**Pedagogies
of the Sacred,
of Difference,
and of Hope.**

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**W(holy) Awareness:
 A Womanist Religious Education Curriculum
 Using Jazz for Prostate Cancer Awareness as a Case Study**

Abstract. The span and multi-dimensionality of living, inter-institutional and inter-generational, embeds, within each of us, different ways of learning. Particularly, for those in faith communities, we are simultaneously learning and receiving education in faith, on a daily basis, in various situations. Christian tradition emphasizes death and suffering as redemptive processes through which resurrection channels the power of hope, healing, and educative purpose. Death, in Christian education, underscores that death can be life-giving. At a moment of death, Jazz for Prostate Cancer Awareness was birthed.

Introduction

In the midst of death, what are the possibilities for one to be born anew, encompassing communal healing and ethos? In the moment of a loved one passing, is it possible that the very pain one experiences can become the resource that is life-saving? Life-giving? Oftentimes, death is seen as finality, where the body, the soul, and the mind cease to exist and leave no productively creative power. Rarely is death seen, experienced, or thought to be a moment to harvest something good and fruitful, especially educative for the purpose of healing and growing one's faith. Once the deceased person is buried, there is the presumption and experience of loss of life, by family, friends, and community. Nonetheless, there is, also, a critically educative juncture of death that teaches and grows one's faith.¹

Education, then, is ongoing and on a daily basis. Whether we watch a movie, have lunch, talk on the phone, or have a business meeting, we are educated, learning from life's experiences. Reminding us that there is no singularly accepted form or practice of education, Gabriel Moran's *Showing How: The Act of Teaching* insightfully elaborates: "If education is the interaction of forms of life with end (meaning) and without end (termination), then what remains to be done is to describe the major forms that are lifelong and lifewide."²

This lifelong and lifewide learning, as Moran highlights, has a particular educative experience for African-American men. Men of African descent, throughout their lives, become knowledgeable that the death-life cycle is institutionally structured, where black men's bodies

¹ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 16.

² Gabriel Moran, *Showing How: The Act of Teaching* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 156.

perpetually exist in a state of impending and/or immediate violence.³ Enduring such inhumane treatment, such as frequent arrests, police beatings, law enforcement tasing, illegal chokeholds, false arrests, and legally justified homicide, African-American men acquire the wisdom of a lived-experience knowledge, comprehending how to live as unprotected and underserved citizens.

The consistent threat of violence against and the actual death of African-American men is a pervasive phenomenon. Black men's lives, in America, are in an uninterrupted life-death cycle, where, oftentimes, they have no protection, safe spaces, sacred communities, or healing opportunities. Despite the modern-day health and wellness innovations and preventive measures, black men, especially in regard to different types of diseases, such as cancer, face a far more alarming mortality rate than any other group.⁴

Clearly, there is a dire need for a healthy and communal intervention to save the lives of African-American men. Currently, there is one approach, such as #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM), which attempts to address the state-sanctioned violence and gendered institutional oppression, providing more protection to save the lives of black men. After the tragic deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Mike Brown, and Jordan Davis, where the U.S. criminal court found no one guilty of murdering these black men, #BLM “was born out of the outrage that escalated after each of these killings was legally sanctioned.”⁵ #BLM, as cultural worker Alicia Garza states, “is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.”⁶

Another method of saving and prolonging black men's lives is through spirituality. In several studies, specifically related to cancer and black men coping with cancer, researchers⁷

³ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012), Foreword.

⁴ “Distrust of Health Care System May Keep Black Men Away from Prostate Cancer Research,” Rachel D. Cohen, aired Oct. 17, 2018, on NPR; “Cutting CRC,” <https://cuttingcrc.com/minnesota>.

⁵ Darryl Lorenzo Wellington, “The Power of Black Lives Matter,” *Crisis* 122, no. 1 (2015): 18-23.

⁶ Wellington, 20.

⁷ Richard A. Jenkins and Kenneth I. Pargament, “Religion and Spirituality as Resources for Coping with Cancer,” *Journal of Psychology Oncology* 13, nos. 1-2 (1995): 51-74; Cheryl L. Holt, Eddie M. Clark, David L. Roth, “Positive and Negative Religious Beliefs Explaining the Religion–Health Connection Among African Americans,” *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 24, no. 4, (2014): 311-331; Lee Caplan, Patricia Sawyer, Cheryl Holt, Cynthia J. Brown, “Religiosity After a Diagnosis of Cancer Among Older Adults,” *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* 26, no. 4 (2014): 357-369; Lee S. Caplan, Patricia Sawyer, Cheryl Holt, Richard M. Allman, “Religiosity and Function Among Community-Dwelling Older Adult Survivors of Cancer,” *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* 25, no. 4 (2013): 311-325; Wendy Samter, Chris R. Morse, Bryan B. Whaley, “Do We Need to Put God into Emotional Support?: A Comparison of Caucasians’ and African-Americans’ Evaluations of Religious versus Non-Religious Comforting Messages,” *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 42, no. 2 (2013): 172-191; Cheryl L. Holt, Min Qi Wang, Eddie M. Clark, Beverly Rosa Williams, Emily Schulz, “Religious Involvement and Physical and Emotional Functioning among African Americans: The Mediating Role of Religious Support,” *Psychology & Health* 28, no. 3 (2013): 267-283.

concluded, in the treatment of patients, spiritual care was significant, throughout the healing process.

Religious beliefs and practices are instrumentally significant methods and measures that greatly enhance the overall quality of treatment and outcome for African-American men. Furthermore, the way black men and women, who have been diagnosed with disease, use their religious education were “positively associated with mental health and vitality.”⁸ Community, spiritual care, and guidance are transformational resources. Religious education, as a mode to incorporate a praxis that holistically treats the wholeness of black male subjectivity,⁹ is one approach that helps the healing and coping process for patients, building sustainable faith throughout the recovery. “The church [and other faith communities] as a healing community has a major responsibility to address these situations, through both service and advocacy for a more just system.”¹⁰

Jazz for Prostate Cancer Awareness is one way to start understanding how religious education can be a resourceful tool that teaches, builds community, and increases one’s faith. In 2011, in an intimately safe environment, including close friends and family, a sanctuary of hope was created: jazz, pain, and faith became healing tools. Ralph Stowe, an African-American male and the founder of the nonprofit organization Jazz for Prostate Cancer, a 501(c) that raises black men’s awareness about prostate cancer, spontaneously found a way to bring a life-giving cause to a death celebration. The fact was that no one was sure what happened to James “Jimmy” Stowe, Ralph’s brother, who died from prostate cancer. Once Ralph repeatedly explained to family and friends, at the service, that his brother died from prostate cancer, Ralph, after a brief discussion with his physician Dr. Isaac Kim, felt compelled to do something. This celebratory moment of Jimmy’s life presented a life-saving platform, a spontaneously improvisational conversation about prostate cancer. Awareness was the key to life.

After witnessing Jimmy’s experience of isolation in death, Ralph realized, regardless of money, influence, health insurance, and age, Jimmy died primarily because he was unaware about prostate cancer. Sharon Frederick, Ralph and Jimmy’s sister, stated, “It was devastating to find out that one by one by one [all three] of my brothers had prostate cancer. No symptoms, just go to the doctor. [Each brother told her] ‘I have cancer.’” Re-sourcing the pain of losing his brother, Ralph developed Jazz4PCA as a “campaign which raises awareness about prostate cancer and support for free prostate cancer screenings, using the appeal, inspirations, and draw of live jazz music.”¹¹

⁸ Holt et al., 272.

⁹ Harold G. Koenig, “Religion, Spirituality, and Medicine: Research Findings and Implications for Clinical Practice,” *Southern Medical Association* 97, no. 12 (2004): 1194-1200.

¹⁰ Christian Medical Commission, “Healing and Wholeness, The Churches’ Role in Health,” 1990 https://difaem.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Publikationen/Dokumente_AErztliche_Mission/healing_wholeness.pdf (accessed April 29, 2019).

¹¹ “Jazz for Prostate Cancer Awareness,” <https://www.jazz4pca.org>, (accessed November 28, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how Jazz4PCA, as a nonprofit organization, uses jazz culture to explore the creation and re-creation of sacred space, raising awareness about prostate cancer with black men. In particular, my study will highlight the form of religious education curriculum that supports a communal culture and heals black men. Religious education curriculum is a critical method to usher in the presence of God. Educators, in various faith communication and general education environments, should consider curriculum “as artistic educational work contributing to the fashioning of a people.”¹² Culture, as seen with hip hop¹³ and other aesthetic forms, has a powerful influence over the mind, heart, and spirit of people. Through cultural expressions, values, mores, epistemologies, principles, and faith are transmitted, and sometimes learned and practiced.¹⁴ Praise and worship, in most churches, are standards in the service, fellowship, worship, and testimonies of God.

Significance of The Study

The significance of this paper is that I am offering a religious education approach to the particular issue of prostate cancer, in black male lives. Additionally, I will use Jazz4PCA as an alternative religious education model to explore. African-American men, similar to Jimmy, need and desire community, especially in a society where they either live in isolation or lack the safe space to intimately commune.¹⁵ Jazz4PCA is one way to extend the paradigms of religious education. A “warrant toward community is theological. For the touchstone and ultimate symbol of communion is a divinity who from the first centuries has been presented to us as a community of Persons.”¹⁶ We are commanded to be in community, in relationship with God, and with our neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40).

A communally-centered jazz cultural model calls men to a context of common concern. We are educated in community, open sacred spaces using jazz culture. This paper evaluates how

¹² Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 16.

¹³ Daniel White Hodge, *The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs, and a Cultural Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

¹⁴ There are a number of discussions that acknowledge the significance of culture on the church and faith communities, especially the black church aesthetic. Yolanda Y Smith, *Reclaiming the Spirituals: New Possibilities for African-American Christian Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010); Emilie M. Townes, “To Be Called Beloved: Womanist Ontology in Postmodern Refraction,” in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, eds. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 183-202; Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “‘Go Tell Mary and Martha’: The Spirituals, Biblical Options for Women, and Cultural Tensions in the African American Religious Experience,” in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, eds. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 217-236.

¹⁵ James Ralph Verhoye, “The *Samson Society* and the Rhetoric of Authentic Christian Brotherhood” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2015), 1.

¹⁶ Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 78.

Jazz4PCA, using a curriculum of *koinonia*, promotes healing, collaboration, and community-organizing, connecting people in faith, in “sacred spaces.”

Womanist Religious Education and the Lives of Black Men

In an era of #BlackLivesMatter, more attention has been given to raise awareness of the historically disproportionate level of state-sanctioned violence against black men. In response to an increasing number of deaths and brutalities against black men, different types of interventions, such as protests, speeches, and rallies, convened around the country. Yet, there is still a need for intervention. Jazz4PCA, starting in 2001 and till now, made such a critical insertion, dramatically altering the life-death cycle of black men.

African-American men’s lives are the embodiment of “value in the valley”¹⁷ and momentous occasions at the mountaintop. One way to understand black women’s and men’s experiences, particularly in the Christian church, is through Lynne Westfield’s articulation of a womanist¹⁸ religious education. “Womanist religious education, a burgeoning discipline by Black female scholars of religion, addresses the pedagogical, epistemological, spiritual, and sociopolitical implications of the ‘tridimensional phenomenon of race, class, and gender oppression in the experience of African-American women.’”¹⁹ Westfield, “recognizing the complexity of African American women’s diaspora,” uses an alternative framework that intersects across various disciplines, which is not limited to the lives of black women but the entire community. Instead of dichotomizing of one’s subjectivity and secular-profane-and-sacred prioritization,²⁰ a womanist religious education aims to liberate the entire being, including the mind, the body, and the soul, of black women [and men] and use this alternative, in Christian education and religious education, as a tool of liberation for all people.

A womanist religious education, instead of denying—or at least claiming to deny—the body and one’s subjectivity,²¹ intentionally claims and (re) claims the black woman’s and man’s life, a wholeness of mind, body, and spirit, as invaluable significant, in direct relation to other types of subjectivities. Emanating from within Black people’s lives, resilience, as Westfield notes, is significant.²² Therefore, resilience “is about mastering the terrain of the oppressive

¹⁷ Iyanla Vanzant, *The Value in the Valley: A Black Woman’s Guide through Life’s Dilemmas* (New York: Fireside, 1995), 22.

¹⁸ N. Lynne Westfield, *Dear Sisters: A Womanist Practice of Hospitality* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 1-2. For additional information that explains womanism and Westfield’s experiences as a womanist, the first chapter of the book succinctly provides this information.

¹⁹ Westfield, 2.

²⁰ Elias, *A History of Christian Education*, 96-253. Elias discusses the historically ongoing power struggles in religious education, Christian education, and general education.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²² *Ibid.*, 6-8. The author does a brilliant analysis between survival and resilience, emphasizing how “resilience is about finding ways of living within one’s context and understanding the context so well that one reconstitutes the self while in chaos (but not out of chaos) to see one’s self in a positive light while the world around would say the opposite.”

context so well that one re-creates and heals the self in the very midst of chaos. It is mastering the ability to see one's self in life-affirming light while the world around would shroud in shadow."²³ What black people live, as a practice of theology, is what black women and men do: "experiences of God reside in the mystery between our own examined lives and a horizon that surpasses any individual or group's meanings, a mystery we enter through the practices of the ordinary, not through the abstract theorizing about which most of us are ignorant."²⁴

Westfield suggests several ways to incorporate womanist religious education.²⁵ First, storytelling, as an aesthetic, learning site, can become "sacramental encounters" for teachers and students.²⁶ Second, she unpacks "practices for historical ethos," elaborating more specifically about storytelling implementation. She explicitly states that sharing stories, through novels, poetry, autobiographies, or dramas, are good examples. Additionally, she advises that teachers should "pray for students and self" and "assume nothing."²⁷ She also notes that "practices of embodied pathos," whereas the teacher and students are intentional about personalizing the development and implementation of curriculum design and lesson *for* an agenda of liberation.²⁸ Finally, Westfield's third principle of application is communal logos. A womanist religious education, incorporating this last principle, engages in "active listening," expecting emotions, "being responsive," claiming "your own personhood," and "creat[ing] ritual."²⁹

There are a number of strengths and limitations to Westfield's womanist religious education, regarding Jazz4PCA. Starting with the strengths, Westfield provides an alternatively productive framework for engaging embodied experiences that are, oftentimes, marginalized, dehumanized, and/or neglected, similar to the lived experiences of black men. She also upends any type of educational setting, religious and non-religious, that supports the status quo of oppressive structures, especially calling out the way most school systems are still segregated and black churches "are intoxicated by the post-civil rights malaise."³⁰ One other strength of her work is that her approach is holistically applicable to diverse subjectivities and positionalities, as Westfield, using a kitchen-table metaphor, encourages all people to see their accountability in the dehumanizing limitations of oppression and the fruitful creation of liberation. Jazz4PCA, paralleling similar principles, extends an accessible reach, into the living spaces of black men, as well as their respective communities.

²³ Ibid., 8.

²⁴ Ibid., 9.

²⁵ Ibid., 108. Westfield builds her argument by challenging the public schools and the Black church education culture to incorporate a liberation agenda, which is basically non-existent, in these classrooms.

²⁶ Ibid., 115. Westfield has an in-depth discussion on how the act of storytelling can invoke mystery, the Divine, and sacred.

²⁷ Ibid., 118-119.

²⁸ Ibid., 120-122.

²⁹ For more information on the communal logos, see Westfield, 122-126.

³⁰ Ibid.

Of course, the process or processes of implementation of many, with a compass that is multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and multi-directional, has some limitations. One limitation is how to start, continue, manage, and move the process forward, where there are many voices. With Jazz4PCA, the concern is to build a quality communal environment, starting with 100 to 200 people, and a long-term goal is to explore other relationships with more hospitals, cancer support groups, and families. Another limitation is the socialization of identities, acknowledging the cultural and linguistic lens that angles one's vision and capacity for understanding. Moreover, particularly in what some call a post-racial society, a good number of individuals might not be able to see any of these issues.

To address these limitations, an educational curriculum, employing a womanist religious education framework, would need to do several things. Of course, one should plan to institute a flexible learning environment, creating moments that are planned as well as spontaneous. Secondly, there needs to be a clear statement of trust and commitment to the process, as well as ongoing reminders that the learning community is a safe place to grow, make mistakes, and receive necessary help. The overall curriculum design can be a scaffolding of a wide-range of activities, such as Bible study, a book club, movie-going, sharing meals, and possibly one-on-one outings.

Womanist Religious Education as Sacred Communal Logos

There are some important aspects of this kind of gathering that can offer critical problem-solving strategies that heal black men's lives, create safe spaces, and obstruct the violence against black men's bodies. A communal logos, in a womanist religious education, is about the reclamation, rejuvenation, and meaning-making death-life process for black men, women, and communities.

The openness of dialogue supportively reconstructs the event sites and the embodied subjectivities into a spiritual communing. Therefore, the shared stories, located in the historically cultural system of community meaning-making processes, are produced to use communal symbols and references that adhere to that particular interlocutor's expected understandings. The Jazz4PCA sacred space:

1. writes their healing bodies into a counter narrative of American history,
2. gives them a sacred presence,
3. shows black masculine courageous vulnerability,
4. explains a collective opportunity to witness from one's soul, and
5. reorients self in a community (through a discursive and experiential markers of black manhood, a redefining of terminology, such as "strength, a "new black man," "revolutionary," and black manhood).

The communal logos demonstrates how sacred spaces can be created that respond to individual and collective needs. Additionally, this type of womanist religious inoculation can

“maintain a degree of fluidity and flexibility that would enable them to respond to diverse organizational and theological variation.”³¹

The collective “voice” of black men, in resituated sacramental gatherings, also recognizes the ongoing tensions (e.g., strained family and community bonds and support) in the liberation-oppression dialectic and community organizing efforts. Their communal texts explore the multi-dimensionality of their lives and those in their respective communities and provide anecdotal lessons for all attendees. What emerges is an increased awareness about the many challenges and successes of how they have lived with understanding prostate cancer.³²

The collective power, directly emanating from within the sacred sites of the physical environment and the embodied subjects, not only restructures and rehabilitates their histories and their communities. The dialogically communal logos renders permeable a living sanctuary for liberated black male bodies to heal and *become* in a sacredly defined space. Critically understanding the captive state of black masculinity in the realm of white patriarchy and capitalism, the sacred atmosphere, as previously mentioned, speak to the lack of black male positive role models and the negative internalization that African-American men experienced. Denying the totalizing discourse of white patriarchy that stereotypically degrades black male identity, there is a rejuvenating reconceptualization about African-American manhood.

Curriculum, as a religious education intervention, has several meanings. Elliot W. Eisner noted that curriculum is the development of different events that are put in place for specific educational outcomes for students. Fundamentally, curriculum aims to provide certain desired educational benefits for learners, and, in this process of learning, evaluation and goals are crucial to know, if and when student comprehension was achieved.

Jazz4PCA, using a music aesthetic to develop a nurturing environment, incorporates a curriculum for healing, through sacred spaces. Attendees experience a “[c]urriculum” that “is about the mobilizing of creative, educative powers in such a way as to ‘fashion a people.’”³³ The Jazz4PCA curriculum is a practice, where it is “socially established,” a “cooperative human activity,” “goods internal to that form of activity,” “standards of excellence,” and “our own lives are enhanced.”³⁴

A Sacred Pedagogy of Community as Culture

Jazz4PCA demonstrably imbues a culture of community, as a form of sacred pedagogy. When we look at the African-American Christian education tradition, community, culture, and

³¹ Galia Sabar, “Fluid Religious Identities in the Holy Land 1990s-2000s: African Labor Migrants between ‘Brotherhood of the Cross and the Star’ and ‘Resurrection and Living Bread Ministries International,’” *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 5, no. 1 (2014): 101.

³² Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanist Literary Theory* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), 100.

³³ Harris, 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

faith are integrally connected and promote healing and unity.³⁵ Religious education embodies an epistemic function, integrally informing one's historicity, potential, problem-solving strategy, and of course, identity. An epistemic function of religious education, understanding the socio-political prescription embedded in one's belief, is simultaneously generative, degenerative, and obstructive. In sum, at this point, I have a more informed understanding of the manner in which religious/spiritual education, in the process and production of ideas, creates and destroys information.

Aesthetics, in womanist theology and black theology, unlike other religious educational models, is an important conduit that provides healing. The embodied experiences of African-American men and women, particularly in a sacramental encounter through a Jazz4PCA event, have a storehouse of shared cultural wealth, identities, and traditions that can build communion and unity. The starting point, as I see, is exactly where we are. We begin, as critically understood in Seymour's article, in linking our socio-historical identities with recognizably historicized periodization, regarding religious and non-religious education. With an organization, such as Jazz4PCA, there can be a personal excavation of our individual families, including gathering artifacts, stories, family heirlooms, attendance at family and community functions, and a family tree. Spiritual healing is about each one needs to teach one. The nourishing healing for those in community is to responsibly shoulder the need to bond in restoration, from daily sins and an external and internal decolonization process.

Culture, implemented in a communal framework, can foster a religious pedagogy that grows the spirit, mind, and soul, fomenting a liberative praxis as sacred. Freire emboldens the possibilities of freedom dreams, and nonetheless, the markings of oppressed, drawn on me and codified in gendered institutional racism. Boldly, Freire admonishes, "Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one."³⁶ Attempting to manage a soul's pain to fight, in a religious educational program, community participants learn, through a cultural paradigm, how to forge ahead, lovingly heal the bruises, and experience the grace of God. A religious experience can be multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and multi-cultural, especially regarding the cultural importations of African-American vernacular culture. Fundamentally, this is the work of Jazz4PCA.

Employing Sacred Communal Pathos in Black Men's Lives

Historically, black men in white America have always struggled against and within the dominant standards of manhood, striving to protect their own lives and others in their respective communities. Struggling to sustain a sense of dignity, self-respect, and personhood, black men, embattled by stifling under- and unemployment and white supremacist state-sanctioned violence, have faced an uphill battle to attain their humanity.³⁷ Taking an oppositional stance, in many situations, African-American men developed a resistance tradition that spoke true to the nature of

³⁵ Smith, 47.

³⁶ Freire, 49.

³⁷ Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 101.

their lived experience, culture, and community, even paying the highest price for freedom with their lives.

Resisting such cultural and material oppression, black male lives, existing in a perpetual state of “terror,” are subjected to a dialectical reality of resistance between liberation and oppression.³⁸ Regardless, if black men conform or not to the prevailing standard of masculinity, they are, nonetheless, in a constant state of fight or flight. George Jackson attested to similar issues in *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. He states,

Black men born in the U.S. and fortunate to live past the age of 18 are conditioned to accept the inevitability of prison. For most of us, it simply looms as the next phase in the sequence of humiliations. Being born a slave in a captive society and never experiencing any objective basis for expectation had the effect of preparing me for the progressively traumatic misfortunes that lead so many black men to prison gates. I was prepared for prison. It required only minor psychic adjustments.³⁹

Permanently stratified outside the circumference of manhood, black men continually challenged oppressive structures, living in the inner-city landscape. Black men have a healthy resistance tradition that reclaims their humanity and are fueled by an urgency to re-characterize their moral status and evaluate how it affected their relationship to manhood. The dominant views of society cast black men as contemptibly promiscuous and stifled their progress “both psychologically and materially.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately for them, black men’s bodies were always raced and read against the grain of white men’s masculinity, comparatively stereotyping black men as rapists, brutes, illiterates, coons, Uncle Toms, and social deviants: a socio-political location of innate pathology.

A sacred womanist religious engagement of communal pathos speaks to their struggles against white oppression, culturally and institutionally. Resisting the dominant standard of masculine conformity, black men are able to critique white patriarchy and attempt to demonstrate a discursive and community-organizing process, interrogating the negatively material and immaterial consequences for black Americans. They re-channel to the world the contradictions in America, demonstrably testifying about the unjust treatment experienced in an ideologically democratic society, yet simultaneously nourishing and building a collective pathos. Even in the present-day context, in the turbulence of gentrification, disenfranchised voters, and declining black institutional resources, Jazz4PCA is a critically life-saving intervention.

A Womanist Theology of Wilderness Sacredness

Today, there are numerous challenges about creating healthy and sacred spaces for black men, against the daily gendered institutional racism around the church’s religious education,

³⁸ Haki R. Madhubuti, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The Afrikan American Family in Transition: Essays in Discovery, Solution and Hope* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1991), vi.

³⁹ George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (New York: Bantam, 1970), 4.

⁴⁰ Giddings, 85.

such as inadequate discussions about living-wage employment, prison pipeline system, sexuality, sensuality, relevant biblical lessons, and a multi-dimensional pedagogical implementation. From my observation and church experiences, the lack of safe spaces, intentionally created by organizational decision-makers, inadvertently manifest as sites of wilderness. For today's parishioner, oftentimes, the church experience of religious education leaves their souls "uninhabited" vessels, desolate, and barren.⁴¹ At the same time, such tangible conditions, bereft with a seemingly nothing-ness state, are still under the domain of God's sovereignty, and the black male's experience of wilderness, inside and outside the church, is under the reign of God's kingdom, as well.

Similar to the Israelites' wilderness experience, where they learned "obedience," "disobedience," "renewed obedience," that "the Lord is the God of judgment," and about the "faithfulness of the Lord," today's church folks and non-church folks can learn how to resource this wilderness location. Consequently, just as to the Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians salvation are equally significant and interdependent, so is the fact that our black men, in the death-life cycle, are our future. Each generation is, necessarily, interdependent on each other. The church religious education programs *must* reconcile that the salvation of one is about the salvation of all believers. Not one generation can have salvation *without* the other.

A wilderness, desert theology, as a way to contextualize the relationship within the context of state-sanctioned violence against black men, also has some positive implications. The somewhat abandon-ness, a wide and widening gulf in many congregations among generations, I suggest, as it is not intentional, is an environment where God can show his power, as He did with the Israelites, over the 40-day-40-night wilderness experience. Using faith, love, and hope as sustenance, churchgoers can abide by God's commandments and vulnerably bridge dialogues and Christ work together. Believers, children of God, left wandering in a physical state of a barren area, which is "best used for tending to flocks of animals,"⁴² can encounter a spiritual feeding of God's love and power.⁴³

Jazz4PCA, as a nonprofit organization, provides some critical perspectives, concerning the lives of black men, and implementing an understanding of a theology of wilderness suffering.

The following discussion will explore the theology of suffering in the wilderness, interrogating several aims of Jazz4PCA that speak to a religious education vision for black men. Wilderness suffering, oftentimes associated with the Israelites' 40-days-and-40-nights life in Sinai, can be viewed as punishment for disobedience to God. However, a wilderness experience, also evinced in the Israelites journey, can yield benefits for believers, producing a positive internal transformation and closer relationship with God. Amid a challenging external environment, there is an opportunity for spiritual growth, less dependent on corporeal limitations of the flesh.

⁴¹ J. D. Douglass, and Merrill C. Tenney, *Zondervan Bible Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 352.

⁴² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Nelson, 2006), 165.

⁴³ Merrill and Tenney, 352.

Similar to the Israelites' recompense, even after their consistent complaining, black men, their families, and friends, at a Jazz4PCA event, convey a message of hope and deliverance, despite moments of feeling lost. Participants take a journey of hope, as an example of wilderness theology, formulaically offers a way to live in the unknown, can move from and through darkness to light.

The theology of wilderness suffering explores the themes of worthlessness, purposelessness, ugliness, hurt, loss, and pain, similar to a Job-like reality. Not knowing God's plan for one's life, some people sense no God or higher power, left to waywardness and despair. The fact is: living by faith and trusting God is not easy. A religious education program, specifically opening pathways for people to express their doubts and fears, which would in turn offer wisdom, tentative action plans of faith, and ministry, could strategically help nurture the growing of a believer's faith.

Wilderness suffering proves, in the end, to release Christ followers into a state of freedom. Awareness, which is the primary goal of Jazz4PCA, is a key resource to start healing one's body, knowing that God, a Christian can directly communicate with God. The overall experience is recognizing an awareness of one's physical limitations of understanding, offer up a prayer to God, gaining freedom in having faith. There is faith that God will and can bless a believer's situation, a generation, and society, less focusing on mankind's powers and physical conditions. Through a freedom of faith, we become one, in a state of wilderness submission, with God's plan. One can receive, in an environment of seeming bleakness, God's immaterial gifts of love, mercy, and His presence, intervening in our lives.

Methodology

The purpose of my exploratory paper is to use a religious education curriculum methodology. Evaluating Jazz4PCA, I used short-response questionnaires, surveys, and Jazz4PCA artifacts to explore how the group and participants create an alternative sanctuary through jazz events at different sites. Using the curriculum guidelines from Harris's work, I will analyze the data to develop a religious education curriculum of *koinonia* (community).⁴⁴

The case study method has several benefits for my research. One benefit is that I can closely gauge the various elements of how the nonprofit was created, especially in a time when there is ongoing state-sanctioned violence against men and women of African descent. Another equally important benefit is that faith communities can observe and learn how to intervene, saving souls for salvation and healing. Much of the information for Jazz4PCA events shows that an overwhelming majority of the time, all tickets are sold, participants attend, and a fellowship of healing is provided. A third benefit is to consider implementing similar tools of healing that directly intervene in people's lives, making faith and daily living compatibly inseparable.

The data gathering and analysis of Jazz4PCA, as a case study, includes several components. At the inception of the process, the building of community and organizational insight is an important step. Through informal conversations with founder Ralph Stowe, the executive board, and musicians, I received invaluable guidance that yielded a perspective to

⁴⁴ Harris, 25.

comprehend Jazz4PCA’s history, aims, and future goals.⁴⁵ Speaking with Ralph and his team, I learned to assess how important the commitment to community was and focus on *how* to develop a communal culture.

Jazz4PCA, as a case study that uses religious education curriculum and brings awareness to save black men’s lives, unfolds in several steps. While the first step involves capturing the person or organization’s autobiography, the second step, which I implemented, was attending a Jazz4PCA event, receiving “direct observation of the [organization’s] action and patterns in various social settings.”⁴⁶ After speaking with Ralph, other people on the Jazz4PCA team, and event participants, I understood how they managed different dynamics of the preparation and hosting, such as seating, songs played, and audience engagement, and I elaborated on the overall experience of the Jazz4PCA event.⁴⁷

Analytical keenness of a Jazz4PCA religious education aesthetic curriculum offers a number of case study explorations. The integrally intimate aspects of faith, healing, and community, viewed through a Jazz4PCA lens, could demonstrate a “study of social interactions” that lead faith or non-faith leaders to understand ways “to deal with social patterns in a much more concrete and full way.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, while investigating the connection between “expressed beliefs and actions,” the Jazz4PCA case study provides a frame to unpack, connect, and deconstruct the interconnectedness, or lack of, to the multi-dimensional and multiple-consciousness of the dynamic human experience. Sometimes, on the notion of faith, there is a paucity of delineating perspectives on this continuum. Instead of defining faith, primarily, through a traditional religious construct, a more fluid nuanced articulation could signal a dramatic juncture to bring in more people into a thriving faith, one attainably livable, inside and outside of church.

The Jazz4PCA aesthetic curriculum, moreover, can be a form of transgressive religious education. Though surrounded by institutional and discursive violence, the nonprofit organization successfully creates sacred sites for black men to heal, learn how to heal, and be educated, in the community. The black church tradition, referencing the distinct African and African-American cultural patterns, effectually imbues a joyfully healing resistance, in the very presence of black-body-killing conditions.

Case study method, analyzing a jazz culture of sacred community, particularizes the cultural capital of jazz music for black men and other event attendees. The experience pours the expressive essence of humanness into a resurrecting power that redemptively reclaims black subjectivity. There is an esteemed value in the overall experience of people of African descent,

⁴⁵ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

which is pre-life experience before, during, and after the European slave trade.⁴⁹ Theological undercurrents of the Jazz4PCA case study can help us “see,” even if only through an intangibly experience of the Holy Spirit, life, in death-like situations.

Conclusion

The Jazz4PCA aesthetic curriculum can be a form of transgressive religious education. Though surrounded by institutional and discursive violence, the nonprofit organization successfully creates sacred sites for black men to heal, learn how to heal, and be educated, in the community. The black church tradition, referencing the distinct African and African-American cultural patterns, effectually imbues a joyfully healing resistance, in the very presence of black-body-killing conditions. Though God “has not always delivered African American women [and men] from their oppression,” God “has often provided a means of survival and quality of life for African American women [and men] in the midst of their oppressive situations.”⁵⁰ This case study sheds light, even though relatively microscopic, on *how to* keep and maintain an ongoing faith, amid daily sins.

Case study method, analyzing a jazz culture of sacred community, particularizes the cultural capital of jazz music for black men and other event attendees. The experience pours the expressive essence of humanness into a resurrecting power that redemptively reclaims black subjectivity. There is an esteemed value in the overall experience of people of African descent, which is pre-life experience before, during, and after the European slave trade.⁵¹ Theological undercurrents of the Jazz4PCA case study can help us “see,” even if only through an intangibly experience of the Holy Spirit, life, in death-like situations.

⁴⁹ Moore, 41.

⁵⁰ Smith, 91.

⁵¹ Moore, 41.

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THE EXACT SYNONYM FOR “MISSIONARY” IS NEGRO TEACHER:
BLACK FEMINISM IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

This research is an African-American socio-historical study informed by the tenets of black feminist/womanist theology. African-American Sunday school missionary teachers as othermothers in the early twentieth century were motivated by an ethic of care that was spiritual, historical, and political. Utilizing the scholarship of Patricia Hill Collins, Delores Williams, and Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, this essay re-constructs the oppressive image of mammy by revaluing the image of motherhood and a belief in black women’s empowerment to suggest that the pedagogy of missionary othermothers coalesced with the elements of power and caring in their struggles for survival, quality of life, and full citizenship status.

This research examines, uncovers, and gives voice to faceless and nameless black teachers who were leaders in their local communities. While many will continue to remain nameless, a little of their work will be revealed and will aid scholars in continuing to construct an African-American epistemology of teaching.

THE EXACT SYNONYM FOR "MISSIONARY" IS NEGRO TEACHER: BLACK FEMINISM IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Introduction

In September, 1900 in Richmond, Virginia the Twentieth Annual Session of the National Baptist Convention met to organize a new arm of the national body. The official name of the organization, "The Woman's Missionary Convention, Auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention," afforded African-American Baptist women the opportunity to "organize and systematize" their work for the utilization of talent and stimulation to Christian activity that prompted women to service. In response to the jeremiad of many black women, "if there was only some way for women to work," Layten proclaimed that women should unite with the national organization to revive, stimulate, and enlarge "the missionary spirit" to serve in their churches, homes, communities and abroad through already existing as well as newly-organized missionary societies.¹ According to Mrs. Layten, the goals of black female missionaries were to work to overcome not only godlessness but ignorance, immorality, and prejudice which operated against the acceptance of African Americans as full-fledged citizens of the American Republic.

At the juncture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, African-American women organized local and national clubs to implement reform proposals for their communities to improve the social, economic, and political status of black Americans. Fannie Barrier Williams noted in 1900 that the club was only one of many means for the social uplift of a race. Williams further proposed that the club movement among colored women was something deeper than mere imitation of white women. It was "nothing less than the organized anxiety of women" who had become "intelligent enough to recognize their own low social condition and strong enough to initiate the forces of reform."² At the National Baptist Convention in 1900, African-American Baptist women joined the ranks of other female reformers, both secular and denominational, to form an Afro-Baptist society for women's work.

Many teachers contributed to the missionary work of women's societies by teaching both in public school and Sunday school, and by also conducting missionary training to children and youth in local churches. Some even took their teaching skills and missionary spirit to foreign lands. Sunday school teachers organized societies like the African Methodist's Self Denial Missionary Band and the National Baptist Young People's Union which cooperated with their denomination's Home and Foreign Mission Boards to enlist children and youth in missionary work. The foci of African-American Christian women's missionary activism and Sunday school work came, then, to a crossroads at the point of teaching. Mary McLeod Bethune, a leader in African-American education, explained this intersection in her speech entitled, "The Negro Woman in American Life":

¹ National Baptist Convention Minutes (1900), 195-197, microfilm, reel 4427-3.

² Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement among Colored Women of America (1900)," in *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 54-59; Kate Dossett, *Bridging Race Divides: Black Nationalism, Feminism, and Integration in the United States, 1896-1935* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008); Lillian S. Williams, "And Still I Rise: Black Women and Reform, Buffalo, New York, 1900-1940," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 14, no. 2 (1990):7.

The exact synonym for “Missionary” is Negro teacher. The “Gospel” which she carries is that of successful living. Reading and Writing and ‘Rithmetic are her main products, but just as many manufacturing companies do a larger business with their by-products than with the chief commodity, so the Negro teacher must, more often than not, do a large percentage of educating along other than purely academic lines.³

This portrayal of African-American missionary as teacher is conversely different from the predominantly white and overwhelmingly female missionary teachers in Jon Zimmerman’s *Innocents Abroad* where many mission instructors went overseas in an effort to “avoid teaching” and many women imagined themselves as “ministers or ‘missionary evangelists.’”⁴ As well, Sally McMillen limned Sunday school teachers as profoundly influential in the Sunday school classroom, developing a sense of confidence and self-worth in southern women. Yet, McMillen posits that teaching Sunday school offered a different type of experience for southern women than many other organized volunteer activities that left Sunday school teaching an individualized activity and teachers without a sense of female bonding and leadership opportunities.⁵ While these portrayals may be accurate for some teachers, there is an alternative view of African-American female teachers - a black feminist image of Sunday school missionary teachers as “othermothers” motivated by an ethic of care that was spiritual, historical, and political. Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant writes in “A Womanist Experience of Caring” that “to see caring and mothering in larger, sociohistorical realms, we can recognize how in sharing knowledge we can also share power.” The pedagogy of missionary othermothers combined the elements of power and caring in their struggles for survival, quality of life, and full citizenship status among African Americans.⁶

Black feminist/womanist thought develops out of black women’s experiences to express what sociologist Patricia Hill Collins terms “black women’s standpoint” and as Delores Williams defines, “the ethical principle of revaluing.”⁷ Collins argues that the controlling images of the mammy, the matriarch, and the welfare mother are designed to oppress. In contrast to these oppressive images and by revaluing the image, “motherhood can serve as a site where black women express and learn the power of self-definition . . . and a belief in black women’s empowerment.” Further, Collins asserts that in African-American communities, fluid and changing boundaries often distinguished biological mothers from other women who cared for children. As a result, othermothers – women who assisted bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities – were central to the institution of black motherhood.⁸ As nurturers of children

³ Mary McLeod Bethune, “Selected Sayings,” *Mary McLeod Bethune Papers, 1923-1942*, Bobst Library, New York University, New York, NY, microfilm.

⁴ Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 130, 136.

⁵ Sally G. McMillen, *To Raise Up the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 238-239.

⁶ Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, “A Womanist Experience of Caring: Understanding the Pedagogy of Exemplary Black Women Teachers,” *The Urban Review* 34, no. 1 (March 2002):83.

⁷ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 32; Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 176.

⁸ Hill Collins, 118-119.

in an extended family network that reached out to the entire African-American community, othermothers provided a foundation for black women's political activism whereby feminist ethics of caring and personal accountability for the generic "black community" moved communities forward.⁹

Evelyn Higginbotham asserts that the catalyst for black feminism in Baptist women's missionary societies in the twentieth century was formed by churchwomen in the late nineteenth century. Using an African-American female interpretation of scripture, those missionary women argued that the creation story in Genesis "denied any right of man to oppress woman for woman was to be man's companion and helpmate." Those nineteenth-century churchwomen also interpreted female biblical characters in other scriptural texts (e.g., Mary the mother of Jesus, the two sisters: Mary and Martha) to formulate a feminist thought that valued motherhood and woman's participation in the home; woman's duties and responsibilities outside the home to prophesy and spread the gospel; charitable philanthropic work and social reform; and, to broaden employment opportunities for women.¹⁰ While Jualynne Dodson utilized hegemony as the source of women's activism in the African Methodist denomination, she acknowledges that A.M.E. experiences were comparatively normative to women's societies in other denominations.¹¹ These studies and others focus on African-American feminist denominational leaders such as Virginia Broughton, Sarah Hatcher Duncan, and those who graced national and international stages, namely, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Mary McLeod Bethune, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and others. Conversely this research examines, uncovers, and gives voice to faceless and nameless black teachers who were leaders in their local communities. Albeit, while many will continue to remain nameless, a little of their work will be revealed in this work.

Othermothers

Missionary organizations of northern white and southern black denominations created a number of secondary schools and colleges across the South almost immediately after the Civil War. The American Missionary Association (Congregational Church), Freedmen's Aid Society (Methodist Episcopal Church), American Baptist Home Mission Society, and the Board of Missions for the Freedmen of the Presbyterian Church were most prominent in founding colleges. Black denominations both Methodist and Baptist, as well, established secondary schools and colleges. James Fraser avers that "these religious bodies, and the schools they founded, went in a different direction from Hampton and Tuskegee" which were industrial school models. James Anderson clearly states that "teacher training in the missionary schools supported classical liberal education for black Americans." And it was not, Fraser concludes, "a curriculum that prepared teachers who would encourage those who had recently been slaves to accept political and economic disenfranchisement."¹² Schools including Oberlin College, Howard University, Talladega College, Fisk and Atlanta Universities and single-sex colleges,

⁹ Hill Collins, 129-132.

¹⁰ Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 128-136.

¹¹ Jualynne E. Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power, and the AME Church* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 5.

¹² James W. Fraser, *Preparing America's Teachers* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007), 104; James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 240.

Spelman and Hartshorn “were heavily influenced,” Stephanie Shaw asserts, “from their founding and in their development, by Christian missionary principles and community development impulses.”¹³

Those African-American Sunday school teachers who sprang from African-American women’s missionary societies viewed themselves as missionary-minded and were trained to be black feminist/ womanist othermothers. The skills these women developed in missionary societies, like those at missionary colleges and secondary schools, were never intended for their personal advancement alone. Missionary training schools sought to build character, emphasized leadership development, and fashioned servants of Christ with the ability to interpret biblical scripture that would empower a disenfranchised and oppressed people in a segregated society. African-American missionary society teachers as othermothers were expected to serve in their communities. Sunday school missionary teachers as othermothers worked to enhance the quality of life in their communities not only in theory but also in praxis. Othermothers supervised children, helped people struggle with and resist oppression and committed themselves to service in the community and the race. In their commitment to serve, othermothers were motivated by the spirit, negotiated public and private spheres, protected historical tradition, and engaged in political activism shaping a black feminist/womanist image of African-American missionary-minded teachers in black communities.

Spiritual Othermothers

Mrs. H. H. Flowers, in her presentation at the 1903 National Baptist Woman’s Convention, considered “house to house visiting” of greatest importance in missionary work. The first great need, shared Flowers, was that workers “be filled with the Holy Spirit” and thus “be prepared of God to go among all classes of people and help them in whatever condition found.”¹⁴ Though not a tangible concept, “spirit” is a concept that is necessary for understanding the impetus for activism among African-American Christian feminists. Spirituality is integral to black feminist thought in churchwomen. Social scientist Marla Frederick contends that “spirituality is a process of engagement with God that informs the thoughts, motivations, and actions of individuals.” Frederick further opines that “spirituality is about living through moments of struggle and moments of peace and ultimately acquiring a better life, a life that is filled with a deeper knowledge of God. This better life comes from the onset of not only public political confrontation but also personal affirmation and development over time. . . . Spirituality is personal and experiential. . . . One who is spiritual is concerned about others and is especially concerned about what God thinks. Finally, spirituality consists of action, reflected in how one treats others and how one follows the direction of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵ Black feminist/womanist missionary teachers were caring spiritual othermothers who believed that the spirit – religious experiences with the divine - empowered them to “help” others in whatever situation people found themselves.¹⁶ This “power” was to be passed on to those in the community to “uplift the race” – uplifting the image of the race, conditions of the race, citizenship status of the race –

¹³ Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 69.

¹⁴ National Baptist Convention Minutes (1903), 343, microfilm, reel 4427-3.

¹⁵ Marla F. Frederick, *Between Sundays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 14.

¹⁶ Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman, eds., *This Far by Faith* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 4.

eliminating segregation and disenfranchisement and endowing African Americans with first class citizenship in America. It was “spirit” that not only empowered but motivated missionary teachers into activism as othermothers to African-American communities with particular concern for youth and children. Children and youth were of particular concern for all of America in the twentieth century.

America experienced sweeping child reform in the first several decades of the twentieth century that effected Congress’ creation of the Children’s Bureau in 1912.¹⁷ Baptist women were encouraged to organize through Sunday schools and other groups and “make the Master’s loving law in letter and spirit” their work, as a denomination for the uplifting of the race by “making little ones and their welfare the supreme issue in church and community work.”¹⁸ By the 1930s, following the lead of U.S. President Herbert Hoover, the nation developed a greater interest in child welfare. In December 1930, Hoover instituted a National Commission on Child Welfare that urged the nation “to help give every child its right chance.”¹⁹ Thereafter, Mrs. E. E. Whitfield declared to Baptist churchwomen that the national movement for child welfare made it necessary for the Baptist Woman’s Convention to set up a department of child welfare as Negro children were the “most needy and neglected group in America.” “It is,” Whitfield contended, “plainly the duty of any organization of Negro women to get solidly behind [the child welfare] movement and set in motion facilities for reaching the humblest home in which children are being reared.”²⁰ To that end, orphan homes, hospitals for babies, and delinquent homes were established under the direction of the newly-formed Child Welfare Department of the National Baptist Convention Woman’s Auxiliary. Zion Methodist women, under the direction of the Corresponding Secretary of the A.M.E. Zion Woman’s Mission Society, Mrs. A. W. Blackwell, compared the activism of African Methodist women in the early 1900s to the declaration of war by the female judge, Deborah, in the Bible (Judges 4). There was “a great multitude without church, homes, and pastoral leadership, a great army of children without ‘spiritual guidance’” that cried, “Save or we perish!” And, the Woman’s Home and Foreign Missionary Society came to the rescue in response to the children’s cries for spiritual guidance.²¹ The care of children became not only the responsibility of their own parents, but also the othermothers of missionary societies who understood by Christ’s commandment as it was written in the “loving law in letter” and as guided by the “spirit.” Missionary teachers became spiritual othermothers to the community taking persons to Sunday school and other church services; and holding gospel meetings on the street, in jails and other public places. Home Field Missionary, Mrs. E. E. Whitfield, recruited volunteers to teach in rural districts: “Get children that do not go to Sunday school and get them in a Sunday school somewhere. Little children are waiting to be gathered out of the vice breeding centers of our cities and given a chance to grow into clean, useful men

¹⁷ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 38.

¹⁸ National Baptist Convention, Inc. Minutes (1921), 278-79, microfilm, reel 4427-4.

¹⁹ National Baptist Convention, Inc. Minutes (1931), 291, microfilm, reel 4427-4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Second Quadrennial Report of the Woman’s Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (1908-1912), 18.

and women.”²² Attentiveness to cleanliness and character was essential for African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And, spiritual othermothers who sought to advance the future of the race by getting children in a Sunday school somewhere suggested that Sunday school was a place to learn good manners, high moral standards, a cultured appearance and Christian character so as to refute negative stereotypes by white Americans.²³ Training young people to rise above the expectations of a white supremacist social structure was in itself an act of resistance by African-American Missionary teachers and confirmed the courage they exhibited vis-à-vis the power of God that was subsequently shared with others in their communities. As spiritual othermothers, these teachers were living evidence to the community of the resilience that builds from religious experiences with the spirit.

Black feminist thought through these teachers as spiritual othermothers revalued the consciousness and power of spirit. It was the work produced by spiritual othermothers and resulting accomplishments that revealed the tangibility of spirituality and bequeathed African-American female teachers with agency in their communities. Yet, the intangibility of the “power of the spirit” was a concept in African-American neighborhoods that could not be detected thus not destroyed by southern white hegemony. The work produced by spiritual othermothers, then, not only involved children but entailed servicing all in the community -- men, women, and children. Black feminist/womanist missionary teachers exercised the ethic of responsibility in communities as not only spiritual othermothers but were, too, historical othermothers as vessels of African-American history to biological mothers for transmission to succeeding generations.

Historical Othermothers

National Baptist Home Field Missionary Whitfield was as concerned with the welfare of the mothers as she was with the children. Sunday school/missionary teachers established Sunday afternoon Missionary and Industrial Clubs that revived the African-American cultural practice of quilt- and garment-making during the winter season and set aside time for heart-to-heart talks with members.²⁴ Regenia Perry elucidated that for many generations African-American women in the South engaged in the art of making patchwork quilts. Motivated originally by a need to provide insulation from cold winters spent in drafty cabins, historians subsequently unearthed iconographic symbols of storytelling and secret encoded messages to slaves in the practice of quilting.²⁵ One well-known prototype is the Bible quilt by Harriet Powers which is a vivid and literal interpretation of biblical scenes from both the Old and New Testaments. The technique, design, and patterning of the eleven scenes beginning with the Garden of Eden and ending with the Nativity display both African and African-American influences. Perry and others surmised that Powers attempted to tell a complete story in each square, probably considered herself a lay minister and utilized the quilts to teach Bible stories as a vehicle for

²² National Baptist Convention, Inc. Minutes (1931), 309, microfilm, reel 4427-4.

²³ Shaw, 88-90.

²⁴ National Baptist Convention Minutes (1903), 315, microfilm, reel 4427-3.

²⁵ Regenia A. Perry, *Harriet Powers' Bible Quilts* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1994); Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View* (New York: Doubleday, 1999); Weisenfeld and Newman, eds., *This Far by Faith*, 21-31.

spreading God's word and power.²⁶ Additionally, Tobin and Dobard deciphered codes in quilts that revealed such messages as when to gather tools needed for the journey to freedom, when to pack, and the time to escape for runaway slaves.²⁷

It was noted in the National Baptist Woman's Convention minutes of 1903 that "sewing, darning, and patching" were considered by foremothers as "rare gifts." The Missionary and Industrial Clubs revived an "almost abandoned" art.²⁸ Reviving the art of quilting was not merely the practice of quotidian domesticity, but enabled black feminist/womanist missionary teachers to evolve in their regions as historical othermothers. Historical othermothers gathered community women together, particularly biological mothers, in Missionary Clubs, teaching the history of African-American slavery and Bible stories as a vehicle for spreading God's word and "power" just as Harriet Powers had done in prior decades. It was a triple heritage ideology, then, linking the fullness of black heritage as Africans, African Americans, and Christians that operated in black church pedagogy through the revival of quilting.²⁹ Sunday school/misssionary teachers as historical othermothers in practicing quilting at Missionary Clubs demonstrated a process of story-linking that Anne Streaty Wimberly asserts is "commonly undertaken by African Americans." Wimberly further explains that story-linking is a process that connects parts of personal everyday stories with the Christian faith story in the Bible and the lives of African-American exemplars of the Christian faith outside the Bible.³⁰ Story-linking in Missionary Clubs shaped positive notions of self-identity through reflections of their historical predecessors, an activity that equipped women to act in ways that were liberating for themselves and the broader community.³¹ African-American missionary teachers became synonymous with African griots, storytellers and historical othermothers in their communities as Missionary and Industrial Clubs elicited opportunities for them to freely and openly share their black heritage while formulating a communal spirit with other women. Because black feminist/womanist othermothers revived an "almost abandoned art," by doing so they revalued what was historically considered to be one of the "rare gifts" of black motherhood, quilting.³²

Political Othermothers

Black feminist/womanist teachers were missionaries that taught the "gospel of 'successful living'" in Sunday schools and throughout African-American communities including public schools in the first half of the twentieth century. Their pedagogy was conducive to a black activist theology of education for the educational, social, political, and economic transformation of African-American people as informed by Christian faith and the interpretation of scripture.³³ Sunday school teaching, along with teaching in other public and private

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 70.

²⁸ National Baptist Convention Minutes (1903), 315, microfilm, reel 4427-3.

²⁹ Yolanda Y. Smith, *Reclaiming the Spirituals* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 12.

³⁰ Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 37-39.

³¹ Yolanda Y. Smith, "The Table: Christian Education as Performative Art," *Religious Education* 103, no. 3 (May-June 2008):304.

³² National Baptist Convention Minutes (1903), 315, microfilm, reel 4427-3.

³³ Haggler, xv

institutions, became an arena for political activism.³⁴ By virtue of their visibility in the community and the church, Sunday school teachers emerged as community leaders and black feminist/womanist political othermothers.

Sunday school teachers in the first half of the twentieth century advocated for African Americans and were political othermothers in African-American communities. In 1933, in the Sunday school and B.Y.P.U. Congress report there was a jeremiad against Sunday school literature, specifically “discriminatory” lithographs, printed by the publishing houses of white Baptists and an admonishment for black Baptists to buy from their own printing house, literally boycotting white publishers. The concern by Sunday school teachers for their students read thusly: “One wonders to what extent Sunday school teaching and texts tend to develop a sense of inferiority in young colored folk at the most impressionable age. . . . One wonders what effect this . . . has on the minds of little black children.”³⁵ The political activism for a positive representation of African Americans in teaching materials by African-American Sunday school teachers paralleled the work of school teachers who championed the same cause in public schools. It is not surprising that African-American youth, following in the footsteps of their political othermothers, formed alliances with organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the 1930s to take up the cause against inappropriate representations of black Americans in textbooks.

Sunday school teachers as political othermothers demanded the respect of African Americans in Sunday school literature. Sunday school teachers were political othermothers who, in the records of woman’s societies, disavowed antilynching laws, fought for the elimination of Jim Crow cars in public transportation, solicited the election of Christians to political offices in order to eliminate discriminatory laws, fought for equal justice in law enforcement, woman’s suffrage, and full citizenship rights for African Americans.

Between Church and State

James Fraser authored a book published in 1999 entitled *Between Church and State*. In that monograph, Fraser formulates an overarching question, “How should a diverse and democratic society deal with issues of religion in the public schools?”³⁶ He frames the answer to that question in the context of multiculturalism. Fraser suggests that “a commitment to multicultural education . . . is a commitment to a society in which many different cultures survive and thrive and are encouraged, and in which representatives of these different groups each make their own contribution to a larger common culture that is more vibrant for what all of them bring.”³⁷ Most discussions surrounding multiculturalism emphasize pedagogical methods to instruct students in the tenets of tolerance and diversity. Multicultural education would benefit from an exchange of ideas that increasingly included the diversity of teachers and administrators, in addition to students, and the contributions that these different groups bring to the larger conversation. There are developing ideologies of teacher culture and African-

³⁴ Collins, 150-151.

³⁵ National Baptist Convention, Inc. Minutes (1933), 97.

³⁶ James W. Fraser, *Between Church and State* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

American culture is essential in constructing an African-American epistemology of teaching that would impact a larger discussion of teaching in public education. Religion is integral to any discussion of African-American culture and its influence on both the public and private lives of black Americans. Historically, the essence of black teachers as spiritual othermothers simultaneously thrived in both religious institutions and public education formulating a black feminist/womanist approach to teaching in schools.

Among the myriad of responsibilities, they visited parents' homes, organized fundraising drives, assisted people with legal problems, letters that needed writing, forms that needed filling in, negotiated difficulties with landlords and ministered to the sick. African-American public educators attended church and taught Sunday school.³⁸ Where there was no church and/or Sunday school, school teachers were expected to organize one.³⁹ Former students and faculty at the Caswell County Training School vividly recalled their principal, N. L. Dillard, admonishing them to follow his example and attend the black churches in town. Dillard, even as a male, tapped into the predominantly black feminist perspective on education. Dillard sang in the choir at one church and taught Sunday school at another. Teachers utilized church gatherings as a point of contact with parents.⁴⁰

African-American teachers were spiritual othermothers in state-run classrooms as religion was motivational and a necessary survival tactic for African-American public school teachers as it was for teachers in religious institutions. There are numerous testimonies from black public school teachers of the religious experiences that motivated and sustained them in performing the overwhelming duties required of educators in African-American communities, particularly those teaching in rural schools. One Atlanta University student teaching near Statesboro, Georgia wrote, "I am back in the woods but I have faith in God with me just the same as when I was in school."⁴¹ Katie A. Phillips, who began her career as a public educator and later became a missionary teacher, was also an exemplary spiritual othermother. Born in Beaufort, South Carolina, and raised in Brunswick, Georgia, Miss Phillips was educated at Hampton Institute and lived a few years in Brooklyn, New York where she was active in Sunday school. After six years, she returned to her Georgia home and for a time, taught in a county school on St. Simon's Island.⁴² In later years, Phillips believed that it was "the spirit" that moved upon her heart to teach in Africa where she multi-tasked as an academic teacher and a teacher of the gospel. As Sunday school teachers who were mobilized by the spirit to go out into black communities to find children for Sunday school, Katie Phillips felt "especially" moved by the "spirit" while teaching in a county school in Georgia to expand her classroom from her homeland of birth to "her people in Africa."⁴³ Religious experience for many African-American teachers transcends place and time. It neither has to be in a church nor on a Sunday morning. Spirituality leads them to view their lives as ongoing commitments to the lives of those in

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 241, 246.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁴⁰ Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 85-87.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² "Miss Katie A. Phillips Candidate for Foreign Field," *Mission Herald*, December, 1908, microfilm, reel 4437.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

African-American communities.⁴⁴ For some, that commitment extends to the African diaspora, as well.

Even in this twenty-first century, African-American female public school educators attest to the experience of a divine presence that motivates them in their vocation or calling. Case studies conducted by Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant reveal evidence that African-American female teachers focused on possibility and responsibility rather than restrictions and others' expectations in a society that continued to devalue and subordinate women of color. One woman in the study spoke of her responsibility to "manifest the divinity" within her in the classroom. Further, she said that divinity meant for her to "develop a kindness and a love and a patience . . . [a] level of understanding, of humility, of groundedness, of goodness" – a paraphrase of the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.⁴⁵ The black feminist/womanist ethos of spiritual othermother is not exclusive to Sunday school teachers and teachers in religious organizations but is characteristically displayed by teachers in state-funded institutions, as well.

The image of public school teachers as spiritual othermothers runs congruent to the black feminist/womanist epistemology of African-American Sunday school/ missionary teachers. African-American Sunday school/missionary teachers who also taught in the public schools brought religion to state-funded education when they entered the classroom. They embodied the "spirit" that elucidated caring for their students. Conversely, as public school educators these same women rendered the work of Sunday school teachers as a public responsibility to support and care for the African-American community as a whole.

Conclusion

Sunday school teachers were black feminist/womanist missionary teachers as they fulfilled the image of spiritual othermothers. As historical othermothers, Sunday school teachers retold the history of African Americans by reviving the African-American tradition of quilting in the community. African-American female teachers as political othermothers were among those who nurtured and mentored young people to think and make decisions for themselves in movements against segregation across America, and particularly in the Jim Crow South.

Sunday school teachers as spiritual, historical, and political othermothers aid contemporary educational scholars in continuing to construct an African-American epistemology of teaching. A more complete construct may be developed by including in this discourse African-American Sunday school teachers. This examination of African-American female teachers is not to resolve the failure to provide a unified account of African-American teaching. It instead attempts to open new doors that have been historically closed and provide additional perspectives on the historically black church as an educational institution as well as a religious organization. This study, too, will help inform teachers in general about their own pedagogy and professional identities as part of the time-honored tradition of American teaching.

⁴⁴ Frederick, 27.

⁴⁵ Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, "Womanist Lessons for Reinventing Teaching," *Journal of Teacher Education* 56, no. 5 (November/December 2005):443.

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Postcolonial Imagination and Liberating Interdependence in Christian Religious Education for Divided Societies

Abstract

This paper identifies the potential of combining postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence in religious education conducted by a community of faith located in divided societies, by using literature-based review and analysis in reference to postcolonial theory. Postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence lead to intercultural education which promotes dialogue, liberation, and social justice in the Indonesian context. It creates a space for Indigenous peoples, their stories, and their cultures, as well as for Indonesian women to share their life stories in religious education.

A. Introduction

Colonialism in Indonesia by European Western countries contributes to the marginalization of local cultures, a culture of silence in education, and divisions in society. This chasm is growing and becoming sharper in the present time due to democracy, globalization, and capitalism, as well as neocolonialism. Addressing this context, I assert the potential of postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence as a pedagogical practice in Christian religious education. Postcolonial imagination creates a space for the stories of Indigenous people and their cultures, as well as the everyday stories of Indonesian women, as significant sources of learning about God. With respect to diversity, liberating interdependence, a concept borrowed from Musa W. Dube, an African feminist postcolonial theologian, provides a framework to connect the story of the Bible with the many stories of the Indonesian people who come from various backgrounds. The relational aspect of these differences, namely ethnicity, religion, political ideology or preference, gender, and many others, matters. Both postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence can inform an intercultural pedagogy for the church, aiming toward liberation in the Indonesian context.

Contacts and encounters between the colonizers and colonized have shaped the Indonesian culture. The Dutch colonized Indonesia for three hundred and fifty years and influenced many aspects of Indonesian life, including Christianity. Christianity, including Protestantism, was planted by the westerners with their agendas.¹ The role of missionaries during colonialism as school and church teachers affects the way the church conducts education. The church here refers to the Protestant church that was established during Dutch colonialism in the

¹ John A. Titaley, "From Abandonment to Blessing: The Theological Presence of Christianity in Indonesia," in *Christian Theology in Asia*, ed. Sebastian C.H. Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 86.

seventeenth century, which was known as the *De Protestantsche Kerk in Nederlandsch-Indie* or *Indische Kerk*. Since the early twentieth century, this church has formed several ethnic Protestant churches, which are found in Minahasa, Maluku, East Nusa Tenggara, and Western Indonesia. In these churches, the only source of teaching is the Bible, which plays a vital role in people's lives. However, there is a gap between the Bible's message and the everyday life of the people. According to Tabita Kartika Christiani, an Indonesian theologian and Christian religious educator, this gap leads to a culture of silence in education, in which women feel reluctant to reflect on their lives as they read or hear the stories of the Bible.² This Bible-centered approach also provides no space for Indigenous cultures to be considered as an essential source for understanding God. A division occurs between the stories of the Bible and the people. This promotes a binary mindset in education between the church and everyday life; the church and the culture, and the sacred and the profane.

In *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*, Pui-lan Kwok asserts that the concept of "dialogical imagination" describes the process of creative hermeneutics in Asia.³ It attempts to open a space for the complexities, the multidimensional linkages, and the different levels of meaning that link the Bible to the Asian context, which includes Indonesia. This process involves an ongoing conversation among different religious and cultural traditions. For Kwok, a dialogical model takes into consideration both the written texts and oral discussions. In this regard, Mikhail M. Bakhtin's dialogism and *heteroglossia* are helpful to identify the church as a community with multiple discourses and to investigate how different groups of people create meaning out of the Bible from their diverse backgrounds.⁴ Kwok thus moves further toward a postcolonial imagination, where she combines historical, dialogical, and diasporic imagination. These are the three tasks that she believes are required for doing feminist theology as an Asian-American in the context of America.⁵ I build on this to create a method for postcolonial imagination by adding the level of Indigenous imagination. Through Indigenous imagination, local cultures can serve as an essential source of imagination in addition to the Bible.

In line with this, liberating interdependence serves as an approach to deal with the many margins that exist in divided societies. Boyung Lee, an Asian-American postcolonial theologian and religious educator, utilizes Dube's notion of liberating interdependence. She claims that church communities should move beyond multicultural pedagogy and move toward a liberating interdependence through intercultural education.⁶ Lee argues that the multiculturalism that has characterized the mainline churches promotes the notion of many margins and one center. With liberating interdependence, the church will become an interculturally engaging church that acknowledges the differences, but also the interconnectedness, of different stories, histories,

² Tabita Kartika Christiani, "Biarkan Mereka Bercerita: Pendidikan Kristiani dan Keadilan Gender" in *Perempuan Indonesia dalam Karya dan Pengabdian* (The Work and the Vocation of the Indonesian Women), eds. Deetje Rotinsulu and Mariska Lauterboom (Jakarta: PT. BPK. Gunung Mulia, 2014), 15.

³ Pui-lan Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 12, 13.

⁴ See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁵ Pui-lan Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

⁶ Boyung Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community: Faith Formation from the Seminary to the Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 129-30. See also Boyung Lee, "Toward a Liberating Interdependence: Exploring an Intercultural Pedagogy," *Religious Education* 105, no. 3 (May-June): 283-98.

economic systems, political structures, cultural texts, races, classes, and genders. Thus, in intercultural dialogue, there is no longer a center and a margin; no one will claim the place at the center.

Combining postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence create a space for diverse narratives to serve as the essential sources of teaching and learning. It will also provide a brave space for bodily practices to be a site of reflection and learning. An example of this is when, in Indonesia, people use the Bible as a venerated sacred object and put it on the head of the newborn babies to protect them.⁷ A body can function as a text or a narrative. Bodily practices can be a site of learning and a way of knowing that leads to coexistences in divided societies.

In revealing the potential of postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence in Christian religious education, I will first examine the history of colonialism in Indonesia, as it contributes to the marginalization of local cultures, a culture of silence, and the division in society, using a postcolonial lens. I will specifically refer to education and the role of the Dutch missionaries. Then, I will review and analyze the concept of postcolonial imagination through the work of Kwok and liberating interdependence from Dube and Lee. Their work serves as the primary literature in my research. In this section, I will also propose postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence as a pedagogical practice/approach for Indonesian Christian religious education. Lastly, I will draw a brief conclusion and suggests topics for further research.

B. Indonesian Colonialism: Education, Discrimination, and Division

A growing chasm exists everywhere around the world, including in Indonesia. Social divisions often relate to religious preferences, political ideology, ethical orientation, cultural identity, ethnicity, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, amongst other factors. Recently in Indonesia, there have been many conflicts that involve religion and ethnicity, as well as political ideology and preference, especially during the latest 2019 Presidential election. It seems that divisions characterize Indonesian society. These divisions generate a critical context for the Christian religious education that is offered by the church. The church (as a religious educator) needs to give serious attention to this: how to promote dialogue across these divisions and boundaries within the society, as it is also present in educational settings. In order to address division, as well as discrimination and marginalization in education, it is necessary to examine the history of colonialism and how it has affected the way the Protestant church conducts its religious pedagogy.

Indonesia, although it is known for having the largest Muslim population country in the world, is a nation that diverse in its culture and religion. The government guarantees religious freedom and acknowledges six official religions. However, there are many other belief systems that are adhered by the people. This includes the religions and spiritualities of Indigenous groups, which were subordinated during colonialism. During the nineteenth century, missionaries used considerable pressure to convert the ethnic and Indigenous groups. They marginalized Indigenous religions and declared these beliefs to be superstitions.

Besides subjugating local groups and their cultures/spiritualities, the marginalization of women, and a culture of silence in education, colonialism also contributes to many chasms in

⁷ This is a common practice in Eastern Indonesia, such as the Moluccas and East Nusa Tenggara.

society. The *Priyayi* and *Santris* classes existed prior to colonization, but as Dutch colonized Indonesia, the discrepancy between them became even more apparent. Hence, the *Santris*, a devout Muslim class, became the dominant force in the colonial period, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Unlike the *Santris*, the *Priyayis* or the Muslim aristocratic class, allied with the colonizer.⁸ This is one of many divisions. There was also a sharp division created between Christians and Muslims during Dutch colonialism.

The Dutch favored the Christians, such as those in Ambon-Moluccas, an island located in Eastern Indonesia. According to Frank L. Cooley, a Presbyterian missionary who worked in Indonesia for 33 years, there were noticeable differences between the Christian and non-Christian villages in Central Moluccas.⁹ The Christian villages were more orderly, sanitary, and stable. The Ambonese Christians were also better educated and seemed to enjoy a higher standard of living. The public buildings in the Christian areas were kept in a better condition, as were the residences and village streets. Christianity offered a certain type of uplift and stability to the village life; becoming a Christian meant having a new social status, compared to one's non-Christian neighbors. Cooley contends that the Dutch considered Christians to be a separate and higher class than the non-Christians; he writes, "this special status carried certain coveted privileges in the form of educational and employment opportunities in the Dutch commercial, governmental, and military establishments, not offered to or taken by the local Muslims." They (the Christians) were called *Belanda Hitam*, the Black Dutchmen. Thus, Ambonese Christians became closely associated with the Dutch colonial regime.¹⁰ Many divisions were created (or became sharper and more evident) during the Dutch colonial period. Divisions tie to religion (Christian and non-Christian), class (*Priyayi*, *Santri*), *adat* or Indigenous culture (*adat* elites mostly men, whereas women were considered second-class citizens), and ethnicity (*pribumi* or natives and the *non-pribumi*). Division also relates to distribution of power between the ruler and the ruled, the colonizer and colonized. It also relates to discrimination and marginalization. Amidst all of this, education by the Dutch played an important role.

The Dutch first provided general education for Indonesians when JB van Heutsz established the *Volkscholen* or village schools, in 1907 (the Dutch colonized Indonesia since 1605).¹¹ In education, the role of the Dutch missionaries was significant. They served as both school and religious teachers. From the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, the period of the Dutch East India Company, missionaries not only spread the Gospel, but they also served as schoolteachers and catechetics. They perceived themselves not only as teachers but also as the guardians of the uneducated people.¹² The standard method used by missionaries in education was memorization, with no opportunity for the development of critical thinking skills. Students memorized the principal doctrines of Christianity from the Bible, without understanding their

⁸ Soe Hok Gie, *Di Bawah Lentera Merah: Riwayat Sarekat Islam Semarang 1917-1920* (Jakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1999), 58.

⁹ Frank L. Cooley, "Altar and Throne in Central Moluccan Societies," *Indonesia*, no. 2 (October 1966): 135-156. The Rev. Frank L. Cooley is a Presbyterian Pastor and mission worker who worked in Indonesia for 33 years (1952-1985). He wrote many books regarding Indonesian history and is considered as the foremost Protestant historian of Christianity in Indonesia.

¹⁰ Cooley, *Indonesia*, 147-9.

¹¹ R.B. Cribb and Audrey Kahin, *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia* (Lanham Maryland, Toronto, Oxford: The Scarecrow, 2004), 132.

¹² Karel Steenbrink, *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam: Contacts and Conflicts 1596-1950* (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993), 24. Th. van Den End, *Ragi Carita: Sejarah Gereja di Indonesia 1, 1500-1860* (Jakarta: PT. BPK. Gunung Mulia, 1988), 73, 67

meaning. This leads to dualism in education, where the students experienced the separation of the Bible and everyday life, as well as the separation of mind and body in a classroom setting.

In preparing teachers and preachers, the education given was very basic. A missionary would take boys and girls, give them an elementary education, and discipline them. Moreover, they would perform household tasks, too. Aware of the significant influence of the social status that comes from gaining congregants, Th. van den End and Jan Sihar Aritonang describe that the missionaries mostly chose the children from the upper class to be educated as teachers and preachers.¹³ Boys were baptized and employed as teachers, while girls became brides for the missionary assistants or the Christian village chiefs. Education was not entirely intended to liberate the locals, especially women. In the late nineteenth century, Raden Ajeng Kartini, a girl from the island of Java, advocated for the education of the Indonesian girls/women. She was only allowed to attend school until she was twelve years old, even though she was from an aristocratic family. Then, she was secluded to prepare for her marriage, before authority over her was transferred from her parents to her husband. There was minimal education offered to marginalized girls/women. Schooling was for the aristocratic class but was only at the elementary level. The education system that was established during the Dutch colonial period contributed to discrimination and inequality, including that which was provided by the Protestant church. The missionaries organized the church in patriarchal and hierarchical order to maintain the power relationship between the colonizer and colonized.¹⁴

In sum, Dutch colonialism affected the Indonesian peoples' lives and culture. There are positive and negative aspects that came with the mission work. The Dutch colonial rule and the missionaries helped to establish the Indonesian education system, but at the same time, they prohibited the existence of Indigenous cultures and restrained the roles of women, which, in return contributed to division, discrimination, and marginalization within the society.¹⁵

C. The Potential of Combining Postcolonial Imagination and Liberating Interdependence

In bringing the notion of postcolonial imagination to the field of Christian religious education, an awareness of social location is necessary, as it determines access to languages and how people use them. An awareness of the role of power and its dynamics in a classroom is also needed. A religious educator must recognize the different social location of the students in accessing both religious/Biblical and cultural languages. Moreover, understanding *heteroglossia* as the many voices/languages leads to an understanding of the Bible as a "talking book."¹⁶ According to Kwok, an image of the Bible as a talking book will invite "polyphonic theological discourses and ongoing dialogues."¹⁷ A teacher thus needs to consider the different backgrounds and hopes held by the Bible's dialogue partners (the students). Borrowing Mary Elizabeth Moore's concept of "intersection," every person is located in an intersection.¹⁸ Moore argues that

¹³ Th. van den End and Jan S. Aritonang, "1800-2005: A National Overview," in *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, ed. Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 158.

¹⁴ van den End, *Ragi Carita*, 34-35. See also van den End and Aritonang, *1800-2005*, 155.

¹⁵ See S. Nasution, *Sejarah Pendidikan Indonesia* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 1994). See Titaley, "From Abandonment," 86.

¹⁶ Kwok, *Discovering the Bible*, 40.

¹⁷ Kwok, *Discovering the Bible*, 5.

¹⁸ Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Education for Continuity & Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 110.

education must begin in the middle of a person's life, which she calls the intersection. It begins where the student meets other students, faces the future, probes the past, confronts contemporary issues, and so forth. The starting point of a church's pedagogy is neither the Bible nor the present setting, but an intersection. Every student is located in a specific intersection that might be different from that of another student.

I envision this intersection as a hybrid third-space; a place where the postcolonial imagination occurs. It is a space where the words in a living conversation will always denote an open-ended answer. Here, the teacher acknowledges the uniqueness of each person or context. It is the site of a complex struggle, as well as a place of meaning-making.¹⁹ In dialogue, the meaning is made at the border between a text and a reader, society and an individual, between utterances, and divisions. Here, boundaries are everywhere, and dialogue is always an encounter with boundaries. It is a place where those who are voiceless can alter their identity, and power relations can shift as a result of negotiations. The marginalized can speak and assert their agency. As Homi Bhabha claims, the "third space displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom."²⁰ Dialogical imagination in a hybrid third-space can help to understand the use of the Bible alongside local narratives. It provides a space for the women and all who are oppressed to acknowledge or to channel their voices in many different ways. This form of imagination has the potential to be developed in the Indonesian postcolonial context.

Postcolonial imagination can be a strategy for reading the stories of the Bible, Indigenous cultures, and the stories of different people in connection with one another. Therefore, besides dialogical, historical, and diasporic imagination, Indigenous imagination is necessary for the Indonesian context. The threefold approach to imagination will become a fourfold imagination. Indigenous imagination provides a space for the teacher and the student to imagine and reflect upon the Indigenous cultures that bear local wisdom in their everyday lives, alongside the Biblical narratives.

In postcolonial imagination, the body is a site of reflection; it is a text. In this regard, I will expand Bakhtin's notion of dialogic imagination in "The Discourse in the Novel," as well as Kwok's postcolonial imagination to include dialogue between the Bible as an object and the bodies of the people who use it. Here, intertextuality/intersubjectivity occurs between the people as a cultural text and the Bible as a sacred text. People's bodily and emotionally behaviors toward the Bible are narratives, where they can learn something. The Bible, as described by Charles E. Farhadian, drawing on his ethnographic work in Papua, an Eastern island in Indonesia, is not only a source of knowledge or an identity marker but is also an object that can protect the people both spiritually and physically; it is a powerful object. People will put the Bible at the top of the head of their newborn babies and will bring it with them when they travel far from home and are uncertain of their surroundings, whether or not they have read it. Postcolonial imagination provides a space to reflect and imagine these practices as a source of learning about God. Here, the students do not imagine with their minds only, but also with their

¹⁹ See Ira D. Mangililo, "When Rahab and Indonesian Christian Women Meet in the Third Space," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 31, no. 1 (2015): 64.

²⁰ Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 211. See also Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge), 1994.

bodies. Their bodies are the imagining bodies.²¹ Their bodies record things and keep memories, which is valuable for educational purposes. Postcolonial imagination leads to an embodied pedagogy that involves imagining bodies.

Regarding the relationship between the teacher and the student, postcolonial imagination leads to equality or at least an acknowledgment of the power dynamics in a classroom. Dialogue can be interpreted as a hierarchical inversion of traditional student/teacher roles, as well as a relationship of collaboration among participants. The role of a teacher/pastor that is too often dominant and can even forsake the role of the student can be viewed differently. The teacher and the student, the pastor and the congregant, have equal access to meaning-making concerning their Christian lives through the narratives of their bodies and their lives, the Bible, and the Indigenous culture.

In support of postcolonial imagination, liberating interdependence can serve as an approach to deal with the many margins that exist in divided societies. Dube, who coined the term liberating interdependence, draws from the historical experiences and strategies of resistance of Two-Thirds World women. She proposes a move toward what she contends to be decolonizing feminist practices in Biblical studies. In using “decolonizing” as a practice, Dube resists both patriarchal and imperial oppression to cultivate a space for “liberating interdependence.” It is an approach that highlights the interconnectedness of different narratives and relationships within both specific and global contexts that recognize and affirm the dignity of all.²² Dube proposes a reading of Biblical texts for liberating interdependence by using decolonizing as a postcolonial approach.

Acknowledging diversities in culture as well as the realities of colonialism and imperialism, Lee recommends a model of interculturalism that leads to a liberating interdependence. This model is an alternative to the current dominant approach of multiculturalism in mainline churches, which is individualistic and colonial in the way it engages with different racial and ethnic communities.²³ Lee states that the prefix “inter,” in both interculturality and interdependence, signifies a relationship and a dialogue between two or more different communities. Moving beyond multicultural pedagogy, which is individualistic and colonial, toward liberating interdependence is necessary. A postcolonial intercultural pedagogy can create liberating interdependence, and vice versa the liberating interdependence is necessary for intercultural pedagogy. Lee opts for an intercultural approach that reaches across cultures and boundaries in different ways rather than a multicultural one where marginal communities “are not necessarily in communication with one another, except as mediated by the dominant group.”²⁴ In liberating interdependence, the small and marginalized groups have a space to talk and connect one another. Therefore, moving from a multicultural to intercultural framework is necessary.

In an intercultural education, liberating interdependence and postcolonial imagination serve not only as a reading strategy for the Bible but also as an approach to reading the Bible together with Indigenous stories, such as myths and folklore. Indonesia is rich in its Indigenous stories, and they need to be used as a significant resource for religious education. Furthermore, the bodies of the people (the students) are also texts or narratives. Dialogue can occur between

²¹ See James B. Steeves, *Imagining Bodies: Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Imagination* (Duquesne University Press, 2004), 6, 157.

²² Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist*, 111, 185-6.

²³ Lee, *Transforming Congregations*, 129-30.

²⁴ Lee, “Toward Liberating,” 284.

the bodies of the people, the stories of the Bible, the stories of the Indigenous cultures, and the everyday life stories of the students. In this regard, a religious educator needs to pay attention to the body in the learning process. The body and emotion are as important as the mind in education.

Theological educators and ministers must pay serious attention to their education and ministry. Attention and intention toward freedom and social justice through liberating interdependence and postcolonial imagination are needed. This pedagogical model is an integrative approach of formation, reformation, and transformation of both individual and communities. In this regard, educators or ministers need to promote interaction and relationships among learners of different backgrounds and remain conscious of the value of interculturality. Postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence need to inform the curriculum of Christian religious education in the Indonesian context. It must be a postcolonial-imagination and liberating-interdependence-informed pedagogy. In this pedagogy, there is a bridging of the disciplinary divide between Biblical, theological, historical, cultural, and pedagogical trajectories. It is a pedagogical practice that seeks to uncover, examine, and challenge the colonial epistemological framework, logic, methodology, knowledge production, and representation in Indonesian Christian religious education.

D. Conclusion

Postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence have the potential to create an intercultural and interreligious education in divided societies such as Indonesia. It provides a brave space for the bodily practices, the many stories of the people (women), and the Indigenous cultures to serve as sources of reflection and learning that leads to coexistences in divided societies. Here, I envision a dialogical pedagogy that addresses the need for education in, from, or about religion or spirituality to foster dialogue across divisions or differences. It can also educate one about the Christian faith and remain hospitable to any form of dialogue with other faith traditions or spiritualities in the context of the diversity in Indonesia. This pedagogy will also help the educator to facilitate integrated learning, to challenge and question binary mindsets and dualism in education. Here, education always connects to the spiritual quest; ethical and spiritual values relate to critical thought and reason.²⁵

Amidst this, a religious educator needs to constantly ask about where (or what or how) God is in her/his teaching. A quest for God always needs to inform her/his pedagogy. As a religious educator for almost 20 years, I understand God as the one who surpasses the boundaries of the Western colonialism. God is both personal and communal. God is the one who is present through the culture of Indigenous groups. The local culture has something good and functional to offer as a source of learning about God and life. Here, the Bible is the inspired word of God, and God also speaks through other local narratives, not only that of the Israelites. God is at work in the entire world; the Spirit is actively present. God, the Sacred, who creates everything, penetrates God's creation in sacredness. God is the liberator who inspires and liberates religious educators to educate in ways that humanize and liberate. Furthermore, God is the one who acts "to decolonize, diversify and promote[s] counter-hegemonic social condition."²⁶

²⁵ See Hanan. A. Alexander, *Reclaiming Goodness: Education and the Spiritual Quest* (Notre Dame, ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

²⁶ Emmanuel Yartekwei Amugi Lartey, *Postcolonializing God: New Perspectives on Pastoral and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2013), xiii.

Postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence as an approach not only functions to acknowledge the variety of voices that form languages, meanings, and identities, but it also helps to discern and to be sensitive to power relations and their dynamics. It then has the potential to become a liberating-postcolonial approach that is valuable to many fields, including in Christian religious education. Finally, it is significant to recognize that human situations, including educational settings, have power imbalances and that these should be resisted, so that the submerged voices can be brought out, and the power dynamics can be exposed. This is ongoing work rather than something that can be accomplished once and for all. What I have offered in this paper is a preliminary step towards more thorough research regarding (decolonizing) Christian religious education in the Indonesian context. Further research will include an in-depth analysis of Indonesia's history of colonialism employing postcolonial historiography, a study of its Indigenous cultures, and discerning the educational implications of postcolonial imagination and liberating interdependence through ethnographical research and the discipline of practical theology. I hope that in addressing and mapping Christian religious education in Indonesia, both in the present and the future, religious educators will always challenge colonialism and imperialism in their pedagogy.

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“To Make One’s Heart a Swinging Door”: Towards a Contemplative Pedagogy for Neighbor-Love Based on the Religious Thinking of Howard Thurman

Abstract: With religio-political polarization and out-group violence on the rise, what can religious educators do to foster compassion, understanding, and charity across lines of difference? Social neuroscience research, as well as Christian tradition, suggest that empathy - the capacity to share in and understand another person’s affective and mental states – can increase our concern for others and significantly influence our behavior towards those beyond our social groups. Given the central place of empathy and compassion in the Christian life, considering how religious educators might cultivate such capacities may thus serve as an entry point to healing divisions and promoting neighbor love. That said, despite interest in the role of empathy in religious education (RE), few have considered how practices of imaginative and intercessory prayer might serve as a pedagogy for fostering empathetic connections with others. This paper contributes to research on empathy in RE by bringing together Howard Thurman’s reflections on prayer and love of neighbor, with the aim of showing how practices of prayer might serve as pedagogical “paths” towards empathy and reconciliatory love across lines of difference.

Perhaps one of the most prominent themes in both the life and literary works of Howard Thurman is that of love for our neighbors, especially the neighbor from whom we segregate ourselves. Indeed, like Gutierrez, Thurman identifies love of neighbor as the defining call of the Christian life, as well the basic condition upon which the flourishing of society and all of life depend. This perhaps comes out most clearly in his closing remarks in his well-known work, *Disciplines of the Spirit*. Reflecting on the indispensable, as well as personal nature of love for human thriving and societal health, he writes, “The experience of love is either a necessity or a luxury. If it be a luxury, it is expendable; if it be a necessity, then to deny it is to perish. So simple is the reality, and so terrifying. Ultimately there is only one place of refuge on this planet for any [person] – that is in another [person’s] heart. To love is to make one’s heart a swinging door.”¹

In a century and a political context where hate crimes, violence, and polarization are on the rise, Thurman’s reflections arrive as pointed and provocative. He reminds us that love for our neighbor is neither optional nor abstract. Rather, love fundamentally takes the form of personal imperative. It requires creating spaces of welcome and refuge in our own lives and bodies for other people, especially those beyond our cultural, political, and religious circles. Critically, such love does not stop with acceptance or tolerance. On the contrary, it must manifest in reconciliation, a reconciliation that takes concrete form at the level of individual relationships and political structures.²

¹ Mary Elizabeth Moore and Shin Myoung Kim, “Encountering Dignity: Building Human Community,” *Religious Education* 113, no. 3 (May 27, 2018): 322, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2018.1456068>.

² If conversion to God necessitates and even occurs through our conversion – our commitment to - our neighbors’ liberation, then religious educators must treat division, hatred, oppression, inequality, and segregation not merely as “problems” to be solved but as fundamental blocks to people and communities’ knowledge and communion with God. As Gutierrez underscores, “Christians have not done enough in this area of conversion to the neighbor, to social justice, to history. They have not perceived clearly enough yet that to know God is to do justice. They still do not live in one

The question is, of course, how? How do we cultivate this kind of love for neighbors, especially across lines of difference? As our current socio-political context and the history of Christianity make clear, answering this question is at once necessary and elusive. Charity and solidarity across lines of difference are not – as much as Christians want to claim – motions that proceed organically from confessions of faith. We see these limits to our love daily, especially in situations where divisions are deep or the wounds of injustice remain fresh. Moreover, even when our intentions are well-meaning, misunderstanding, implicit biases, and fear often undermine our efforts to establish trust and understanding. We thus find ourselves faced with the reality that love, much like a seed, must be sown, tended, and given time and space to grow. Identifying the steps involved in the sowing and tending of love: this is the challenge – and invitation – for religious educators today.

Significantly, Thurman’s description of love above provides a clue. He describes love as an ability to keep one’s heart an open doorway. Such ability to keep one’s heart open reflects a discipline of seeking to understand, identify with and care for another person in her need. Though Thurman does not use this language, the ability to understand, identify with, and respond to other person’s need can be understood as the correlates of empathy and compassion, respectively.

Interestingly, significant developments in the social neurosciences also suggest that empathy – the capacity to share in and understand another person’s affective and mental states – can increase our compassion for others and significantly influence our social behavior. In particular, strengthening our abilities to empathize has been found to reduce implicit biases, increase altruistic and prosocial behavior, and lead to positive appraisal of those beyond our social groups³. That said, just as there are factors that influence our love, so there are influences on our empathy. Implicit biases, social and environmental factors such as proximity and perceived similarity, and current emotional state all modulate our capacities to empathize with other people.⁴ Critically, these influences on our empathy increase in significance when it comes to people who live on the far side of our lives, whether intentionally or due to physical constraints. In such cases, it can be a major effort to simply try to understand and appreciate – let alone love – our neighbors.

What does this imply for religious educators? On the one hand, the potential for practices of empathy to play a role in moving people towards concrete and even political forms of love remain high. Indeed, religious educators consistently identify empathy as crucial for building bridges between diverse communities,⁵ essential for practicing compassion,⁶ and a central feature of “encounters with

sole action with both God and all humans.” Gustavo Gutiérrez and James B. Nickoloff, *Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 289.

³ Tania Singer and Olga M. Klimecki, “Empathy and Compassion,” *Current Biology* 24, no. 18 (September 22, 2014): R875–78, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2014.06.054>; Jean Decety et al., “Empathy as a Driver of Prosocial Behaviour: Highly Conserved Neurobehavioural Mechanisms across Species,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 371 (January 19, 2016): 20150077, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2015.0077>; Claus Lamm, Markus Rütgen, and Isabella C. Wagner, “Imaging Empathy and Prosocial Emotions,” *Neuroscience Letters*, Functional Neuroimaging of the Emotional Brain, 693 (February 6, 2019): 49–53, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neulet.2017.06.054>.

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⁵ H. Edward Everding and Lucinda A. Huffaker, “Educating Adults for Empathy: Implications of Cognitive Role-Taking and Identity Formation,” *Religious Education* 93, no. 4 (1998): 413–30.

⁶ H. Edward Everding and Lucinda A. Huffaker, “Educating Adults for Empathy: Implications of Cognitive Role-Taking and Identity Formation,” *Religious Education* 93, no. 4 (1998): 413–30.

dignity.”⁷ At the same time, simply creating opportunities for encounter does not mean that empathy for others will naturally emerge. Again, given the persistent and even growing divisions between Christian religious communities, one begins to wonder whether empathy might require more deliberate cultivation. What kind of religious practices and pedagogies, then, can promote empathy and love of neighbor?

Again, while the notion of nurturing empathy for self and others in educational settings is not new, few have considered how prayer might serve as a pedagogy for empathetic connecting with and converting to our neighbor. On the one hand, the lack of attention to prayer as a possible path towards cultivating empathy, compassion and neighbor love is unsurprising. Skepticism regarding prayer’s contribution to building love for neighbor abound and for good reason: prayer has been deployed as a tool for division as often as it has served the agenda of peace, and public petitions to God in the face of outrageous violence are increasingly perceived as distractions or worse - forms of implicit indifference. Nevertheless, Christian tradition identifies the practice of prayer as integral to love of neighbor, and even a brief look at the lives of Christian contemplatives and revolutionaries suggests that the line between prayer and practical love of neighbor is not so sharp after all. Within the realm of Christian religious education, however, the question of whether and on what grounds prayer practices might prove a pedagogy for empathy, compassion and practical love of neighbor, especially in the face of religio-political polarization and violence, remains open. Yet articulating answers to it is pressing, given that religious educators not only teach people about prayer and the call to neighbor-love but engage people in such practices regularly, whether within the classroom or the congregation.

In the following paper, then, I explore Howard Thurman’s reflections on reconciliation, empathy, and prayer as they relate to loving one’s neighbor, with a view to how religious educators might employ prayer as an avenue for foster empathetic in religious education. I begin by tracing the connection that Thurman makes between empathy, prayer and the practice of reconciliation and love in his *Disciplines of the Spirit*.⁸ I then examine the avenues he identifies for taking up the disciplines of empathy and love. Specifically, I highlight the connection between the development, on the one hand, of a contemplative attitude and experience of God’s assurance experienced in prayer, and the emerging capacity to pursue a discipline of empathy and love for neighbor on the other. Finally, I build on Thurman’s ideas to explore how imaginative and intercessory forms of prayer might contribute to healing divisions and promoting empathetic understanding within the context of religious education. My aim is to show that incorporating such practices of prayer alongside other modes of engagement with our neighbors can serve as part of a contemplative pedagogy for cultivating neighbor-love across lines of difference.

Reconciliation and Relational: Potentialities and Paradoxes

Thurman understands this basic need to receive and give love as the crucial impulse of reconciliation, namely, the re-establishment of relationships between those who have been estranged. Though he does not use the word communion in its theological sense as Gutierrez does, the reconciliation that Thurman envisions belongs to the larger project of supporting the fundamental unity – with neighbor and with God – for which God intends us. Like Gutierrez, part of making such communion between persons and God possible is to eliminate structures of injustice and hate, as well as the ingrained patterns of thinking and political systems that prevent love’s “free-flowing

⁷ Mary Elizabeth Moore and Shin Myoung Kim, “Encountering Dignity: Building Human Community,” *Religious Education* 113, no. 3 (May 27, 2018): 322, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2018.1456068>.

⁸ Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*.

circulation”⁹ between people. As Thurman underscores in reference to segregation, “Any attitudes, private or group, which prohibit people from coming into “across the board” contact with each other work against the implementation of the love ethic. So considered, segregation, prescriptions of separation, are a disease of the human spirit and the body politic.”¹⁰

That said, whereas many focus on direct engagement in the socio-political sphere as the main avenue for practicing love, Thurman repeatedly emphasizes the role one’s inner life and personal relationships plays in the “discipline” that is love. As he writes in his chapter, ‘Love’, in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, “Neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative. A [person] must love [her] neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between.”¹¹ In other words, while love of our neighbors and commitment to the healing relations must necessarily include (and may well begin with) social and political action, Thurman sees the transformation of social structures as starting at the level of personal and mutual relationships. Specifically, he argues that establishing “primary contacts” with people – namely, contacts that are personal, mutual, and direct – are both the necessary avenues and contexts for cultivating love of neighbor and dismantling the barriers of economic inequality, social and physical segregation of communities, discrimination, and white supremacy that plagued society in his day – and continue to plague ours. In short, choosing to physically interact with and ultimately exercise love for neighbor and even “enemy” is, for Thurman, a form of resistance.

At the same time, Thurman recognizes that establishing primary contacts with people, unless they are infused with attitude of reverence and respect,¹² cannot foster understanding, trust, or love.¹³ Cultivating such an attitude thus involves creating spaces where mutuality can be concretely experienced. In his words, we are to “take the initiative in seeking ways by which you have the experience of a common sharing of mutual worth and value.”¹⁴ Though Thurman is addressing the “disinherited” here, his words apply equally to all persons called to practice the love-ethic of Jesus. Each of us, in short, shares the “ethical demand” to seek and foster encounters where respect and reverence for the other can be practiced.¹⁵ Significantly for Thurman, the seeking and creating of such experiences constitutes a “discipline, a method, a technique, as over against some form of wishful thinking or simple desiring.”¹⁶ Respect and reverence, simply put, hinge on concrete experience,¹⁷ and it is our intentional pursuit of such experiences and the attitude of respect that emerges from them that that comprises our “painstaking discipline.”¹⁸

For religious educators, Thurman’s identification of the need for a discipline of encounter for cultivating this attitude of reverence and respect, what Thurman calls “respect for personality.”¹⁹ The question, of course, what goes into creating interactions where people can share feelings of mutual worth and value?²⁰ On the one hand, Thurman sees the willing expression of vulnerability and need as playing a fundamental role in establishing mutual relations. Concrete experiences that bring us into encounter with other people’s need or afford us opportunity to express our own can provide the context out of which an attitude of reverence and respect can develop.

⁹ Thurman, 127.

¹⁰ Thurman, 127.

¹¹ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 79.

¹² Thurman, 94.

¹³ Thurman, 96.

¹⁴ Thurman, 90.

¹⁵ Thurman, 96.

¹⁶ Thurman, 91.

¹⁷ Thurman, 96.

¹⁸ Thurman, 96.

¹⁹ Thurman, 91.

²⁰ Thurman, 88.

At the same time, Thurman underscores that our social and political systems, of which the segregation that continues to characterize Christian worship bears witness, frequently create obstacles to the organic evolution of this attitude of respect.²¹ Indeed, he states directly that reverence for personality can only exist between people who no longer stand under the “heavy weight of status.”²² Unfortunately, the weight of status – or lack of it – continues shape our social relationships and perceptions of other people in potent and poisonous ways. It goes without saying that Christian communities are certainly not immune to the influence of status; on the contrary, systems and practices of power, hierarchy, and privilege regularly shape our interactions with other people, whether directly or indirectly, as well as inside and “outside” the church. Finally, personal biases, political rhetoric that reinforces perceptions of “us” and “them”, and fears about expressing weakness or vulnerability, especially with people we don’t know well or trust, all work together to hinder respect for our neighbors, let alone reverence and love.

It is at this point that another question emerges: is there an even more basic attitude or practice underlying the respect for personality that can help people begin to reshape their fundamental perceptions of their neighbors? If so, how would such an attitude shape efforts to create encounters where mutual worth and value are experienced? While Thurman does not provide an answer in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, where the phrase “reverence and respect for personality” appears, it is possible to identify clue to his thinking on this topic in one of his subsequent works, *Disciplines of the Spirit*. In particular, Thurman parses out in his chapter, ‘Reconciliation’, practices and features inherent to a discipline of reconciling with and ultimately loving our neighbors. Specifically, he claims that the pursuit of reconciliation relies upon and grows out of a person’s capacity to recognize, identify with, and respond compassionately to the needs of one’s neighbor. Though he does not use this language, these three capacities align with the definition of empathy. From the Greek *empathos*, empathy means to “feel with.” To empathize with another is to consciously or even non-consciously to tune our own emotional experience to another’s so that we begin to feel what she feels or think as she does.

Significantly, as noted above, empathy plays a pivotal role in fostering prosocial behaviors, especially compassion, altruism, and inclusivity. In Thurman’s understanding specifically, the practice of empathizing lays the ground for fostering the trust, respect, repentance and forgiveness that are crucial for reconciliation. Again, while Thurman’s reflections emerge against the backdrop of the Civil Rights Movement and have in mind the relationships between blacks and whites in the United States, they offer guidance to religious persons today who confront the injustices of not only a “new Jim Crow,” but also white supremacy, anti-immigrant sentiment, and acts of targeted violence and hate against minorities. In the following section, then, we explore the practice of empathy as described by Thurman and its contribution – and crucial role in – reconciliatory and loving engagement with our neighbors.

Empathizing as Reconciliatory Practice: Resonating with our Neighbor’s Need

Thurman establishes early in his final chapter of *Disciplines of the Spirit* the basic premise that supports his emphasis on empathizing with others. The power and necessity of empathy for reconciliation, Thurman claims, arises from the basic and universal need humans have to be understood and cared for. He writes, “...the building blocks for the society of man for and for the well-being of the individual are the fundamental desire to understand others and to be understood. The crucial sentence is, ‘Every man wants to be cared for, to be sustained by the assurance of the watchful and thoughtful attention of others. Such is the meaning of love.’”²³ The need to be listened

²¹ Thurman, 91.

²² Thurman, 94.

²³ Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, 122.

to, cared for, and sustained via another's watchful and thoughtful attention: this is a crucial component for human health and thriving, as well as the establishment of just society.²⁴ Indeed, Thurman argues that when a person's need to be cared for is not met, he experiences an inner conflict that then manifests outwardly in many forms, one of which is conflict with his neighbors. Why? By hating one's neighbor or taking up violence against her, a person demands the recognition from another that she has not received or at least not experienced as real. This is especially true in situations where the validity of our being is challenged, whether through explicit violence like hate-crimes or police shootings, or subtle, systematic ones. As Thurman puts it, "Under such circumstances, hate becomes a [person's] way of saying that [she] is present."²⁵

Importantly, for Thurman, the capacity to love, and ultimately reconcile with other people, grows out of the experience of feeling ourselves totally cared for and understood by another. "Association with others, contacts with fellowship, this is the setting in which recognition of the need to be cared for emerges and may become a part of the working purpose of the individual in defining and determining the quality of his own relationships."²⁶ This experience of being cared for and understood, in turn, enables us to do the same for our neighbor.

On the one hand, Thurman's explanation of reconciliation as emerging from an ability to recognize and respond to another's need suggests that the capacity to empathize is inherent to all human beings. By simply "living in an atmosphere of acceptance and belonging," we develop an "intent" to honor the other person's needs, as well as the skills to cooperate and work with our neighbors.²⁷ At the same time, the question arises as to how one develops and sustains this capacity to empathize, especially when the "atmosphere of acceptance and belonging" crucial to it is denied to us. What other sources, besides people, can supply us with the understanding and care required for the showing the same to our neighbor?

It is at this point that the relationship Thurman sees between the discipline of reconciliation and the discipline of prayer becomes relevant. Specifically, Thurman understands the ability to empathize with and love one's neighbors as a fundamental expression and outgrowth of experiencing God's care for us. In the following section, then, I examine the tie Thurman establishes between empathy for neighbor and the empathy from God, with a view to its implications for religious pedagogy and practice.

The Ground of Empathy: Prayer as Seedbed of God's Assurance

It is necessary in discussing Thurman's understanding prayer to begin with a definition. Thurman identifies prayer as a "form of communication between God and [humans],"²⁸ the avenue by which our native hunger for God is most fully expressed and satisfied.²⁹ Importantly, this hunger to be united to the God who is the source of our identity and the basis of our being is not unique to certain individuals.³⁰ Rather, all people possess a hunger for God by virtue of their belonging to the Creator of Life.³¹ At the same time, the hunger itself does not constitute prayer. It is only when our native yearning for God moves into our conscious awareness and becomes the deliberate focus of our energies that our longing for communion is transformed into a mode of communication.³² For

²⁴ Thurman, 111.

²⁵ Thurman, 119.

²⁶ Thurman, 110.

²⁷ Thurman, 111.

²⁸ Thurman, 88.

²⁹ Thurman, 88.

³⁰ Thurman, 87.

³¹ Thurman, 95.

³² Thurman, 96.

Thurman, then, prayer is a deliberate, self-conscious activity by which we quicken our hunger for communion with the Source of Life. In praying, we make the hunger of our hearts so “dominant and controlling” that our longing ultimately becomes a “citadel of encounter” with God, a “trusting place where the God and the soul of man [sic] meet, where they stand on common ground and the wall or partition between them has no status.”³³

Yet what happens in this space of encounter with God? While we often think of communion with God itself as the goal of prayer, Thurman underscores that other fruits are born out of this space, the most significant of which is the assurance of God’s care and love. Such assurance is critical to our full humanization: we each long for “an answer that confirms [us], that establishes for [us] a basis of ultimate self-validation.”³⁴ While Thurman suggests that such confirmation may come as a fact of religious experience generally,³⁵ he intimates that it is through prayer that such confirmation is most deliberately sought and experienced. This is because prayer affords us space to share our whole self with God - our hopes and dreams, anger and anxieties, private concerns and personal failures.³⁶ This freedom to expose ourselves completely to the presence of the Creator is crucial to energizing and deepening our experience of God’s assurance. Only when we allow our full need to be exposed to God – only when we practice, in other words, vulnerability – can we experience a love which “know no merit or demerit.” For Thurman, it is precisely the “miracle” of religious experience, especially in the form of prayer, that allows us to practice such vulnerability and experience such faithful attention and care. Our experience of prayer, in sum, enables us to develop the “sense of being totally dealt with, completely understood, and utterly cared for;”³⁷ it allows us, in a word, to experience God’s empathy.

Importantly, as we have seen, this experience of being “totally understood and utterly cared for” is essential to empathizing with our neighbors.³⁸ In fact, it is such assurance, Thurman claims, that Jesus sought when he went off to pray at the end of a long day of ministry. Why? He needed to re-experience and receive anew the caring attention and concern of God, in order to offer it those around him. Similarly, the experience of having felt ourselves cared for and totally understood, which we arrive at most deeply in the space of prayer, produces in us a security that frees us attend to the needs of others and even desire unity with them.³⁹ Specifically, through prayer we cultivate an availability to fully seeing our neighbor and introducing “harmony into [her] life by sensing and honoring [her] need to be cared for and therefore understood.”⁴⁰

What does the connection this connection between vulnerability, assurance and care of God experienced in prayer and the necessity of identifying with and caring for the needs of our neighbor imply? Put simply, prayer serves as one of the primary places we experience the love and total attention of God from which our capacity to empathize emerges. Moreover, by continually and intentionally revisiting God’s confirming “yes” to our presence in the space of prayer, we can find fresh strength to understand, identify with, and care for our neighbors.

At this point, then, that we arrive at question of practice. How can we channel the experience of God’s empathy and love we know in prayer into a discipline of reconciliation with and love for neighbor? In

³³ Thurman, 96.

³⁴ Thurman, 82.

³⁵ Thurman, 83, 121.

³⁶ Thurman, 90, 100–101.

³⁷ Thurman’s words, “In religious experience a man has a sense of being touched at his inmost center, at his very core, and this awareness sets in motion the process that makes for his integration, his wholeness. It is as if he saw into himself, beyond all his fragmentation, conflicts, and divisiveness, and recognized his true self.” Thurman, 121-22.

³⁸ Thurman, 111.

³⁹ Thurman, 111.

⁴⁰ Thurman, 108.

the following, I lift up the three main avenues that Thurman identifies as inherent to the practice of empathizing with and ultimately loving our neighbors, while also drawing out the connection between them and the discipline of prayer. I conclude by reflecting on how imaginative and intercessory prayer might serve as additional avenues for fostering empathy in religious education.

Disciplines of an Empathetic Spirit: Practices for Fostering Neighbor-love

Unsurprisingly, Thurman is not silent on the topic of practice. On the contrary, he argues that relying on the spontaneous expression of empathy and compassion is not enough to fully engage the work of reconciliation or the discipline of love. There comes a point at which, Thurman underscores, we must take up our care-giving, harmonizing work deliberately.⁴¹ Having felt ourselves “totally dealt with” and understood, we must engage in disciplines that enable “the talent or gift [to] move forth into the life of another.”⁴² We must, in other words, begin to develop practices and attitudes that deepen our capacity to empathize with and care for our neighbors.

For Thurman, honing our empathy starts inauspiciously, through the simple cultivation of “interest in others,” as well as an effort to identify with them in their “need, anguish, or distress.”⁴³ Though simple in practice, such activities as he explains them require a discipline of presence, availability, and attentiveness that bears similarity to contemplative practices. For Thurman, this effort to attend to and identify with others then deepens our ability to connect with our neighbor’s need. Eventually, we search for avenues by which we might relate to her more fully and thus open a door of understanding between us. Once this mutual understanding is established, we become increasingly capable of exercising empathy, even in situations where we are the subject of this person’s hatred or harm, particularly in the form of non-violence.

Eventually, however, Thurman underscores that the effort to empathize with others moves towards the ultimate goal: that of loving our neighbor, even those whom we see as “enemies.” For Thurman, such a practice of love begins with the sheer acceptance of the other person. This acceptance, which is offered without condition, requires deliberate work: we must choose to move past “all that alienates, that is distasteful,”⁴⁴ as well as our ideas about how the other should be or act, and try to centralize the other’s need for to be cared for and understood. Only when we have chosen to release our judgments and resentments can our primary concern become to meet her need.

It is essential to underscore that, for Thurman, choosing to “accept” the other does not in any way equate to condoning or even subjecting oneself to hatred or violence. On the contrary, acceptance of the other is the refusal to believe that the other person is somehow categorically “evil” and therefore an exception to the rule of love. In this way, choosing to love and accept one’s neighbor is a form of asserting one’s existence and worth, which we have had confirmed in experiencing the love of God.

Yet love, for Thurman, does not ultimately end with acceptance; rather, to develop a discipline of love, one must also identify “the opening or openings through which [our] love can flow into the life of the other, and at the same time locate in [ourselves] openings through which [her] love can flow into me.”⁴⁵ Importantly, identifying such openings relies on an “increased understanding of the other.”⁴⁶ It is at this point that we see the potential role that “primary encounters” might play in a pedagogy for fostering love across lines of difference. Based on Thurman’s earlier emphasis regarding the necessity of encounter in the formation of an attitude of reverence and respect for other, one

⁴¹ Thurman, 108.

⁴² Thurman, 109.

⁴³ Thurman, 109.

⁴⁴ Thurman, 124.

⁴⁵ Thurman, 125.

⁴⁶ Thurman, 125.

would expect him to name face-to-face interactions as the way to both increase our understanding of others and create an opening by which our love can flow out to another person.

Interestingly, however, Thurman does not move in this direction. Rather, he suggests that one of the primary ways we can cultivate empathetic connection with and understanding of another person is to deploy our imagination. Specifically, Thurman suggests we undertake a discipline of visualizing ourselves in another person's place, looking out through her eyes and location in an effort to try to see and feel what she sees and feels.⁴⁷ This "disciplined use of the imagination" bears great similarity to the practice of perspective-taking, in which we attempt to guess at what another might be thinking, save one detail: Thurman's emphasis here is not on connecting with another person's thoughts, so much as her emotional state. In this way, the visualization process that he describes - what I will subsequently call imaginative inquiry - offers a way for people to practice empathizing with others without being physically proximate to them. Significantly, Thurman likens this process of imaginative inquiry as embodying the "*angelos* of God."⁴⁸ Indeed, in sending forth our imagination "to establish a point of focus in another man's spirit, and from the vantage point so to blend with the other's landscape that what he sees and feels is authentic - this is the great adventure in human relations" and a miracle.⁴⁹

The final avenue for fostering the discipline of love, which depends, as we have seen, on the ability to empathy, is that of taking our time. Specifically, Thurman argues that we must seek to relate to others "out of a sense of leisure," of spaciousness.⁵⁰ Here we see the contemplative attitude emerging once again as a central characteristic of developing understanding, empathy, and ultimately love for neighbor. Specifically, Thurman's emphasis here is on the practical act of taking one's time in relating to others. In other words, loving one's neighbor, for Thurman, is not an activity that can be hurried. In fact, the very attitude of patience, attentiveness, and care that we develop and hone through prayer is the same one we must bring to our encounters with others. Indeed, as Thurman underscores, "Whatever we learn of leisure in the discipline of silence, in meditation and prayer, bears rich, ripe fruit in preparing the way for love."⁵¹

It is here that we find ourselves returning to the theme of prayer and contemplation. For Thurman, empathy and love emerge fruit as an abiding work of work of prayer. As we noted above, Thurman sees prayer as the avenue by which we experience the assurance of God's care. Such assurance, in turn, becomes the reference point for our lives and sources of strength for living and especially empathizing. Significantly, Thurman sees the assurance experienced in prayer as something that infuses a person's entire life and relationships.

The experience of prayer, as I have been describing it, can be nurtured and cultivated. It can create a climate in which a man's (sic) life moves and functions. Indeed, it may become a way of living for the individual. It is ever possible that the time may come when a man carries such an atmosphere around with him and gives a quality to all that he does and communicates its spirit to all who cross his path.⁵²

Given the significance Thurman sees for prayer to provide us with the assurance crucial for empathizing, as well as tutor us in the contemplative posture central to its cultivation, how might

⁴⁷ Thurman, 125.

⁴⁸ Thurman, 126.

⁴⁹ Thurman, 125.

⁵⁰ Thurman, 126.

⁵¹ Thurman, 127.

⁵² Thurman, 103.

religious educators engage prayer as a pedagogy for nurturing empathy and practicing neighbor-love? While the possibilities for incorporating prayer into religious education abound, I briefly lift up two: intercessory prayer and imaginative prayer. I argue that each practice builds upon the others identified by Thurman to provide learners with both a fundamental experience of God's care and the opportunity to develop and deepen their empathy and care for others. When incorporated regularly into our religious and educational contexts, such practices can form a contemplative pedagogy that leads us towards the sacred: the sacred presence of God in us and our neighbor.

Prayer as Pedagogy: Praying Our Way to Peaceable Relations

Intercessory prayer. Intercession is one of the central practices of Christian communal life and one of the richest resources we have for deepening love for neighbor. Indeed, to bring the need of another before God is one of the clearest ways we can connect with that person in the space of prayer. Yet our praying for another in her moments of need must start with deep attentiveness: we slow down to see and linger with this person; we pause to contemplate and tune into her emotions, thoughts, and experience; we channel all our mental and emotional resources into the work of bringing this person before God. This kind of effort to “bring [a person] and his need clearly to mind, or into complete focus, and expose him to the scrutiny and love of God through our own thought” – which Thurman identifies as the work of intercessory prayer – can hone our capacities for both empathy and compassion. Moreover, in developing a habit of intercessory prayer for a particular person, we deepen the emotional and relational bonds we feel with him or her and thus strengthen the “mood of trust” crucial to caring for our neighbor. This is especially true when this person is a stranger, rival, or the religious or political “foe”: rather than focus on the harm done or hate between us and another person, we gradually come to recognize them as like us, needing the same care, belonging, and love. Intercessory prayer, in this way, can humanize those whom we have deemed as “other;” in fact, by praying for and attempting to empathize with this person's needs over and over, it becomes possible to slowly deconstruct our previous categories and re-perceive this person as our kin in Christ.

At the same time, intercession does not – and cannot – always take the same form. In interceding for others, particularly those who have harmed or oppressed us, our intercession may initially look much more than laments or protests than bold requests for the other's need for healing or mercy meet. We may, in fact, find ourselves interceding much more for ourselves than for our neighbors. Yet such intercession is hardly less valuable in terms of cultivating empathy than is intercession for others. On the contrary, in expressing our need to God, we have the opportunity to experience afresh the care of God that we did not receive – and deeply deserve. Only after

In the context of religious education and liturgical contexts, providing space for people of faith to intercede on behalf of people in their communities and beyond them can serve as pedagogy for cultivating empathy for others. Such intercessions can be engaged creatively, through performative activities or poetry, or through more traditional forms of verbal prayer, as well as corporately or quietly. It is essential, in all cases, however, that our intercessions are engaged with genuine emotion and are offered from a place attentiveness and presence. Finally, intercessions, when they are spoken or performed, can serve as sources of ongoing reflection and dialogue. By inviting a community to engage in critical dialogue around its intercessory prayers, we can offer people a chance to nuance and re-form their understandings of others and ourselves and thus deepen their capacities to empathize with their neighbors on ground.

Imaginative prayer. Imaginative praying, though not something Thurman directly addresses, offers another avenue for cultivating empathy. Much like the imaginative role taking that Thurman describes, imaginative forms of praying draw upon our creative faculties and emotional sensibilities to reach out towards God in prayer. Specifically, imaginative forms of praying involve placing ourselves

in an imagined setting in which God and/or others are present in some way⁵³ and then using our senses to imagine what we hear, see, smell, taste, or touch. Perhaps its most well-known developer of imaginative praying is St. Ignatius of Loyola, whose *Spiritual Exercises* offer a method of imaginative and dialogical prayer that rely on the imagination and the use of visual imagery and dialogue to deepen our knowing of and communion with God.⁵⁴

It is essential to underscore that many in Christian history and today have disparaged the role of imagination in prayer. Some of this distaste for image-based praying is due to historical disputes internal to Christian community; some of it is simply due to the preference for empirical or “objective” knowledge. While Thurman notes that imagination is often ridiculed in his time (as often is in ours) as anti-intellectual and childish, he claims that the ability to “send [our] imagination forth to establish a point of focus in another man’s spirit,” is “the great adventure in human relations.”⁵⁵ Moreover, such imaginative activity is a sacred. As Thurman describes it, to take up for a moment another person’s place: this is both the imagination’s greatest power and the avenue by which our knowing can be transformed into the “*angelos* of God.”⁵⁶

Practically, imaginative forms of praying for others, similar intercession, can orient our attention toward the other and arouse our emotional participation in relating to him or her, thus serving as a gateway for cultivating empathy and love for our neighbor. To engage in imaginative contemplation of one’s neighbor requires focusing our energy not on requests for the other’s welfare but on the other person herself. This can be done in many ways: by imagining ourselves, as Thurman describes, in the place and experience of another person; by observing God interact with another person whom you find hard to love; by visualizing ourselves present with the other alone; by placing ourselves on the sidelines of some moment in the other person’s life; or by calling up into memory a previous interaction with that person. Regardless of the avenue one chooses, however, the goal of such a practice is to attend fully to the other in way that helps us gain insight into her needs and emotions, her thoughts and experience. As during intercession, we must slow down to notice our or another’s emotional reactions. We take time to read wrinkled foreheads, to trace the anger in someone’s jaw, to notice the sad smile. We pause to ponder the need behind the presentation: we ask ourselves what this other might be feeling or thinking, what experiences past or present have come to shape her, and how we might show her the care and presence she needs. Imaginative prayer can serve as a kind of provocative seeing, a place where we come into deep contact with others’ pain, rage, desperation, resentment, self-hatred, or grief. In either case, imaginative praying again is a chance to cultivate a form of a contemplative practice. It requires mindfulness, involves holy listening, and openness to the present moment and person without judgement, as well as the capacity to empathize with the other person in her need.

At the same time, there is a danger in our that imaginative renderings of the other and engagements with her will not only be misguided (namely, not fully accurate) but may actually reproduce harmful historical and personal patterns of relating to others. In other words, both our imaginative and intercessory praying can, rather than guide us towards genuine connection with others,

⁵³ While the gospels have traditionally provided the content for such scenes, any kind of meaningful or even mundane setting can serve as a starting point. In fact, many who practice imaginative prayer today comment on how some of their most significant prayer experiences have come not through contemplation of the gospels but through imagining God in one of the ordinary spaces of one’s life.

⁵⁴ Margaret Silf, *Close to the Heart: A Practical Approach to Personal Prayer*. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2003), 127–29; Kevin F. O’Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), 141.

⁵⁵ Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, 125.

⁵⁶ Thurman, 126.

become “poisonous pedagogies” that conceal and reinforce dynamics of hatred, oppression, and implicit bias.

Creating opportunities for people to reflect critically upon and dialogue about their encounters with others in prayer offers one way that religious educators can address this challenge. One might, for instance, have people journal about their prayers and reflect on several things: how they constructed the scene (who was involved, what actually transpired in the course of prayer, ie. what did you do? God do? The other person or people do?), as well as their emotional reactions and any shifts in their thinking post-prayer.

Another option would be to provide people with space during a class or catechetical setting to engage in imaginative praying or imaginative encountering with people whom they normally dislike or find hard to appreciate or love. Ideally, such an opportunity would accompany an engagement or dialogue with another group. In either case, educators can create space for people to debrief and unpack their prayers in a way that both cements and nuances the experience. Much like one might do with a role play, theatre exercise, or “field trip”, religious educators can ask questions that help unearth assumptions and misunderstanding, uncover habitual yet harmful patterns of interacting, and provide opportunities for confession, hope, and the re-visioning of relationships, ideas, and systems that fuel animosity, hatred, and distrust. In this way, having people discuss their prayers aloud with others can lead to a renewing and even reconstruction of their ideas about who they and others are and thus a tool for cultivating empathy across lines of difference.

Each of these practices of prayer on their own, when incorporated in religious educational settings, offers a unique, yet complementary opportunities to help learners deepen their assurance of God’s care, as well as develop the capacity to sense and honor another’s needs. At the same time, when the practices are taken together, they offer a pedagogical pathway towards helping learners develop compassion for and convert to their neighbor. Of course, the platforms by which one integrates such practice into an educational pedagogy or curriculum can vary: for some it may entail building prayer “assignments” into a syllabus; for others it may mean creating rituals of silence or intercession; for still others it might look like joining such practices with other mediums such as music or the arts. The creative doors are wide open. The only guideline is that the neighbor remains central to the endeavor, with the goal that learners’ hearts – and ours as well – become refuges for the other⁵⁷ and homes in which our neighbor encounters God’s love.

Conclusion: Towards a Contemplative Pedagogy for Empathetic Practice

“The whole person responds – and only responds – to what it attends to,” writes Stephen Chase.⁵⁸ Attention is, in short, the first step towards moral response. As we have seen above, the practice of prayer – of God and our neighbor – is ultimately an act of attentiveness. Our attentiveness to God in prayer clues us in to the abiding love and mercy of God, awakening in us assurance and bringing us into communion, an integration of our life with the life of our Creator. Our attentiveness to people in prayer, likewise, which grows out of our own assurance before God, attunes us to their particularities and complexities, their needs and hidden thoughts. For Thurman, such prayer-filled attentiveness is crucial for developing care and love for our neighbor: “Whatever we learn of leisure in the discipline of silence, in meditation and prayer, bears rich, ripe fruit in preparing the way for love.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Thurman, 127.

⁵⁸ Steven Chase, *Nature as Spiritual Practice* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2011), 298.

⁵⁹ Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, 127.

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Christian religious education, like prayer, is a discipline in attentiveness. In this essay, I have suggested that using contemplative practices such as those identified above can become a pedagogy for a particular kind of attentiveness that leads to a conversion to our neighbor. Through experiencing the confirming care of God and others, we become liberated to attend to others' needs and begin to pray for others in ways that deepen our abilities to show empathy, compassion, and love across lines of social differences. Prayer in short pushes us outward, from the "trusting place where the soul and God" meet to the tension-rife space between neighbors until we have cultivated the skill of "tarrying with another" until our hearts becomes swinging doors. Can contemplation lead to compassion? Does prayer lead to social peace? While such questions will never be fully closed, my hope is that this paper is one, small step to clarifying the mystery. In either case, may religious educators keep us praying: for our neighbor's sake.

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Contemplative Pedagogy in Religious Education

Abstract

This paper highlights contemplative pedagogy as an educational approach with a demonstrated capacity to facilitate unification within the individual and among different people. The early parts of the paper present a biblically-rooted analysis of the human dynamics that impede peaceful coexistence and a discussion of the ways educators can exacerbate learners' alienation from the transcendent, themselves, and others. The latter part of the paper discusses scientific research and the author's own experiences that suggest possibilities for promoting unity through contemplative pedagogy, specifically through practices of transcendence, depth, and relatedness.

Introduction

The present historical moment is one of great cultural, political, and religious division. I need not devote precious words to piling up examples, for this reality is widely recognized. Although almost everyone laments this state of affairs and longs for a way out, overcoming current divisions is proving difficult to say the least.

It is my hope and my belief that our work as religious educators can help to overcome the things that divide us, and it is my aim in this paper to propose one kind of teaching that has proven effective in doing so, namely, contemplative pedagogy. Recognizing the diversity of teaching practices that fall under the descriptor of "contemplative," Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush synthesize that they all have "an inward or first-person focus that creates opportunities for greater connection and insight."¹ To this inward focus, Oren Ergas adds "a different engagement with time" and "an intention to be aware and attend to experience in a different way" as common features of contemplative teaching practices.² Such practices have become so popular that Ergas argues a "contemplative turn" has occurred in the world of education. One benefit of the popularity of contemplative practices in education is that they have been well studied from a number of disciplinary perspectives, yielding insights into the effectiveness of contemplative pedagogy for enhancing students' academic achievement, general well-being, and capacity for relationship and social relating.³ This last outcome makes contemplative pedagogy a particularly appealing realm of inquiry for educators seeking to heal current social divisions.

Before diving into pedagogical considerations, I will offer a theological analysis of the internal human dynamics that impede peaceful coexistence. I will argue that, if we encounter

¹ Daniel P. Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 5.

² Oren Ergas, "A Contemplative Turn in Education: Charting a Curricular-pedagogical Countermovement," *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 27.2 (2019): 255-56.

³ Barbezat's and Bush's book presents an overview of this body of research.

divisions in the world “out there,” it is because our societies reflect a prior division “in here,” that is, within the human heart. In the following section, I will analyze the ways in which education and educators can, intentionally or unintentionally, exacerbate the divisions among us. In the final part of the paper, I will explore the possibilities for promoting unity and openness generated by practices of contemplative teaching.

The Divisions Within

The political and social events of recent years have brought out into plain sight many of the things that divide us—political affiliation, citizenship status, religious and moral convictions, and others. However, it would be too facile an explanation to leave our social analysis at the level of these highly visible differences. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s research suggests that underlying highly visible political differences are the unspoken “deep stories” that give meaning to people’s experiences and the world in which they live.⁴ Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt offers compelling evolutionary and psychological evidence that the differences we see in people’s political and religious views are largely due to innate intuitions or gut feelings.⁵ Scripture pushes the analysis even deeper, offering valuable theological insights into the interplay of the human need for communion and freedom at the root of our felt responses to others and of the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of our experiences.

At the heart of the Christian faith and of Jesus’ teaching is a drive toward unity. Jesus prayed that we all “might be one” (Jn 17:21) and instructed his disciples, “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12:31; cf. Mt 22:39). Pursuant to uniting all God’s children, he challenged his followers to root out the causes of division and antipathy from within: “For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come” (Mk 7:18–21). Although talk about the heart can strike the modern person’s ear as mere sentimentality, Jesus’ words reflect a profound insight into human psychology. The heart is the key.⁶ Whatever we set our hearts upon determines where our lives lead and who we become.⁷ If we fuel our desires for material goods and social success, we become materialistic, self-absorbed people. If we allow our desires for created things to run unchecked, our desires multiply and our lives become fragmented. Like Saint Paul, we become conflicted within ourselves, doing what we know we ought not and failing to do what we know we should (Rom 7:15). And so, if we experience divisions in our societies and relationships and fragmentation in our lives, that is first and foremost because our hearts are divided. These external divisions have their origin in the divisions within.

The text of Genesis 3 reflects the Judeo-Christian understanding of whence these internal divisions arose. The story of Adam and Eve taking the fruit from the forbidden tree dramatizes the

⁴ Arlie Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: The New Press, 2018).

⁵ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

⁶ For Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries, the heart (*leb* in Hebrew, *kardia* in Greek) represented the center of the human person, the source of the human’s intellectual powers as well as the emotions.

⁷ This anthropological insight is a central theme of Augustine’s *Confessions* and, more recently, James K. A. Smith’s *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016).

tension human beings experience between their desire for communion and their desire for autonomy. We want to belong, to experience intimacy and love, but we also want to be in control of our own lives.⁸ The Genesis account suggests the first humans were unable to balance these competing desires and so broke communion with God, grasping at what God had reserved for Godself. This would prove a fatal mistake. It is in God that human beings find their center and their wholeness. To turn away from God is, in the words of Saint Augustine, to turn from unity to be lost in multiplicity.⁹ The curses of Genesis 3:14-19 record the consequences of this break in communion. Having cut themselves off from God, human beings would henceforth experience alienation from themselves, one another, and the created world.

Fallen humanity's alienation from God has been experienced in different ways in different times. Much of Scripture and a certain strand of Christian preaching expresses this alienation in terms of being "enemies" to God (Rom 5:8) or of suffering God's wrath in punishment for sin.¹⁰ In more recent history, many have experienced this alienation as God's absence. This feeling was perhaps most poignant in the wake of the atrocities of the 20th century, especially the Holocaust. In the face of so much suffering and human brutality, many wondered, "Where is God? How could God let this happen?" Even more recently, many have questioned God's existence, not because of some great tragedy, but rather because they do not feel God's presence and they feel they have no need for God as an explanation for the world as they encounter it.¹¹ In the words of Ronald Rolheiser, they have no "vital sense of God within the bread and butter of life."¹² As Rolheiser points out, many practicing Christians experience this sense of absence today, not only secularized persons.

If the Christian tradition is right that in God we "move and live and have our being" (Acts 17:28), alienation from God unavoidably leads to alienation from ourselves. When we do not recognize our true identity as beloved children of God, we are compelled to reinforce our own egos by means of titles, achievements, and possessions in order to compensate for this lack of sense of self.¹³ Because the ego is a shoddy construction, we find ourselves constantly defending it by ignoring our faults, vulnerabilities, and insecurities or by scapegoating and projecting them onto others.¹⁴ We deny our embodiedness and our mortality. And because we human beings are ultimately incapable of bearing the burden of creating ourselves and a meaning for life *ex nihilo*,

⁸ See Raj Raghunathan, *If You're So Smart, Why Aren't You Happy?* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2016), 239.

⁹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), II.i(1).

¹⁰ A classic example of the latter is Jonathan Edward's famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

¹¹ For a historical account of how secularization occurred, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

¹² See Ronald Rolheiser, *The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 17.

¹³ See Ronald Rolheiser, *The Shattered Lantern*, 37-38.

¹⁴ See Bernard Lonergan's *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) on the dynamics of bias and Rene Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephan Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) on the scapegoat mechanism.

many today are crumbling under the weight of it, succumbing to forms of mental illness including anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse.¹⁵

Alienation from God and alienation from ourselves both contribute to our alienation from one another. When God confronts Adam about disobeying God's command, Adam's immediate response is to blame Eve (Gen 3:12). Adam's response exemplifies the sort of defensiveness and violence with which humans often respond to perceived threats, whether to bodily or psychological integrity. When we feel that our well-being is threatened, we tend to project outward the tension created by the perceived threat. Understanding this psychological proclivity helps to make sense of some of people's more regrettable social behaviors. The poor white man's self-disdain has often been redirected into boasts of racial superiority.¹⁶ Fears stoked by economic instability have recently given rise to anti-immigrant sentiments around the world.¹⁷ Fearfulness for national and personal security have fueled the demonizing of people from certain countries and geographical regions. Such are the roots of racism, nativism, and every form of hate and discrimination.

The Genesis account thus illuminates how internal divisions—namely, alienation from God and from ourselves—leads to divisions in our societies. Because God created us for Himself, who is love (1 Jn 4:8), our wholeness and fulfillment as human beings lies in receiving God's love. However, receiving God's love can be difficult because it requires acknowledging our dependence upon something outside of ourselves. It means accepting our fundamental insufficiency. This is essentially the same decision that the first human beings faced. Like them, we often fail to balance our needs for communion and autonomy. Because it is difficult for us to accept our dependence upon another, we pursue many lesser substitutes for love like honor, popularity, a sense of superiority, and power. But because none of these substitutes is sufficient in itself, we are always seeking more and end up pulled in many different directions. Being at war with ourselves, we project our inner conflict out into the world.

The primary battleground for world unity, therefore, is not in the streets or at negotiation tables but rather in the depths of the human heart. We will never heal the divisions we see in society until we heal the prior divisions in our own hearts. This is why Jesus enjoins his followers to be "pure of heart" (Mt 5:8). If we educators aspire to promote healing in the world, we do well to seek methods of educating that encourage learners to turn to their own inner depths. However, as we will see presently, the unfortunate reality is that modern education often does just the opposite.

When Education Contributes to Alienation

Education has tremendous potential to promote unity and connectedness in the world. However, the sad truth is that education has sometimes had the opposite effect, contributing to the

¹⁵ For research on the connection between lack of meaning and mental illness, see Aaron Antonovsky, *Unraveling the Mystery of Health: How People Manage Stress and Stay Well* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987). For an psychological analysis of how modern life overwhelms many people's meaning-making, see Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ See Jonathan M. Metzler, *Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment Is Killing America's Heartland* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

¹⁷ Beets, Gijss, and Frans Willekens. "The Global Economic Crisis and International Migration: An Uncertain Outlook." *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research* 2009 (2009): 19-38.

alienation of students from the transcendent, themselves, and each other. Such alienation can and has occurred in religious and secular educational context alike.

Most obvious are the ways that secular institutions have sometimes contributed to students' alienation from the transcendent by marginalizing the spiritual dimension of the human person in educational settings. This marginalizing of spirituality commonly derives from a prioritizing of a positivistic outlook and instrumental reasoning to the exclusion of what Michael Polanyi calls "tacit knowing."¹⁸ In their book *Cultivating the Spirit*, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm criticize this modern assumption, pointing out that what secular institutions and educators often present as a neutral position is in fact nothing of the sort. By marginalizing the spiritual, secular institutions are effectively promote a positivistic, materialistic, agnostic/atheistic perspective. Furthermore, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm point out that, contrary to what they might profess, secular institutions are actually very much involved in students' spirituality insofar as activities like orientation, advising, and residential life often bear upon students' purposes, hopes, values, and beliefs, which are commonly religious and spiritual in nature.¹⁹ The main purpose of their book is to present their findings from a seven-year national study that highlights the many positive outcomes of supporting students' spiritual growth during their time at college.

Ironically, religious educational institutions can sometimes also contribute to students' alienation from the transcendent. The most glaring instances are those pertaining to scandals, such as the Catholic clergy sex abuse scandal that has driven many from the Catholic Church and, in some cases, undermined people's faith in God. What many people have found most repellent about the abuse scandal is the apparently greater concern of bishops for protecting the reputation of the institutional Church than for protecting and tending to the victims. A more subtle problem are failures of religious communities and religious education to communicate the relevance and meaningfulness of religion.²⁰ Perceiving their religious community or tradition to be overly concerned with the details of ritual and doctrine, some conclude that there is nothing of real substance or value in their faith tradition.

Education has at times also contributed to students' alienation from themselves. Many would argue that this problem is particularly acute in modern education. Parker Palmer suggests that part of the problem is that "objectivism" is the primary paradigm of knowing operative in the educational world today. This is problematic because this mode of knowing "portrays something we can achieve only by disconnecting ourselves, physically and emotionally, from the thing we want to know."²¹ It is easy to recognize this paradigm at work in secular educational institutions,

¹⁸ Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 4.

¹⁹ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm clarify that they employ the term "spirituality" to refer to "our inner, subjective life," "our affective experiences," "the values we hold most dear," and "aspects of our experience that are not easy to define or talk about, such things as intuition, inspiration, the mysterious, and the mystical" (*Cultivating the Spirit: How College Can Enhance Students' Inner Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 4).

²⁰ For a discussion of some reasons why young people fail to find meaning or relevance in the Catholic faith, see Saint Mary's Press, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2017).

²¹ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 10th Anniversary Edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 52.

especially in those that elevate the “hard” sciences above other areas of study. However, this approach to education infiltrates religious institutions as well. It manifests in an intellectualist approach to religious education that focuses relentlessly on doctrine while ignoring learners’ embodiedness, affectivity, personal history, relationships, and spirituality.²² Such was one critique of the high school religion curriculum framework developed by the U.S. bishops some years ago.²³ To treat students as such truncated subjects—and bracketing their spirituality in particular—is, in the words of Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, “to encourage a kind of fragmentation and a lack of authenticity.”²⁴

Finally, education can further alienate people from one another. Palmer criticizes that the objectivist approach to education divides the teacher (i.e., the one who controls the knowledge) from the students (i.e., the ones who receive the knowledge). This occurs when teachers hide behind their advanced degrees, titles, and lecture notes and refuse to engage with the deep questions and lives of their students or to reveal their own humanity to them. Palmer compares this development in education to developments in modern warfare, wherein it has become possible to kill our enemies from ever greater distances and therefore avoid acknowledging their humanity. While such objectivism might be the more common bias of secular education, sectarian education can lead to similar outcomes for different reasons. Our faith community sometimes devolve into insular “tribes,” and our religious convictions sometimes close us off from listening to the stories and perspectives of others. One symptom of such distorted religion is the deployment of labels like “heretics,” “bad Christians,” “liberals,” “conservatives,” etc.—all synonyms for the “other” with whom we refuse to enter into relationship.

I believe that Palmer accurately diagnoses an underlying cause of these three forms of alienation—whether in secular or sectarian settings—when he writes, “The external structures of education would not have the power to divide us as deeply as they do if they were not rooted in one of the most compelling features of our inner landscape—fear.”²⁵ He continues, “We fear encounters in which the other is free to be itself, to speak its own truth, to tell us what we may not wish to hear. We want those encounters on our own terms, so that we can control their outcomes, so that they will not threaten our view of world and self.”²⁶ In other words, many if not all of these alienating forces within modern education trace back to tensions within the inner lives of educators, educators who desire certainty, clarity, and control and who fear the chaos they might encounter in themselves or in genuine encounter with others. We are alienated from ourselves, and, failing to acknowledge and address our inner fragmentation, we alienate ourselves from others.

²² The problem in such an approach to religious education is not the instruction in doctrine (which is salutary) but rather the imbalance in the formation of learners’ minds and these other aspects of their being.

²³ See, for example, William J. O’Malley, “Faulty Guidance: A New Framework for High School Catechesis Fails to Persuade,” *America* (September 14, 2009), <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/707/article/faulty-guidance>

²⁴ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 7.

²⁵ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 36.

²⁶ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 37-38.

Contemplative Teaching as a Resource for Healing Alienation

Palmer's writing is one sample of a body of work that seeks to analyze and address the causes of alienation within our educational systems and institutions, to return us to ourselves and to one another.²⁷ There is much of value in these previous works. My aim in this latter part of the paper is to raise up contemplative pedagogy as another resources for healing division. In so doing, I am not presenting a merely theoretical framework. One reason for raising up contemplative teaching practices is that these methods have been rigorously studied and found to produce reliably a variety of desirable outcomes.

Maria Lichtmann's book wonderful *The Teacher's Way* offers a helpful framework for examining the methods and benefits of contemplative pedagogy. Lichtmann describes her contemplative approach to teaching in terms of the four-fold design of the ancient Christian practice of *lectio divina*. She explains:

Corresponding to *lectio* (reading) is **attention**, an abiding energy of the mind that is a just and loving gaze upon reality; corresponding to *meditatio* is **reflection**, the turning over and mirroring from different angles of the subjects that we attend to; corresponding to *oratio* is prayer's **receptivity** and relatedness, that inner openness allowing us to be moved and changed by what we attend to and reflect upon, making transformation possible; and finally *contemplatio*, which meant seeing God, leads to that **transformative vision** that can see "that of God" in the other and in creation.²⁸

Lichtmann describes contemplative teaching as a practice that embodies three spiritual practices that "all serious practitioners exemplify"—namely, depth, relatedness, and transcendence—that prove to be powerful resources for healing the three-fold alienation described above.²⁹ While there are many aspects of Lichtmann's that merit reflection, I will focus my analysis below on these three spiritual practices as they take shape in the practice of contemplative teaching.

Transcendence

Above we discussed how human beings' alienation from themselves and others is a consequence of our alienation from God. According to the Genesis account, the first humans sought to seize control of their own being rather than gratefully receiving it from God. Their desire for autonomy at the expense of communion was the beginning of humanity's alienation from God.

²⁷ Another notable work is bell hooks's *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

²⁸ Maria Lichtmann, *The Teacher's Way: Teaching and the Contemplative Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 12. Bolding original.

²⁹ Lichtmann, *The Teacher's Way*, 30.

We also discussed how the “objectivism” ensconced in modern education reinforces this alienation by bracketing and diminishing the spiritual dimension of people’s lives.

Lichtmann’s writing offers profound insights into how contemplative teaching can help to heal such alienation from the transcendent. When Lichtmann writes about transcendence as a pedagogical and spiritual practice, she means the practice of relinquishing control and opening up to something outside of ourselves. The contemplative approach stands in stark contrast with modern methods of education that, in the words of Palmer, aim to “shore up our self-aggrandizing myth that knowledge is power and that with it we can run the world.”³⁰ We saw this mentality exemplified above in narrowly scientific and doctrinal educational approaches and in those educators and religious officials who exercise a tight-fisted control of the classroom or potentially scandalous situations in order to keep chaos at bay. Attentive to the dangers of an overly-controlling approach to education, Lichtmann offers that “in contemplative teaching what we are teaching for is not freedom alone... but this deep communion.”³¹ Our need for communion is inescapable, and we are only happy and at peace when we are in communion with God. As it says in 1 John 4:18, “perfect love drives out fear” and as such is the only cure for the divisions we experience within ourselves and in the world.

One way contemplative teaching reestablishes this balance of freedom and communion (indeed, freedom in communion) is by utilizing the resources of poetry and story. There is always more to reality than we can fully cognize. As Michael Polanyi puts it, “we know more than we can tell.”³² Our language is particularly limited when we restrict ourselves to analytical, scientific, and conceptual modes of discourse. Nevertheless, we are attracted to these forms of language because they appeal to our desire for clarity and control. Poetry, by contrast, does not attempt to domesticate reality or pin down the transcendent aspects of our experience. Rather it evokes them using the language of simile and metaphor. It utilizes the concrete to point us to the transcendent. Breaking us out of an “immanent frame,” such language enables us to recover a sense of the wonder and expansiveness of reality.³³ In this way, writes Lichtmann, “metaphor carries us across from the known to the unknown.”³⁴ Entering into the realm of the poetic, we leave some security behind, but we are compensated by rediscovering “a pattern of interconnectedness among the things of this life and their inherent mystery.”³⁵

As an instructor in my university’s Core Curriculum, every fall I read through one of the Gospels, including the parables, with a class of first-year students. The parables of Jesus are a classic example of poetic language that ushers us from the realm of the familiar into the that of mystery. Jesus’ parables always relate to something that would have been familiar to his audience—casting nets in the sea, laboring in the vineyard, baking bread, shepherding sheep. However, equally characteristic of the parables is an unexpected twist that upends the audience’s

³⁰ Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 57.

³¹ Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way*, 90.

³² Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 4.

³³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542.

³⁴ Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way*, 98.

³⁵ Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way*, 98.

accustomed way of thinking about things: The vineyard owner gives equal pay to the last to arrive and to the first. The disrespected father runs out to embrace his profligate son. The master commends the dishonest steward. Walter Conn describes the parables' effect eloquently: "Having robbed us of the certainties of our given world, they would leave us at the brink of relativity, naked and totally vulnerable before the divine mystery that is God."³⁶

More often than not, the god that people reject is not the God of Abraham, Jacob, and Jesus Christ but rather an idol, an image of god that is too small. They are right to reject a god that is so insignificant. Reopening someone to the transcendent God requires an encounter with something bigger than themselves and bigger than the productions of their limited imaginings and concepts. In this regard, the confusion the parables produce is not a pedagogical shortcoming but rather their intended effect. Jesus' intention is to disrupt complacent thinking and open us up to the utter mystery of God.

Contemplative pedagogy serves a similar purpose. Lichtmann suggests that "there is a something 'more' in encounters between teachers and students and students and subjects that we cannot wholly receive and assimilate... a mysterious third enters this encounter... We could call it 'truth' or simply acknowledge our being called by it."³⁷ By utilizing the language of poetry and story, creating space for silence, and dwelling upon the texts, contemplative teaching draws students' attention to this "mysterious third." It frees us from the concepts and categories that make us feel secure but at the same time cage us in. Such encounters and expansions of our awareness are the necessary means of overcoming our alienation from the transcendent.

Depth

When Lichtmann writes about "depth," she means "the recessive 'ground'" behind our decisions and actions, what psychotherapists call the unconscious and what the Bible calls the "heart."³⁸ We have seen the problems caused when we become alienated from this dimension of our lives. Lacking awareness of ourselves, we live in a state of dis-integration and self-deception, and sometimes inflict on others that pain that we feel within ourselves. Furthermore, when alienated from ourselves, we are cut off from God because our "psychological and spiritual depths... is where God meets us."³⁹

Lichtmann proposes silence and reflection as two tools for re-establishing the connection with our inner depths. Silence is powerful, particularly today when there is so little silence in our lives.⁴⁰ From the omnipresent screens and advertisements to the chattering of their professors to

³⁶ Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986), 214.

³⁷ Lichtman, *The Teacher's Way*, 103.

³⁸ Lichtmann, *The Teacher's Way*, 31.

³⁹ Lichtmann, *The Teacher's Way*, 31

⁴⁰ However, silence can also be frightening to certain students. See David A. Treleaven, *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing* (New York: Norton and Company, 2018).

the earbuds attached to their ears, our students are immersed in noise almost constantly. Taking a contemplative approach to teaching transforms the classroom into an oasis of calm in a busy world. Teachers can carve out a space for silence in a number of ways: asking students to turn off and put away their electronic devices, allowing a meaningful pause (e.g., ten seconds) for reflection when asking questions, inserting writing pauses into class discussions, and sitting quietly with the text before diving into discussion and commentary. Silence makes deep reflection possible.

Time is another requisite. Teachers can give their students the gift of time in the form of in-class writing, at-home journaling, and assignments of a length that makes real reflection possible. Students should have opportunities to reflect on themselves as well as on the texts. Teachers can encourage them to pay attention to their own thinking, their emotional reactions to different events and ideas, and to their values.⁴¹ Studies suggest that creating opportunities for self-reflection that give students space to process their experiences and deepen their self-understanding promotes equanimity and assists them in finding meaning in life.⁴²

Another way that modern education often alienates students from themselves is by treating them as disembodied minds—by requiring them to bracket their values and feelings and by privileging rational, empirical modes of knowing over experiential, intuitive, and imaginative modes. Scholar-practitioners like Jerome Barryman and Courtney Goto have advocated for the importance of play and embodied learning.⁴³ Attention to the body is also characteristic of contemplative pedagogy. Practices like walking meditations, yoga, and labyrinth walking have all made their way into the educational context.⁴⁴

One contemplative practice that incorporates both silence and the body is meditation. It has become my own practice to begin each class with a period of silent meditation (a breathing meditation for my undergraduate students and contemplative prayer for my seminary students). In both cases the meditation involves assuming an upright, stable position, breathing deeply, and focusing attention on our breathing, either the sensation of the chest rising and falling or the air flowing in and then out. I remind students that, as any noises or thoughts distract them, they should gently bring their attention back to their breathing. This practice is a valuable one for today's young people. Besides having their attention constantly divided by the hyper-sensory environment in which they live, they face constant demands from parents, friends, employers, and general social expectations to be this or that. Contemplative practices return learners to their bodies and generally help them to center themselves. As a result, they feel less anxious and more comfortable in their own skin.⁴⁵

⁴¹ For guidance see Mark D. Morelli, *Self-Possession: Being at Home in Conscious Performance* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Loneragan Institute, 2015) and Alexander W. Astin, *Mindworks: Becoming More Conscious in an Unconscious World* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2007).

⁴² Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 54.

⁴³ Jerome Barryman, *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991; Courtney Goto, *The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Leaning into God's New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

⁴⁴ See Barbezat and Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, Ch.8

⁴⁵ See Barbezat and Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, 27-29 for research on meditation's capacity to decrease anxiety and enhance health in other ways.

Relatedness

When Lichtmann writes of contemplative teaching as a spiritual practice of relatedness she means that it nurtures awareness of our interconnectedness. Despite its claims to superior knowledge, purely objectivist approaches to education yield only a limited sort of understanding because they require us to bracket certain aspects of our experience and our humanity. Lichtmann suggests that a contemplative is likewise committed to understanding things clearly, but that a contemplative approach pursues understanding by seeking connection rather than “objective” distance: “If contemplation is seeing what is really there, then it more deeply relates us to the world, not to our own fancies and projections.”⁴⁶ Likewise, where sectarian approaches sometimes put the emphasis on differences and boundaries, contemplative practices help us to approach others in a spirit of openness and hospitality.

This has been my own experience in taking a contemplative approach to teaching. In my first-year Core course, I make of point of cultivating attentiveness in my students in the early weeks of the semester. Building upon our daily practice of attending to our breathing during meditation, I coach them in attending carefully to the readings and to the comments of their peers during class discussion. I warn them of the ways our assumptions and pre-conceived notions can distort what we read and hear, and encourage them to make the effort to hear what the other person is actually saying. These practices of attentive reading and listening dispose learners to receive their classmates’ views with greater compassion and understanding.

The contemplative practices of transcendence, depth, and relatedness are mutually reinforcing. As Lichtmann explains, “in seeing ourselves in our depths, we see the other in relation; in seeing the other, we see God.”⁴⁷ When learners receive the opportunity and support to enter into their own inner depths and grow more comfortable with what they find there, they create a space within themselves that is hospitable to others. Research on contemplative pedagogy gives us an insight into how this occurs in practice. Because meditation puts the mind and body in a relaxed state, it deactivates the body’s natural alarm systems and thereby helps students to engage in class activities and discussions in a spirit of openness rather than defensiveness.⁴⁸ Engaging in meditation over an extended period of time instills in practitioners an ability to regulate their emotional responses, which in turn enables them to respond less impulsively or defensively when confronted with the unfamiliar.⁴⁹ The ability to return to baseline more quickly increases the likelihood that students will respond to another person calmly rather than reacting to them as a threat. This is precisely what those of us who employ contemplative pedagogy have seen at Seton Hall. Our students who engage in contemplative practices typically become more patient listeners,

⁴⁶ Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way*, 32.

⁴⁷ Lichtmann, *The Teacher’s Way*, 80.

⁴⁸ For research findings, see Barbezat and Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, 24-32.

⁴⁹ Barbezat and Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, 30.

disagree with one another more respectfully, are less inclined to escalate an argument, and exhibit greater sensitivity and empathy toward one another.

One contemplative practice in particular, the loving-kindness meditation, seems to be especially efficacious in terms of promoting healthy relating. This meditation involves first thinking about all the good things one desires for oneself such as health, peace, and happiness and then extending those same wishes to another person (a classmate, for example). Studies have found that engaging in this meditation over time rewires the brain's neural circuitry associated with emotion, increasing the meditator's empathy and other positive emotions when interacting with others.⁵⁰ In their national study, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm found that students who engaged in meditation practices like this one showed more growth in measures of caring and connectedness than their peers.⁵¹

Conclusion

I have argued above that the external things that divide us—race, politics, religion, nationality—are not the real problems. This is not to say that racism, nativism, and the like are not highly problematic. Nor is this to dismiss the value of efforts to address these problems by means of activism, dialogue, conflict mediation, and political mechanisms. Rather my point is that underlying these external divisions are pre-existing divisions within each of us. Our struggle since the beginning of human history has been to balance our desires for autonomy and communion. We have failed consistently to strike the balance, preferring control over community. We seek to seize what can only be received. We seek security on our own terms rather than entrusting ourselves to God and one another. Ever grasping for more, our desires and insecurities multiply and our inner lives become fragmented. At war with ourselves, we inevitably find ourselves at war with one another.

If the root of our social divisions indeed lies within each individual, pedagogies that attend to learners' interior lives will be an indispensable resource for religious educators seeking to heal these divisions. Drawing upon the work of Maria Lichtmann and current research, I have presented examples of how contemplative pedagogy serves this aim and evidence that it serves it well. Each of us "lives and moves and has our being" in an ecosystem constituted by self, other, and God. The contemplative practices of depth, relatedness, and transcendence promote the habits and learning conditions needed to attend to and restore balance to this ecosystem.

Of course, as with any educational approach, there are potential pitfalls associated with contemplative pedagogy.⁵² Practitioner Anita Houck explains that contemplative practices can be utilized out of context in a way that disrespects their native religious traditions.⁵³ Furthermore, teachers who engage their students with contemplative practices run the risk of exacerbating the anxiety of students who have experienced trauma or who already feel silenced due to their

⁵⁰ Barbezat and Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, 30.

⁵¹ Astin, Astin, and Lindholm, *Cultivating the Spirit*, 82.

⁵² For some critiques of contemplative pedagogy, see Oren Ergas, "A Contemplative Turn in Education: Charting a Curricular-pedagogical Countermovement," *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 27 (2): 255-56.

⁵³ Anita Houck, "Contemplative Pedagogy: Experiments and Reflections," *Horizons* 46(1) (2019): 113-139.

membership in a marginalized group.⁵⁴ Given all that we have discussed above, it comes as no surprise that contemplative teachers routinely encounter resistance or difficulty when inviting students to enter their own inner depths. Often there are things hidden in the depths that we would rather not confront. Notwithstanding, challenging ourselves and our students (respectfully and responsibly) to confront the demons within is a necessary risk because, unless we do, will continue to project those demons outward and to sow the seeds of division in our communities.

⁵⁴ For a scholarly effort to address these issues in practice, see Treleaven, *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness*.

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EXAMINING FAITH:
THE INCLUSION OF THE SPIRITUALLY TRAUMATIZED LGBTQ BELIEVER OF
COLOR IN AFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE MINISTRIES

Abstract

The main purpose of this writing is to study and discuss the emotional damage sustained by LGBTQ Faith Believers of Color, and how such experiences affect their spiritual journeys and belief in God. This paper seeks to aid [prospective] inclusive and affirming ministries in their efforts to innovate and restructure their current curriculum so that it may provide the spiritually traumatized Believer of Color services through which they could achieve holistic healing and restore their dislocated or diminished faith. This research furthers the belief that introducing new spiritual teaching methodologies and coaching strategies will prove beneficial for the religious organization, teacher and student.

I. The Problem

In the Bible, there are many stories of those who had been feeling lost and then miraculously restored. Even old songs suggest that being lost but found and brought back to God could bring forth healing, power and joy. I do not challenge that fact; however, I do question what occurs when being restored to a community, even one that is considered a group of one's peers, could potentially cause more anguish to those suffering from preexisting traumas. This further raises the question: What must be taken into account in order to provide pastoral counseling to a community of LGBTQ Believers of Color that best facilitates spiritual growth?

Issue

As a certified coach, religious educator and spiritual teacher, I have heard many stories of spiritual trauma occurring in affirming and inclusive ministries.¹ Being a former minister in the affirming and inclusive church, I understand the hurt experienced by those disillusioned by conventional teachings, and their desire to let go of anything related to God. In this paper, I will investigate the meaning of faith trauma, as well as its effects on the LGBTQ Believer of Color, in order to eventually aid in the development of a new paradigm, or teaching methodology that

¹ "Affirming" and "inclusive" descriptors imply that the organization asserts in its mission that it is accepting of the LGBTQ Faith Community. However, there is a slight difference in the meanings. Inclusive means that one is welcomed in the setting. Basically, they include all that would like to be a part. Whereas, affirming also means that they also affirm one's entire being, including sexuality. Just the same, there is not one better than the other. They both offer a safe space for those seeking a worship space where they are free to be themselves.



would benefit the “spiritually traumatized” hoping to reintegrate themselves in an affirming and/or inclusive ministry.

Under our current government’s administration, sexual orientation has reemerged as a topic of moral turpitude, and the preaching hour has been filled with vehemence as pastors try to bridge the gap between societal changes and traditional teachings that prohibit and condemn homosexuality. James V. Brownson states: “The church is stuck on the question of homosexuality. In many North American denominations, despite vote after vote and debate after debate, questions remain, tempers flare, and peace and clarity seem continually elusive. In the last two decades, no issue has been more polarizing or contentious, particularly for mainline churches.”²

Unfortunately, historical fundamental teachings in traditional churches, especially those within the African [American] diaspora, have not only prevented the acknowledgement the LGBTQ community outside of condemnation, but they have also defied the ability of members to truly “love thy neighbor”.³ It would seem that in an effort to free themselves from their oppression, those have become victimized have also, in turn, become oppressors themselves. Philosopher Paulo Freire noted that, “But almost always during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or “sub-oppressors.” The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped.”⁴

The question becomes: How can one overlook the effects of the traumatization that has occurred within LGBTQ community while developing methods of pastoral care? Furthermore, how does one heal a community that has suffered previously, while they continue to identify as an oppressed collective?

One method is to examine at the faith journey of individuals within the African-American LGBTQ community. Faith is often the thread that connects the African American historical journey, church, community and family unit.⁵ Understanding the manner in which all these aspects are enmeshed is crucial to implementation of updated religious curricula and how it applies to the African-American LGBTQ community.

Understanding the effects of faith, as well as its connection to personal and spiritual trauma in the LGBTQ community, requires the ability to explore key areas that have historically shaped sexuality, as well as how the subject has been engaged among members. Without proper analysis of the effects of faith trauma, there is a risk of leaving a vital aspect in need of healing overlooked as it relates to the holistic health of the mind, body, spirit and soul.

² James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013), 3.

³ (Mark 12:31 NRSV)

⁴ Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 45.

⁵ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981), 90.

Faith Healing and the Bible

Trauma is understood to be “a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury; an emotional upset; and emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster”⁶ Herein, I define *faith trauma* as “a traumatic act that causes one to question the Image of God and/or the image of themselves in God.” The most important thing to understand is what is perceived as *traumatic* is respective to the person; so it is respectfully that I offer the idea that faith is important to acquiring healing.

In Acts, John and Peter are greeted by a lame man who was lain outside of a gate named Beautiful. The “traumatized” man, who was disabled from birth, was begging for money. Peter told him that he could offer him something else, in the name of Jesus. He then told the man to stand up and walk. The Bible says that “immediately” the man’s legs were strengthened. The people inquired of the man’s healing and was told by Peter that “faith in His name...has made this man strong...”⁷

The woman with a hemorrhaging issue was healed by touching the cloak of Jesus. She had been bleeding for twelve years but she believed if she could just touch his garment, she would be cured. Upon her restoration, she was told by Jesus that her “faith had made her well.”⁸

Most popularly referred to as an example of restoration for a victim of trauma and faith healing is the story of Job. It took a strong level of faith on Job’s behalf to remain loyal to God and His Plan. God trusted Job enough to offer him as a beacon of faith.

In Luke 5: 17-39, there is a yet another story of healing. A few townspeople took a man who could not walk to see Jesus. The space was so crowded that the group decided to cut a hole in the ceiling and lower the man down to Jesus. These men recognized the needs of their brother and overcame an obstacle as a unit in order to get him restored. The Word says that “when Jesus saw their faith,” he looked at the lame man and spoke to him absolving him of any condemnation.⁹ Griswold points out that a congregation that sees itself more like family, as opposed to a collection of members, tends to be unified by different incentives or motives, i.e. community activism.¹⁰ Through their collective actions, not only was the man healed but others were able witness the miracle themselves, forever imbued with the importance of supporting one another.

⁶ Merriam-Webster, Inc., *Trauma*. n.d. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trauma> (accessed October 1, 2017).

⁷ (Acts 3:16 NRSV)

⁸ (Matthew 9:23 NRSV)

⁹ (Luke 5:19 NRSV)

¹⁰ Griswold, *Cultures and Societies in a Changing World*, 121.

II. The Education of the LGBTQ Faith Believer of Color

In opening a conversation about redesigning the established curriculum in the church, it is necessary to look at how the understanding of homosexuality historically and theologically has affected Christian Education as a whole.¹¹ Considering the fact that the word, “homosexual” was not coined until 1869, the questions that arise when trying to engage the universal church regarding the subject seem to be never ending. The biggest historical and theological arguments stem from the understanding of the differences in the sexuality models, and definitions as they relate to present-day culture, as well as the interpretation of the Bible in its literal sense.¹² Although these debates have been ongoing for hundreds of years, the first biblical translation to actually use the term, “homosexuality”, was the Revised Standard Version published in 1946. Furthermore, in 1952, the American Psychological Association, listed homosexuality in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) as a sociopathic personality disturbance, which remained an accepted definition until 1973.

Historical Perspectives

When addressing historical perspectives of homosexuality in Christian Education, one must begin with the Jewish and Greco-Roman writers and theologians. Around the 4th century, Greek philosopher, Plato in *The Republic* aimed to illustrate how government and education could produce a “just” state.¹³ During this time, ancient Greeks believed that human beings had animated bodies which were driven by a three-part soul: 1) the appetitive part which expresses the needs that brought their fulfillment; 2) the spirited part which shifts the unnecessary needs in the interest of survival; and 3) the rational part which supersedes both parts to provide good judgment.

As Plato’s teachings began to influence other writers on matters of sexuality and one’s relationship with their body, other musings begin to emerge regarding same-gender eroticism. One of the most vocal about the expression of same-gender eroticism was Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, who was also a contemporary of the Apostle Paul.

Based upon studies of the Torah, Philo formulated many speeches and writings that spoke to the cultural declination of masculinity, as well as the loss of power and self-respect exhibited by those that participated in such behavior. Women were considered property as well as weak, needing a man to lead and guide them. Therefore, if a man were to allow for such a behavior, then he, in turn, would be no better than a woman.

Philo wrote in the Special Laws III: “Moreover, another evil, much greater than that which we have already mentioned, has made its way among and been let loose upon cities, namely, the love of boys,... being accustomed to bearing the affliction of being treated like

¹¹ LGBT Issues Committee of the Group for the Advancement of Psychology, *LGBT Mental Health*, 2012, http://www.aglp.org/gap/1_history/ (accessed March 5, 2016).

¹² In lieu of using the word, homosexuality, to refer to the behavior of same-gender-loving individuals, this study chose to use the phrase, “homoeroticism” to indicate the action but understanding that the concept of what is known as homosexuality today cannot be confirmed to be such in Antiquity.

¹³ Decker F. Walker and Jonas F. Soltis, *Curriculum and Aims*, 5th ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009), 14.

women, waste away as to both their souls and bodies, not bearing about them a single spark of a manly character to be kindled into a flame...., are not ashamed to devote their constant study and endeavors [sic] to the task of changing their manly character into an effeminate one.”¹⁴

However, based on his interpretation, the eroticism Philo was identifying was not same-gender relations, but rather, as we understand it today, a preference that can be defined as pedophilia, or as it was referred to in those ancient times, “pederasty” and effeminized men. Just the same, his polemic teachings became the foundation for much of what is taught today.

In spite of the fact that Greek and Roman ideologies greatly impacted Christian Education, the greatest influence has been that of the Hebrew writings.¹⁵ To offer a deeper understanding of the mentality of early Christian Educators, Scholar Richard B. Hays further asserts, “In point of fact, however, every pertinent Christian text from the pre-Constantinian period (Romans, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Testament of Naphtali [if this is indeed a Christian text,] the Apostolic Constitutions, Clement of Alexandria, Minucius Felix, etc.) adopts an unremittingly negative judgment on homosexual practice, and this tradition is emphatically carried forward by all major Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries (Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, et al.)”¹⁶

Another challenge that the LGBTQ community continues to face when defending themselves against religious backlash, comes in the form of the interpretation of the New Testament in the Bible. Although the Old Testament is considered archaic as it relates to culture, traditional Christians argue that for Paul to make a point to reference “homosexuality” in the New Testament, it must have still been relevant.

What is not taken into account is -- Paul’s teachings allowed for Stoicism to emerge on a larger scale through his conversations regarding the difference between “natural” (*kata physin*) and “unnatural” (*para physin*) behavior.¹⁷ This understanding sits at the core of Stoicism, whose ideals regarding education lied in its ability to teach people to live according to the laws of nature. Hay notes, “This categorization of homosexual behavior as “contrary to nature” was adopted with a particular vehemence by Hellenistic Jewish writers, who tended to see a correspondence between the philosophical appeal to “nature” and the clear teachings of the Law of Moses.”¹⁸

Education in the African American Church

In previous years, much of the content that was included in the church’s curriculum was void of the African American cultural experience. This was the same prevailing culture that used verses from the Bible to justify slavery, ban interracial marriages, and place women in subservient positions. It also begs the question, how could a culture previously oppressed by the

¹⁴ Philo, *The Works of Philo*, ed. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 1283.

¹⁵ Elias, *A History of Christian Education: Protest, Catholic and Orthodox Perspectives*, 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁷ Richard B. Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14, no. 1 (1986): 192.

¹⁸ Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1: 193.

interpretation of scriptures not sympathize with the plight of another oppressed culture encountering the same?

In spite of the cultural evolution that has resulted in the reversal of civil, human and legal restrictions, many African Americans continue to believe that disapproving of homosexuality is part of one's Christian duty. Black theologian Kelly Brown Douglas argues that "By invoking biblical authority [African Americans] place a sacred canopy, a divine sanction, over their views toward gay and lesbian people."¹⁹

Educator Mary Moore reminds us that "beings are affected by the entire past experience of their culture, including the beliefs that help shape their character and action."²⁰ She further reminds us that history must be taken seriously in regards to education. Even Kelly Brown Douglas agrees as to the importance of history, she challenges, "The Black Church community's obstinate stance in regard to issues surrounding gay and lesbian rights is most striking when one considers both the historical black struggle for social equality and the Black Church's prominent role within that struggle. It appears inconsistent, if not hypocritical, for the Black Church to be in the forefront of racial justice concerns, yet resistant, if not repressive, when it comes to the rights of non-heterosexual persons."²¹

In the early 1800s, Richard Allen, the first African American Bishop and founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, organized a church in Philadelphia which included a school for adults that centered on faith, reading and writing. This opened up the door for other African American churches to open schools within their buildings leading what was known as Sunday school. Sunday school was a prominent influence in the education of Black people from the 1820s until the Civil War. However, due to tax-based funding in the public schools, Sunday schools began to shift its focus from literacy back to doctrine and other relevant Christian teachings.

After Blacks were freed from slavery, the focus of religious education in the Black church shifted once again. The curriculum was tailored and developed for the use of preparing the clergy rather than educating the laity. By the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, there were colleges available for training Black clergy and educators, but the issue of segregation would require the focus of Christian Education to change yet again, towards that of safe haven as the civil rights movement began to emerge.

An issue that appeared to be in the forefront of the Black community was the criticism of the Black Church and Sunday school education's inability to meet the current needs of the people. Many challenged that the teachings held a very traditional, European influence. Thus, Black Christian Education, which predominately focused on biblical study, was overhauled and geared more towards the Black experience, and social justice.

¹⁹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 90.

²⁰ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Education Method* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1991), 176.

²¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, "Black Church Homophobia: What to Do About It?" *Yale University: Reflections*, 2006, <http://reflections.yale.edu/article/sex-and-church/black-church-homophobia-what-do-about-it> (accessed March 20, 2016).

III. Curriculum of Faith

C. S. Lewis once said “The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts.” This investment in a person mirrors the labors of working the ground and sowing seeds for harvest but special tools should be used when developing curriculum for people who have experienced faith trauma. The methodology should promote openness and introspection making their journey all the more intrinsically spiritual.

Stages of Faith

James Fowler believed that faith was the “generic element” of human struggle to find purpose, which may or may not rest in religious expression.²² He furthered the explanation of his viewpoint through his work on spiritual and psychological analysis, “The Stages of Faith.” The Stages of Faith consisted of six cycles through which an adult would transverse as they progressed from birth to adulthood. Very few human beings have been capable of completing all six states of development involved in their spiritual journeys.

Although the understanding of each of these stages are necessary for a psychological insight into the process of faith, for the sake of paper, the following developmental stages have been truncated with an emphasis on the two areas (Stages 2 and 3) essential to the LGBTQ Believer of Color religious education model:

- Infancy and Undifferentiated Faith - Approximate Ages: Birth to 2 years

This stage is not truly counted amongst the six, and Fowler classifies this post-natal era as a pre-stage. During this stage, an infant begins to assess its environment, and begins to analyze risk versus safety, which allows relies heavily on who or what the child decides is worthy of its trust.

- Intuitive-Projective Faith - Approximate Ages: 3-7 years

It is this phase that is designated as Stage One and the most egocentric stage, because the child may be less likely to be open to understanding the perspectives of others. It is during this time that the child’s imagination begins to take shape, along with attempts to formulate ideas regarding the definition of faith.

- Mythic Literal Faith - Approximate Ages: 6-12 years

As the child enters Stage Two, not only can they begin to question what they have learned so far, but also begin to formulate and create their own opinions regarding “stories, beliefs, and observances that symbolize belonging to his or her community.” The child is able to distinguish between fantasy and reality, although God tends to be anthropomorphized. Soon they are able to decipher and ascribe meanings to symbols, as well as be more open and able to recognize the perspectives of others. It is also a phase in which they may develop strong beliefs regarding justice (what is right/ what is wrong) and the concept of reciprocity. Although this stage is typically attributed to school age children, some adults struggle to progress from this stage.

²² Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 90.

- *Synthetic Conventional Faith - Approximate Ages: 12 years and up*

Stage Three is when the first buds of religious self-identity start to emerge. The individual also begins to understand the need to conform to authority figures, which until then may have been their parents, guardians, or other related adults. As they have grown older, these perceived authority figures have come to include peers and members of their respective religious communities, whose acceptance of the child is, at this point, to them very valuable. It is often in this phase that many adults remain developmentally, unable to reconcile the contradictions that inherently exist between what authorities teach and what the individual's experiences have taught them to believe.

- *Individuate-Reflective Faith - Approximate Ages: Late Teens-Adulthood*

One often enters Stage Four when deciding to leave the childhood home, and explore other cultures, traditions and experiences. It is during this time that the source of authority ceases to be solely ascribed to coming from an "external" origin and shifts to an "internal" one.

- *Conjunctive Faith – Age 30 years and Up / Midlife*

Stage Five, the penultimate stage of development, brings with it the lesson of acceptance and appreciation of diversity and mystery. This time is referred to as the "second naiveté" for it is a time of unabashed openness, especially to those of other faith perspectives.

Universalizing Faith – Adult

The final step, Stage Six, has proven to be the most difficult level of the spiritual journey for most people to achieve, and is also often referred to as the stage of Enlightenment. It is upon reaching this destination in their spiritual development that these individuals come to believe that we are all of one universal body.

It is my opinion that the progression and focus of the model shifts slightly in respect to the faith journey of a LGBTQ Believer of Color who has suffered deep spiritual traumas at the hands of family, society or their religious community. Even though Fowler notes that many adults often get caught in Stage Three, I believe that spiritually traumatized individuals actually vacillate *between* the periods of Mystic-Literal Faith (Stage Two) development and Synthetic-Conventional (Stage Three) and take time to fully rise from the intersectionality of both stages. A deep seeded trauma, regardless of the stage in which it may have occurred, causes a great level of uncertainty that proves to be a formidable hurdle as one attempts to process their faith dynamics in the hopes of staying on track and progressing to Stage Three. It should also be noted, that any recurrent traumas, such as abandonment, isolation, humiliation or condemnation, could cause the individual to quickly regress to Stage Two.

Dr. Greg Popcak discusses how easily one can fail to progress and how Stage Two can in manifest adulthood, "Even though this stage is common to early childhood, many people stay at this stage for life. At best, in adulthood, this stage reflects a simple piety with a humble, dutiful attitude toward faith leaders and moral norms. At worst, in

adulthood, this stage reflects an angry kind of us-vs-them fundamentalism that persecutes those who dare to think differently.”²³

Those who suffer for at the hands of these closed minds for thinking “differently” also have their own faith journeys paused, polluted, or annihilated all together. For those that continue to struggle in spiritual anguish, the need to re-examine the concept of the *Imago Dei* may once again arise.²⁴ Once a spiritually traumatized believer arrives at this state, it is imperative from this point forward they be offered a space of understanding and compassion. Integrating elements of pastoral care and spiritual coaching into the religious education model is essential to finding ways to address trauma.

IV. Holoklerian Coaching Methodology

One day, I came across a Bible verse that led me down a revelatory path: Acts 3:16 which reads, “...Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”²⁵

The phrase “perfect soundness” translated in Greek is “holokleria” which is defined as being “of an unimpaired condition of the body, in which all its members are healthy and fit for use.”²⁶ To refer to anything as “holistic”, the work must be characterized as “the treatment of the whole person, taking into account mental and social factors, rather than just the symptoms of a disease.”²⁷ Thus, it is important to instill a holistic approach within religious education to facilitate a deeper believing and healing.

After seeking input from others, conducting a community townhall and analyzing coaching session summaries, I discovered four attributes that kept reappearing related to healing in the mind, body, spirit, and soul especially within those spiritually traumatized:

1. *Mind Attribute - Belief*: This subject was not founded on the belief in a Higher Power but rather how one felt about themselves and others.
2. *Body Attribute – Intimacy*: Although the term evokes the concept of sexual intimacy, the intimacy being sought herein is spiritual. Even in the midst of pain and hurt, people still seek a connection with something that feels real to them, without dogma and doctrine.
3. *Spirit Attribute – Forgiveness*: This is one of the biggest aspects of working with someone who is spiritually traumatized. Whether they are seeking forgiveness for themselves or the ability to forgive others, forgiveness is an act that takes a lot of hard work and time, especially if their anger or disappointment is directed at God.
4. *Soul Attribute – Self Love* –Although the term seems synonymous with *Belief*, there is a crucial difference, being that it leads them not only to examine what they think about

²³ Popcak, Dr. Greg. *What Stage is Your Faith?* May 6, 2014.

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithonthecouch/2014/05/what-stage-is-your-faith/> (accessed January 10, 2019).

²⁴ Image of God

²⁵ (Acts 3:1-10 NRSV)

²⁶ Thayer and Smith. *Holokleria*. January 1, 1999.

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/holokleria.html> (accessed June 28, 2014)

²⁷ Merriam-Webster. *Holistic*. n.d. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/holistic> (accessed January 4, 2019).

themselves but how do they love themselves through the process. I have come to this as “Pink Love”, a practice by which the awareness and amity moves within the heart chakra to heal, transform, and evolve the way one sees themselves and the world.

Holoklerian Learning Theory

These attributes serve as foundational elements onto which a strategy for innovating instruction and learning in religious education can be built. Educators often hope that their students will be intrinsically motivated but this is not usually the case. According to Eggen, et al., “it isn’t realistic for all or even most, learning activities.”²⁸ Previously, I discussed James Fowler’s Stages of Faith and my analysis as they relate to a spiritually traumatized LGBTQ Believers of Color. I assert if an understanding of these spiritual stages is combined with the introspective strategies of Holoklerian Coaching Methodology, a new teaching philosophy can be created – The Holoklerian Learning Theory. This theory could then be applied when developing a curriculum for the spiritually traumatized LGBTQ Believer of Color in churches, religious institutions and other sacred spaces.

One element to keep in mind is that educators must be willing to approach delicate subject matters with an open mind, regardless of personal belief. If they are unable to offer up an unbiased ear that inspires confidence and trust, the possibility for intrinsic motivation will be lost. Malcom Knowles, a pioneer of adult learning, found that adults learn better when they understand why the information they receive is important to know or how it will be of use to them.²⁹ Knowles’ assessment furthers my argument that the teaching model I propose, *The Holoklerian Learning Theory*, could prove to be truly beneficial. In an effort to better showcase my stance, let us examine the type of learning involved in this andragogic approach, which could be described as an example of Transformative Learning.³⁰

Coined in 1833, the term “andragogy” was reintroduced by a German scientist in the 1920s, and then brought to the American forefront in the 1960s, where it was used to explain how adults learn.³¹ It is also important to understand the two different types of motivation that reveal themselves when comparing andragogy to pedagogy -- intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These drives differ in regard to who rewards the behavior. In the case of presenting information with intrinsic value, the individual will be keen to learn more because they understand that as a result of this information, they gain a tool. This is a tool they can use to better themselves and their situations.³²

The Holoklerian Learning Theory suggests that your role as religious educator is to serve as a holistic guide as well as a scholarly vessel. If the educator understands that this individual

²⁸ Paul Eggen and Don Kauchak. *Strategies and Models for Teachers: Teaching Content and Thinking Skills*. 6th. (Boston, Massachusetts: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012), 49.

²⁹ Deb Peterson. "5 Principles for the Teacher of Adults." *About.com Continuing education*. n.d. http://adulted.about.com/od/teachers/a/teachingadults_2.htm (accessed 25 June, 2014).

³⁰ Scott Wallace. *Transformative Learning Theory*. n.d. <http://www.transformativelearningtheory.com/index.html> (accessed June 28, 2014).

³¹ Karen Jarett Thoms. "They're Not Just Big Kids: Motivating Adult Learners." *Proceedings of the Annual Mid-South Instructional Technology Conference*. Murfreesboro, TN: U.S. Department of Education, 2001. 2.

³² Raymond J. Wlodkowski. "Fostering Motivation in Professional Development Programs." *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (Wiley) 98 (Summer 2003). 1.

may have regressed back into Stage Two (Mystic-Literal), where they have lost sight of their own internal authority as well as the trust in what they have already learned, then the response can be tailored in such a way that does not leave them feeling chastised or isolated in their spiritual development or the questioning thereof. Ultimately, the purpose of The Holoklerian Learning Theory, is to create curricula in supportive environments which foster a state of “perfect soundness” within the sense of self, subsequently allowing them to seek and find purpose, identity, life experience, intellectual growth, and new levels of spiritual confidence.

In order for the Holoklerian Learning Theory to be effective, there are three strategic processes that must be utilized. Although the terminology utilized to put forth these strategies may appear to be quite academic, these practices can still be integrated into spiritual curricula such as Sunday school lessons, Bible Studies, lectures, etc. These approaches are described as the following:

1. Create a healthy, successful adult learning environment through multidimensional sharing.³³ It is imperative for an adult learner to feel included. If the program’s elements imply that everyone’s perspective is respected, then the potential for intrinsic motivations increases among its pupils.
2. Identify at least three core Applicable Components of Relevancy (ACR) in which the instructor can demonstrate for the student how the content speaks to achieving harmony and growth in their personal life.
3. Create a curriculum that speaks to intrinsic motivation and purpose. When the concept of intrinsic purpose is introduced, it entuses the student to move forward in their journeys via introspection.

Regardless of the setting, the Holoklerian Learning Theory (alongside Holoklerian Coaching Methodology), can serve as a foundation for creating teaching strategies to help lessen societal and religious influences that have negative emotional impacts on their communities.

Although curriculum is defined as a “course to be run,” when looking at the spiritually traumatized LGBTQ Believer of Color, the term aligns itself with the description utilized by Iris Cully – “all learning experiences – the curriculum of life.”³⁴ In order to achieve the seamless integration of these concepts to the current platform, it is important to remind the religious educator that the meaning of curriculum is fluid and that church/religious curriculum has always been “broader than schooling alone.”³⁵ This is a powerful observation as it relates to inclusivity and the concept of homosexuality in religious education because it implies that one can develop new approaches to helping the universal church and/or other religious entities educate their local communities.

Before fully introducing curriculum of inclusivity to the intended community, an in-depth conference or educator training module centered on the LGBTQ lived experience is essential. One that allows discussion of theological analysis, biblical interpretation and LGBTQ equality as it relates to present societal norms will help instructor to feel confident in the materials that he or she is developing as well as address any questions that they may have regarding inclusion. The

³³ Wlodkowski, "Fostering Motivation in Professional Development Programs," 4.

³⁴ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 55.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

training exercises can be taught by one teacher, or overseen by multiple teachers so that each would focus on a separate area of expertise. Each segment must have a central focus; in addition to its purposes fully outlined in the session.

Conclusion

When making an effort to shift the dynamics in place in the African American religious community faced with the concept of faith trauma inclusivity, the *why* as it relates to cultural history and *how* it can manifest cannot be overlooked. Foremost, one must understand that it is not odd for a group of individuals that have struggled to obtain their own voice, to create a wall of distrust in the face of adversity, especially if the struggle appears to either contradict or challenge a core belief system of their own cultural existence. The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped.”³⁶ This is where we must introduce the “pedagogy of the oppressed,” which is the “pedagogy that must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity.”³⁷

Paulo Freire said, that “the more radical a person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it.”³⁸ However this cannot occur if one’s reality is negated based on the assumption of another. Brown states, “The blackness of the black church is more than a matter of color or culture. The blackness of this church depends upon its morally active commitment to advance the life, freedom and dignity of all black bodies. When this church, for whatever reasons, becomes alienated from certain bodies, its very blackness is threatened.”³⁹

In order to arrive at a pedagogy of communal inclusivity, one must closely examine the realized truth of the LGBTQ community. Incorporating another’s lived truth is essential. Author Gloria Jean Watkins, otherwise known as “bell hooks”, affirms that the “engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute, but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself.”⁴⁰

In conclusion, the historical vehemence towards homoeroticism and further investigation of theological perspectives and embedded hermeneutics approaches allows for the reconstruction of methodologies, aims and ideologies. It is in everyone’s best interest that the dismantling of traditional and despotic teachings begin now, for it will allow affirming spaces to openly welcome those who have suffered as a result of these oppressive stances, and allow faith leaders to navigate those deeper, denied truths and create a holistic healing process for the LGBTQ Believer of Color, and finally offer others a religious practice that considers inclusion as a truly inherent principle.

³⁶ Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Black Bodies and the Black Church: A Blues Slant* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.

⁴⁰ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom*, 11.

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Addressing the Sex Abuse Crisis in Communities of Faith and Learning

Abstract

This paper argues that educational communities of faith and learning (e.g. Catholic colleges and universities) are especially primed to face into the pain and reality of the sex abuse crisis in honest and constructive ways. Citing the need for strategic collaboration between mental health professionals and religious educators, it calls for pedagogies which: are trauma-informed and utilize the insights of neuroscience; promote open dialogue in the face of organizational silence; foster safe and courageous spaces; attend to the dangerous memory and deep impacts which accompany survivors of the sex abuse. It argues that failure to address the sex abuse crisis with open and interdisciplinary discourse fosters a null curriculum that will only serve to have corrosive implications.

Introduction

“The Sex Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church: Reckoning, Repentance, and Renewal,” was a three-day symposium held at my home institution in March 2019. The planning for this symposium began in Fall 2018, soon after the release of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report (2018) and the revelations about the extensive abuse by the defrocked Cardinal McCarrick as well as the actions of Bishops who participated in decades of cover-up about priests in their dioceses who were abusers. The college’s Faculty Steering Committee for the Catholic Intellectual Tradition was deeply convinced that this topic deserved paramount attention if the institution was to maintain its integrity and to attend with honesty to the signs of the times in the church and in Catholic higher education. The symposium included presentations from journalists, theologians, therapists as well as scholars of English, Philosophy, History, and Criminal Justice. A spokesperson from the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), the college’s sponsoring religious community leader, and campus ministers helped to lead sessions. Award-winning Catholic journalist, author, and film maker, David Gibson, gave a keynote address. A prayer service for healing was held and more than 600 students attended eleven sessions.

In assessing its impact, the planning committee was very pleased with the program’s breadth and scope but especially noted how exceedingly grateful faculty and staff were for the opportunity to engage in conversation about the painful topic of sex abuse in the church, a reality that so many have been affected by in some way or another. Colleagues from outside the college and parishioners in the local community echoed a tremendous sense of gratitude for this symposium while recognizing that the topic of sex abuse is simply not discussed enough. So much so, the significant number of notes and comments of appreciation for the symposium provoked in me a fundamental question which is at the heart of this paper: what took so long? Why did it take the disclosing of scandal in the highest levels of the church and the scathing

report of a state's grand jury to trigger the necessity of a conversation that seemed to have been put off for years?

Given the gravity of the issue, there is a perception that, despite some notable exceptions, analysis and dialogue of the sex abuse crisis in Catholic higher education circles has been somewhat sparse.¹ In religious education literature there is a dearth of analysis of this crisis and its impacts on teaching and learning in communities of faith. Why this apparent lacuna, especially in light of the pain the sex abuse crisis has inflicted? As a religious educator I seek to highlight the resources that may equip educators and ministers in communities of faith and learning to address the sex abuse crisis in informative and healing ways. In particular this paper argues that conversations about the sex abuse crisis in communities of faith and learning are strengthened by: 1) the implementation of a diversity of teaching languages; 2) education about trauma-informed religious education practices and theological insights; 3) glean key insights from neuroscience related to imagination, brain development and story-telling; 4) the development of strategic collaborations with mental health centers and, 5) the utilization of pedagogies that present sex abuse as a dangerous memory in the face of intractable amnesia and organizational silence.

Languages and Learning Spaces

First, languages of teaching and learning. To promote dialogue and healing, institutions of faith and learning must utilize the resources of a variety of teaching languages: homiletic, academic, aesthetic and therapeutic. The pain of the sex abuse crisis cannot be addressed by relying only on rationalistic speak. Kieran Scott (2001) unpacks a variety of teaching languages while suggesting that they all might contribute to more holistic learning in settings of religious education.² Certainly, the higher education setting is most accustomed to the academic manner of teaching. At the Iona College symposium (March 2019), academic analysis from an inter-disciplinarian lens shaped many of the presentations ranging from theology to religious studies. At the same time, there was recognition of the need for therapeutic language. Scott describes examples of such language as words and actions of mourning, healing, welcoming, and calming.³ It is only fitting that attempts to educate about the sex abuse crisis provide space for people to express anger, voice confusion, vent frustration and to mourn for the pain of survivors and for the many who brought to their graves their silent suffering. A John Jay College study (Terry, Mercado, and Perillo 2008) reveals that about 4% (4,392) of all U.S. priests in ministry from 1950-2002, had serious allegations of sexually abusing a mean average of over 2.1 male and .48 female victims; these statistics do not include the numbers of other religious or lay

¹ The author recognizes the Boston College conference of February 2004 and the work of this institution's Church in the 21st Century center, and the on-going, pioneering work of Voices of the Faithful as well as other initiatives across the country which are exceptions to this observation.

² Kieran Scott, "To Teach Religion or Not to Teach Religion: Is that the Dilemma" In *Religious Education as Practical Theology*, ed, Bert Roebben and Michael Warren (Louvain: Peeters, 2001) 145-173.

³ Scott, 153.

professionals affiliated with the church who also were accused of sexual abuse.⁴ In all, these numbers speak to the significant impact of this crisis and the likelihood that in teaching and learning contexts many may have been affected by the sex abuse crisis, either by knowing personally or knowing of a survivor. Unrelated to the crisis in the church, some will have experienced some type of trauma in their own lives and conversation about the sex abuse crisis may serve as a trigger unleashing harsh memories. It is critically important that they be given the space to express themselves.

L. Callid Keefe-Perry and Zachary Moon (2019) argue persuasively that the study of trauma in the area of religious education be “more than a niche area of interest,” calling for an understanding of trauma as “a regular part of the reflective lenses of all religious education’s scholars and practitioners.”⁵ Citing the work of Bruce Perry, they suggest that the numbers of people in any given classroom whose lives have been disrupted by some form of trauma could be 1/3 of those gathered.⁶ Such numbers certainly support the necessity of safe spaces and the embrace of therapeutic language in religious education concerning abuse. But Keefe-Perry and Moon challenge the notion of safe spaces, calling for learning contexts in which both survivors and teachers foster, not just safe spaces, but communities of courageous risk-taking. Identifying learning spaces only as “safe spaces,” they maintain, places the onus primarily on the facilitator to create such spaces.⁷ The fostering of courageous risk-taking may take a commitment of all learning participants.

Attending to risk-taking, especially for those who have suffered trauma, may involve expanding languages of learning and teaching to aesthetic forms of writing and expression. Frank Rogers (2008), a narrative arts therapist, speaks of his drama program with teenage boys who have suffered abuse and live in a residential treatment program.⁸ He describes how their imaginative agency in creating plays that portray the experience of God’s total indifference in their lives can help his students name and discover truths about their lives. In addition, Keefe-Perry and Moon, heeding the work of Rebecca Chopp, caution against an “over-emphasis on rationalism” which “inherently suppresses the expression of experiences wherein one’s very sense of self is violated, ruptured, or damaged.”⁹ Acting calls for embodied knowledge; poetry invites symbolic expression. Both of these imaginative forms may foster deeper and more authentic communication especially for those who struggle to articulate in discursive ways the impacts of their trauma.

⁴ Karen J. Terry, Cynthia Calkins Mercado, and Anthony D. Perillo “Priests Who Abuse and Were Abused: Understanding Victimization in the Catholic Church,” *Victims and Offenders* (3, 2008) 412-422.

⁵ L. Callid Keefe-Perry and Zachary Moon, “Courage in Chaos: the Importance of Trauma-Informed Adult Religious Education,” *Religious Education*. (V. 114, 1, 2019) 30,31.

⁶ Ibid, 32.

⁷ Ibid, 33.

⁸ Frank Rogers, Jr, “There is the Hope: Abused Boys Finding God Through Fiction,” *Religious Education*, (V. 103, 3, 2008) 293-296.

⁹ Keefe-Perry and Moon, 36.

Another key language in promoting dialogue and healing in communities of faith and learning is that of the homily. Homilies can provoke new insight and engender a renewed sense of solidarity with persons and pericopes in Scripture. Their tones can reflect both the challenge and the affirmation of the prophets; the stories and the examples the homilist offers may indeed meet the listeners just as they are in their panoply of emotions. Homilies, though, can easily fail. Shelly Rambo's (2010) work on trauma and theology points to a frequent articulation of the paschal mystery of Christ as a linear narrative of new life swallowing up the pain of death.¹⁰ Those who have suffered the trauma of sex abuse, either directly or indirectly, often cannot experience that new life. Their trauma does not allow them to shake off their pain, as it were; instead they often find themselves simply remaining, trying to make it through each day, carrying with them their deeply internalized scars. Rambo proposes a "theology of remaining," that correlates better with the experience of those who have suffered trauma. How might the homilies in communities of faith and learning embrace such a theology? Good homilies reflect nuanced theology that demonstrate empathic understanding of the impacts of the trauma of sex abuse.

Gleaning Insights from Neuroscience

In addition to a diversity of languages employed in addressing the sex abuse crisis, the positive impacts of neuroscience research on the field of religious education cannot be underestimated and relate directly to fostering learning and healing for communities addressing the sex abuse crisis. David Hogue's (2003) work on imagination and storytelling is especially instructive in this context.¹¹ Hogue describes imagination as "the distinctively human capacity to envision multiple alternative realities."¹² Imagination can usher in a world of possibility: possible vocational interests and career opportunities, possible gifts and talents to develop, possible relationships to pursue, possible goals to set. The scenarios are endless and the possibilities of promoting healing through fostering imagination and storytelling are promising.

The workings of the imagination are creative by nature. Integrally linked with perception and memory, the creative nature of imagination is related to how humans record information in the first place. Neuroscientists tell us that the very act of brain perception is interpretive and creative by nature.¹³ Rather than passively recording data, the brain works to create images and connect them to sensory data. Perception and imagination work hand in hand as a creative dynamic. The images in the brain, Hogue maintains, are "more like art than snapshots." Thus, the processes of perception and imagination, are not so much mechanical ones, functioning like a machine, but artistic ones. Hogue offers the example of the visual artist engaged in the creative work of drawing a

¹⁰ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010)

¹¹ David A. Hogue, *Remembering the Future, Imagining the Past* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2003)

¹² Ibid, 44.

¹³ Ibid, 25.

portrait.¹⁴ Such an artist does not simply reconstruct a person's face on a piece of canvas through precise measurements and calculations. As Hogue contends, an artist's rendering of a portrait is an interpretive exercise which captures the soul of the individual being portrayed, not only his or her facial proportions in correct alignment with each other. The final rendering of the portrait is a result of the interplay of perception, memory, and imagination all of which are integrally linked for the artist. Telling stories is similar to creating portraits. They allow participants to craft stories that, while attending to memory, also invite new possibilities and can nurture hope and healing.

Not many of us are portrait artists nor are we necessarily trained in the healing work of art or narrative therapy. While religious education is not meant to be therapy, how might we cultivate imagination in liberating, healing ways, given the crippling reality of sexual abuse that many students face? David Hogue (2011) has disabused us of the notion that memories are locked files that are neatly stored in distinct categories that make up the brain.¹⁵ The brain encodes or records information by filtering images and sounds throughout the brain. Every time we re-collect those images, we can do so in different ways. As Hogue contends, our feelings and experiences at the time our re-collecting those memories help to shape the ways in which we re-collect. In other words, the circumstances that promote imaginative story-telling can shape the very content of the stories. As practitioners and academics, then, we are challenged to foster productive settings that can indeed shape the story-telling in positive ways.

In discussing imagination and storytelling, several religious educators and pastoral theologians raise salient suggestions that can offer some helpful parameters for our consideration. I would like to draw upon the insights of Claire Annelise Smith (2011) and Mary Clark Moschella (2008) to provide insights about imagination and story-telling in the context of communities that have been traumatized by sexual abuse.

Utilizing the findings of neuroscience on the development of the pre-frontal cortex and the limbic system, Smith emphasizes the critical role that reflection time can play in allowing space for the imagination to expand. Commenting on adolescent brain development, she notes how the limbic system, driving emotional responses and reactions, evolves at a markedly more rapid pace than the pre-frontal cortex, the executive functioning component controlling critical thinking, deliberation, and planning.¹⁶ Smith suggests that especially in the current technological age, one that has gifted us with the strengths and limitations of manifold social networking sites and a vast array of mind-numbing video games, a habitus of passivity and disengagement with others could hamper the growth of reasoning and reflective capacities. Citing the work of Patricia Greenfield, Smith notes that "critical thinking and imagination are somewhat stymied by constant stimuli."¹⁷ To develop imagination and critical thinking as a complement to emotional

¹⁴ Ibid, 20.

¹⁵ David Hogue, "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Brain," *Religious Education* (V 106, 3, 211) 260.

¹⁶ Claire Anneliese Smith, "Still Developing: Teenagers, Brains, and the Arts," *Religious Education* (V 106, 2, 2011) 262

¹⁷ Ibid, 263.

development, young people need opportunities to reflect in safe, challenging and liberating ways that are not easily found through technology. Even more, young people who have suffered trauma such as sexual abuse especially need healthy and reflective spaces because they may be particularly vulnerable to intense emotional reactions in their relationships and overall interactions. Such spaces could help provide time to process, to share, and to foster relationships rooted in trust. Out of such positive interactions, participants can imagine “future stories,” in which people can envision their future in healthy, productive, and hopeful ways.

To develop productive spaces for reflection and imagination, academicians and practitioners can benefit from Mary Clark Moschella’s (2008) scholarship as a pastoral theologian. Moschella speaks of “ethnographic listening,” a type of deep listening that forces one to renounce any pretense of expertise.¹⁸ This intense level of listening involves suspending judgment and allowing oneself to become a learner again. In academic settings it may be especially difficult to surrender one’s role as expert. Moschella describes this approach to listening as floating. “As you stop being an expert,” Moschella says, “you start really being there; suspended, you listen, watch, perceive, take in the context of the interaction, and perhaps begin to sense the currents of group life.¹⁹” According to Moschella, people know instinctively when they are heard and may readily admit that the quality of listening provoked the depth of sharing, as painful as it may have been. Moschella further relays that it would not be uncommon for someone to comment “you heard me into sharing.²⁰”

Strategic Partnerships

Fostering listening and healthy spaces of interaction is especially aided through partnership with mental health professionals. In order to be attentive fully to the needs of learning communities addressing the sex abuse crisis, homilists, teachers, and pastoral ministers should not work in a vacuum. They need to consult and collaborate with mental health professionals. Most higher education contexts have counseling centers with professional therapists and psychologists. Local houses of worship may have access to community mental health centers that can possibly be a resource. Partnership with professional counselors is vital to the success of efforts to educate about the sex abuse crisis in the church and to attend to the needs of participants. It is important that those who have suffered the trauma of sex abuse be informed ahead of time about what will be discussed. Participants deserve the permission to opt out of discussions that may elicit in them pain, panic and severe anxiety. Presenters need to be trained and prepared to refer students to counseling centers if the need arises. The presence of counselors at seminars also helps to convey the solicitous concern of the community and communicates clearly that the organizers take very seriously the needs of the learners.

Partnerships among the various academic disciplines also can foster more robust and holistic discussion of the impacts of the sex abuse crisis. By its nature the sex abuse crisis

¹⁸ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008) 142.

¹⁹ Ibid, 143.

²⁰ Ibid, 142.

connects inherently to disciplines such as psychology, law, criminal justice, history, philosophy, and theology. But the fields of business, marketing, management and mass communication also provide critical lens by which one can examine the crisis. It is important to be multi-dimensional in one's approach to this extensive and systemic topic.

Pedagogy of Dangerous Memory

Finally, it is very important that the communities of learning, in all their efforts to be pastorally sensitive to the needs of those who have suffered trauma, never forget that sex abuse is a justice issue, not to be dismissed because of the intensity of pain it evokes. Religious educators must counter the attempts of communities of faith to silence discussion about the sex abuse crisis in the church. Some might suggest that since the establishment of the USCCB's Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People (2002) that the problem has largely been addressed. While advances have certainly been made, such an attitude can easily lead to passivity. Michael Warren (1989) warns about the tendency of churches and schools to "domesticate" young people rather than to "politicize" them.²¹ The power dynamic must not be forgotten. At Boston College's conference on the sex abuse crisis more than a dozen years ago, Paul Lakeland (2006) posited that institutionalized secrecy is critical to the systemic problem of the scandal.²² At the same conference, Jean Bartunek (2006) emphasized the "organizational silence" so common to hierarchical structures which rely on underlings to keep its secrets.²³ The barring of the organization, Voices of the Faithful, from Catholic diocesan facilities is a prime example of this silencing. Likewise, the hesitation of Catholic institutions of higher education to address directly the sex abuse crisis also reflects this notion of organizational silence.

Employing the language of theologian, Jean Baptist Metz, Russell Butkus (1989) calls religious educators to a pedagogy of "dangerous memory" as a process of critical reflection on suffering.²⁴ At the time Butkus was lamenting the amnesia common to contemporary, middle class U. S. Catholics who forgot their heritage as poor immigrants or asylum seekers. Thirty years later, Butkus' argument sadly still applies to the issue of immigration. At the same time this pedagogy of dangerous memory might well be directed to education about the sex abuse crisis in communities of faith and learning. For Butkus, the second and third movements of Thomas Groome's (1991) shared praxis model are employed. In this second movement one might reflect critically on the current and past influences that shape an individual's assumptive world as it relates to the topic of the sex abuse crisis. In the third movement one turns to the Story/Vision of the tradition and particularly the subversive remembrances of narratives of those

²¹ Michael Warren, *Youth, Gospel, Liberation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 34.

²² Paul Lakeland, "Understanding the Crisis in the Church," in *Church Ethics and Its Organizational Context*, ed. Jean Bartunek, Mary Ann Hinsdale, and James F. Keenan (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, Roman & Littlefield, 2006) 7.

²³ Jean Bartunek, "The Sex Abuse Crisis as Social Drama," in *Church Ethics and Its Organizational Context*, 19.

²⁴ Russell Butkus, "Dangerous Memories: Toward a Pedagogy of Social Transformation," in *Religious Education as Social Transformation*, ed. Allen J. Moore (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press) 220-227

who seek justice. In this component participants can learn of the exemplary witness of justice seekers and peacemakers whose risk-taking can inform educators of the strategies and stamina needed to take on this subject. The final component of the third movement involves some type of personal interaction with a survivor who has suffered injustice. A thoughtful integration of these three movements, following from Butkus' argument, has the capacity to instill in learners a sustained commitment to undo the injustice and effect positive action. Butkus' notion of a pedagogy of dangerous memory deserves serious attention especially in the face of the insidious tendency for institutions to gloss over the harmful effects of the sex abuse crisis. Such a pedagogy may ensure that the sex abuse crisis does not become part of a null curriculum that falls to the wayside as a victim of amnesia.

Conclusion

These insights begin and end in the same place: with my reflections as a practitioner of religious education, as the director of a mission and ministry center at a Catholic college, seeking to attend effectively and with integrity to the sex abuse crisis in the church. The March 2019 symposium at my own institution sparked a dialogue that needs to be sustained here and at many institutions of learning in American Catholic Higher education. James O'Toole (2006) has described the history of the Catholic church in America in six stages: the priest-less church; the church in the democratic republic; the immigrant church; the church of Catholic action; the church of Vatican II; and the church in the 21st century.²⁵ In some ways, the phrase, "what goes around, comes around," is apt especially in noting the dwindling number of priests in the current stage, resembling O'Toole's first stage. What remains unresolved is O'Toole's final quandary: that in this age lay people may finally be taking their leadership to a new level. As he said, "Perhaps, in combination with the gradual disappearance of the clergy, laypeople will again become the principal sustainers of their own religious identity, thereby leading the American Catholic church back to the future."²⁶ Such leadership will not occur in healthy and exemplary ways if the sex abuse crisis is put under the carpet. Its impacts need to be addressed thoroughly and systematically. Neuroscience, trauma-informed practices, diverse teaching languages and pedagogies help provide the tools necessary to sustain the conversation about the sex abuse crisis. Educators need to rise to the challenge with courage and confidence.

²⁵ James O'Toole, "The Six Ages of Catholicism in America," in *Church Ethics and Its Organizational Context*, ed. Jean Bartunek, Mary Ann Hinsdale, and James F. Keenan (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, Roman & Littlefield, 2006) 31-41.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 40.

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Language of Hope in Europe

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Language of Hope in Europe

Abstract

In Europe, the diversity in religions, cultures, languages and historical backgrounds is enormous. World War II and the Soviet Regime have played a large part in this and the flow of refugees from other continents increases the pluralism even more. How can people live together in these countries and how can religious education add to this bridging between differences? The language across all European countries is very different. This is not only literally the case between countries, but also figuratively speaking and inside individual countries. These differences occur in cultural sense and across age groups as well.

Secondary education has the task to form young people to become firmly rooted people who can hold their own in society and contribute to a better world. It is essential that they learn to examine their own core values and their roots during their time at school. A language is needed in which pupils recognise themselves and their values. This should be a main focus of spiritual and religious education. It happens especially in religious education classes in denominational schools. However, these schools are currently accommodating increasing numbers of non-religious pupils. What role do religious values still play in this situation? How do pupils feel about active involvement in religious institutions, and about basing life choices on religious beliefs? Can other, non-religious values be detected which could form the basis for value-oriented personal formation and a language in which this is brought to light

Research of these subjects has been ongoing in the Netherlands for more than twenty years now. This is currently being expanded to two other European countries: the Czech Republic and Germany (former East Germany). These are also secularized countries, where denominational schools are attended by an increasingly diverse population, and yet these countries have a very different history. Will the results here be similar to those of the earlier Dutch studies? Or do the history and context of these countries play a stronger role, and does this show in the values that are important to pupils? A comparative pilot study is being conducted as start of this broadening perspective. This is geared towards greater insight into the values of pupils in various school classes in denominational schools in these three European countries. This information will allow us to detect their language and with this design appropriate new forms of spiritual and religious value-oriented world view education.

Keywords: religious affiliation, religion, belonging and believing, values, religious education

1. Introduction

Three countries were selected and first will be shortly described, where the focus is on their religious and cultural developments in recent history. A flow of secularization has taken place in these three European countries especially which is why we choose to compare the religious values and beliefs of pupils in these countries. We focus on religion and belief in these secularized countries and try to highlight differences based on culture and history more than on religion. Former research on religion, belief and religious values will be presented. Our research questions are based on this and will be presented at the end of this chapter. With answering our questions we hope to add to new forms of religious and worldview education on denominational schools in secularized countries, taken into account the differences in culture and history.

1.1 *Three European secularized countries*

Like many Western European countries, the Netherlands is a pluralistic, multireligious and secularized country. Originally mainly Protestant and Roman Catholic, the Netherlands nowadays has low percentages of religious affiliation: 40 % of the

population call themselves Christians, and 49 % non-affiliated. The expectation is that this decline will continue over the coming years. Hellemans has called this decline the third stage in the development of the main established churches: “far-reaching secularization and increasing marginalization of the main churches without the rise of new churches or groups to fill up the void. (...) these countries are tending towards becoming ‘post-Christian’ in the near future”. (Hellemans 2012 p.3) The place of young people in today’s Dutch society is not very different from that in the rest of Western Europe. Dutch researchers have studied the way young people in Western Europe currently experience faith, and have concluded that for most, faith is oriented towards family, friends, and themselves as individuals, which is defined as ‘immanent faith’. The Czech Republic is among the most secularized countries in Europe when it comes to belief in the basic elements of Christian doctrine. On the other hand, in terms of belief in magic, amulets, and the powers of fortune-tellers, the Czech Republic is almost at the top compared to other European countries. People in the Czech Republic have practically no interest in Eastern philosophical and religious systems (Hamplová, 2013). Closer analysis of sociological data further reveals that when it comes to Christians’ identification with the doctrine of the churches to which they belong, the Czech Republic is not closest to Slovakia, with which it was joined in a federative state for seventy years, but to Austria (Váně – Štípková, 2013).

The position of religiosity and spirituality in the Czech Republic is quite specific. The Czech Republic has approximately 10.5 million inhabitants. According to a 2011 census of persons, houses, and apartments, almost 1.1 million of these inhabitants are members of the Catholic Church. 51,000 people stated that they were members of the second largest church, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, and 39,000 that they belonged to the third largest church, the national Czechoslovak Hussite Church, which was founded in reaction to anti-modernist tendencies in the Catholic Church after the First World War. By contrast, more than 4.5 million inhabitants did not answer the census question on religious affiliation at all.⁴ 3.6 million stated that they professed no religion, and 708,000 that they were believers but were not members of any church (ČSÚ, 2014). However, people who believe neither in God nor in any other supernatural power or phenomenon form an absolute minority in Czech society. In the 2008 ISSP enquiry, only 6% of the respondents responded in these terms and can thus be labelled real atheists (Hamplová, 2013).

In an extensive study which combines a religious studies approach and a historiographical approach, David Václavík (2010) has convincingly shown that the roots of the contemporary negation of ecclesial forms of Christianity and the associated skepticism with regard to anything formally or manifestly religious grew gradually and continuously in Czech history. Its beginnings must be sought at the latest in 1867 when the Austrian Empire was transformed into the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. When official opposition politics against the Viennese government began, the Catholic Church, or practicing the Catholic faith, were rejected, since the church was perceived as part of the state and government apparatus, and practicing the Catholic faith as consenting to

⁴ The question was optional and a part of the public manifested its disagreement with the otherwise obligatory census of persons, houses, and apartments by not answering the optional questions. But Christians were generally encouraged by the churches to answer these questions, among other reasons because at that time census results still affected church financing.

the existing order in state and society. The communist regime was thus merely an episode, albeit an important one, in the process of the Czech nation's breakaway from established forms of religiosity. In a way, the social processes of the 19th century, including those at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, and therefore also the massive wave of defections from the Catholic Church after the First World War, appear to have been a greater influence on the Czechs' breaking away from the Christian faith than the forty-year-long period of communist government (Hamplová – Nešpor, 2009). In the 1920s alone, approximately 2.5 million people left the Catholic Church. About half of these entered the national Czechoslovak Hussite Church; the other half remained without any religious affiliation. This movement of defection from the Catholic Church probably has no parallel in world history as to scale and speed. However, a "general religiosity", calling for a renewal of the churches and demanding that religion serve humanity and national development, was already apparent at that time. In addition, alternative religiosity was developing markedly in Bohemia, a phenomenon which only became widespread elsewhere in Europe at the end of the 20th century (Hamplová, 2013).

We may conclude therefore that the proverbial Czech atheism, which is so often quoted, does not exist at all; or, to put it more precisely: "The proverbial 'Czech atheism' is anything but real atheism" (Nešpor, 2010). The present situation of religiosity and spirituality in the Czech Republic and its historical development cannot be interpreted, therefore, as constituting an atheistic society. "Despite all changes that have occurred in the Czech religious scene in the course of the 20th century or even by means of these changes, it is possible to observe a long-term transition from ecclesial forms of religiosity and especially from the established churches to 'alternative forms', to personally experienced and especially in extreme moments utilized transcendent anchoring (Nešpor, 2016)". For the sake of completeness, we should add that belief in traditional Christian elements (God, heaven, hell, miracles) is more widespread and more stable in the Czech Republic than are belief in elements of Eastern religious philosophical systems (nirvana, reincarnation), although a minor decrease can be observed as the above implies (Hamplová, 2013).

Germany, in its turn, also has a peculiar history of its own. Article 4 of the constitution guarantees freedom of religion for the German people: the "Freiheit des Glaubens", the "Gewissens" and the "Freiheit des religiösen und weltanschaulichen Bekenntnisses sind unverletzlich". The separation of church and state was proclaimed in 1919.

In 2002, approximately 34% of the population belonged to the Protestant, mainly Lutheran churches, and another 34% to the Roman Catholic Church; 3.7% belonged to the Islamic faith. In 1995, the Jewish community counted 72 communities with a total of nearly 54,000 members. In 1933, before Hitler came to power, the Jewish population in Germany came to about 530,000. The largest Jewish community is located in Berlin, followed by Frankfurt and Munich. Traditional Jewish communities in Leipzig and Dresden have been actively professing their faith, also since the German reunification. 18 Lutheran and Reformed (*reformierte*) churches in West Germany are united in the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD). In 1991, the EKD was merged with the Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen from the former GDR. The Evangelical churches in Germany belong to the World Council of Churches and there is close collaboration between them and the Roman Catholic Church. Protestant churches organize biennial

national gatherings: the so-called church days.

Up to 1994, the Roman Catholic Church was divided into 23 dioceses, five of which were archdioceses. After a reorganization necessitated by reunification, Germany currently has 20 dioceses and seven archdioceses: Bamberg, Cologne, Freiburg, Munich and Freising, Paderborn, Hamburg (new), and Berlin. The archdiocese of Cologne is the richest in the world, thanks to the German system of church tax ("Kirchensteuer"). The Roman Catholic Church organizes biennial meetings: the so-called Catholics Days (Van der Mark).

The German Democratic Republic (German: Deutsche Demokratische Republik, DDR), often also called East Germany, was a communist country in Europe. It was founded in 1949 in the Soviet-occupied part of defeated Germany. Officially, the GDR existed from 7 October 1949 to 3 October 1990, the day of German reunification. On that day the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany were united, thus forming present-day Germany. Most of the old federal states that had existed before the GDR were restored. More than half of the population in the area of the former GDR and in the northern state of Hamburg have no religion. A huge shift has taken place in East Germany in this regard. There was an ongoing marginalization of the influence of organized religions by the Communist government of East Germany. The great emphasis of the state was on avoiding religion (Kellner).

1.2 Religious thinking and discourse

People in Central and Eastern European countries are not as familiar with open discussion of religion and values as their counterparts in so-called Western European countries are. The main reason for this is that the thesis of the colonial history of Europe does not hold for Central and Eastern Europe. The former Austro-Hungarian Empire and its successor states were never colonial superpowers in the sense that Great Britain, France, Spain, or the Netherlands were. Their experience with overseas countries was always mediated. From the point of view of the colonial history of Europe, the question is rather to what extent individual European countries such as the Czech lands, Croatia, Slovakia, etc., were Austro-Hungarian colonies. But in Central and Eastern Europe, this question is not and cannot be posed in this way, because the relationships between states and nations were ordered differently.

In the past decade, however, a colonial role has been ascribed to the European Union and its leading member states, especially Germany. The EU has also been compared to the Soviet Union and its "colonial" endeavor, even though most Central and Eastern European countries were never part of the Soviet Union. An important conclusion that follows from this is that the mentality that is prevalent in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe is like the mentality of the victims of colonial oppression. This has an important impact on public and political discourse on key issues, as well as on the way current world events are interpreted. As a result, significant segments of society in Central and Eastern European countries a priori reject a focus on the outside world and on concepts such as secularization. The societies of the individual states are polarized between two basic positions. One can be characterized as a position that insulates itself from everything foreign, a priori rejecting social change and the impact of world

developments, rejecting the findings of the humanities and social sciences – e.g. regarding the social construction of reality. The other position is open both to foreign influences and to social change and development, and strives for rational and objective assessment of these, as well as other information. The first position fears “colonization” on the part of the EU, the second points out contemporary Russia’s “colonizing” efforts. This polarization has led to a ideological fight in the whole of society, in discourse, and in political debates.

Older investigations of spirituality and religiosity already confirmed that certain kinds of fear are felt especially in Central and Eastern European societies, regardless of whether these are predominantly Catholic, such as Poland, or secularized, such as the Czech Republic. These fears are associated with the transformation of society, and they arise from a low standard of living and also include existential fears, especially the fear of death, of one’s own futility and uselessness. The American Pew Research Center’s 2017 investigation of religion and national belonging in post-communist Central and Eastern European countries reached similar conclusions. Religion, which helped to form and reinforce, develop and defend identity in Central and Eastern European countries, is becoming an instrument of oppression of everything that is different. A highly secularized country like the Netherlands can, for instance, be seen as representative of a new way of life that must be opposed, and might therefore be seen as a new kind of enemy, or opponent.

Earlier research amongst Dutch pupils (age 15-18) showed that faith related values are not important for them, nor being religious, having faith or belonging to a religious institute (Van Dijk 2015).

1.3 Religion in the three countries

We look first at the figures in the three countries, compared to world figures.

	Netherlands	Czech Republic	Saxony	World
• Christian*	40%	27 %	26 %	33%
• Orthodox	---	1 %	< 1 %	---
• Muslim	5%	< 1 %	---	22%
• Hindu	0.5%	---	---	14%
• Buddhist	0.5%	---	---	7%
• Other religion	5%	---	1 %	12%
• Atheist	---	25 %	---	---
• No religion	49%	46 %	73 %	2%

(*Christian here includes Protestant and Roman Catholic. Data: Netherlands: Schmeets and Van Mensvoort, 2015 p. 4; Czech Republic: Pew Research Center 2017, World Johnson and Grim, 2013 p.12; Saxony: Ergebnis des Zensus 2011)

For East Germany we have chosen the Saxony figures. Some details were not available in the data sets for all countries (---in the list). What is clear is the Christian nature of these countries, and the presence of a large percentage of non-affiliated people. In

Czech republic, the label of non-religious or atheist is often used by fans of alternative spirituality/religiosity, including horoscopes, amulets and so on. Compared to the rest of the world these countries have very few Muslims (the Netherlands tops the list in this respect with 5 %) as well as few Hindu or Buddhist people.

The key findings of the Europe's Young Adults and Religion survey contain the following figures on young people's religiosity:

- The proportion of young adults (16-29) with no religious affiliation ('nones') is as high as 91% in the Czech Republic, 80% in Estonia, and 75% in Sweden.
- 70% of Czech young adults – and 60% of their Spanish, Dutch, British, and Belgian counterparts – 'never' attend religious services.
- Only 2% of Catholic young adults in Belgium, 3% in Hungary and Austria, 5% in Lithuania, and 6% in Germany say they attend Mass weekly. This contrasts sharply with their peers in Poland (47%), Portugal (27%), the Czech Republic (24%), and Ireland (24%).

Source: Stephen Bullivant (2018).

1.4 Research Design

In our research we will focus on these three countries. Especially on denominational schools it is hard to come up with fitting religious education lessons with its highly secularized population. Knowledge about their religion and their belief, and the role it plays in meaning making in life will help to develop RE-lessons. Therefore, we ask pupils on denominational schools questions regarding their religious affiliation, their religious activity, their belonging and believing, their religious and nonreligious values and the sources where they find inspiration in their lives as possible entrance for religious education. We compare these three countries to find out whether, despite their almost equal secularization level, values differ or concur. This might add a purpose for learning in religious education addressing the different worldviews and historical context.

2. Method

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the variables, respondents and methodological choices will be described. The translation of the questionnaire, the respondents and their characteristics as well as the sampling procedure is presented in the following paragraphs.

2.2 The questionnaires

In this research project we used a questionnaire which was used in the Netherlands for over twenty years to establish the religion, belief, values and worldviews of secondary school pupils (Van Dijk-Groeneboer 2001, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2013). The items were translated by native speakers in Czechic and German language and very slightly

adjusted when necessary for the specific context, for instance the school levels, and expressions as 'Protestant', 'Evangelical', 'Lutheran' and 'Christian', which in all three countries have different pronunciations and meanings. Especially the real, through meaning of certain values remains hard to grasp, as will be elaborated on in our discussion paragraph.

The full original questionnaires are obtainable via the authors.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

To find respondents, a convenience sampling method was used. Especially when religious elements occur in research, many schools decline participation, so finding an entrance into schools is difficult. All three researchers have their contacts in this religious education field with denominational schools through the RE teachers. Therefore, since this is a pilot study, the schools that participated were those with teachers who were known to the researchers. This of course has an effect on the possibilities for generalization of the data, which will be focused on in our discussion paragraph. All pupils could complete the questionnaire digitally using their own devices.

300 Czech pupils, 300 German pupils, and 900 Dutch pupils in denominational secondary schools completed the same questionnaire. In Czech Republic, the pupils came from 59 high schools across the country, 21 of which were founded by political parties, 31 were Catholic, 5 were Protestant, and 2 were Jewish. In the Netherlands, 4 Catholic and 4 Protestant secondary schools participated, and in Saxony three Catholic *Gymnasium (=highest education level)* schools participated.

In the Netherlands 954 questionnaires were send out, 954 returned of which 903 were valid to enter the analysis. In Saxony 307 out of 318 lists were valid and in Czech Republic 292 out of 320. Some of the returned questionnaires were invalid for analysis, primarily due to missing data or flippant and/or inappropriate answers.

2.4 Data management

The survey was conducted for scientific reasons only. The data will be saved and guarded according to the data management rules in scientific research. All data will be kept without any personal details, so that none of the answers can ever be traced back to the respondent. The respondents participated voluntarily. The data will be kept as an original data source at the Faculty for Catholic Theology for ten years, and is open for other researchers to check the reliability of our analyses and conclusions. Approval for the research was given by the data management team of this Faculty and their data management policy is in line with the Fair Information Principles in the GDPR.

3. Results

3.1 Statistics

Descriptive analysis of the data was conducted with SPSS. This yielded in frequencies tables and crosstabs tables. Since this is still a pilot study, the analysis conducted so far is quite basic, but further analyses will be made in the future as well as a more representative sample study as follow up is prepared. In some questions a Likert scale was used where possible answers were ‘totally disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘agree’ and ‘totally agree’. These were assigned numbers 1 to 5 and the weighted mean was used in the data description.

3.2 The data

Our analysis will first answer questions regarding their religious affiliation.

Table 1 Religious affiliation (in %)

	Czech republic	Nether- lands	Saxony
Roman Catholic	37	12	20
Protestant	3	2	28
Christian	23	18	9
Jewish	1	1	0
Muslim	0	3	0
Atheist	7	12	10
Humanist	4	2	1
Non-affiliated	20	43	26

Over a third of respondents in Czech Republic, a fifth in Saxony, and a tenth in the Netherlands call themselves Catholic. Almost a third of German young adults call themselves Protestants, either Evangelical or Free Evangelical, i.e. belonging to the “Evangelische Freikirchen”. 18 % of the Dutch respondents and 23 % of Czech respondents call themselves Christians. Almost half of Dutch young adults are non-affiliated, as are a quarter of their Eastern German, and a fifth of their Czech peers.

Table 2 Religiosity and religious activities (in %)

	DISAGREE			AGREE		
	SA	CZ	NL	SA	CZ	NL
I call myself religious	37	28	61	59	63	32
I know exactly what I believe	23	31	43	65	61	46
I want to believe but somehow I cannot	77	82	79	9	6	15
If I marry, I will do that in church	27	22	56	56	58	27
If I get kids, I will baptize them	40	30	69	39	54	15
I would like to have a religious funeral	27	21	62	50	60	24

Statements on religiosity and possible involvement with the church for future life events were presented and pupils were again asked to express their level of agreement. Czech and Saxonian pupils call themselves religious far more often than their Dutch peers, and more of them know exactly what to believe. Life events like marriage, the birth of a child, or a funeral are much more associated with religion for Czech or German young people than for Dutch pupils.

We furthermore asked the pupils what they think it means to be faithful with regard to religious affiliation and attending church services (believing and belonging). In all three countries, about 50 % of the respondents say that “when you believe you do not need a religion, nor do you need to attend services”.

Table 3 Believing and belonging (in %)

	Czech Republic	Saxony	Netherlands
Actively religious, strong belonging to one religious organization	37	27	6
Actively religious, feeling connected with different religious organizations	13	15	4
Actively religious, not connected to any religious organization	27	18	10
Not actively religious, belonging to one religious organization	8	16	24

Not actively religious, not connected

to any religious organization 15 24 55

This table shows Dutch pupils are hardly feeling belonging to a religious organization and more than half of them is not actively religious. Most of the Czechian pupils are actively religious as well as half of the Saxonian pupils.

The survey tries to identify the values upon which the respondents base their identity formation. A list with 23 variables was presented to the pupils, and they could then mark whether they regarded each of these values as very unimportant, unimportant, neutral, important, or highly important (ranking 1 to 5). In the list were three faith-related values, which produced the following results (the percentage that agreed or strongly agreed that this is an important value).

Table 4 Faith-related values (in %)

	CZ	NL	SA
Having a life guided by God, Allah or a Higher power	32	13	22
Having trust in God, Allah, or a Higher power	52	15	40
Having faith	67	21	47

Furthermore, we present the three values that were most often chosen in each country (the values that had the highest weighted mean, marked with *), and we have placed these beside the figures of the other countries for comparative purposes, as the following overview shows.

Table 5 Values ranked high (weighted means)

	Netherlands	Czech Republic	Saxony
Being free and independent	4.37 *	4.10	4.42
Being happy with yourself	4.49 *	4.60 *	4.63 *
Living for your family	3.48	4.49 *	4.22
Enjoying life	4.53 *	4.32	4.53 *
Having a happy relationship	4.23	4.55 *	4.47 *

One of these values was among the highest in all three countries, “Being happy with yourself”. Saxonian and Dutch pupils value “Enjoying life” very high and Czechian and Saxonian pupils value “Having a happy relationship” very high.

Finally we describe the respondents’ religious and mystical experiences in music, sports, and nature. Pupils were asked to select whether they believed that the following statement applied to themselves or not. The ‘agree’ figures (adding up “agree” and “totally agree”) are shown here in percentages.

Table 6 Inspiration in music, sports and countryside (in %)

	CZ	NL	SA
Music is important, because it helps me when I am sad	75	57	79
Sports are important, when I do sports I can really feel happy sometimes	27	37	43
I like going into the countryside, it makes me feel at ease and I experience unity	53	23	46

4 Discussion

In our data we find indications that confirm our hypothesis that the values of the pupils in the three secularized countries differ. Religious affiliation and religious activities, religious and nonreligious values, as well as the relationship between believing and belonging to a religious institute are different in these countries. For religious education in all countries however, the entrance might be found through music and by entering into a dialogue about the meaning of religious experiences in this music, as well as in sports or in going to the country.

Doing comparative research in different countries with different languages is very difficult. Especially doing quantitative research, since the real meaning the respondent attaches to certain concepts cannot be checked, as is often the case in surveys. This is especially problematic with religious and value-oriented questions, because the concepts themselves have everything to do with the real, true meaning of words. Unfortunately, this cannot be avoided and we are aware of it. Nevertheless, this research gives some direction in which pupils in these countries differ from each other on certain values and this enhances further thinking on their language and what religious education can add to bring these core values into dialogue in the classroom.

Some remarks are to be made concerning possible bias in our data. The questionnaire was spread during RE classes, so pupils might have been tempted to answer 'more religiously' than usual because their expectations in this setting turn more towards religion. Moreover, the lists were spread amongst denominational schools that were also known to the researchers, so generalization to all Catholic or to all denominational schools in the country or towards non-public schools in general are hard to make. Thirdly, it is important to point out that the results of these pupils on denominational schools are also likely to be much more 'religious' than the average figures for young people in these countries, as believing and religiously active families are more likely to choose these denominational schools that have been founded by churches (in all three countries) and by local authorities (Czech Republic) than to choose public schools. The representativeness of the figures is therefore somewhat uncertain; we would like to emphasize that this is only a pilot study to obtain first insights and ideas on young people and their religion in these three countries.

18 % of the Dutch respondents and 23 % of the Czech respondents call themselves Christians, which is interesting in itself. Are they just Christians 'in general', as in: 'good citizens'? Or are they in fact Protestant or Catholic, but without using this more precise definition due to their religious illiteracy? The latter is most likely the case at least for the Dutch respondents. The percentage of pupils calling themselves atheist is worth further elaborating on, taken into account the remark of Nešpor whether atheism in Czech Republic is real atheism. However, with these quantitative data unfortunately there is not much more to conclude on this point.

Looking into the results on believing and belonging to religious institutions, there is a wide tendency to be skeptical about institutions, which have lost their importance, as

other research has confirmed. In Czech Republic, over a third of respondents stated that they belonged to and believed in one specific religious institution. This was a little less than a third in Saxony, whereas hardly any Dutch pupils at all shared this statement. Another interesting fact is that almost a third of the pupils in Czech Republic said they were actively religious but did not feel connected to any religious institution, whereas about a fifth of the Dutch and Saxonian respondents said that they were not religiously active but did feel connected to one religious institution. This appears to be more a case of having an old feeling of belonging to a specific religious institution, which however the respondents in question attend only at Christmas and for life-changing events. These different types of belonging and believing can be connected to earlier research outcomes (Riegel, Van Dijk-Groeneboer & Ziebertz).

The results show insight in the values pupils give meaning. The religious oriented values are only found important by Czech pupils, especially having faith and having trust in God, Allah or a Higher Power. In the Netherlands, the values that scored highest were all individually oriented, whereas in Saxony and Czech Republic, two out of the three highest ranking values were family- and relationship-oriented. This might have something to do with the history of these countries. A good relationship and good family life is important especially for Christian and Catholic people, as they live lives that are not promoted by the state itself and, even more importantly, have been opposed for many years by the communist regime. As a result, faith was opposed and became a private matter. Many Czech people feel religious bonds across borders and say that religion is important in life, but do not feel proud to be a citizen of their country. This alienation or feeling of loneliness among Christians is a known phenomenon in Czech Republic and to a lesser degree in Saxony (Ökumenismus der dritter Art).

Different values are appreciated differently in these three countries, partly because of their diverging histories and the deeply rooted cultures these have evoked. Religious Education can enhance the creation of meaning for pupils in secularized countries. Value-oriented religious education is needed to form young people in a realistic worldview, especially now they are loose from religions in this secularized context, and in recognizing a horizon towards which they can steer their lives. But this is easier said than done, especially with regard to young adults in these three countries. Religion and religious traditions have been pushed to the background; narrative discussions are therefore needed in the classroom to re-open the search for pupils' roots and values. According to our research results, music, nature, and sports might be interesting points of departure to begin these value-oriented educational activities.

After analyzing the quantitative data, the final step will be to search for the words young people use themselves when they describe what they think is important in their lives in the field of religion, meaning and purpose in life, and of their philosophy of life. The qualitative part of this comparative research will yield information about the language that secondary school pupils use in these three countries. The analysis is currently being carried out and it will be finished around spring 2020. It takes much effort to identify the real, underlying meaning of concepts that are used in each country, but this

can contribute significantly to getting to know young people, their language, and their core values. This means it will be possible to develop better educational practices to form them (Kienstra, Van Dijk & Boelens 2016, 2017). These activating and reflective educational tools will help to create brave, strong young people, who are open and aware of their own values in today's world.

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FROM ROOTS TO WINGS: RECASTING THE ‘WEDGE MODEL’ OF YOUTH MINISTRY INTO A SACRED PEDAGOGICAL FORM

*“There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other, wings.”
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Abstract

Despite their sharing the idea that the primary reason why youth and young adults are leaving Catholicism is largely due to their not encountering Christ and his love within the structures of Church teaching and tradition, tensions between neo-traditional and postmodern religious educational approaches have continued to swell. As Catholic neo-traditionalists continue to press forward a return back to ‘how the Church once was’ postmodern religious educators worry that those who already live in the margins will continue to be pushed further away from opportunities for encountering Christ. This paper will outline the “Wedge Model” of youth ministry, deconstruct it, and then reconstruct it (in conversation with lived experience) as a sacred pedagogy centered upon teaching Catholic youth how to connect to and practice the liberating love of Christ.

Keywords: disaffiliation, neo-traditional, post-modernism, sacred pedagogy, youth ministry

1. Introduction

As disaffiliation continues to swell among young Catholics, the Catholic neo-traditional call to abandon postmodern inspired forms of religious education, like that of Terence McLaughlin’s “openness with roots,” has grown stronger over the last decade. For some Catholic neo-traditionalists, the growing number of young Catholics who have renewed their interest in medieval scholasticism and the Latin Mass indicates that reverting back to ‘how the Church once was’ is the needed answer for solving the current crisis of faith, disaffiliation. Other religious educators, however, worry that a retreat away from postmodern pedagogical methods will only further enflame the rate of disaffiliation among Catholic youth and further delay the building of bridges to the LGBTQ, immigrant, etc. communities. Despite hailing from two different religious educational approaches, however, Catholic neo-traditionalists and postmodern enthusiasts do share one common understating: the primary reason why Catholic youth are leaving the Faith is largely due to their not encountering Christ and his love within the structures of Catholic teaching and Tradition.

Christ does not limit his presence to just the context of Catholicism. Therefore, for Catholic religious education to be successful in reconnecting its young church to Christ and his liberative love, it should seek to employ sacred pedagogies which connect Christ’s presence in the secular culture to the Christian faith tradition. That is, to be successful in re-guiding the disaffiliated or outcast back to their roots and give the young church the wings it needs in order to move its faith tradition forward from division to coexistence, a recasting of a sacred pedagogy is needed.

Through a recasting of the wedge model of youth ministry into an “openness” pedagogy, this paper will present a new sacred pedagogy that religious educators may use to connect young Catholics to Christ and his liberative love. The developed sacred pedagogy presented in this analysis will also offer Catholic, as well as other, religious educators a new tool for creating spaces of coexistence between Catholic neo-traditionalists and postmodernists. Specifically, by looking at the primary stages of the wedge model (relational ministry, evangelization, recognition, catechesis, and service), this paper will recast these stages into conversation with McLaughlin’s “openness with roots” in such a way that a new model, focused upon placing Christ’s liberative love into practice, will spring forward. This refashioned sacred pedagogy will present a new religious educational model for healing the divides which currently hinder Catholicism (as well as other Christian denominations and other faith traditions) from sharing and doing the work of Christ’s liberating love – the love frees persons from political and social discrimination.

1.1 Methodology: A Qualitative Community of Practice

Developed from an exploration of the past, present, and future, this paper employs a two-fold qualitative method: narrative and grounded theory. The narrative method is used to create a cohesive image of current tensions between Catholic neo-traditional and postmodern religious educational approaches. The narrative method, moreover, offers a clear portraiture of the past and present tensions which exist between neo-traditionalist and postmodern religious educational approaches. The second primary method this paper uses is the qualitative method of grounded theory. Specifically, by using an inductive approach, this paper offers an outlining of the wedge model of youth ministry, deconstruct it, and then reconstruct it (in conversation with lived experience) as a sacred pedagogy centered upon teaching Catholic youth how to connect to and practice the liberating love of Christ.

2. “Straw for the Bricks”: Definitions & Understandings

In a 1989 article for the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Pastoral Studies*, Stephen Pattison offered the observation¹ that students in pastoral studies programs are often asked to partake in the process of Theological Reflection before they are properly prepared to do so; or in the words of Pattison, “students are being asked to make bricks without straws.”² Structures made with straw-less bricks crumble easily in challenging climates. Similarly, students and scholars who do not frame a foundational understanding of the words and theories which form the underpinnings of their path of study will also find their research questions, thought experiments, and arguments crumbling around the work that they are trying to achieve. Therefore, before this paper moves forward in its exploration of its proposed thesis it will first offer some “straw for the bricks.” For it will be these “straws” that will bring forth clarity to the re-construction and use of the “Wedge Model of Youth Ministry” as a form of sacred pedagogy practiced in Catholic youth ministry.

2.2 Neo-Traditionalism

¹ The root metaphor of Pattison’s observation is derived from the Book of Exodus 5:1-23.

² Stephen Pattison, “Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection,” *Practical Theology* (August 26, 2016): 2-9.

One of the most interesting effects that social media has had upon Catholicism is the organic development of #catholictwitter and “weird Catholic Twitter.” The diversity of thought and lived Catholicism housed in these social media handles is nothing short of prodigious. Anyone who casually scrolls through those who post to these handles will find debates and discussions ranging on whether or not Pope Francis is the legitimate pope of the Catholic church to whether or not it is appropriate to allow a crying baby to stay in the pews during Sunday liturgical celebrations. These “Catholic tribes,” as observed by Michael Warren and Damian Thompson in their *Catholic Herald* article, “Meet America’s Catholic Tribes,” are filled with “noisy groups of priests and laity who disagree on pretty much everything. There are fault lines everywhere, growing wider thanks to a deadly combination of scandals and social media.”³ Fault lines which have grown in large part to a rapid rise in neo-traditionalism (or “rad-trads”⁴ as they like to call themselves on social media) among American Catholics.

One of the reasons why the Catholic neo-traditional movement has successfully moved the fault lines of Catholicism is rooted in their rapid movement away from traditional Catholicism. A decade ago, the writings and teachings of 20th century Catholic theologians (e.g., Pope Benedict XVI, Dr. Scott Hahn, Bishop Robert Barron, and George Weigel) worked to reorient Catholics toward placing modern Catholic theologies in continuity with Catholic tradition and its teachings in regard to unchangeable “Truth.” In contrast, neo-traditionalists are suspect of any theological developments formed in postmodernity and they are especially suspect of the postmodern methods currently employed by Catholic academics and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Neotraditional Catholics, in other words, hold and openly express a deep disgruntlement towards modern Catholicism, an institution that they believe has been infiltrated by secularism. In the compendium work, *Fundamentalism Observed*, theologian William D. Dinges (Catholic University), offers the following observation of what Catholic neo-traditionalism seeks to accomplish in its fervor:

[Neo-traditionalism] seeks to arrest and reverse religious change among Catholics and to preserve the ideological, organizational, and cultic patterns altered, abandoned, or discredited in the post conciliar era. [It] is a protest against the blurring of Catholic identity and the loss of Catholic hegemony in the social, cultural, and political sphere.⁵

In as far as neo-traditional approaches within youth ministry there are some shared similarities between neo-traditional and postmodern youth ministry programs. The neo-traditional Mater Dei parish (Irving, TX), for example, offers the following to the youth of their parish:

Little Flowers (Young Girls Social & Spiritual Group): A program for teaching virtues and studying through Scripture, saints’ biographies and the Catechism for girls (9-12).

³ Warren Davis, Michael, and Damian Thompson. “Meet America’s Catholic Tribes.” *Catholic Herald*, November 15, 2018. <https://catholicherald.co.uk/magazine/the-time-of-the-tribes/>.

⁴ For more information on ‘Rad Trads’ and their use of social media to press forward a return to traditionalism see Mary Meisenzahl, “Inside the World of Weird Catholic Twitter — and the ‘rad Trads’ Keeping the Old Traditions Alive,” *Mel Magazine*, March 2019, <https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/rad-trad-weird-catholic-twitter>.

⁵ William Dinges and James Hitchcock, “Roman Catholic Traditionalism and Activist Conservatism in the United States,” in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin Marty and Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 67.

Our Lady's Fiat: For young ladies (13-18). Meeting time consist of a tea party brunch, a short devotion and a talk led by [our pastor], and an activity

St. John Bosco Boys Group: A boys' formation program (13-18) which aims to foster the virtues of purity, temperance, prudence, justice, and fortitude along with the development of Christian conviction and true leadership. Courses offered provide spiritual formation alongside intellectual growth.

Youth Group (13-18): A meeting of the parish's youth which begins with a rosary and is followed by a group dinner and interactive talk (with a parish pastor), followed by games.

What lies at the fault line between postmodern approaches youth ministry and neo-traditional approaches is the neo-traditional youth's devotion to the Tridentine Mass – the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite or The Latin Mass (TLM) – and to intellectual formation.

The international youth movement *Fœderatio Internationalis Juventutem* (FIJ) is a good example of the integrated approach that neo-traditionalists have formed in relation to ministering to the youth of their parishes. According to its website, FIJ is committed to connecting Catholic youth (practicing and disaffiliated) to the “doctrinal presentations of the divine truths so eloquently expressed by” TLM. A feat in which FIJ aims to achieve through their broader commitment in offering opportunities for “prayer, friendship, and learning.”⁶ Neo-traditional youth ministry deeply roots itself in the practice of traditional forms of liturgy. Youth not only are encouraged to participate in TLM but are also pressed to use their experiences formed within TLM as a “springboard” into better understanding the teachings of the Catholic faith.

Although one could say that the use of liturgy in youth ministry is an approach shared by postmodern parishes⁷, the approach employed by neo-traditionalists differs in as far as they do not see the liturgy as a place for youth expression. That is, unlike the Roman Rite, TLM does not offer opportunities for the integration of youthful liturgical music and other expressions of faith (e.g. holding hands during the recitation of the Lord's prayer). “Meeting the youth where they are” in relation to liturgy is shuddered as it is seen as a “watering down” of divine worship and tradition.

In relation to the second point, neo-traditional approaches to youth ministry also emphasizes a call to be formed by Catholicism's intellectual tradition. Instead of creating programs which work from the baseline that the youth who participate know little to nothing about their faith, neo-traditionalists press their youth to explore challenging theological teachings, historical developments, and criticisms of the “outside world.” It is not uncommon to find neo-traditional youth debating Aristotle and Plato or St. Thomas Aquinas and Augustine in relation to the ills of the outside world during a youth group gathering. To simply know the catechism or be able to explain how the Ten Commandments can be helpful in “guard railing” teen life, neo-traditional youth programs challenge their youth to deepen their intellectual understandings of the great

⁶ Fœderatio Internationalis Juventutem, “About,” Fœderatio Internationalis Juventutem, accessed July 25th, 2019, <http://juventutem.org/about/>.

⁷ A popular program used by many postmodern parishes which emphasizes the use of liturgy and Eucharistic celebrations to be the essential core of youth ministry is Life Teen. For more information about Life Teen and its employed ministerial models, visit <https://lifeteen.com>.

philosophers and theologians who neo-traditionalists believe to have properly interpreted the Deposit of Faith.

Neo-traditionalism's approach to religious education reflects its held suspicions of the outside world. In a 21st century, ordinary diocesan school theology class, for example, one will find a plethora of approaches employed by the teacher in his/her attempt to teach their students about their faith and how to place it into practice as they move through their ordinary lives. Neo-traditionalism, in its protest against religious change, approaches religious education through the lens of "regurgitation." Youth should learn theology and the traditions of their faith, but opportunities for questioning are not encouraged in as far as they cause confusion. An example of this form of approach can be found in the use of the Baltimore Catechism in the late 19th and early-mid 20th century catechetical programs. Written in a "Q & A" style, the Baltimore Catechism does not concern itself with explaining the teachings of Catholicism in great detail nor offers opportunities for Catholic teaching in conversation with lived experience.; youth are read the questions and are to recite or regurgitate, verbatim, the answer:

Lesson Seventh: On the Incarnation and Redemption

Q. 318. What does "incarnation" mean, and what does "redemption" mean?

A. "Incarnation" means the act of clothing with flesh. Thus Our Lord clothed His divinity with a human body. "Redemption" means to buy back again.

Q. 319. Did God abandon man after he fell into sin?

A. God did not abandon man after he fell into sin, but promised him a Redeemer, who was to satisfy for man's sin and reopen to him the gates of heaven.

Q. 320. What do we mean by the "gates of heaven"?

A. By the "gates of heaven" we mean the divine power by which God keeps us out of heaven or admits us into it, at His pleasure.⁸

In their pursuit of "passing on the Faith" in a way that does not diminish or tarnish Catholic teachings, Neo-traditionalists encourage a return back to religious educational practices that are "fixed" and focused upon a "predetermined content."⁹ Any approach that encourages a deconstructing of a teaching or tradition and its reconstruction through a sociological, anthropological, etc. lens is viewed as offering youth an opportunity to open gates towards heresy.

2.2 Postmodernists

Pope John Paul II's thirteenth encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, explicitly reminded the Catholic church that its relationship with postmodernism is one of great complexity. Postmodernism, according to Poe John Paul II, can also mean a lot of different things as "the term designates the emergence of a complex of new factors." The judgement placed upon it can be "sometimes positive and

⁸ Frances J. Connell. *The New Baltimore Catechism*, No. 3. New York: Benziger, 1941.

⁹ For a detailed examination of how catechetical approaches have changed in the last century, see Tommy King, *Can We Say Catechesis?* in "Children and the Church," special issue, *Leaven* 4 (January 1, 1996): 34-38.

sometimes negative.”¹⁰ For many youth ministers in Catholic parishes, postmodernism is and has been a largely positive influence on the work that they do “in the trenches.” Moreover, given the use of inductive models and the ‘public theology’ which organically rises through the practice of youth ministry, one cannot deny the positive presence of postmodernism within many Catholic parishes today. It is in light of this understanding that the use of the term “postmodern parish” has been employed. The next “straw” that this paper will offer will be a broader comprehension of what Catholic postmodernists believe as well as what youth ministry looks like in a postmodern Catholic parish.

For many Catholics who value the spirit of Vatican II, postmodernism is a “fresh wind of the Spirit sent to revitalize the dry bones of the Church.”¹¹ This is especially true of the “rebuilt” Church movements that have casted new tools to be used for the Church’s mission of reaching the margins of the postmodern world.¹² For postmodernists:

“The fruit of the Spirit emerges in our lives from the seeds planted by the practices of bring in the Spirit, it becomes a witness to a postmodern world (John 17). Nothing is more countercultural than a community serving the Suffering Servant in a world devoted to consumption and violence. But the Church will have this countercultural, prophetic witness only when it jettisons its own modernity...postmodernism [is] another catalyst for the church *to be* the church.”¹³

In her book *Postsecular Catholicism: Relevance and Renewal*, Michele Dillion (Professor of Sociology, University of New Hampshire), offered an exploration of how “Catholicism negotiates the tension between the forces of tradition and those of change,”¹⁴ In her exploration of postmodern Catholicism, Dillion asserts that the “Catholic Church is very much a public religion as it is a “universal institution dedicated to the public common good” that houses teachings on social justice “particular pertinent to the problems of contrite modernity.”¹⁵ For Dillion, “Vatican II’s rejection of a false opposition between religious and social activities and its explicit affirmation of human agency, lay competence, and honest discussion in discerning the issues of modernity marked a highly significant” shift in how the Church approached its expressions of faith. The Church’s relevance in an ever-increasing complex social world is reliant upon whether or not it successfully joins secular practices, understandings and hopes into the delivery of the Church’s teachings.¹⁶ Postmodernists, unlike Traditionalists, embrace this same ideal. For the Church to remain relevant and perceived to be a place for all people, it must remain in conversation with the outside world. Postmodernists do not see the outside world as a imminent threat against Catholicism. Although they proceed with caution, postmodernists understand that there is great truth and beauty worth capturing from secular theories and philosophies. In relation to youth ministry, postmodernists believe that the teachings of the

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, “Fides Et Ratio” (lecture, Saint Peter's, Rome, Italy, September 14, 1998), paragraph 9.

¹¹ James Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 18.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 30

¹⁴ Michael Dillion, *Postsecular Catholicism: Relevance and Renewal* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5

¹⁶ Ibid., 19

Church will only be explored by the youth as long as their presentation are written in a language that youth understand.

“Meet them where they are” is perhaps one of the most famous Jesuit colloquiums of our day. The phrase highlights the belief that God will come into your spiritual home even in the midst of spiritual chaos and in a manner that you understand. “Meet them where they are,” in other words, is a good example of how postmodernists approach the “doing” of ministry. There are many Catholic parishes in the US that have radically transformed their approach to ministry with tools that they have gathered from this ideal. The Church of the Nativity, for example, in Timonium, Maryland is an example of the good that may come from using postmodern approaches in an effort to inform new approaches in ministry. According to the pastor of the Church of the Nativity, Father Michael White, when he first arrived at the parish he found a “languid community aging in place” with 96% of weekly Mass goers reporting that the reason why they chose to be a member of this parish or attend liturgy there was because the church had “convenient parking.” Externally and internally the parish was also a mess, spiritually and physically.¹⁷ Knowing what most likely laid ahead in as far as Mass attendance and low participation in offered ministries, Father Michael created a dynamic strategy to bring the parish back to life. His attention to intentionally bring in the outside culture of his parishioners and those whom he hoped to reconnect to the Faith brought a deep breath of fresh air to the parish and its pastoral leaders.

Refashioned for the 3rd millennium, the Church of Nativity’s youth ministry program now flourishes with several hundred youth attending parish events on a regular basis. Its long-time youth minister, Christopher Wesley, explains that the primary reason for its success is rooted in the parish’s attentiveness to “the coming together of the present and future of the Church. It [is this type of] movement that takes the Church relevancy and impact to the next level.”¹⁸ By making the youth ministry program “more accessible,” postmodernists have been effective in showing youth that “Faith is not dead,” but very much alive in the midst of their messy lives. God is where they are.

Another example of how postmodernists differs from traditionalists is centered upon the modern approach to “accompaniment” in relation to youth’s spiritual journeys. In the post synodal apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis notes the importance of respecting the freedom of young people as they build their lives and explore the world.¹⁹ Moreover, Pope Francis urges the Church to be more welcoming to youth much in the same way that other secular educational intuitions are. The Church, in the words of Francis, should avoid “rigid criteria for students” since these types of conditions would “deprive many young people of the accompaniment that could help enrich their lives.”²⁰ That is, the Church must be open for the free flowing of youth culture in and out of its institutions as it too accompanies youth as they walk on their spiritual journeys. Youth culture, which is largely formed out of postmodern thought, is to be cherished

¹⁷ For more information on the Rebuilt Parish association and to see other success stories in relation to parishes renewing their visions and ministerial plans, visit: <https://rebuiltparish.com> .

¹⁸ Christopher Wesley, *Rebuilding Youth Ministry: Ten Practical Strategies for Catholic Parishes* (South Bend, Indiana: Ave Marie Press, 2015), 3.

¹⁹ Pope Francis. “Christus Vivit,” paragraph 242.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, paragraph 247.

and welcomed in the Church as it offers an opportunity to make meaningful connections to the youth that the Church hopes to connect to the life and love of Christ. Traditionalists approach, as mentioned before, secular youth cultures with great suspicion. Therefore, in ministering to young people they do not see the benefit of inviting the youth culture into conversation with the traditions and teachings of the Church.

As mentioned above, in contrast to traditionalism, postmodernists employ a plethora of approaches in their sharing of Catholic teachings and traditions. Moreover, it is not uncommon to find a Catholic theology or religion teacher or catechists who has not found some form of cultural tools to enliven the lessons that they teach in an effort to bring their students to a better understanding of why their faith teaches what it does. In his blog, seanmcdowell.org, high school theology teacher, Sean McDowell, posted the question: “How do we make theology come alive for students?” His question, which he did explore in more detail in his April 2019 blog post of the same title, is a good example of the form of questioning that postmodernists begin with in their exploration of how to connect youth to their faith traditions. Sean’s list of answers to his “research question” show a broad snapshot of postmodern religious education “at work:”

1. Use stories
2. Use cultural examples
3. As good questions
4. Connect theology to practical life

At the heart of well-formed postmodern pedagogies, as the above shows, is an explicit attention to what captures the religious imagination of youth: relevancy. Youth, as seen at the 2018 Catholic Youth Synod, want to be seen and heard; they have a deep desire to learn about truth, but only in a manner that is fashioned out of the images that they share. This is one of the essential cores of the postmodernists’ approach to religious education.

3. From Roots: Revisiting & Deconstructing a Forgotten Youth Ministerial Model

If there is one concrete known fact in regard to youth ministry is that practitioners in this field have a plethora of models to choose from in determining the right “fit” for their ministerial context. Often, these models are presented in flashy “boxed programs” marketed with the promise of fun, relevant podcasts, dynamic images, and relevant discussion questions, all easily accessible online or through a downloaded app. Beyond the tree limbs, however, deeply buried beneath the ground lies the forgotten youth ministry models that continue to inspire and support the new models and approaches ministers use today. It is within these roots that the “Wedge Model” situates itself, freely branching out into the 3rd millennium and sharing its rich wisdom with the next generation of religious educators and youth ministers who long to return the disaffiliated to the feet of Christ and strengthen the faith of those who remain so that they do not ever leave.

Constructed through the research and practical experiences of Southern Californian youth ministers, the “Wedge Model” of youth ministry is a six-stage process that can be used and adapted as a method for the faith and spiritual formation of youth in almost any context. The six stages that outlines this model, as shown below, are as follows: 1. Relational ministry, 2.

Evangelization, 3. The “moment of recognition,” 4. Systematic Catechesis, 5. Service, and 6. Leadership development and peer ministry.

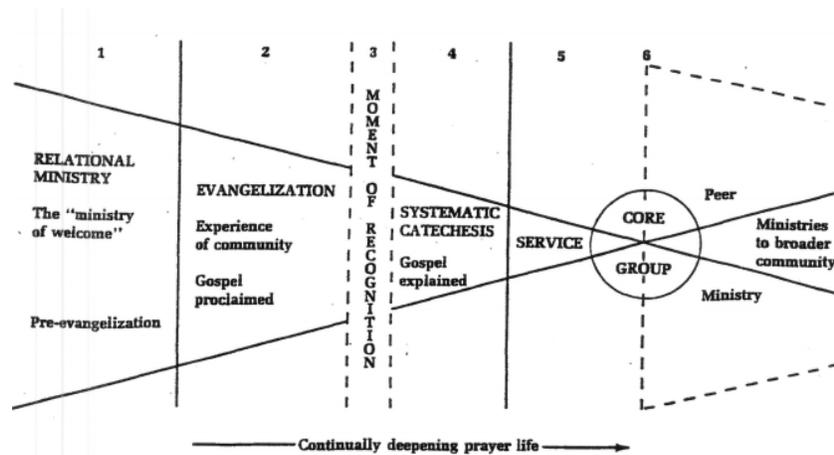


Figure 1.1. Wedge Model in Thomas Zanzig, “Youth Ministry: Directions and Reflections,” in *Readings and Resources in Youth Ministry*, ed. Michael Warren (Winona, Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press, 1987).

Stage One: Relational Ministry

The first stage of this model, relational ministry, has, in recent years, seen a renewed interest as a result of Pope Francis’s ministerial direction. In a homily (May 8, 2013) at a weekday Mass, Pope Francis reminded the faithful that if Christians are to be effective in proclaiming the Good News of Christ, they must be like Paul and build bridges and not walls. These bridges, Pope Francis added, must reach out to where people are, eager to listen to everyone, to become acquainted with them, and form relationships with them. This is relational ministry at work. Effective youth ministry is not possible without relationships. “Until young people feel welcomed by and into the parish community of faith, there is no reason why they should be open to the message it proclaims.”²¹

Although relational ministry is widely accepted as the first step in youth ministry among many other models, it would be disingenuous to not explore some of its weaknesses as a point of deconstruction. The first weakness of this stage hails from within the current crisis of the Catholic sex abuse scandal. As more dioceses tighten up the processes of how youth ministers interact with the youth that they serve, forming cohesive relational ministries is becoming more difficult. In order for this stage to benefit the youth and not offer additional opportunities for them to be harmed in ill formed relationships, the family will have to take on the role as a guide for this process. The youth minister, on other words, will have to shift their relational ministry to the whole family rather than forming a bridge towards where the youth reside. Without a strong, safe, and secure relationship between the youth minister and the youth the rest of the process risks also being dismantled.

²¹ Thomas Zanzig, “Youth Ministry: Directions and Reflections,” in *Readings and Resources in Youth Ministry*, ed. Michael Warren (Winona, Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press, 1987), 45.

Another weakness in the relational ministry stage is that too often overzealous ministers forget to “shut-up” and listen to the youth in front of them. Youth should not have to fight for a place at the table or to be heard.²² For relational ministry to achieve its goal of “welcoming” youth ministers who use this model must keep in mind that the voice of the youth that they minister to is valuable. By “shutting-up” and listening to what the youth needs, wants, desires, etc. youth ministers will be better positioned to teach them about the faith in a language drawn from what has been shared.

Stage Two: Evangelization

Once youth have formed a healthy connection to the faith community, it will be natural to want to share what they have found with others. At this point, youth ministers should offer social activities and service-learning experiences as they will most likely be eager to share the joy that they have, hopefully, found in the Church. It is at these gatherings that the youth minister will have the best opportunity to evangelize.²³

The essential elements that youth ministers should incorporate into the stage of evangelization are witness, outreach, proclamation, invitation, conversion, and discipleship. Of these, the most important element of evangelization is proclamation as “there is no true evangelization if the name, teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom, and the mystery of Jesus are not proclaimed.” Evangelization, in other words, begins with the sharing of Christ.²⁴

In deconstructing this stage, the primary concern that arises is the presence of proselytizing in place of faith sharing. A youth minister or even youth who are excited to share their faith and to proclaim the work of Christ may, at times, press others to accept and believe Church teachings and traditions before they are ready to. This is especially common among traditionalists who, as this paper showed above, see it as their duty to convert non-believers to the Faith and believers to seeing the teachings and the traditions of the Church in the same way that they do.²⁵ To approach evangelization in this way causes great harm. Youth cannot be pressured to accept Faith teachings and traditions until they are ready to, especially those who struggle with genderism, sexual identity, racism, etc.. Evangelization through youth ministry must allow them the space they need to explore the Good News in light of their social context and understanding. Jesus took his time in evangelizing non-believers, youth ministers must also do the same if they are to be effective in fostering meaningful connections to the life and love of Christ.

Stage Three: The “Moment of Recognition”

²² For a more detailed look at the theology of place sharing, see Andrew Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007).

²³ Zanzig, *Youth Ministry*, 46

²⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (Washington DC: USCCB, 1997).

²⁵ An example of a traditionalists who has been identified as proselytizing under the name of “evangelization” is Dr. Taylor Marshall. Dr. Marshall is a well-known traditionalists scholar who uses social media platforms to explain the Faith through the lens of rigid traditionalism. To learn more about Dr. Marshall and his ministry, see <https://taylormarshall.com>.

The “moment of recognition” is not the same as “conversion or encounter that a youth in some way was thunderstruck by the faith in some emotional sense overwhelmed by the presence of God.”²⁶ Although some youth do experience these moments of great conversion, like St. Augustine did as a youth in a garden, not many of them do. The essential goal of this stage is therefore to guide a young person to a new understanding or acceptance of something that they had not thought of before or had previously dismissed or rejected. Moreover, although the youth minister can (and should) offer opportunities to youth in which “the individual might find the faith attractive and worthy of consideration, it cannot force the youth to accept the faith or live it out.”²⁷ Like the stage of evangelization, youth must feel free to explore, whether through questioning or thought experiments. For it is through the process of exploration that they will find either what they are looking for or what God desires for them. Those are the moments that will bring them to “recognition,” and they will see the Faith fully alive and at work. A weakness in this stage is that youth ministers may be tempted (or feel pressured) to manufacture the perfect opportunities for “moments of recognition.” A good example of this can be seen in the summer teen conferences held across the US. Any youth minister who has taken a group of their youth to one of these conferences often lament that it is hard to keep their youth excited about their faith after they return home. Opportunities like these, which are designed to prompt these types of moments, fail to offer youth suitable, lifelong recognition of faith teachings; youth ministers should be aware of the fleeting theological awakenings that this stage may encourage them to foster.

Lastly, postmodernists who are eager to deconstruct theological insights or guide their students through a process of reflection in an effort to prompt youth towards “moments of recognition,” also may cause harm if they do not adequately prepare the youth for what they experience. Therefore, postmodernists should take the necessary time in providing the necessary foundation that you need in order to “unpack” the experience for which they encounter within and outside the walls of the Church.

Stage Four: Systematic Catechesis

In stage four, the “Wedge Model” sees that youth are now ready to participate in the systematic teachings of the Faith, its depth and meaning. It is not enough to just have the youth recite the teachings of the faith, for this stage to be effective, youth need a safe space to explore and question the teachings and traditions of the Faith. So that youth stay engaged with what is presented in this stage, this exploration must also be “creative, enjoyable, and interesting.”²⁸ Youth, that is, should be offered lessons on the Faith written in a language that they understand and in a manner that captures their interest so much so they remain lifelong Truth seekers.

One major weakness this stage has lies at the question of whether or not it should come before the “moment of recognition.” As mentioned above, it is important to provide youth the anchors they need to be able to discern theological teachings and Church history and traditions. With this in mind, it would make better sense to situate this stage of intellectual formation earlier in the

²⁶ Zanzig, *Youth Ministry*, 46.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 47-48.

process. A response to this question will be furthered explored in the reconstruction of the “Wedge Model.”

Stage Five: Service

When youth are properly formed it is natural for them to find ways to give back to their community. “This is not only the natural desire of Christians but one of the most attractive characteristics of many young people.”²⁹ Thus, as youth mature in their faith, they often begin to look for ways to fulfill their desire to live out the Good News. A well-formed youth ministry program offers many service-learning opportunities for youth to explore what they have learned in the classroom. It is these forms of volunteer opportunities that youth will learn about the beauty of their faith practice, informed by their own experience, in an environment that also will offer the opportunity to explore and question what they are now experiencing in their serving of the other.

The weaknesses of this stage are similar to the “moments of recognition” and “evangelization.” Any service opportunity must be constructed with great care and thought if it is to be effective in guiding youth to a deeper appreciation of their faith. A youth leader, for example, should not return home from a service-learning experience without having a plan for their youth in terms of discerning what it is that they encountered. So that the youth experience is not forgotten as soon as they arrive home, group discussions, a review of major events during the time volunteering, and an examination of one’s faith understanding is needed.

Stage Six: Leadership Development & Ministry

The last stage of the “Wedge Model” process is the acceptance of a leadership role within the faith community. Youth who have successfully moved through each of the prior stages and who have a desire to accompany youth on their journey “will respond [to the invitation to lead] as well as seek ways to share and celebrate the Good News with others in the community.”³⁰ The overarching aim of the “Wedge Model” is to foster this natural process which will guide the formation of strong Christian communities.

Rooted in the theology of friendship and accompaniment this last stage has few weaknesses. It is important to remember, however, that youth are emotional beings and may need additional guidance in forming proper leadership styles. For a faith community can be gravely damaged, as evident in the most recent scandals of the Catholic church, by poorly formed leaders.

3.2 Reconstructing the Wedge Model

Now that the “Wedge Model” has been deconstructed, it is now time to refashion the pieces into a new cohesive unit that that both traditionalists and postmodernists may use to create effective youth ministry programs. As this model is reconstructed, there are two insights that are worth briefly exploring as theses may serve as good guides for traditionalists and postmodernists in framing the use of this model in their contexts.

²⁹ Zanzig, *Youth Ministry*, 41-70.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Lens of Disaffiliation

The first insight that traditionalists and postmodernists should keep in mind is that this new model is refashioned through the lens of disaffiliation. As mentioned in the introduction, postmodernists and traditionalists both share a common concern in regard to the rapid disaffiliation among Millennials and Generation Z.³¹ The disaffiliation lens, therefore, is needed as any new model of youth ministry must keep in mind the youth who live on the margins of faith. Postmodernists and traditionalists must find meaningful ways to reach beyond the youth who regularly attend Mass, youth retreats, and other youth-oriented events as reaching out to the those who live in the faith margins is at the core of missionary discipleship.

Lens of Liberation

The next needed lens for new models of youth ministry is liberation of human dignity. *In the Scandal of Redemption: When God Liberates*, Oscar Romero asserts that the need to liberate human dignity, especially among the oppressed, is paramount. Romero goes further to explain that “salvation begins with the human person, with human dignity, with freeing everyone from sin.”³² Youth today are oppressed in many ways whether it be due to their gender identity, race, religion, or because of their young age; their voices go unheard and they are often not invited to the table of meaningful dialogue. Therefore, new youth ministry models must also include a liberative lens; it must seek an answer to the question: how may youth ministry liberate youth from objects of oppression?

Arthur Canales explains that “pastorally, liberation involves growth, learning, maturing, and conscious development, and adolescents, as with all people, must continue to struggle toward transformation if authentic liberation is the goal.”³³ For a new model of youth ministry to have liberation as its practicing lens it must include these types of opportunities, youth must be accompanied and freely given the space that need for spiritual, emotional, and physical development. Canales further asserts that “liberation within youth ministry should facilitate the challenge and struggle that young people encounter moving from a naïve consciousness to a critical consciousness.”³⁴ Youth, therefore, should be challenged to look beyond their ordinary lives and go out to the margins, just as Christ did and continues to do.

The “Bridge Model” for Youth Ministry

The “Bridge Model” for youth ministry is a redacted model drawn from the deconstructed “Wedge Model” of youth ministry. For the purpose of brevity and clarity, this paper will present this new model with some reflective thoughts on what each stage would look like in practice.

³¹ For more information in regard to religious trends in Generation Z, see the Barna Study: Gen Z available at <https://shop.barna.com/products/gen-z>.

³² Oscar Romero, *The Scandal of Redemption: When God Liberates the Poor, Saves Sinners, and Heals Nations*, Plough Spiritual Guides: Backpack Classics (New York: Plough Publishing House, 2018), 53-54.

³³ Arthur Canales, “Models for Adolescent Ministry: Exploring Eight Ecumenical Examples,” *Religious Education* 100, no. 2 (2006), 214.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

With this in mind, broader future conversations on this model will further assist its development and use within the traditionalist and postmodern Catholic parish.

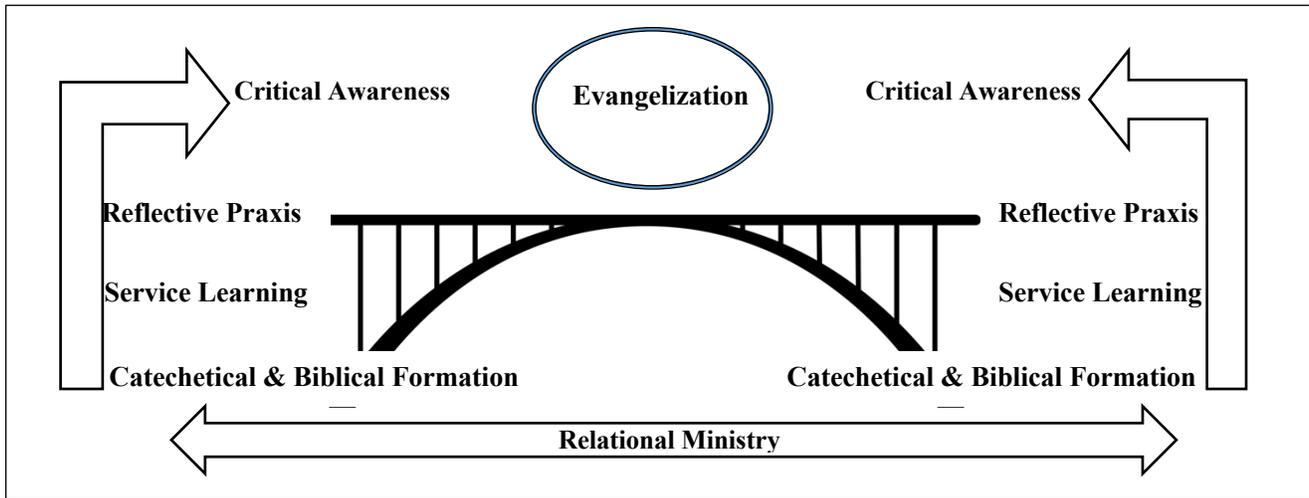


Figure 1.2. illustrated by Dr. Jodi Hunt, PhD

Stage One: Catechetical & Biblical Formation (Systematic Catechesis)

The first stage of the “Bridge Model” of Youth ministry is reflects both of the traditionalist and postmodern belief that youth cannot be properly formed unless they are provided “straw for the bricks.” By offering youth the teachings and traditions of the Church as a first stage in their spiritual journey, they will be well equipped to better understand Christ and his teachings which, in turn, will afford them the opportunity to nurture a relationship with Christ and his teachings.

To add, Biblical formation is also needed as youth can gain valuable insight in studying and contemplating the Scriptures. For it is only when youth have basic knowledge of their faith that they will be inclined to reflect upon this knowledge in dialogue with their everyday lived experience. Intellectual formation, in other words, serves as the catalyst for further inquiry into the teachings and traditions of the faith. Youth who are not intellectually formed remain stagnant in their faith life as they lack the necessary maps to assist them in understanding where they are going and have been while walking on their faith journey.

Stage Two: Service Learning (Service)

Once youth have been instructed about their faith they should then be encouraged to go out and see the world which lies beyond the walls of the Catholic Church. Contrary to what many of today’s youth ministry programs do in relation to service-learning projects (i.e. mission trips, volunteering in soup kitchens, visiting the elderly, etc.), the stage of service learning is not directing youth to spread the message of the Gospel (that will come in the final stage) to those who live on the margins.

Service learning is a chance for youth to “see and to know;” to be challenged in thinking beyond themselves, to connect to their neighbor. It is during this stage that youth should be also provide

ample opportunity to reflect upon what it is they are experiencing in the greater world in conversation with their intellectual formation.

Stage Three: Reflective Praxis (“Moment of Recognition”)

Stage three offers youth the space and freedom to explore what they have seen in their lived experience as well what they have learned about their faith. After experiencing life of the margins, some youth may struggle with reconciling the Faith with the shared experiences of “the other.” Youth, therefore, will need to be made to feel safe in exploring questions like “what does God allow suffering?” As they need to know that judgment will not be past for their questioning of the teachings and traditions of the Church.

In some ministerial contexts, it may be good to guide youth through the reflective process using a specific model of reflections or praxis. These can be helpful in that they allow participants clear guidance in the process of reflection. For traditionalists and postmodernists, reflection can serve as a “springboard” into helping youth better understand why they think the way that they do. This process in its self can be quite liberating as it allows youth to see that their questioning is a valuable expression of their human dignity.

Stage Four: Critical Awareness (Leadership Development and Ministry)

Stage four of the “Bridge Model” is rooted in Paulo Freire’s pedagogical method of critical consciousness or awareness. Working from Freire’s understanding that critical awareness is the act of interjecting into a lived reality in order to transform it, the goal of this stage is to guide youth in unifying what they have learned through their intellectual formation with the experiences they encountered outside the walls of the Church. It is during this stage that youth ministers should continue the process of reflection, but with the added aim to uplift the cries of the voiceless.³⁵ Youth should, moreover, be challenged to reflect upon their own social and cultural context in light of what they have seen or experienced as doing so will open their hears and eyes to seeing how changes in their immediate surroundings can greatly impact the other. Arriving at the point of critical awareness is an essential step youth will need to take on their journey in becoming part the liberative process of changing the world.

One of the primary concerns of the traditionalist movement and subsequent parishes is that they do not engage in the outside world. Although traditionalists are critical of the outside world, they do little to dialogue with it. Many traditionalist parishes, moreover, are largely insular. Therefore, this stage will press traditionalists to go outside of their immediate faith community and connect to and seek to better understand the secular world.

Stage four offers youth “new eyes” to see their faith as it connects to the greater world in which they are citizens of. A youth’s efforts to evangelize will not be effective if they are not aware of the real needs, spiritually, emotionally, and physically, of the those whom they long to share the Good News with. Much in the same way that Christ intimately knows his people’s needs, wants,

³⁵ See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

and desires, youth should also be challenged to get to know their neighbors in the same way for if critical awareness is not pursued, evangelization will remain ineffective.

Stage Five: Evangelization (Evangelization)

The final stage of the “Bridge Model” of youth ministry is evangelization. Once youth have reconciled their faith beliefs and understandings and have a better sense of the needs and faith desires of “the other” will they be ready to go out and share the Good News. The primary reason why evangelization was placed as the final stage is, as mentioned above, the Good News will not be well received if it is not extended out like a bridge to “the other.” Youth should be encouraged to act like engineers of a bridge, to extend the Good News one steel beam at a time, reaching towards where “the other” is. At times, youth may feel discouraged or uncomfortable in sharing the Good News with people with whom they have little in common with, but with solid formed critical awareness these barriers to evangelization will, in time, diminish.

The central goal of evangelization in the “Bridge Model” of youth ministry is to offer Christ’s liberative love to “the other.” With this in mind, this stage must be critical of any method of evangelization that encourages proselyting. Additionally, in sharing the Good News, youth should be encouraged to also seek opportunities to integrate the living of Catholic Social Teaching in fighting for justice and defending human dignity. Traditionalists and postmodernists should reclaim the process of evangelization as it was practiced in the early Church. Although Christ did not avoid teaching the Truth to nonbelievers, no matter how difficult it was to do at times, he was also very clear that his love for God’s children never changed, no matter who the person was and what he/she chose to do; Jesus loved them simply because they were a child of God. If the Catholic Church is to ever move people back to the Faith, this too must be at the heart of how it evangelizes. Once can imagine how well-formed youth evangelizers could change the greater world for the better.

Relational Ministry

In the “Wedge Model” of youth ministry, relational ministry is situated as the first stage, however, in the new model that this paper offers it is intentionally moved from the status of stage to “constant.” The reason why relational ministry is approached this way in the “Bridge Model” is based upon the understanding that relational ministry is not a single stage, but rather a continually foundation for the accompaniment of youth. That is, without strong relationships, youth will flee their faith journeys altogether, whether it be out of fear, confusion, or lack of interest. For this reason, relational ministry should be viewed as a tool for sustaining the context of accompaniment. It is, in other words, the earth in which our bridges are built upon.

4. To Wings: A Sacred Pedagogy for Youth Ministry

The Catholic Church and secular world are both gravely concerned about the social and political chaos that has befallen much of our world today. The Third Millennium has, unfortunately, bred renewed hatred between people of different faiths, genders, sexual identity, and race. Within in the Catholic church, fault lines, as mentioned in the introduction, continue to swell between traditionalists and postmodernists as they fight to show who is “really” Catholic or which

liturgical celebration is going to keep Catholics “Catholic.” In the midst of these tensions, as this paper outlines, are places for unifying different pastoral approaches in one cohesive model that will benefit both in their own quest in bringing the liberating love of Christ to young people. This is what good sacred pedagogy offers, some dirt to repair the fault lines between faith divisions.

At the root of Yves Congar’s “sacred pedagogy” is his understanding that the “world can become sacred; but that this is decidedly not an ontological transformation” of reality so much so that this transformation is a “functional” one. That is, Congar “advocates a sacred pedagogy that can respond to both the loss of a sense of the sacred in culture in general, and to the muddled attempts made by others.”³⁶ In light of the newly formed “Bridge Model,” the art of refashioning the “Wedge Model” out of the roots of liberative methods creates aims to create this same sacred pedagogy for use within both traditional and postmodern Catholic parishes. For the traditionalist parish who has lost a sense of the culture, this sacred pedagogy will assist in their formation of dialogue between the sacred and the lived experience of the disaffiliated. On the other hand, the sacred pedagogy that arises out of this model will also help the postmodern parish in as far as it will help their youth ministry programs reconnect to the sacred out of their understanding and embracing of the outside world. It is through this sacred pedagogical balance that traditionalism and postmodernism will find unity which, in turn, will benefit the growth and development of the future Catholic church.

What does sacred pedagogy look like in practice? There are numerous ways to incorporate the “Bridge Model” into a youth ministry program as many programs already have the stages in place in some form. Even so, to be effective in deepening youth’s connection to the sacred and their call to express liberative love, these stages should be reformed to reflect how they have been outlined here. To properly achieve this in both traditional and postmodern settings, the primary task that needs to happen is the intellectual, spiritual, emotional formation of youth ministers. That is, if the “Bridge Model” is to be effective in accompanying youth to acting as liberators, the leaders that guide them there (ordained, religious, and laity) must also be at a place of critical awareness. The witness of youth ministers is the necessary step in offering wings to youth so that they may fly out into the world to share the liberative love of Christ.

5. Conclusion

Terrence McLaughlin’s work in Catholic education centers upon offering youth pathways “from roots to wings.” Youth, in short, need strong roots for flight; they need to be intellectually formed, religious inspired, and critically aware before they leave the ground. Youth also need the freedom, however, to fly or to go out and place into practice what they have witnessed and learned for if we do not let them fly then we have failed in our own mission of evangelization.

In the post synod exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis urges youth ministry to create opportunities that are “creative and daring” for youth so that they are inspired to “get messy” or involved with the life of the Church. The “Gospel,” Pope Francis points out, “also asks us to be daring, and we want to be so, without presumption and without proselytizing, testifying to the

³⁶ Alec Arnold, “How to (Not) Make the World Sacred: Congar’s “Sacred Pedagogy,”” *New Blackfriars* (September), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12411>.

love of the Lord and stretching out our hands to all the young people in the world.”³⁷ Providing youth with roots through models like that of the refashioned “Wedge Model” will, as this paper has shown, give them the speed and wind that they need to fly out of the tensions which lie between traditional and postmodern approaches to youth ministry – their sharing the liberative love of Christ will see no boundaries. And that in itself is an awesome thing for our future Church.

³⁷ Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit*, paragraph 235.

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“The Remix”: Hip-Hop as a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy for Religiously Educating Youth

Abstract: One significant contributor to low levels of engagement with biblical content among young people is a perceived lack of cultural relevancy. One option to consider when exploring alternative methods for biblical engagement is the significance of the cultures that are shaping and influencing the lives of urban youth. This study will specifically highlight hip-hop culture, its healthy integration within youth ministry programming and the ways it might serve as a culturally relevant pedagogy essential to the increase and encouragement of young people’s engagement in religious education and spiritual practices.

Introduction

Throughout the history of Christian tradition, scripture has held primacy as the central text for both Christian faith and education. It informed the moral instruction that took place in the home and the formal observance of rituals that took place during corporate meetings in churches, temples and schools. Bible-based Christian teaching was embodied and actualized in the life of the believer, indicating that one was in covenant with God. Fluency of biblical text contributed significantly to one’s spiritual formation and who they were as individuals.¹ Biblical disengagement, whether as the result of the Bible’s complex history as an oppressive tool, people’s repeated exposure to ineffective teaching or something else, is a pedagogical problem. This paper argues for a pedagogy of cultural relevance by reclaiming teaching from the Bible in ways that resonate with urban youth.

According to Harold Burgess, one essential function of the educational work of the church is, “[t]o introduce learner to the Bible. This biblical introduction, it is acknowledged, must go well beyond the mere transmission of information about the Bible or the rote memorization of biblical passages. It must promote an understanding of the Bible in terms of its relevant contemporary message. The Bible, then, is considered to be worth knowing in and of itself because it is the primary written witness to revelation. Furthermore, the Bible is the basic source of Christian theology, and its principles

¹ Russell G. Moy, “American Racism: The Null Curriculum in Religious Education,” *Religious Education* 95 no. 2, (2000): 119-122, DOI: 10.1080/0034408000950202. Within the text, Moy quotes Grant S. Shockley, “Christian Education and the Black Religious Experience,” in *Ethnicity in the Education of the Church*, ed. Charles R. Foster (Nashville, TN: Scarritt Press, 1987), 32.

provide potential solutions to many human problems. In addition, it has been theorized that a knowledge of the Bible will prepare the way for men to receive God and to respond to Him in the present.”² While this is true, given the ways in which it has been misused, constituents of marginalized communities might not want to engage the Bible. Additionally, it has been subjected to ineffective and pedagogically unsound methods of teaching.

Young people today are struggling to connect and engage with scripture. In particular, many youth have difficulty identifying how the Bible – with its dense language, ancient stories and strange rituals – is relevant to their lives. A recent study conducted by the Barna Group highlighted young people’s perceptions of the Bible, the role they believe it should play in their lives and their level of personal engagement with it. According to that study, nearly half (47%) of American millennials (ages 18-33) are not engaged with the Bible.³ This is especially alarming, given that there are more versions and ways to access the Bible today than there were in the past. Among urban youth, Bible engagement seems particularly low. In general; young people tend to engage sources through which they acquire the most fulfillment and meaning, neither of which they encounter when they read scripture.⁴

Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray in *Teaching the Bible Through Popular Culture and the Arts* offer a wealth of pedagogical possibilities to assist in this crisis of biblical disengagement among youth. Arguing that the integration of musical texts in the religious education of youth can curate a space for engagement, they discuss how music can provide a catalyst for engaging young people specifically with the Bible. In addition, the amount of music available makes it possible to locate items that relate to the variety of biblical text and themes. Utilizing music as a comparative text alongside the Bible in order to explore particular themes, opens up fresh avenues of inquiry and interpretation and slowly closes the gap of disengagement.⁵

Bridging this gap calls for cultural relevance and, while the biblical text is in no ways irrelevant, the methods which we’ve used to communicate and teach young people are. Engagement with scripture has been regarded more as a religious practice than a relational one. This represents a failed opportunity to encourage, young people to reflect on scripture for meaning in their lives while encountering God through His word, thus connecting the realities of their world with the revelation of the word. Beginning with irrelevancy, Charles Foster in *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* offers insight regarding flaws within religious education as it relates to the teaching of scripture and the ability to make it applicable to one’s present life.

² Harold W. Burgess, *Models of Religious Education: Theory and Practice in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1996).

³ American Bible Society, *State of the Bible 2018: Bible Engagement Segmentation* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018), 6-13, <http://american.Bible/Bible-engagement-research-state-of-the-Bible> (accessed February 7, 2019).

⁴ Tim Hutchings, “E-Reading and the Christian Bible,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 44, no. 4 (December 2015): 423–430.

⁵ Mark Roncace, and Patrick Gray, *Teaching the Bible through Popular Culture and the Arts* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

The generational gap between literature and congregants makes interpretation difficult. This gap has resulted in individuals developing their own interpretations, ones compatible with their experiences and current realities. Foster argues that it's not the text that's irrelevant, but rather the way in which the text is taught. This is not to suggest that nothing is working, but that the growing number of young people disengaged with the Bible should urge us to consider alternative methods that are culturally relevant, and which cause youth to think critically, connect individually, apply spiritually and live out actually.⁶ Hip-hop culture, in particular, is playing a formative role in the lives of urban youth. The contributions of hip-hop are significant, emerging out of experiences that continue to speak to – and echo the sentiments of – young people. It's musical, it's artistic, and it's rooted in cultural sensibilities that are attractive to this generation.

Hip-hop is one of the most popular cultural movements and one of today's most lasting and influential forms of art. Comprised of and characterized by music, art, dance diversity, quality, innovation and influence, it is, in many ways, the language of this generation, a language one must embrace to effectively engage and educate young people, because it articulates young people's matters of importance that otherwise would not be heard. Hip-hop doesn't just transcend cultural barriers, but religious categories also emerge out of hip-hop. While some view hip-hop as just a contemporary cultural art form, hip-hop is also an educational and historical coded language that speaks to and for this generation. Hip-hop is a cultural cookie cutter that contributes considerably to the cultivation of young people today. Hip-hop's significance has and continues to form young people's attitudes, language and identity.

Method

This paper employs an art-based methodology that seeks to speak directly to the ways in which hip-hop can serve as a powerful tool for biblical teaching and learning when appropriately aligned with the prevailing social and aesthetic interests and experiences of urban youth. The works of Gloria Durka, Joanmarie Smith and – more specifically – Maria Harris, explicitly address the aesthetic dimensions of religious education, in particular Harris describes an aesthetic approach to curriculum. Each argues that, unless the process of religious education is aesthetic, it is not education and it is certainly not religious.⁷ Hence, this paper seeks to: 1) explore the intersection of hip-hop culture and religious education, 2) examine how the integration of pop culture within youth ministry programming can inform our pedagogical practices and encourage young people's engagement in spiritual practices, and 3) reimagine religious education that resembles, relates and responds to the spiritual needs of young people.

Within the context of an aesthetic approach to curriculum, I will examine the significance of hip-hop for Christian faith and aesthetic teaching-learning from within religious education. As an art-based form, hip-hop represents an opportunity to re-envision and reform the pedagogical approach to young peoples' religious education.

⁶ Charles Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994).

⁷ Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith, eds., *Aesthetic Dimensions of Religious Education* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

More specifically, hip-hop presents an aesthetic curriculum that is effective for teaching the Bible. In the field of religious education, there have been explorations into identifying the importance of specific artistic expressions in teaching the value of faith. This research will follow this same course of study, emphasizing an aesthetic approach to curriculum to explain how hip-hop as a cultural art form presents an aesthetic curriculum that is effective for engaging young people with the Bible.

Like Harris's forms of curriculum, hip-hop as a cultural art form serves as a model of a holistic approach to curriculum for religiously educating youth. Through its five essential elements, hip-hop provides a number of aesthetic pathways through which learning can be achieved and conveyed: by way of movement, spoken word, music etc. all of which include a mode of learning. Hence, hip-hop models a more holistic approach to teaching scripture than those previously and presently employed in work with youth. In addition, this holistic approach is intentional in ensuring that the curriculum tends to the young peoples' teaching and learning needs while simultaneously affirming their contributions to the learning process.

The notion of hip-hop as a pedagogy of cultural relevance aims to create meaningful connections for young people, authentically and practically incorporating the creative elements of hip-hop into teaching, and inviting young people to make a connection with the content while meeting them on their cultural turf by teaching to, and through, their realities and experiences. When a curriculum does not reflect the culture, interests, and realities of youth, they lose interest in the content and context.

Hip-hop History: Emergence, Effect & Expansion

Hip-hop is a genre of music and a way of life which emerged from the housing projects of New York City in the late 1970s. At its inception, hip-hop was a direct result of overflowing creativity, suppressed energy, and a lack of available outlets for release and expression among impoverished teens and young adults. This alternative to the gang involvement and violence that followed the defunding of afterschool programs, music and art classes grew into a vehicle for African American inner-city youth to host block parties and fundraisers as DJ's and promoters. Hip-hop wasn't engaged beyond New York City until 1979 when "Rapper's Delight" brought hip-hop national and international recognition. Since the seventies, hip-hop has become a billion dollar industry and the language of young people.

Although no single individual can claim credit for the founding of hip-hop music or the hip-hop culture, Afrika Bambaataa, Busy Bee Starski, and DJs (disc-jockeys) Hollywood and Kool Herc are generally considered among the most prominent figures in the early years of the genre.⁸ Collectively, their gathering in the Bronx started the humble beginnings of hip-hop. The result of their endeavors grew into what is known as the hip-hop culture of today. Despite challenges and numerous critics, hip-hop has become one of the most popular musical forms in the world. Its reach and longevity have been much

⁸ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation* (New York: Macmillan, 2005), 12.

greater than most expected when it surfaced in the late 1970s. Hip-hop, through its various modes and messages, has broken down racial, ethnic, gender, class, language and regional barriers to become the greatest bridge in the pop culture of America today. It is the avenue through which young people contest and convey the challenging forces in their lives.

Since its beginning, hip-hop has been a youth movement. Young people gave hip-hop life. In hip-hop, they have found a religion that gives them principles to live by. For many of these youth and young adults, hip-hop is their only way of life, an identity until they find their own. Through hip-hop they've encountered authenticity, advocacy and agency. Hip-hop continues to evolve to the present day, altering generational thinking from politics and race to art and language.

Hip-hop and Spirituality

In *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap*, Anthony Pinn uncovers the significance of the spiritual in the world of rap music. He argues that there is no distinction between the sacred and secular, and that they coexist and merge in unexpected places. Rap, like the various forms of black popular music which preceded it has profound connections to the myriad religious traditions found within African American communities.⁹ The sacral roots extend from the spirituals and gospel right through to the blues, jazz, soul, and finally hip-hop. Although it has often been deemed blasphemous, hip-hop is ripe with deep religious potential specifically because it explores life's complexities and current conflicts, and normalizes the tension of both sacred and profane expressions coexisting within the narrated experiences of marginalized youth.

In *The Soul of Hip-hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology*, Daniel Hodge writes: "Hip-hop allows everyday life, language, and culture to be given fair examination. There is nothing too sacred to talk about or deal with. Hip-hop that exposes injustice is considered political and socially conscious and is often associated with [a] hip-hop spirituality [which] portrays [a] God of "the streets" and Jesus as a "social critic and revolutionary."¹⁰ Hip-hop's offensive and profane elements also reflect deep religious truths that challenge traditional Christian perspectives". This broader conversation of what spirituality is and can be, allows room to highlight the ways in which young people engage spirituality and the significance of hip-hop as a viable tool for exploring biblical themes and Christian faith with young people.

Both Smith and Jackson argue that, while hip-hop embodies a spiritual dimension, hip-hop alone isn't enough to tend to one's spiritual needs. They state: "The spirituality hip-hop offers is attractive but can't provide consistent, holistic solutions, internal peace and sustainable life change. Like all other musical styles, hip-hop is spiritual by nature; however, its influence depends on the artist and his or her interpretation of life. It would be putting too much weight on hip-hop to expect it to meet

⁹ Anthony Pinn, *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Daniel W. Hodge, *The Soul of Hip-hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2016), 13-28.

all the spiritual needs of its people.”¹¹ Smith and Jackson contend that faith communities can glean from hip-hop, specifically from its criticism, with hopes that meaningful examination will foster a greater understanding of hip-hop culture’s power to effectively engage young people. Hence, this paper argues that, by utilizing and exploring the art of hip-hop through a cultural, political and theological lens - and pairing hip-hop culture with spiritual practices and programming - religious educators can acquire new pedagogical approaches that engage young people and create a space for transformative learning and spiritual formation.

Hip-hop and Theology

The underexplored dimension of hip-hop is its theology. Theology, in its basic sense, is the study of God, how God interacts, intercedes, speaks, lives, thinks, wants and is, and hip-hop repeatedly depicts God showing up in the most unusual and interesting places. Hip-hop theology argues that popular culture can be a sacred place, an area in which one can encounter God in what’s deemed the most unholy of places. Since hip-hop theology embraces both the sacred and the profane, it challenges us towards a basic theological understanding of the profane.

In their *article Theomusicology and Christian Education: Spirituality and The Ethics of Control in the Rap of MC Hammer*, N. Lynne Westfield and Harold Dean Trulear state: “Theomusicology treats black music in a holistic manner and secularity as a context for the sacred and profane rather than as the antithesis of the sacred ... As such, theomusicology is a tool for us to move beyond the simplistic notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ that are uncritically used to characterize black secular music and especially rap music, and to help us develop an understanding of the meaning system under construction by African American youths.”

Hip-hop is a community where sacred and profane expressions coexist and describe both positive and negative experiences interchangeably. Performers and listeners of hip-hop claim to undergo euphoric experiences, which suggests that a spirituality resides in so called profane expressions as well. This fits well within what is known about the history of black popular music and its entanglement with the divine and the religious. Yet, while those who engage hip-hop experience a sort of spiritual ecstasy through its lyrical content and musical arrangement, there is an inability to experience the sacred dimensions of rap music by those who don’t engage fully, perhaps borne of an unwillingness to acknowledge how hip-hop exists along the continuum of evolving black musical expressions. Namely, within the context of the church, generational gaps and tensions have hindered the validation of hip-hop and its significance in the lives of young people and its contribution to their faith formation and liberation.¹²

Evelyn Parker in *Bridging Civil Rights and Hip-hop Generations*, notes:

¹¹ Efre Smith and Phil Jackson, *The Hip-hop Church: Connecting with the Movement Shaping Our Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 154.

¹² Harold Dean Trulear and N. Lynne Westfield, “Theomusicology and Christian Education: Spirituality and the Ethics of Control in the Rap of MC Hammer,” *Theomusicology: A Special Issue of Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology* 8 (1994): 218-238.

“The struggle of black youth and their adult affiliates to validate hip-hop while debating with adults who seek to reject hip-hop as a viable culture elucidates the contemporary generational divide that needs bridging if the black Church is to be healthy and wholesome and live out its prophetic mission.” Parker argues that the church’s inability to: 1) acknowledge that young people are engaging spirituality through alternative cultural resources they’ve located in hip-hop and 2) validate it as a tool for teaching and learning, has made it almost impossible for young people to view the church as progressive, culturally relevant or culturally responsive.¹³ The lack of cultural relevance, agency and acceptance within the church has caused many youth, particularly black youth to shape spaces of their own, utilizing hip-hop as a tool by which they experience liberation and encounter the divine.

Religious Education through Hip-hop

In the field of religious education there have been explorations into identifying the importance of specific artistic expressions in teaching the value of faith. This paper endeavors to do the same. The sole purpose of religious education is to provide, develop and promote programs that equip individuals for discipleship. The core elements of religious education are biblical teaching and learning. It is through active participation in religious education programs that students acquire the tools and skills needed to grow spiritually in a community of believers. In order for this discipleship to happen, the teaching and learning experience must be authentic, relevant and holistic, meeting students where they are and at their level of need.

Hip-hop as a teaching technique within church-based religious education is an authentic, relevant and holistic approach that encourages the analysis and incorporation of one’s experiences in order to meet young people where they are emotionally, socially, intellectually, morally and spiritually. Hip-hop’s emergence as a youth led movement to contest dehumanizing forces in their lives and communities positions it as a prime tool for addressing young people’s oppressive realities and communicating a hope for change, liberation and justice. Thus, utilization of hip-hop as a form of teaching will aid young people in understanding and engaging with their faith and viewing hip-hop through the lens of cultural heritage and relevance will help them achieve liberation.

Hip-hop as a teaching tool requires both exploration and activation of the imaginative dimensions of young people. Integrating the aesthetic thoughts and ideas of youth and granting them full control to implement what they dream will increase participation and will link them to the work at hand. In *Reclaiming the Spirituals: New possibilities for African American Christian Education*, Yolanda Smith offers (through the utilization of the spirituals) a template to teach all cultures and forms of art.¹⁴ Drawing from Smith’s template and approach to religious education, this paper furthers the scholarship examining the potential for hip-hop as a cultural art form of teaching and

¹³ Evelyn Parker, “Bridging Civil Rights and Hip-hop Generations,” in *Black Practical Theology*, eds. Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 19-34.

¹⁴ Yolanda Smith, *Reclaiming the Spirituals: New Possibilities for African American Christian Education* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004).

learning within a religious context. It lifts up the significant and far-reaching contributions of hip-hop and highlights its inherent value as musical, artistic, rooted in cultural sensibilities that are attractive to this generation and useful in the way that it echoes the sentiments of young people.

Hip-hop is a popular and enduring cultural movement comprised of and characterized by music, art, dance diversity, quality, innovation and influence. Hip-hop, in many ways, is the language of this generation, a language one must embrace to effectively engage and educate young people because it articulates young people's matters of importance that otherwise would not be heard.¹⁵ Like the spirituals, hip-hop transcends specific cultures. Just as spirituals aren't restricted to the church, hip-hop isn't restricted to the streets or to the realm of secular entertainment. As it continues to form young people's identity, style, attitudes, language and fashion, hip-hop is an educational resource also. Hip-hop opposes the oppressive occurrences in the lives of young people and validates and gives voice to their concerns. The more it is accepted and integrated into religious educational programming, the more a cultural pedagogy will be forged that attends to the circumstances of youth and gives them a voice through the biblical narratives.

Hip-Hop and The Bible: The Art of Storylinking

Hip-hop's four primary artistic elements (knowledge is the fifth and foundational element) - emceeing (rap music), deejaying (playing, mixing and scratching records), B-boying/B-girling (break dancing) and graffiti (visual art) - resemble the curriculum forms Harris utilizes. Each embodies a pedagogy of cultural relevance and curriculum in the way it requires a reciprocal exchange between young people and those executing the element. Each element offers young people the opportunity to join the teaching and learning experience. For the sake of biblical engagement with young people, the curriculum of engagement helps young people connect their stories with the biblical narrative in order for them to witness God's presence and action in their lives. Merging faith and hip-hop will foster unique spaces of theological formation, where youth are able to connect their feelings, expressions of meaning, faith in God and Christian living.

To connect refers to the act of attaching, joining, linking, associating or relating to something. Connecting is essential in helping young people see themselves – both present and future - as a part of the everyday story displayed in both hip-hop music and the larger story of God found in scripture. Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, through the lens of African American tradition, presents a modern model of religious education she identifies as storylinking. It mirrors the methods of religious education during slavery where teaching and learning was fixated on liberation and vocation. Storylinking is the process of pairing portions of one's lived experience with the biblical narrative and those of the Christian experience not found in scripture for the purpose of fortifying the faith of members of a community who lived through similar circumstances.

Employing this narrative approach to teaching will help young people to critically reflect on their life stories in light of the Christian faith story by pairing the biblical

¹⁵ Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip-hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2002), 3-24.

narrative with everyday life stories conveyed through hip-hop lyrics. Each element of hip-hop entails story-linking, allowing young people to engage in deep, layered and echoed God-talk as biblical and personal narratives expressed through hip-hop intersect, forging connections with what was read through scripture and heard through song.¹⁶

Hip-hop and Education: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

There is a significant amount of research in urban education that focuses on cultural relevance as an essential component of teaching and learning. Scholars, such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, discuss the importance of engaging urban youth through culturally relevant and even culturally sustaining pedagogies. Ladson-Billings defines culturally relevant pedagogy as: “A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes.”¹⁷ Therefore, culturally relevant pedagogy is a method that encourages educators to join students’ lived experience to their learning experience while simultaneously adhering to the expectations of the core curriculum. In Ladson-Billings’ studies of effective educators in urban settings, she identifies cultural relevant pedagogy as a pedagogical approach and a way of educating African-American constituents, ensuring that students are excelling academically, critically thinking and culturally aware in order to contest the status quo of the current systems and social structures.

As Ladson-Billings outlined, culturally relevant pedagogy is critical to student learning. It fosters academic success and opportunities for students to develop cultural competence and critical consciousness to challenge social constructs. Culturally relevant pedagogy can also promote understanding of the content being taught among students, because of the precise connection between the content and students’ lived experiences and realities, fostering an environment where students are eager to learn and are engaged in learning. Thus, religious educators who strive to be culturally relevant become relevant in their practice and the communal disparities that have an emotional impact on young people. This necessitates that religious educators learn more about their students, their students’ lived experiences and the community from which they come, diminishing the divide and building bridges rather than walls (of content comprehension, lived experience and generational differences) within both ecclesial and academic settings.

Evelyn Parker, presents the metaphor “walking together” in her attempt to bridge the gap between the hip-hop generation and those who grew up in the Civil Rights Era. Comparing the contemporary content of Kanye West’s, “Jesus Walks,” with the traditional gospel lyrics “walk with me” suggests that walking together is a collaborative ministry approach that fosters relationships between young people and adults. Parker highlights the role of the previous generation in helping young people search for meaning.¹⁸ Here, Parker is making the connection in order to bridge the gap utilizing hip-

¹⁶ Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 50.

¹⁷ Gloria Ladson-Billings, “But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” *Theory into Practice* 34 (1995): 159-165.

¹⁸ Parker, “Bridging Civil Rights and Hip-hop Generations,” 19-34.

hop. She argues, through her metaphor of walking together, that both traditional gospel and hip-hop can be useful for the education and discipleship of young people. She further suggests that if we don't embrace hip-hop as a form of teaching Christian youth, and if we allow the critique of previous generations to dismiss hip-hop, we forfeit the transformational potential of hip-hop as a culturally relevant pedagogy within religious education.

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"Kierkegaardian Incommensurability and Spiritual Dysphoria:
 Analysis of a Confliction on the Campuses of Catholic Colleges and Universities"

Abstract:

Drawing on Kierkegaard's proposal that religious faith is incommensurable with a rational understanding of actuality, I contribute to the contemporary debate between two sides that articulate what it means for a university to be both truly modern and Catholic. Observing that today's Catholic universities are no longer typically comprised of mostly Catholic faculty or even mostly Catholic students, I articulate a new phenomenon on Catholic campuses: spiritual dysphoria. I argue that this arises from the actual conditions that are paradoxical in the way that Kierkegaard conceives of it.

I

A novel confliction¹ is emerging on the campuses of some religiously affiliated colleges and universities: I call it "spiritual dysphoria," and argue that it is like gender dysphoria. Spiritual dysphoria, as I conceive of it, is the distress experienced when there is a conflict between the spirituality that an individual identifies with and wishes to express, on the one hand, and the spirituality that the college or university identifies with and expects a particular expression of it, on the other. This confliction seems to arise under certain conditions: for example, when a university identifies as Catholic and Jesuit, and attempts to cultivate and express that identity on its campus while at the same time embracing a commitment to diversity and inclusion which extends to those who do not identify as either Catholic or Jesuit. I argue that the confliction or tension arising under these conditions should be of no surprise. I also argue that it is extremely difficult to find coherent solutions to this confliction that are amenable to the frameworks underlying the leading models of diversity and inclusion. Drawing on two decades of experience at a Catholic, Jesuit university, as both professor and administrator, I analyze the conditions that give rise to this confliction, and call attention to problematic connections between institutional rhetoric and practice, and individual belief and expression. I conclude that Kierkegaard's notion of incommensurability in *Fear and Trembling* makes sense of the origin of spiritual dysphoria; but as with all things Kierkegaardian, it is difficult—very difficult—to see how there can be any kind of resolution to such conditions.

¹ The word "confliction" is used quite purposefully because of its flexible meaning. It implies a conflict which can arise due either to opposing principles or principles that appear to be in opposition but in fact are not. Given the topic I am focusing on, this distinction becomes important, and makes a big difference with respect to how one might address the confliction. My analysis proceeds accordingly.

II

The occasion for thinking of this analogy is my reflection upon a personal acquaintance with someone who has experienced gender dysphoria for over a decade, and from the conversations we have had over those years. After coming to grips with this person's story of suffering, especially how the suffering arises out of a conflict between one's self-identity, on the one hand, and the dominant cultural default regarding gender norms, on the other, it struck a chord with me on a spiritual level. It struck me that the sort of conflict and deep discomfort associated with gender dysphoria is remarkably similar to the sort of deep spiritual conflict and discomfort that many people have reported to me, and that I myself have experienced, at Marquette University, a Catholic, Jesuit university. And it struck me that the conditions that give rise to gender dysphoria are remarkably similar to the conditions that allow spiritual dysphoria to arise.

For a fruitful discussion, some definitions are in order. Let us begin with the term "gender dysphoria" itself. Gender dysphoria is sometimes called "gender incongruence," and, until quite recently, was called "gender identity disorder."² For many decades, gender dysphoria was considered a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association.³ Earlier this year, however, the World Health Organization removed "gender identity disorder" from its list of mental health diagnoses. It is now called "gender incongruence," and is now classified as "a condition related to sexual health." The World Health Organization defended this change in classification by explaining that "the classification of gender identity disorder as a mental disorder was inaccurate and stigmatized those [who experience] . . . gender incongruence."⁴ Given this recent change in classification, along with the quickly changing social understanding of the issues involved, I want to emphasize that I am highly aware of the sensitivity with which this discussion must be conducted. Although I will be quoting a source that was published when gender dysphoria was conceived as a mental disorder, I am not maintaining that it is a mental disorder. The primary reason that I will be referring to this source is that it gives context and clarity to the discussion at hand, and is still largely recognized as authoritative.

The source in question is the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, released in 2013, by the American Psychiatric Association.⁵ It gives the following summarized definition:

"Gender dysphoria involves a conflict between a person's physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify. People with gender dysphoria may be very uncomfortable with the gender they were assigned, sometimes described as being

² For a sustained analysis of this history, see "Gender Incongruence / Gender Dysphoria and its Classification History," Titia F. Beek, Peggy T. Cohen-Kettenis, and Baudewiintie P.C. Kruekels, *International Review of Psychiatry* Vol. 28, Issue 1 (Feb. 2016): 5-12.

³ See, for example, "Mental Health and Gender Dysphoria: A Review of the Literature," Dheine, Cecilia, Van Vlerken, Roy, Heylens, Gunter, and Arcelus, Jon, *International Review of Psychiatry* Vol. 28, Issue 1 (Feb. 2016): 44-57.

⁴ Source: National Post, posted 30 May 2019. See <https://nationalpost.com/news/world-health-organization-gender-identity-disorder> (accessed 1 June 2019).

⁵ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition [DSM-5] (Arlington, Virginia: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013).

uncomfortable with their body (particularly developments during puberty) or being uncomfortable with the expected roles of their assigned gender."⁶

In adolescents and adults, gender dysphoria is diagnosed in the following way:

"[It] involves a difference between one's experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, and significant distress or problems functioning. It lasts at least six months and is shown by at least two of the following:

1. A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics
2. A strong desire to be rid of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics
3. A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender
4. A strong desire to be of the other gender
5. A strong desire to be treated as the other gender
6. A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender."⁷

Given these introductory remarks on the nature of gender dysphoria, I wish to draw attention to some aspects that are relevant for this paper. First, the self-identity of the person involved is at odds with the identity that the community perceives the person to be. In particular, the person is deeply uncomfortable with, and highly anxious about, what the society or culture at large expects from her/him/them. The person's gender identity itself becomes a deeply distressing problem under these conditions; the way in which the person wants to express her/his/their identity becomes an obstacle to their flourishing in those circumstances. There is a way in which society at large expects a boy (or man) to look and act, and a way in which it expects a girl (or woman) to look and act; for a person experiencing gender dysphoria, one comes to grips with the disconnect between the way in which they see themselves (and want to express themselves), and the way in which society perceives them (and expects them to act). As a result, there is much suffering and distress involved for the person experiencing dysphoria, often in silence and isolation.

Gender dysphoria can get in the way of one's interaction with others, and can lead to alienation and rejection, even from close friends and family members. It can even lead to violence being perpetrated against them, in response to their expression of their gender identity—even rape and murder.⁸ The possibility of rejection from family and friends,

⁶ <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria> (accessed 5 August 2019).

⁷ <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria> (accessed 5 August 2019).

⁸ See, for example, "Gender Nonconformity as a Target of Prejudice, Discrimination, and Violence Against LGB Individuals," by Allegra R. Gordon and Ilan H. Meyer, *Journal of LGBT Health Research*, Vol. 3, Issue 3 (2007): 55-71; see also (in that same journal issue) "A Study of Transgender Adults and Their Non-Transgender Siblings on

and of violence from strangers, hangs heavily over their heads, and takes a very heavy toll. Not uncommonly, persons experiencing gender dysphoria are led to try to find acceptance in a new community totally separated from the community in which they grew up. Such communities that accept them as they wish to express themselves are typically small, and thus have little power and influence over the broader community. Gender dysphoria can lead to a life in which there is little integration, and instead there is careful crafting of walled-off areas where one's own personal identity is hidden from others. For these reasons, it is no surprise at all that gender dysphoria can lead to a myriad of problems, not only at the personal level but also at the professional, economic, and social levels. Being able to flourish is a tall order for a person with gender dysphoria.

III

Allow me now to establish the analogy between gender and spiritual dysphoria. As with any analogy, it breaks down at some point, and I wish to avoid any misunderstandings or confusions. One element that makes the comparison apt is the importance of self-identity. For many of us, gender goes to the core of our understanding of our own self, and how we express our self; so too, for many of us, spirituality goes to the core of our own self-understanding and self-expression. The expression of our selfhood implies that there is another to whom we relate. This is a second element crucial to understanding the analogy I am drawing. The way in which we express ourselves to others establishes and defines the kind of relationships we enter into. These relations can be to other individuals or to groups. The way we express our self-identity can lead to relations in which we, as private individuals or as career professionals, either flourish and advance or become marginalized, ostracized, even victimized. What makes possible the flourishing of our self and our self-expression in our relationships to others are the fundamental social and cultural norms and structures in which we exist. Sometimes, these fundamental social and cultural norms do not have clearly defined parameters, or at least are not recognized except by a few. Sometimes these fundamental norms and structures themselves pose obstacles to flourishing.

For instance, with respect to gender dysphoria one thing that makes possible the condition of distress is a cultural default in which gender is conceived of as binary. A binary conception of gender is one in which gender is classified as either male or female. Many of our institutions explicitly employ this binary conception. For instance, a birth certificate indicates that a baby is either male or female—there is no other category, and the default framework seems to presuppose that there are not degrees to either male-hood or female-hood. However, many persons experience gender as non-binary.⁹ Thus, the

Demographic Characteristics, Social Support, and Experiences of Violence," by Rhonda J. Factor and Esther D. Rothblum, pp. 11-30. See also "Effects of Violence on Transgender People," by Rylan J. Teta *et al*, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, Vol. 43, Issue 5 (2012): 452-459.

⁹ See, for example, "Bisexual, Pansexual, Queer: Non-binary Identities and the Sexual Borderlands," by April Scarlette Callis, in *Sexualities* Vol. 17, Issue 1-2 (2014): 63-80.

cultural default conception of gender, which is binary, along with the default cultural norms of gender expression, create the conditions for dysphoria to arise. Not surprisingly, it is very difficult for a person who suffers from gender dysphoria to flourish in such conditions.

So, the fundamental norms and structures of our culture play key roles in creating the conditions in which it is possible to experience dysphoria. Now that this has been established, focus can be given to spiritual dysphoria. Spiritual dysphoria, as indicated previously, is the deep unease and distress an individual experiences when the person's spiritual identity, and the expression thereof, conflicts with the cultural norms and parameters of the community's understanding of spiritual identity.

As indicated at the outset of this paper, I maintain that spiritual dysphoria arises on the campuses of many religiously affiliated colleges and universities; but I will restrict my discussion to a community that identifies itself as Roman Catholic and Jesuit—which is what Marquette University, my own institution, proudly identifies itself to be. For a university to be Roman Catholic, it must have an official relation to the Catholic Church in Rome that is recognized as such. The Church's canon law clearly lays out the conditions under which a university's identity is aligned with the identity of the church and when it is not.¹⁰ It is the responsibility of the university to establish that its identity as a university is Catholic.¹¹ It is a very complicated story that properly explains the relevant details of what constitutes the identity of a Catholic university, but suffice it to say that the rise of secularism in the mid to late 20th Century, and the Church's attempt to face this sort of challenge, especially in the form of Vatican II, provides much of the backdrop. For the sake of clarity, yet without going too far into the historical details, a few important issues will be addressed here relevant for this essay. The analysis of these issues and events will help to explain what gave rise to the conditions that makes it possible for spiritual dysphoria to emerge.

For the past fifty years on the campuses of Catholic universities and colleges, there has been a dispute regarding how the Catholic identity of the school can be authentically lived out and expressed in an age in which secularism has become the cultural default.¹²

See also, "Non-binary or Genderqueer Genders," by Christina Richards, in *International Review of Psychiatry* Vol. 28, Issue 1 (Feb. 2016): 95-102.

¹⁰ For the relevant portion from the *Code of Canon Law*, see http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib3-cann793-821_en.html#CHAPTER_I (accessed 5 August 2019).

¹¹ For a sustained discussion of these issues, see "'Catholic' as Descriptive of a University: A Canonical Perspective," by Robert J. Kaslyn, in *American Catholic Higher Education in the 21st Century: Critical Challenges*, edited by Robert R. Newton (Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: Linden Lane Press at Boston College, 2015), p. 61-87.

¹² The literature on this topic is immense. For a small sample of relevant books, see *Handbook of Research on Catholic Higher Education*, edited by Thomas C. Hunt, Ellis A. Joseph, Ronald J. Nuzzi, and John C. Geiger (Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2003); *Handbook of Research on Catholic Education*, edited by

Ever since the publication of the "Land O'Lakes Statement"¹³ in 1967—with its call for academic freedom and autonomy from Church oversight—and the response from the Church nearly a quarter century later in the form of the apostolic constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*¹⁴ in 1990—with its response that the makeup of a Catholic university must be constituted of mostly Catholics,¹⁵ and that bishops have great influence in determining over whether or not a university's identity is truly Catholic¹⁶—battles have waged over what it means to for an institution of higher education to be both truly a modern university and truly Catholic in a post-Vatican II world.

Not uncommonly, the literature on this issue is averse to an actual engagement with the other side; instead of dialogue, one finds mostly different forms of protest. Philip Gleason's *Contending with Modernity* set the tone for what was to come, painting a bleak picture, from a conservative perspective, of the future of Catholic higher education.¹⁷ John C. Haughey's book entitled, *Where is Knowing Going?*¹⁸ took the discussion in a practical direction. He suggested the importance of facing the facts that more and more faculty, students, and administrators at Catholic universities have little or no connection to the Catholic tradition. The influence of these two books, at least in the realm of Catholic higher education, is hard to overstate. Over the last decade and more, many Catholic colleges and universities have had extended discussions of these books that included faculty, staff, and administrators from the highest levels. At Marquette

Thomas C. Hunt, Ellis A. Joseph, and Ronald J. Nuzzi (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001); *Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education Since 1960*, by Alice Gallin (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); *Independence and a New Partnership in Catholic Higher Education*, by Alice Gallin (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); *From Backwater to Mainstream*, by Andrew M. Greeley (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969).

¹³ The document itself can be found in Alice Gallin's book entitled *American Catholic Higher Education: Essential Documents, 1967-1990* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 7-12. For an online version of the document, see <https://cushwa.nd.edu/assets/245340/landolakesstatement.pdf> (accessed 5 August 2019).

¹⁴ The document itself can be found in Alice Gallin's book entitled *American Catholic Higher Education: Essential Documents, 1967-1990* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 413-437. For an online version of the document, see http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html (accessed 5 August 2019).

¹⁵ See *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, Part II, Article 4, paragraph 4.

¹⁶ See *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, Part I, A, 3, 28.

¹⁷ See Gleason, Philip, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Gleason's discussion of the state of higher education received a great amount of attention from scholars concerned about Catholic higher education. His book was the basis of a faculty discussion group that I was a part of during my pre-tenure days at Marquette University, and served to draw out passions on all sides of the debate.

¹⁸ See John C. Haughey's book entitled, *Where is Knowing Going? The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009).

University, the entire philosophy and theology departments had a discussion of these books with the president, provost, and all significant administrators also in attendance. So many discussion and debates on the issue of Catholic identity were held on the campuses of Catholic Jesuit Universities and Colleges, that it led the 28 U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities and the U.S. Jesuit Provincials to publish a self-evaluation assessment tool entitled "Some Characteristics of Jesuit Colleges and Universities" in 2012.¹⁹ Even the most recent edition (2019) of *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*²⁰ is focused on the seemingly impossible task facing Catholic higher education: fulfilling their Catholic missions in a secular age.²¹

On the one hand, a Catholic university is an extension of the Catholic Church; as such it plays an explicit role in the salvation of humanity.²² Thus, its role is not only

¹⁹ See

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55d1dd88e4b0dee65a6594f0/t/56043648e4b0eddafbc448b4/1443116616873/Characteristics+FINAL+Dec+20122.pdf> (accessed 5 August 2019).

²⁰ *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, No. 55 (Spring 2019).

²¹ For a remarkably thorough discussion of what is (and can be meant by) a secular age, see Charles Taylor's, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). Other helpful sources on the nature, meaning, and significance of secularization include the following: *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, edited by Michael Warner, Jonathan Van Antwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010); *A Short History of Secularism*, by Graeme Smith (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 2008); *Secularism: Volume I, Defining Secularization: The Secular in Historical and Comparative Perspective*, edited by Bryan S. Turner (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Inc., 2010). For a series of essays on how secularism has effected higher education in general, see *The Secularization of the Academy*, edited by George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). For a somewhat contrary view on the rise of secularism, see *The Desecularization of the World*, edited by Peter L. Berger (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). For a discussion of the tension between meeting the expectations of both sides, see *Uneasy Partners: The College and the Church*, by Merrimon Cunnigim (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

²² That this is so is made explicitly clear in *Gravissimum Educationis*. In the introduction to that work, the following is stated: "To fulfill the mandate she has received from her divine founder of proclaiming the mystery of salvation to all men and of restoring all things in Christ, Holy Mother the Church must be concerned with the whole of man's life, even the secular part of it insofar as it has a bearing on his heavenly calling. Therefore, she has a role in the progress and development of education. Hence this sacred synod declares certain fundamental principles of Christian education especially in schools." See http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html (accessed 5 August 2019).

inherently spiritual, but it specifically presupposes the spirituality of the Catholic Church. Thus, to be a Catholic university, according to the Catholic Church, its spirituality must be opposed to conceptions of spirituality that entail the falsity of the Catholic conception or which are inconsistent with it. This entails that the expression of a spirituality that is at odds with the expression of spirituality approved of by the Catholic Church is problematic. It is for this reason that the Catholic Church officially requires its universities to have a majority number of Catholics in all its various departments and in leadership roles.²³ On the other hand, in the western hemisphere, it is a cultural expectation that a university be an autonomous entity, with academic freedom to oppose any world-view. Moreover, in the west, a multicultural conception of the good is presupposed, with no worldview or spiritual tradition beginning with a default privileged position that cannot be removed from its privileged position. (No doubt every culture has a default worldview or tradition, but it is up for debate in the west, but they can be replaced by other competing conceptions, unlike the cultural default for the Catholic Church.) In addition, the west is becoming more and more secular, and so the Catholic conception of education, which maintains an essential connection between learning and spirituality, is seen as highly dubious.²⁴ Moreover, according to the Catholic Church, one is either a member of the Church, that is to say, one is either Catholic, or one is not; one is either in communion with the Church or one is not. One might say that, according to the Church, being Catholic is a binary thing: one either is one, or is not. To be Catholic, one must believe certain things and engage in certain forms of expression; if one does not believe those things or engage in those forms of expression, one is not Catholic—at least not from the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church.²⁵

With these issues brought to the fore, we can now outline the conditions under which spiritual dysphoria arises. On the campuses of Catholic, Jesuit universities, a cultural identity is presupposed—one in which an education is an extension of a spiritual dimension of life, and in which the purpose of education is to improve the human community and to glorify God. (This is explicitly stated in Marquette University's mission statement: the university's mission is to make the world a better place and to glorify God.) A Catholic university must live out its mission, and must hire people who agree with its mission; this entails that a Catholic conception of spirituality plays a crucial role in which the education model is expressed (for example, in the curriculum

²³ *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, Part II, article 4, paragraph 4. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html (accessed 5 August 2019).

²⁴ For a brief discussion in support of the claim I am making here, see *A Twentieth-Century Collision: American Intellectual Culture and Pope John Paul II's Idea of a University*, by Peter M. Collins (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 2010).

²⁵ For further clarification of this matter, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, available online at <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM> (accessed 10 September 2019).

choices).²⁶ But how many highly-qualified academics will agree with a mission like that, or go along with what it entails? Not many, given that most highly qualified academics are not Catholic, let alone religious. Many academics are either atheists or agnostics who could not in good faith assent to such a mission statement or to all that it fully entails.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of leading administrators recognized that these conditions are not amenable for Catholic, Jesuit universities to remain in business.²⁷ They recognized that meeting the requirements of the Catholic Church and the cultural requirements of the West demanded a compromise. So, these administrators made compromises, and they began to speak in a coded language that sounded like what the Church would approve of, but they acted in a way that met the cultural approval of the West. They began to hire more and more non-Catholics, to the point where today most of the faculty are no longer Catholic. And they put into positions of leadership more and more people who were not Catholic. The administrators who have taken steps to create these conditions often justify their actions by appealing to the secular academic standards prevailing in the West, including the demands of accreditation agencies and challenging market conditions. But they only speak candidly of such matters behind closed doors, and often in language that smacks of double-speak.

Their intentions were doubtless to reduce the stigma associated with a Catholic approach to education, or to increase its acceptance, in what is now a secular age. I argue that the actions of these administrators have created the conditions under which spiritual dysphoria cannot help but arise. The cultural default on campus is officially Catholic; but any expression of that Catholic identity that excludes or marginalizes others is found to be at odds with its Guiding Values.²⁸ But, of course, a Catholic expression of spirituality in academia will make a Hindu or Buddhist feel a kind of unease, distress, and anxiety that is quite pronounced, especially if they are devout in their identity as a Hindu or Buddhist. On the other hand, someone who is an agnostic or atheist will no doubt feel like they have to conform (at least to some extent) to the mission statement of the Catholic university in question, especially if that university states explicitly in their job advertisement that the qualified candidates must be able to contribute to the mission statement of the school—when the mission statement explicitly affirms a commitment to an educational model that finds its highest and ultimate expression in giving glory to God. There is simply no way that such people can live out their authentic spirituality on a campus that officially is at odds with, and thus institutionally rejects, agnosticism and atheism. The agnostic or atheist will have to quell their desire to authentically express their spirituality; or, to the extent that they do not quell it, their expression may very well threaten the authentically Catholic identity of the school, and thus undermine the standing of the school in the eyes of the Church in Rome.

²⁶ See, for example, Marquette University's mission statement; available online at <https://www.marquette.edu/leadership/values.php> (accessed 5 August 2019).

²⁷ This started with the "Land O'Lakes Statement" of 1967, but has continued in a variety of ways ever since.

²⁸ See <https://www.marquette.edu/leadership/values.php> (accessed 5 August 2019).

But it also works the other way. For example, in some departments at Marquette University wherein atheists hold the majority, there are some atheists who have a disdain, even a contempt, for the Catholic Church. In this environment, a culture has been established in which Catholics who try to authentically live out (or express) their Catholic spirituality in the classroom or in their research will sometimes find themselves on only the unimportant committees, and often without much power in their departments. So, these Catholics, due to their deep unease and fear of both personal and professional retribution, will feel pressured to not fully express their spiritual identity.²⁹ This is perhaps most pronounced with respect to professors whose research projects focus on issues involving Catholic identity in higher education; for the research produced by such projects are likely to be published in so-called second- or even third-tiered journals, not at so-called first rate journals, which are typically secular in nature, which are unlikely to consider such research worthy of publication. At Marquette University, publishing in such so-called second- and third-tiered journals results in one's research counting for less, which leads to less pay and less esteem within the department and the university at large.³⁰

Perhaps those who are not on the campuses of Catholic, Jesuit campuses will be surprised that spiritual dysphoria arises for both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Perhaps the recognition of these conditions, on the other hand, will lead to a solution that is difficult to discern. Indeed, it is difficult to see how Catholic, Jesuit universities can meet both the requirements of the Catholic Church, which defines what it means to be Catholic, on the one hand, and the requirements of the increasingly secular west that demands a variety of conceptions of the good and spiritual expression.³¹

IV

²⁹ The dysphoria extends even to personal communications between Catholic professors when they are on campus. At Marquette University, the Title IX online training that all professors must take maintains the following: that if two professors were to be discussing, in the office of one of the professors, the official position of the Catholic Church, in which homosexuality is considered sinful, and if another person walks by, hears their conversation and becomes offended as a result of hearing that conversation, then those two Catholic professors are in violation of Title IX, and thus put the university in legal trouble. So, it is not just at the professional level that Catholic professors must be on guard, but at the personal level as well.

³⁰ For a related discussion of the way in which the leading administrators of Catholic institutions of higher education are motivated more by the goal of trying to rise in the school rankings of the *U.S. News and World Report* or *The Princeton Review* than they are by strengthening their schools' Catholic identity, see *Status Envy: The Politics of Catholic Higher Education*, by Anne Hendershott (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

³¹ For a discussion of how Jesuit thinkers have recently addressed some possible solutions, see *Jesuit Postmodern: Scholarship, Vocation, and Identity in the 21st Century*, edited by Francis X. Clooney, S.J. (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2006).

One helpful (and novel) way of analyzing dysphoria is to utilize the concept of incommensurability that Søren Kierkegaard puts forth in his analysis of faith in *Fear and Trembling*.³² Incommensurability is the quality or state of being incommensurable, which means "that [which] cannot be measured or compared by the same standard or measure; without a common standard of measure."³³ Given the previous analysis of dysphoria (both gender and spiritual), incommensurability seems especially promising to account for the *origin* of the dysphoria. It is promising, however, only in a Kierkegaardian sense precisely because the way in which it accounts for dysphoria's origin is due to conditions that are essentially paradoxical.

Let us begin by summarizing how Kierkegaard's appeal to incommensurability is relevant to the matter at hand. One of the main themes in *Fear and Trembling* is a sustained analysis (not an explanation) of the way in which Abraham, as the father of faith, can be coherently seen as admirable (as opposed to monstrous) for how he conducted himself in the *Akedah*.³⁴ According to Kierkegaard, the traditional and leading views of his time are all mistaken. On the one hand, Abraham is not admirable according to the philosophical framework of his time because the ethical principles by which Abraham acted must be conceived of as universal; but any attempt to universalize what Abraham did will result in not an ethical *admiration*, but ethical *condemnation* of Abraham.³⁵ Thus, Kierkegaard argues, according to a philosophical analysis of the *Akedah*, Abraham is a monster; or as Kierkegaard is wont to say, "Abraham is lost."³⁶ On the other hand, the traditional religious interpretation is mistaken because although it is true that Abraham "was willing to offer [God] the best,"³⁷ and that he withheld nothing from God, if anyone were to do what Abraham did, he would be lambasted for being a moral monster.³⁸ Yet, as Kierkegaard observes, the preacher tells everyone to be like Abraham; but anyone who were to attempt to sacrifice one's own son would be arrested and cast out of the community.³⁹

Given these failures to make sense of Abraham's greatness (in an admirable sense, not a monstrous sense), Kierkegaard proposes the following: Abraham's greatness is due to an incommensurability between the standards by which things are measured by God (in his kingdom or realm) and the standards by which things are measured by human beings (on

³² See *Fear and Trembling / Repetition*, edited and translated by Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 34, 39, 40, 55, 68, 69, 111. Henceforth in the footnotes my references to this work will appear as *Fear and Trembling*, followed by the page number.

³³ *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, deluxe second edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 923.

³⁴ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 15-23, 60.

³⁵ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 54-61.

³⁶ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 113.

³⁷ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 28.

³⁸ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 11, 76, 77.

³⁹ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 28, 29.

earth).⁴⁰ In other words, to say that "Abraham is justified by faith," means that Abraham is justified because he entered into a relationship with the divine; but any attempt he makes to express that faith on earth (in a manner that makes it understood on a universal philosophical framework) must fail. As Kierkegaard puts it, Abraham entered into "an absolute relation to the absolute"⁴¹ (that is, he entered into a relationship with the divine), and precisely because of that, he was unable to adequately express this relation to any other human being on earth. That is why Abraham could not disclose his intentions to Sarah, Eliezer, or Isaac.⁴² No matter how he was to try to express himself, whether by word or by deed, he would not be able to be understood by any human being. As Kierkegaard puts it, Abraham must "remain silent,"⁴³ because he is, in a very real sense, shut-up within himself, unable to speak in a way that makes him understandable to others. His faith in the divine, and his expression of it, is incommensurable, Kierkegaard maintains, with "the whole of actuality."⁴⁴ For this reason, Abraham must live incognito, living a life in which what is most essential to him must be hidden⁴⁵ from those he lives among—even his closest family members.

Let us now see how this Kierkegaardian analysis is relevant for the topic of this paper. Recall that individuals who experience dysphoria are deeply uncomfortable with what the society or culture at large expects from them. The person experiences suffering that arises out of a conflict between one's self-identity and the dominant cultural default regarding norms. Kierkegaard maintains that Abraham experiences a kind of distress, paradox, and anxiety the likes of which most human beings have never even imagined. The analogy I am drawing suggests that the people who experience both gender and spiritual dysphoria experience, in like manner, a very deep kind of distress and anxiety. I conclude my essay with the assertion that what gives rise to this phenomenon of dysphoria on the campuses of Catholic, Jesuit universities is a set of conditions that cultivate the absurd because of the commitments and policies the administrators of these schools have embraced.

V

Precisely because of the conflicts regarding what it means for Catholic universities to be both truly Catholic and truly modern, as discussed previously in section three, administrators have enacted policies and embraced principles that attempt to construct a community in which all people are welcome and celebrated, regardless of their faith commitments, gender identity, or worldview. In the attempt to meet the market conditions of the west in the early twenty-first century, as well as the requirements of the Catholic Church, mission statements were formed that articulated this community, and groups of administrators held long retreats so as to formulate the guiding

⁴⁰ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 34, 111, 112.

⁴¹ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 62, 93.

⁴² *Fear and Trembling*, p. 82ff.

⁴³ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 87, 88, 113.

⁴⁴ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 34, 111, 112.

⁴⁵ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 82-99.

values by which the community would live. But these conditions are inherently paradoxical. Allow me to illustrate this by appealing to the mission statement of Marquette University, and to the guiding values it abides by. Marquette's mission statement indicates that its educational mission begins and ends with God—more specifically, its mission is to glorify God.⁴⁶ It also indicates, under the heading "Faith" that "As a Catholic university, we are committed to the unfettered pursuit of truth under the mutually illuminating powers of human intelligence and Christian faith. Precisely because Catholicism at its best seeks to be inclusive, we are open to all who share our mission and seek the truth about God and the world, and we are firmly committed to academic freedom as the necessary precondition for that search. We welcome and benefit enormously from the diversity of seekers within our ranks, even as we freely choose and celebrate our own Catholic identity." My claim is that these commitments create conditions under which the absurd and paradox cannot but help to arise.

On the one hand, Marquette University identifies as university whose reason for existing is to glorify God. It seeks knowledge under the framework in which both human reason and divine revelation are necessary to arrive at the truth. Yet it welcomes those who reject this conception of how the truth is arrived at, and insists that it benefits enormously from them. How can atheists, which Marquette welcomes, self-identify with a university that holds the glory of God as its end? It is clear that atheists cannot accept the view that Christian revelation is an essential part of the search for truth. So how, exactly, is the university going to benefit at all, let alone enormously, from conditions under which atheists are an essential part of the Christian community? It becomes even less apparent how the Catholic university, which claims that God and divine revelation are essential in the search for truth, will benefit when there are not just a few atheists on campus, but so many that they make up nearly half of the university community.⁴⁷ That, I suggest, is the epitome of what Kierkegaard would recognize as an illustration of conditions under which the absurd and the paradoxical cannot help but arise.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ "Marquette University is a Catholic, Jesuit university dedicated to serving God by serving our students and contributing to the advancement of knowledge. . . . All this we pursue for the greater glory of God and the common benefit of the human community." See Marquette University's mission statement:

<https://www.marquette.edu/leadership/values.php> (accessed 5 August 2019).

⁴⁷ For a thorough analysis of how Catholic institutions of higher education might make progress on issues related to mission and Catholic identity, see *Revisioning Mission: The Future of Catholic Higher Education*, by John Richard Wilcox with Jennifer Anne Lindholm and Suzanne Dale Wilcox (North Charleston, South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013).

⁴⁸ For some models of how religious institutions of higher education, both Catholic and non-Catholic, might find success in the future, see *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997).

The difference here, and where the appeal to Kierkegaard breaks down, is that atheists reject the standard that Christians appeal to, and Christians reject the atheistic standard in so far as they see atheists as leaving out something crucial—namely, God and God's revelation. Instead of appealing to incommensurability, it seems more apt (in my view at least) to say that these two worldviews are inconsistent. However, administrators at Catholic, Jesuit universities such as Marquette act and speak in such a way that they insist that the two worldviews are not inconsistent. As such, it appears that they think their line of reasoning is more in line with what Kierkegaard refers to when he talks about the incommensurability of faith with "the whole of actuality."

If this analysis is correct, it follows that various members of the community will always be in a very difficult position, for they will inevitably feel a deep, fundamental discontent were they to express their deeply held identities. They will feel that the expression of their identity is not actualizable under the conditions in which they exist. They must, instead, pay close attention to the apparent (but not actual) contradiction (at least according to the community's leaders) between what they most closely identify with, on the one hand, and what the university's administrators officially hold that the university identifies with, on the other. Just as Abraham's existence was inherently difficult, so, too, is existence for those of us on the campuses of Catholic, Jesuit universities such as Marquette University. Just as Abraham understood that his identity could not be adequately expressed to his community, and therefore did not even attempt to do so without inevitably being mistaken for a monster, so is the plight of those who exist on the campuses of Catholic, Jesuit universities such as Marquette University. Living this way is, as one might imagine, quite difficult.

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Cultivating the Capacity for the Moral Imagination: Developing a Constructive Postmodern Theological Curriculum in Higher Education

Abstract

Graduate students in ministry and religious education often discuss how challenging it is, in their ministries and in their personal lives, to engage with people who espouse an ideological worldview deeply different from their own. This study explores how religious educators in higher education can nurture the capacity for what John Paul Lederach calls the moral imagination and embrace Pope Francis call for synodality by developing a constructive postmodern theological curriculum and teaching strategies that encourage dialogue across ideological difference.

Keywords

Moral imagination, ideology, curriculum, religious education, National Dialogue, synodality

Introduction

Many of my graduate students, most of whom are Catholic religious educators and ministers, talk about how challenging it is, in their ministries and in their personal lives, to engage people who espouse deeply different ideological worldviews. There is a seeming divide between conservative/traditional or progressive/liberal religious ideologies that prevents some Catholics from engaging in and sustaining dialogue across ideological difference. I have heard and seen people, my students and colleagues in academia included, differentiate between two polarizing and conflictual ideologies by using phrases such as, “are you a Pope John Paul II/ Benedict Catholic or a Pope Francis Catholic?” In the exhibit hall at the National Conference on Catholic Youth Ministry (NCCYM), for example, one exhibitor displayed cardboard cut outs of all three popes and as the day progressed I saw several people physically move the life-size cardboard Pope Francis out of the picture before taking selfies with the popes.

Given Pope Francis media [popularity](#) for his pastoral presence, in both his words and actions, through his embodiment of the Gospel values of mercy, love and compassion¹ (his handling of the clergy abuse [scandal](#) notwithstanding), it is a wonder why people would move aside a cardboard picture of him to take a selfie without his image, to say the least. Yet, there are Catholics that take deep issue with the Pope’s discussions on synodality. In fact, this might just be one of the most dominant public issues dividing Catholics along the traditional –progressive ecclesiological divide.

In his speech for 50th Anniversary of Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis reimagined into life what the term synodality meant, and in doing so redefined the purpose of the synod of

¹ Robert Draper, “Will the Pope Change the Vatican? Or Will the Vatican Change the Pope?” *National Geographic Magazine*, (August 2015), retrieved from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2015/08/pope-francis-vatican-roman-catholic-reformation/>

bishops. Synodality, for Francis no longer refers to episcopal collegiality, rather “a synodal church” according to Francis:

is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing.” It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (*Jn* 14:17), in order to know what he [*sic*] “says to the Churches” (*Rev* 2:7).²

Redefining synodality from the reciprocal relationship held between bishops and the pope, to include their relationship to the whole church— the people of God— has brought about staunch opposition by some to Francis’s Papacy.³ Ironically enough, his theology of synodality created a contentious debate about the ecclesial nature of the church, contributing this ideological division in the church, and as such, has become a barrier to unity.

Religious and moral ideological differences often enter our class discussions—usually but not always in fruitful ways. Differences include how to effectively pass on the faith to young people or what it means to be Catholic. Aside from navigating ideologically polarizing conversations with my students, I, myself have been in professional situations where I fundamentally disagree with a person’s religious ideology as it relates to religious education, theology, and ministry. Such encounters have occurred in meetings with the National Leadership Network (NLN) at the [National Dialogue](#) (ND), a collaborative initiative aimed at unifying Catholic youth and young adult ministry leaders and organization to understand more fully the lived experience young people and reengage them in the life of the church.

The NLN developed a conversation guide⁴ to engage or re-engage not only young people, the but also the ministry leaders and the parents/guardians of young people through a facilitated dialogue.⁵ We realized that if we are to unify and mobilize pastoral leaders and religious educators, then we ourselves first need to encounter one another through meaningful dialogue, so we broke up in to small groups of 7-8 and piloted the first round of facilitated conversations. Months later, I replicated this listening process with a group of religious educators, parents, ministers, and stakeholders at one of the Archdiocesan high schools in New Orleans. Through this process, which is the focus of this essay, I saw ministry leaders and parents, when given a safe hospitable space to express themselves, enter into and/or create more meaningful

² Francis, “Speech on the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, October 17, 2015: *Origins* 45/22 (October 29, 2015) 382-383.

³ One such critique comes from a series by Xavier Rynne II [pseud] published in *First Things* documenting the Synod on Young People (note this article inaccurately refers to this as a Synod on “Youth”). For one such example, see Xavier Rynne II [pseud], ed. “Letters From the Synod-2018: #19,” *First Things*, (October 29, 2018) retrieved from <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/10/letters-from-the-synod-2018-19>

⁴ The V National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry developed a similar and more comprehensive approach to encountering one another through facilitated listening sessions and dialogues; however, my primary experiences come from the NLN in the National Dialogue, therefore this essay draws from the ND’s method of engagement.

⁵ At the writing of this essay, the work of the National Dialogue refers these sessions conversations and/or dialogues; however, these are actually facilitated listening sessions designed to hear more about the experiences of young people, their parents, and ministry leaders regarding their relationship and experiences with their faith and the church. The NLN is currently in conversation about this language.

relationships with one another, remain open or “stay curious,”⁶ and take risks in sharing their experiences.

Engaging in such a process of transformative listening from across ideological differences is strikingly similar to John Paul Lederach’s four disciplines that “form the moral imagination that make peacebuilding possible: . . .relationship, paradoxical curiosity, creativity, and risk.”⁷ In his work with international peacebuilding, Lederach observes that skill building and mediation can only do so much; there must be a moment that changes how we view conflict, “a turning point that orients us toward a new and more humane horizon” (23). Such turning points come when individuals cultivate a capacity for a moral imagination. My experiences with the National Dialogue process brought many of us to such a turning point in how we understand one another and our differences.

My reflections on the National Dialogue and peacebuilding raise questions for me about how religious educators can help students practice and model dialogue across difference to more fully understand and value the voices of the other and embrace Pope Francis’ call for a synodal church. As I reflect on my praxis, I wonder: how do these experiences and reflections inform my praxis? How can I bring my experiences in building unity amidst ideological difference to my curriculum? What concrete curriculum themes and pedagogic⁸ practices might religious educators draw from to foster dialogue across deep religious difference in ministry programs in higher education as a way of enacting synodality?

By cultivating a moral imagination, I argue that Catholics can bridge the traditional-progressive ecclesial ideology to become a more synodal church. This paper uses the method of practical theology to explore how my experience developing a moral imagination with the NLN can help religious educators explore their own deeply held assumptions to reexamine the art and practice of teaching across difference. This paper begins with a brief history of synodality as it contributes to an ideological divide in the Catholic Church then unpacks the process of engaging in the National Dialogue from the framework of Lederach’s moral imagination. Finally, I explore how religious educators might embrace constructive postmodern theological curriculum, rooted in process, to envision teaching and learning that cultivates the capacity for a moral imagination and models synodality by fostering unity across deep religious ideological differences with students in ministry and higher education.

What’s in a Name? Synodality under Pope Francis

Theologian Massimo Faggioli argues that “synodality is the most important institutional reform of Francis’s pontificate.”⁹ In tracing the shifts in ecclesial ideology since the Second

⁶ The facilitator guide encourages facilitators and dialogue partners to “focus on accompaniment, be empathetic, and stay curious.” See the *National Dialogue Conversation Facilitator Guide*, 2018, 6. <https://www.nationaldialogue.info/comprehensive-reference>, retrieved 30 April, 2019.

⁷ John Paul Lederach. *The Moral Imagination: The art and soul of building peace*, (Oxford UP: Oxford. 2005), 36

⁸ Andragogy is the accurate term for teaching and learning in adult education, however many of my students teach children or teenagers (pedagogy). I will use the term pedagogy to eliminate the awkwardness of using both terms.

⁹ Massimo Faggioli, “From Collegiality to Synodality: Pope Francis’s Post-Vatican II Reform,” *Commonweal*, (November 23, 2018), retrieved from <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/collegiality-synodality>.

Vatican Council, he notes how ideologically polarized the Catholic church has become. Faggioli states:

In just a few years, the papacy went from a defense of Vatican II as a “a sure compass to guide the course of Peter’s barque” (John Paul II’s words), through a period under Benedict in which Rome indulged traditionalist dissent from Vatican II, to the current pope’s embrace of post–Vatican II synodality. Francis’s emphasis on synodality bridges the gap between his Vatican II theological culture and the new horizon of post-conciliar global Catholicism. It is a bridge that he cannot cross alone.¹⁰

The term Synod reached its fullest expression when Pope Paul VI established the first Synod of Bishops in 1965. In 2015, Pope Francis issued his "*Episcopalis Communio*" where he recalled how Pope Paul VI responded to the need for “episcopal collegiality,” among the bishops and the Pope, by “institute[ing] a body known as the Synod of Bishops.”¹¹ Tracing the history and importance of the Synod since its inception, Francis states:

...Since the beginning of my Petrine ministry, I have paid special attention to the Synod of Bishops, confident that it can experience “further development so as to do even more to promote dialogue and cooperation among Bishops themselves and between them and the Bishop of Rome”. Underpinning this work of renewal must be the firm conviction that all Bishops are appointed for the service of the holy People of God, to whom they themselves belong through the sacrament of Baptism.”¹²

Here, and through his theological commission on the theology of synodality,¹³ Pope Francis redefined synodality from encompassing the consultative and collaborative fruits borne from the Synod of Bishops and the Pope, to include more direct consultation from the lay faithful highlighting the importance of the communion between local and universal church. In an interview with the Belgian Catholic weekly newspaper *Tertio* on the Synod on the Family and the papal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis states:

Either you have a pyramidal church where everything Peter says is done or you have a synodal church where Peter is Peter, but he accompanies the church, lets it grow, listens. What is more, he learns from this reality and sees how to harmonize it...¹⁴

It is precisely this language of learning from the whole People of God that made some people fear the Pope is opening the Catholic Church to up to become a democracy, albeit from the perspective of politics in the United States.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Constitution, Episcopalis Communio*, (Rome, Sept. 18, 2018) §2, retrieved from http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html

¹² Ibid., §5.

¹³ International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life of the Church (Rome, March 3, 2018), retrieved September 12, 2018. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html.

¹⁴ U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. “On File,” *Origins*, 46, no. 29 (December 15, 2016), 464.

Pope Francis, through the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, continued to modeled this understanding synodality as he invited young people for the first time in the history of the church to prepare the *Final Document from the Pre-Synodal Meeting* after their meeting in Rome in March 2018. This means the voices lay young adults became a part of the official teaching body of the church.¹⁵ Paul Jarzembowski, who works for the USCCB in the Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth recalls how this was likely the first time in the history of synods “when young people without position were given opportunity to address the full synod of bishops.”¹⁶ This is a watershed moment for anyone working in youth and young adult ministry in the Catholic Church.

Francis also expanded on the theme of synodality in his post-synodal exhortation, *Christus Vivit* (CV), in a way not previously written about in the pre-synodal or final documents leading up to CV. This too caught the attention of critics.¹⁷ Francis specifically states that “youth [and young adult] ministry has to be synodal...”¹⁸ He continues:

It should involve a “journeying together” that values “the charisms that the Spirit bestows in accordance with the vocation and role of each of the Church’s members, through a process of co-responsibility... Motivated by this spirit, we can move towards a participatory and co-responsible Church, one capable of appreciating its own rich variety, gratefully accepting the contributions of the lay faithful, including young people and women, consecrated persons, as well as groups, associations and movements. No one should be excluded or exclude themselves

In this way, by learning from one another, we can better reflect that wonderful multi-faceted reality that Christ’s Church is meant to be. She will be able to attract young people, for her unity is not monolithic, but rather a network of varied gifts that the Spirit ceaselessly pours out upon her, renewing her and lifting her up from her poverty.¹⁹

The Synod on Young People and the Post-Synodal Exhortation invite ministry leaders and religious educators to reimagine church with and for young people. Business as usual can no longer works.

Unfortunately, the ideological divide over Pope Francis’ use of the term synodality is overshadowing this profound moment in the church and preventing people from receiving the Pope’s Exhortation, and with it, the voices of young people who so desperately need to be heard.²⁰ My colleagues in the field of youth and young adult ministry and religious education, particularly through my collaboration with the NLN of the National Dialogue and the USCCB

¹⁵ See for example *Christus Vivit* §33, §43, and §133

¹⁶ This came from a discussion between Paul and I regarding his research on the history of the Synods in September 2019. The 2014-2015 Synod on the Family likewise invited the voices of lay Catholics from around the world in the process leading up to the synod, but those invited to address the full synod of bishops were primarily from academic institutions or other ecclesial organizations.

¹⁷ See LifeSiteNews as one example: <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/vatican-youth-synod-final-doc-approved.-the-most-controversial-points>

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Christus Vivit: Christ is Alive*, Rome (March 25, 2019), § 206.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §206-207.

²⁰ I recognize that there are a likely many other reasons why certain groups do not support Pope Francis’ papacy, however, this issue of synodality seems to have taken deep root and, as such, is hindering efforts to engage youth and young adults falling way from or leaving the church.

National Advisory Team for Young Adult Ministry (NATYAM) were anxiously awaiting a papal exhortation on young people. For the first time in the history of synods and exhortations, we would have in the teaching body of the church, a papal document addressing the needs of Catholic youth and young adults. However, the heartbreak that my colleagues and I currently feel is over the reception of Pope Francis post-synodal exhortation *Christus Vivit: Christ is Alive!*

At the time of writing this essay, the vast majority of Catholic leaders in the United States, from Bishops, diocesan staff, and lay ecclesial ministers and religious educators in catholic secondary schools have not read the document. While many are familiar with the 2018 Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, they are largely unfamiliar with what Pope Francis is asking of the church in *Christus Vivit (CV)*.²¹ This reception, according to some members of my NATYAM, familiar with the arguments criticizing of CV, is due to Pope Francis' ecclesiology, more specifically his theology of synodality.

If Pope Francis issued statements redefining the Catholic priesthood, opening it up to marriage and women, I could certainly anticipate a large vocal backlash in the United States and other parts of the world. But Pope Francis is redefining synodality in light of the teachings from Vatican II, specifically *Lumen Gentiun*. He states as much in his speech to the Synod of Bishops²² in his numerous interviews. His discussion of synodality is not new theology, it is rooted in the Church Teaching of Vatican II.²³

The irony here is that Pope Francis' efforts to redefine synodality as an all-call for unity in the Church have caused a division from some factions within the church, leading these Catholics to oppose his papacy (arguably the same Catholics who believe it is anathema to criticize or question previous popes). What does this mean for my praxis, and for other religious educators in higher education? My students, many of whom are youth and young adult ministers, or lay ecclesial ministers who both indirectly and directly serve young adults through their programs, are called to re-envision a ministry with youth and young adults "synodally." However, some of these same students oppose Pope Francis ecclesiology on synodality. The next section explores, how religious educators can engage ideological differences in graduate programs in ministry and religious education to not only encourage more fruitful outcomes, but model the type of unity Pope Francis asks of us in his treatment of synodality.

Lederach's Moral Imagination and The National Dialogue

The Power of the Moral Imagination

John Paul Lederach, in his *The Moral Imagination: The art and soul of building peace*, articulates and enacts successfully a vision for peacebuilding through the art and practice of dialogue and imagination. Lederach, in tracing the literature on the topic, finds moral imagination accomplishes three important things. First it "develops the capacity to perceive things beyond and at a deeper level than what initially meets the eye... more than immediately available...Second...the authors landed on the term *imagination* in order to emphasize the

²¹ This information comes to me from conference calls with members from staff members with the USCCB and an unpublished survey about *Christus Vivit* from The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM), in September 2018.

²² Francis, "Speech on the 50th Anniversary."

²³ International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life," § 2.

necessity of the creative act” most notably through artistic expression.²⁴ “Third...the moral imagination has a quality of transcendence. It breaks out of what appear to be narrow, shortsighted, or structurally determined dead-ends.”²⁵

In my experience, deeply divisive conversations seldom bridge a new horizon of meaning through rational discourse. On the other hand, as Lederach states:

The moral imagination arises with the capacity to imagine ourselves in relationship, the willingness to embrace complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity, the belief in the creative act, and acceptance of the inherent risk required to bring violence into venture unknown paths that build constructive change.²⁶

These are the first steps towards peacebuilding, and I would argue, offer religious educators way of engaging in dialogue across polarizing difference. In looking back on my experience with the ND, I can see these key skills for cultivating the capacity for moral imagination were implicitly present. And the results, as they currently unfold, attest to the success of these initiatives.

The National Dialogue

At the USCCB Convocation of Catholic Leaders, held in July 1-4, 2017 in Orlando, Florida, the NLN kicked-off the first gathering of The National Dialogue in anticipation of the style of dialogue Pope Francis sought to advance when he first announced his plans to hold a Synod on Young People in 2016. From this initial gathering, the NLN invited a diverse array of ministry leaders from around the United states, including academics who teach in ministry and religious education programs to gather at certain times in the year to move this work forward. This was, in many ways, a grassroots effort by organizations, dioceses, parishes, secondary schools, lay apostolates, and colleges and universities to first unify the field of youth and young adult ministry, then mobilize, or, as Tom East called it, “do the dialogue.” Through this unification process, I and others, entered into new relationships with people I never imagined would happen; people who think very differently than I do regarding ministry with youth young adults and education. Through my reflections on these relationships, I uncovered Lederach’s first discipline that forms the moral imagination: “the centrality of relationships,” as it was through our growing relationships that I became far more aware of our similarities than our differences.²⁷

Responding to the signs of the times, that so many young people are leaving the church, and the forthcoming Synod on Young people, the ND gatherings sought to provide ministry leaders and religious educators with tools to help reach out to youth, young adults, their parents, and other ministry leaders. From these initial brainstorming sessions, the NLN developed a website and created resources on how to facilitate listening sessions with each of the above mentioned groups.

In first efforts to unify the field and practice the style of dialogue we developed, we convened a one-day retreat for our ND session April 11-13, 2018 in Newark, NJ. Amidst much prayer and discernment, I was honored to facilitate one of the small group sessions. Many in the

²⁴John Paul Lederach. *The Moral Imagination: The art and soul of building peace*, (Oxford UP: Oxford, 2005), 26-27.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 29.

²⁷ Ibid., 34

room had starkly different approaches to ministry, including ideological differences regarding Pope Francis. Some advocate for a back-to-basics approach to ministry, others believe in preaching the gospel unapologetically to all those they meet, others believed in passing on the faith through religious instruction, or knowledge of doctrine, while others believed more in the accompaniment model of journeying with youth and young adults, like Jesus in the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).

Amidst these differences in ministry was a suspicion that I, the academic in the room from a Jesuit (read: Liberal) university had little to offer by way of ministry with youth and young adults. This posturing, however, slowly dissipated once we began our “dialogue” because it was through this prayerful retreat process that we engaged creatively in an open-ended session “where the divine and human meet.”²⁸ Our prayerful retreat-style space prompted in us “a predisposition, a kind of attitude and perspective that opens up, even invokes, the spirit and belief that creativity is humanly possible.”²⁹

In our conversations we discussed how so many young people feel wounded by the church, so if we are to engage them in honest open dialogues, we need to “create a space that welcomes the soul.”³⁰ The rules for dialogue are inspired by Parker Palmer’s Circle of Trust[©] among which are the rules “No fixing, saving, advising, no setting each other straight”³¹ Palmer, and the ND guide instruct facilitators and group members to “Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions...[and] when the going gets rough, turn to wonder.”

This process elicited deep, meaningful, personal responses from the group, many of whom were struggling to understand why their own children have left the Catholic Church, feeling their efforts to raise children in the faith had failed. Participates had a “willingness to take a risk” by being open and honest and, “to step into the unknown without any guarantee of success or even safety.”³² This session changed us; it united across our differences for a common cause.

Since then, I facilitated a dialogue with religious educators, parents, ministers, and stakeholders an Archdiocesan high school in New Orleans, in what can be classified as a more ideologically conservative group. The leadership team wanted to engage the local young adult alums of the school so to unify and strengthen the community, so I recommended we “do the dialogue.” I have had more time processing this first dialogue with this group, than the group in Newark, and they remarked how this first session brought us into a deep, meaningful relationships with one another. In our second session, I recalled the overlapping themes that emerged from their first dialogue. From here, the posturing all but stopped and our commitment to youth and young adult ministry united us across our differences.

One final experience that grew from the ND worth noting is the Voice+Vision Summit in July 2019 that took place at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. Academics and practitioners from across ideological difference the heeded Pope Francis call to look past the liberal/conservative divide and “make use of everything that has borne good fruit and effectively communicates the joy of the Gospel”³³ Fr. Frank Pivonka, now president of Franciscan University, and Dr. Bob Rice, Professor of Catechetics and principal organizer of the conference,

²⁸ Matthew Fox, qtd in Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 38.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 130.

³¹ Ibid., 115.

³² Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 39.

³³ Francis, *Christus Vivit*, § 205.

took a giant leap— a risk— towards breaking down the ideological silos that divide our churches and schools.³⁴ From this context, I experienced hearing Cardinal Cupich reflect on CV, watching faculty from what are considered “liberal” institutions, myself included, give panel presentations, and witnessed some of the most powerful preaching I have ever encountered by Dr. Timone Davis, from Loyola University, Chicago— all in Steubenville. Upon reflection, we were engaging in another form of moral imagining: paradoxical curiosity. We, the NLN, and the leadership at Franciscan University made conscious efforts to rise above our ideological differences through our collaboration on this Summit, and did so “with an abiding respect for complexity, a refusal to fall prey to the pressures of forced dualistic categories of truth, and an inquisitiveness about what may hold together seemingly contradictory social energies in a greater whole.”³⁵

Through the process of forming relationships, embracing paradoxical curiosity, modeling creativity and risk, the ND cultivated the capacity for Lederach’s moral imagination in a divided church. While Lederach developed his theory of the moral imagination primarily as a means of peacebuilding and mediation for countries divided by war and other forms of violence, the approach is important to note when engaging people across vast ideological differences. Deep ideological difference breeds hatred, as exemplified in the threats Franciscan University received from the group Church Militant, and from hatred grows violence. Cultivating a capacity for moral imagination provides ministry leaders and religious educators with a method that can enliven synodality, to recognize the Church is one and to work alongside God’s people.

If embracing a synodal church “is an indispensable precondition for a new missionary energy that will involve the entire People of God,” then Catholic ministry leaders and religious educators cannot remain a house divided over ecclesial ideology.³⁶ The experience of unity amidst difference through the process of the National Dialogue could not be accomplished through rational discourse, we needed to cultivate a capacity for moral imagination. If religious educators, in heeding the call towards synodality, are to help raise up new leaders in the church, we must recognize how our curriculum and pedagogy implicitly and explicitly model a theology of synodality with moral imagination. When asking people to engage with others another in meaningful dialogue across deep ideological difference, we must first model the moral imagination in the classroom.

Postmodern Curriculum and the Moral Imagination

The Catholic Church is both universal and particular, yet the particular way of expressing one’s faith can overshadow our universality. Our worldview frames who we are, what we believe in, and the way we approach ministry and religious education. Dialogue across difference; therefore, involves emotions and experience; it involves examining our own identity and our deeply held assumptions. Curriculum theorist William Doll describes how the modernist curriculum values and reinforces characteristics of progress, industry, empirical data, uniformity,

³⁴ In Fr. Dave’s opening address he recalled challenges they encountered in hosting this summit, by way of threats from Church Militant and loss of funding, rooted in part by the anger and hostility over Cardinal Cupich’s presence. But the leadership at Franciscan University was resolute in affirming our common commitment to evangelization and ministry with young people over our ideological differences.

³⁵ Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 36.

³⁶ Commission, “Synodality in the Life,” §9

and rational objectivity.³⁷ Emotions, experiential learning, and subjectivity in the modern curriculum can be characterized as less valuable, less academic, and therefore inappropriate in academic spaces. Parker Palmer suggests educators work against “an academic culture that distrusts personal truth,” where “objective facts are regarded as pure, while subjective feelings are suspect and sullied.”³⁸ Instead, Palmer proposes educators teach from wholeness, or “an undivided self” to unify and keep intact our integrity and identity.³⁹

According to Patrick Slattery, “curriculum development in the postmodern era demand that we find a way around the hegemonic forces and institutional obstacles that limit our knowledge, reinforce our prejudices, and disconnect us from the global community”⁴⁰ (2013, 36). Drawing insight from Michael O’Malley, Slattery describes the modern prescriptive Euro-American education and curriculum as one that fosters an “ethic of exclusion,” that “the conscious absence of soul from education limits the efficacy of the pedagogical project and actually creates conditions in which social ills— anxiety, racism, poverty, exclusion – flourish.”⁴¹ The implicit curriculum of the modern text works against the theology of synodality and erects an invisible barrier to the four disciplines of the moral imagination.

A constructive postmodern theological curriculum, on the other hand, encourages religious educators to be open to the transformation that comes through process curriculum – to allow ourselves to remain open to learning from our students, from worldviews and ideologies far different from our own, to teach from an “undivided self.” From this paradigm, “curriculum,” according to Doll, “is a process – not of transmitting what is (absolutely) known but of exploring what is un-known; and through exploration students and teachers ‘clear the land’ together, thereby transforming both the land and themselves.”⁴² This method of teaching and learning, one centered on process, involves taking risks, putting aside a prescribed lesson objectives to remain open to the needs of the class by engaging in a process open to “paradoxical creativity” to make “space for the creative act to emerge.”⁴³

Religious educators can develop a postmodern curriculum and pedagogy rooted in process to encourage dialogue across conflictual religious ideologies and worldviews to embrace a moral imagination that helps us “let go of the need for certainty, consensus, and uniformity” so that we may grow “closer to wisdom and justice”⁴⁴ This creates a willingness to risk, to leave what is comfortable (clinging to our differences), to risk what is unknown (finding unity, growing into synodality).⁴⁵

Slattery argues that the postmodern theological text recognizes “diversity, eclecticism, and ecumenism,” which are also hallmarks of Pope Francis theology of synodality, for they “bring us closer to wisdom and justice. One must give everything away to become rich, let go in

³⁷ William E. Doll Jr. *Post-Modern Perspective on Curriculum*. (Columbia, NY: Teachers College Press, 1993).

³⁸ Parker Palmer. *The Courage to Teach*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 2007), 18.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁰ Patrick Slattery. *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era: 3rd Edition*, (Hoboken, NJ: Routledge, 2013). 36.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴² Doll, *Post-Modern*, 155.

⁴³ Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 38.

⁴⁴ Slattery, *Postmodern Curriculum*, 106, 107.

⁴⁵ See Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, 39.

order to live, experience suffering to understand joy.”⁴⁶ This underscores the task of cultivating the moral imagination in higher education.

Students more familiar with the modern curriculum, of prescribed standards and measurable objectives are implicitly taught to see education as a commodity, something to gain or “achieve.” The modern curriculum teaches students that if they “master” a subject or discipline, they will have “succeeded” in their education. This approach to teaching and learning is often devoid of creativity and imagination –something best illuminated by the arts and aesthetics. Our students are a part of the curriculum, therefore knowing what our students bring to the curriculum is the first step in our course design. However, religious educators unfamiliar with postmodern curriculum development may feel uneasy putting off their full syllabus or course design before learning about their students. There is risk involved in the process curriculum which is, in many ways, what Palmer means by having the Courage to Teach.⁴⁷ It also begins the work of modeling the moral imagination.

The next step might be in developing a classroom community through pedagogical practices that create the space for students to form relationships. I have had success in watching students form relationships by first establishing classroom norms using our course material on adult communication skills and Parker’s Circle of Trust,[©] then forming small collaborative discussion groups. I also ask students to work together in pairs to create an opening prayer experience for our weekly sessions. Collaborative projects have the secondary effect of building relationships.

According to Slattery, there are two hallmarks of postmodern curriculum development: “Autobiography and arts-based autoethnography.”⁴⁸ I invite students to engage in an open facilitated listening where we explore the intersectionality of our lives, share our stories. In my efforts to teach through autobiography, I begin by sharing my own story, how I experienced religious education, trace the formative events that shaped my identity, then invite students to do the same using Eric H. F. Law’s Invitation Method.⁴⁹ I also design space through our online learning management system where students can post creative reflections on their course learning, by uploading videos, music, lyrics, poetry or other visual and audio forms of art. I also encourage them to create their own images, poems to open them up to the paradox of possibility and creativity.⁵⁰ They share with one another their own interpretations of art and in doing so disclose more of themselves, forming even stronger and more meaningful relationships with one another. These relationships build the foundation for cultivating a moral imagination that can find unity amidst difference.

Diversity is a gift to be celebrated. Difference should not to be avoided or downplayed, but nor should it divide us. Religious educators are called to enhance their art and practice of teaching and learning by designing a space and practices where students might integrate a

⁴⁶ Slattery, *Postmodern Curriculum*, 107.

⁴⁷ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a Teacher’s life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

⁴⁸ Slattery, *Postmodern Curriculum*, 71. I also draw from Anne Streaty Wimberly’s “story-linking method” with my students from her book *Soul Stories: African American Christian education*.

⁴⁹ See Eric H.F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A spirituality for leadership in a multicultural community*, (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993). His method is also reprinted in the Appendix 1 of the USCCB *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers*

⁵⁰ I used insights from Lederach’s discussion on Haiku’s from his chapter on aesthetics and social change his *The Moral Imagination*.

reverence for unity amidst seemingly polarizing diverse worldviews. In doing so, we begin to cultivate the moral imagination towards the full realization of a synodal church, where the people of God journey together to create a more just and compassionate world.

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How to Work with Normativity in the Religious Education Faculty/Program?

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Abstract

Working with normative considerations is an important part of empirical research on religious education and the formation of practical theologians in general and religious educators in RE faculties/programs in particular. How does a sufficient reflection on normativity look like in teaching religious educators? From a practical theological perspective, partly based on the theoretical frameworks of De Kock & Norheim (2018) and De Kock, Sonnenberg and Renkema (2018) directions for working with normativity in RE faculties/programs is provided and discussed on. These directions are based on taking empirical observations in RE practices (including the daily lives of students) as a starting point for organizing pedagogical and theological reflection on the level of four layers of normativity: (1) discourse in religious practice, (2) professional theory of practice, (3) academic theory of practice, and (4) the metatheoretical foundation of observations of and research in practices.

1. Introduction

Working with normative considerations is an important part of empirical research on religious education and the formation of practical theologians in general and religious educators in RE faculties/programs in particular. How does a sufficient reflection on normativity look like in teaching religious educators? In this paper, from a practical theological perspective, partly based on the theoretical frameworks of De Kock & Norheim (2018) and De Kock, Sonnenberg and Renkema (2018) directions for working with normativity in RE faculties/programs are provided and discussed on.

These directions are based on a practical theological perspective in which (a) the empirical reality of the here and now is taken as a main source for developing theological reflection, (b) a threefold set of empirical hermeneutical skills is applied (observation as reception, listening as reception, and learning language), and (c) a thorough reflection on four layers of normativity in studying religious practices is advocated: (1) discourse in religious practice, (2) professional theory of practice, (3) academic theory of practice, and (4) the metatheoretical foundation of observations of and research in practices.

These directions have been elaborated in more detail earlier this year in an inaugural address at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven (Belgium), in which I presented the directions for sufficient reflection on normativity taking *learning in encounter* as a guiding principle for practices of religious education and (practical) theology at Religious Education faculties/programs. Therefore, I start this paper in section 2 with a discussion of how the concept of learning in encounter can be understood. Next, in section 3 the particular practical theological perspective in the paper's argument is explained focusing on the empirical as a source for theological reflection. In the short fourth section I present the threefold set of empirical hermeneutical skills which are fundamental for religious educators in RE faculties/programs, where in section 5 the four layers of normativity are discussed. Section 6 concludes with a discussion of directions for working with normativity in RE faculties/programs.

2. On learning in encounter

In the article “What about Learning in Practical Theological Studies: Towards more Conceptual Clarity”, I give an overview of descriptions and interpretations of what can be understood as “learning” in relation to faith and religion, together with an overview of normative and pragmatic approaches to the concept and practice of learning.¹ In the article, I argue that in both religious practices and academic research, the way learning is conceived and searched for is partly based in interpretational and normative frameworks that meet particular conditions in a particular context and time. In this paper, I propose to choose a concept of learning that starts from the observation that learning is relational; i.e., an intersubjective activity that can be understood technically and pedagogically as a social process,² and theologically understood as a phenomenon situated in the encounter with God and each other.³ Partly following the research outcomes of the PhD projects

¹ A. De Kock, “What about *Learning* in Practical Theological Studies. Towards more Conceptual Clarity,” *SAGE Open* (2015), DOI: 10.1177/2158244015592682.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

of former colleagues Ronelle Sonnenberg⁴ and Harmen van Wijnen⁵ in particular among youth I would say that learning in encounter has both an interpersonal and dialogical aspect, and a participating and acting aspect.

During a paper presentation I held at the annual meeting of the Religious Education Association in 2017, I elaborated somewhat on the concept of learning in encounter.⁶ I stated that developing oneself as an individual cannot be done without others. In other words: Without others, you cannot become yourself and be yourself. Who you are as an individual depends on others with whom you are in a relationship. It is difficult to speak about yourself without speaking about others. However, in how upbringing is written and spoken about nowadays, we commonly observe “the individual without the others”: “To grow up means to discover who you are as a unique human being”; “In the end, education’s aim is the child being able to be authentic.” The implicit message of these kinds of comments is that the child should not be brought up to be dependent on others or even be influenced by others. Frequently, this slips into high rates of individualism, pressure to achieve, and consequently, “stressful” educational ideals.

In response, various pedagogues, teachers, and politicians are pleading for a more relational approach to the individual and, as a consequence, a more relational approach to education, whether in schools or in the home. The most important prerequisite for such an approach is education that gives space, also in a literal sense, to share life with others; to provide opportunities to the child to let others’ lives be part of the child’s life. To let others’ lives be part of your own life is not a passive thing, but something active: it demands a conscious choice. Through these encounters, the child becomes more human and the other becomes more human.

One might say that a great number of expectations from the environment, pressure to achieve, and the complicatedness of finding out who you are in a liquid world, and even a liquid church,⁷ lead young people to a stressful (religious) identity development process accompanied by feelings of tiredness and forlornness as main stress responses.⁸ In struggling with this, children and youth can be helped by educators who say: “wait a minute, let’s take time to be attentive to each other and oneself”; these are the educators (whether as parents, as teachers in school, or as youth workers in the church) who stimulate learning in encounter as a key part of formation in general and religious formation in particular. In the words of Castelli, such an approach asks for a pedagogy of faith dialogue.⁹ Besides taking time, faith dialogue as a pedagogy of religious

⁴ P.M. Sonnenberg, and M. Barnard, “Educating Adolescents through Christian Youth Worship. Reclaiming Space for Learning in Liturgical Context,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (2012), Art. #1111, 8 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v68i2.1111>.; P.M. Sonnenberg, M. Nel, A. De Kock, and M. Barnard, “Being Together in Youth Worship: An Empirical Study in Protestant Dutch Contexts,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (2015), art. #2832, 10 pages, DOI: 10.4102/hts.v71i2.2832.

⁵ H. Van Wijnen, “Faith in Small Groups of Adolescents. Being Together as a Basic Given” (PhD Thesis, Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, 2016).

⁶ A. De Kock, “Raising a Child is Madness: Learning in Encounter and Foundations of Education,” *Paper presented at the 2017 REA Annual Meeting, St Louis (MO), Nov 3-5*.

⁷ P. Ward, *Liquid Church* (Peabody (MA): Hendrickson, 2002).

⁸ Compare C. Klaassen, *Socialisatie en moraal. Onderwijs en waarden in een laat-moderne tijd* (Leuven/Apeldoorn: Garant, 1996); A. Verbrugge, *Tijd van onbehagen. Filosofische essays over een cultuur op drift* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2004); A. De Kock, “Religieuze identiteitsontwikkeling en -vorming van christenjongeren in een moderne context. Master thesis Godgeleerdheid, Universiteit Utrecht” (PhD Thesis, Universiteit Utrecht, 2008).

⁹ M. Castelli, “Faith Dialogue as a Pedagogy for a Post Secular Religious Education,” *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 33, no. 2 (2012): 207–216.

education entails “seriousness, humility, hesitation, articulation and imagination.”¹⁰ Castelli suggests that “[a]n encounter through dialogue will entail change if only a growth in an understanding of the other. Self and the other may not be seeking assimilation or domination, but neither are they totally detached or unchanged by the encounter.”¹¹ A growth in the understanding of the other is in itself a win, but at the same time, understanding the other is part of a reciprocal process in which there is also a growth in understanding yourself. In this way, learning in encounter can be a basic and promising approach to learning for religious educators in both schools and faith communities.

Learning in encounter as a promising approach is echoed in (academic) discourses on religious education in different ways. With regard to formation at school, in one of his blog posts, my colleague and Flemish religious educator Bert Roebben recently stated: “One learns to get engaged in the “together” of society (socialization) by learning experiences in the living presence of others. To become a person (subjectification) requests time – collision and affirmation, feedback and appreciation”¹² Learning in encounter in schools, including in religious education in schools, is thus needed for becoming a successful participant in society. However, this necessity is not limited to schools. Religious education in faith communities is, in the words of Thomas H. Groome, a ‘pressing social issue,’¹³ and in line with that statement, faith communities should stimulate respectful encounters for their (young) participants. Groome states: “[T]he first responsibility of religious educators is to inform and form people in their own particular tradition, giving them a sense of belonging to a spiritual home. We must ground them in the particular, however, in a way that diligently discourages sectarianism and bitterness toward ‘others’. Let us enable people, instead, to embrace the universality of God’s love for all humankind and to respect and appreciate all life-giving religious traditions.”¹⁴

This exact metaphor of an embrace is also used by Miroslav Volf, but in relation to embracing others: “the most basic thought that it seeks to express is important: *the will to give ourselves to others and “welcome” them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity.* The will to embrace precedes any ‘truth’ about others and any construction of their ‘justice’. This will is absolutely indiscriminate and strictly immutable; it transcends the moral mapping of the social world into ‘good’ and ‘evil’.”¹⁵ My Czech colleague Frantisek Stech recently linked Volf’s theology of an embrace with the ‘youth theology’ Bert Roebben portrays in his reflections on religious education and youth ministry: “Youth theology is a form of living theology in the presence of the (young) other; it is doing theology with open arms ready to embrace our fellow human beings, the realities of this world, as well as God who is the (Triune) One searching for

¹⁰ Ibid., 213.

¹¹ Ibid., 210.

¹² English translation from a passage in B. Roebben, “*Menswording als vorming. Pleidooi voor meer eenvoud op school,*” Blog May 9, 2019: <https://bertroebben.blogspot.com/2019/05/menswording-als-vorming-pleidooi-voor.html?fbclid=IwAR16AErrA3xwOk4pkhw8CEVEgcuq7DS9cSLXMxoTZxtAhro7m0RXYZdIYOE>

¹³ T. H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 11.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ M. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville (TN): Abingdon Press, 1996), 29.

each of us with open arms.”¹⁶ This is how learning in encounter can be related to faith formation among young people.

These different voices illustrate how the concept of learning in encounter is present in current debates on religious formation. These and other voices need further reflection by professionals in schools and faith communities, and also by (practical) theologians and religious educators involved in research and teaching on practices of religious education. We can detect at least four key issues for further reflection in terms of both theological and pedagogical consequences of an approach of learning in encounter: goals, identity, authority, and safety.¹⁷ When it comes to the issue of goals, a main question for religious educators is: is there any important goal involved in encountering the other which steers the educational learning process or the process of bringing up the child? If so, what is that goal?

With regard to the issue of identity, a second main question for reflection is: from what conception of identity do religious educators arrange the educational context? Different views of identity can be at work in practices of religious education and youth ministry that can be both pedagogically and theologically loaded.¹⁸ Who is the child, from a theological and/or pedagogical perspective, and what does that mean for why and how they are learning in encounter?

Next, an important field of reflection on theological and pedagogical consequences of learning in encounter is the issue of authority. What or who is authoritative when it comes to decisions in life: voices ‘from outside,’ like structures given in society or the local community, or voices coming ‘from within,’ from the heart, so to say? An encounter with someone who is different might challenge authority structures that the child is used to. The conscious choice to share life with the other who is different is a conscious choice to open up the realm of possibilities, by way of authority located in the other, to critique one’s own voice and views, to correct one’s own opinions, and to develop one’s own identity further.

A fourth key issue for further reflection is that of safety. Learning in encounter with the other is not without risk. A child might lose the sense of self through contact with others; in the relationship between the educator and the child, there is also a risk of children losing themselves through becoming totally focused on meeting the expectations of educators in all kinds of ways. Learning in encounter thus asks for a safe atmosphere in which the child’s integrity is safeguarded and where the child is not forced to lose that sense of self. Education directed toward the encounter with the other who is different should reflect on the issue of integrity: how do we safeguard it; where do we define limits (if at all / if needed) in challenging children to “lose” parts of themselves?

These four key issues are in a way reflecting core questions to be embraced in a sufficient reflection of religious educators on normativity. I will elaborate on that in sections 5 and 6.

3. A Practical Theological Perspective: the Empirical as a Source for Theological Reflection

Now we first turn to what it means to take a practical theological perspective in a sufficient reflection on normativity in Religious Educations faculties/programs.

¹⁶ F. Stech, “Emerging youth theology and the theology of embrace,” *Unpublished paper* (2019), https://www.academia.edu/39581926/Emerging_Youth_Theology_and_the_Theology_of_Embrace.

¹⁷ De Kock, “Raising a Child is Madness.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.* In the paper three conceptions of identity are discussed: an intra-, inter-, and suprapersonal conception.

The study object of practical theology is religious praxis,¹⁹ and its strategic goal is the description, interpretation, and ultimately, the enhancement of religious praxis.²⁰ Taking on a practical theological perspective in the study of (theological) phenomena is then, more precisely, taking the empirical reality of the here and now as a main source for developing theological reflection.²¹ For the academic study of youth ministry, for example, my Norwegian colleague Norheim and I recently discussed how studying the empirical can be the starting point to “gain insight into both the descriptions and interpretations of religious self-understandings or faith constructs of young people and to be able to build theology and design practices in which these insights are taken seriously.”²² After taking it as a main source for theological reflection, an important task for the scholar taking on a practical theological perspective is to then search for interactions between the empirical data and the theological and nontheological interpretative and normative frameworks.²³

By presenting the practical theological perspective in this way, we see reflected in it the four tasks of a practical theologian as identified by Osmer (2008): (a) the descriptive–empirical task, (b) the interpretive task, (c) the normative task, and (d) the pragmatic task.²⁴ What I learned from conducting a large variety of practical theological research together with colleagues and students over the past ten years is that two particular concerns related to tasks (a) and (c) ask for greater than average levels of attention. The first concern is what skills and attitude are needed for an adequate description of religious praxis as an empirical phenomenon. The second concern is how to adequately incorporate a (theological) reflection on normativity that is at work at different levels in an empirical research project on religious practices.

What I propose here as what constitutes a practical theological perspective is particularly addressing these two concerns. To adopt a practical theological perspective in the academic reflection on religious praxis means that the practical theologian (a) takes the empirical reality of the here and now as a main source for developing theological reflection, (b) applies a threefold set of empirical hermeneutical skills in the empirical investigation of religious praxis, and (c) thoroughly reflects on four layers of normativity in empirical research on religious praxis.

Taking the empirical reality of the here and now as a main source for developing theological reflection is based on the assumption, or the theological belief, that God reveals himself in Scripture, tradition, reason, and also in human experience.²⁵ In my view, considering Scripture as the most important source of God’s revelation, a practical theologian, at the same time, gives particular weight to current-day experiences as a ‘source of justification’ in the theological reflection on religious phenomena.²⁶ A practical theological perspective asks for the researcher to encounter the empirical, which results in learning theologically. The encounter with

¹⁹ R. R. Ganzevoort and J. Roeland, “Lived Religion: The Praxis of Practical Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 18, no. 1 (2014): 91–101.

²⁰ H. G. Heimbrock, “Practical Theology as Empirical Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 14, no. 2 (2011): 153–170.

²¹ A. De Kock and B. E. H. Norheim, “Youth Ministry Research and the Empirical,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 69–83.

²² *Ibid.*, 71.

²³ De Kock and Norheim, “Youth Ministry Research and the Empirical.” Pagina?

²⁴ R. R. Osmer, *Practical Theology. An Introduction* (Grand Rapids (MI): Eerdmans, 2008). Pag?

²⁵ See De Kock and Norheim, “Youth Ministry Research and the Empirical,” 80.

²⁶ See R.R. Osmer, “Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67, no. 2 (2011), #Art. 1058, 7 pages. <http://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i2.1058>.

the empirical can take different forms, varying from a somewhat distanced encounter as an observer of religious practices to an engaged encounter where the researcher is part of and a participant in the religious practice under study.

4. Threefold set of empirical hermeneutical skills

In encountering the empirical, the practical theologian uses a threefold set of empirical hermeneutical skills: observing as reception, listening as reception, and learning language.²⁷ This set of skills has been suggested for doing empirical youth ministry research in particular, but I see no reason not to widen the scope to practical theological research in general. The skill of observation as reception means that the practical theologian is fundamentally involved in observing people's faith practices, continuously balancing an apophatic mode (being silent and hesitant being unable to describe the One beyond sensation) and cataphatic mode (trying to describe traces of God and God's attributes). The second skill of listening as reception means that the practical theologian is fundamentally involved in the skill of listening to people's voices, balancing an apophatic and cataphatic mode, "which makes listening not mere registration of words and expressions but a hermeneutical struggle in itself."²⁸ Both observation and listening are done in a mode of reception, which means a mode of 'being with the other' and 'being with the faith practice,' thus being open to what comes to the researcher and being attentive to what comes from within the researcher oneself. When it comes to the third skill of learning language, De Kock and Norheim explain: "The youth ministry scholar and practitioner is continuously learning language with which revelations of God and experiences of faith can be described and theologically reflected on, in a way which is appropriate for the flesh and blood experiences of young people."²⁹ In terms of the broader scope of the practical theological perspective I propose here, learning language is the challenge to communicate what can be learned theologically from the encounter with the empirical in a way that is simultaneously appropriate for the practice under study and constructive for theological reflection in a broader academic discourse.

5. Four Layers of Normativity

In encountering the empirical, the practical theologian should also reflect on four layers of normativity in empirical research on religious praxis. The distinctions between and descriptions of these four layers of normativity come from the work my colleagues Sonnenberg and Renkema and I recently published with regard to the question of how one could adequately reflect on normativity in youth ministry and religious education research.³⁰ This question was raised because we found out that in research reports, it was not uncommon for practical theologians to fail to explicitly reflect on how normativity is existent in practices under study, or how normativity has been impacting or directing (in both wanted and possibly unwanted ways) the design, execution, and reporting of the empirical study undertaken. Following De Kock, Sonnenberg, and Renkema (2018), I distinguish between four layers of normativity: (1) the layer

²⁷ De Kock and Norheim, "Youth Ministry Research and the Empirical."

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ A. De Kock, R. Sonnenberg, and E. Renkema, "Normativity in Empirical Youth Ministry Research," *Journal of Youth and Theology* 17, no. 2 (2018): 81–103.

of discourse in religious practice; (2) the layer of professional theory of practice; (3) the layer of academic theory of practice; and (4) the layer of the metatheoretical foundation of the research project.

(1) The layer of discourse in religious practice is about verbal, non-verbal, and text-based discourses that become visible in practices. “These discourses reflect standards and convictions in the tradition of the practice, as well as the current standards and convictions of actors (including the researcher) in the practice.”³¹ (2) The layer of professional theory of practice is about “standards and convictions situated in operant theories of practice or, in other words, theories of practice at work. This layer has particularly to do with normativity as observed in theories construed on the basis of or directing performances in these religious practices.”³² (3) The layer of academic theory of practice is about “normativity situated in academic theories of practice that can be found in handbooks, academic journal articles, scientific theories, and so on.”³³ (4) The layer of the metatheoretical foundation of the research project has to do with “how the researcher, the research group, or the research community considers the particular empirical research study in terms of how the empirical, the theoretical concepts, and the personal convictions and experiences of the researcher are related to one another.”³⁴

Trying to bring this practical theological perspective back to the core, I would say that a practical theologian continuously says to oneself: “Wait a minute: set aside the quick-fix analysis, be open and receptive in encountering the other and the otherness, to what you see and hear.”

6. Directions for Working with Normativity in RE Faculties/Programs

One of the important consequences of what has been sketched above for RE faculties/programs is that students are to be stimulated to constantly engage (positive) critically with RE approaches taught in the handbooks they might use. The approaches in these handbooks contain lots of wisdom, and we can definitely use them to be educated as religious educator. At the same time, students (and their teachers!) should be asked for critically exposing normativities in these approaches and bringing them into critical dialogue with what can be experienced in encounters with faith practices and theological practices in the here and now.

Furthermore, methodologically, this means that for students, the principal of learning in encounter should be translated into qualitative research designs using good interviewing techniques and ethnographical methods through which data are gathered by observing carefully and listening attentively, and subsequently analyzed in such a way that sufficient language is found to communicate about the results of the research. This resembles the approach of a hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology for theology that Horner recently proposed in the *International Journal of Practical Theology*.³⁵ This hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology encourages practical theologians to refrain “from making judgements in advance about the kinds of phenomena it is possible to encounter.”³⁶ It asks the practical theologian to open oneself to “what gives itself and use phenomenological, hermeneutical, and possibly, also, theological tools

³¹ Ibid., 86.

³² Ibid., 87.

³³ Ibid., 88.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ R. Horner, “Towards a Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Methodology for Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 22, no. 2 (2018): 153–173.

³⁶ Ibid., 153.

to uncover its meaning.”³⁷ Horner argues, for example, that “[i]n evaluating what research participants describe of their experience in relation to God, we may well be looking for events, which we can ... define as descriptions of *happenings that are of such significance that they radically transform the world of the participant*. Such transformation will not prove the divine origin of events but will enable us to interpret experiences in light of this possibility.”³⁸

In order to learn this methodological approach in religious education faculties/programs, I found Deborah Court’s excellent book *Qualitative Research and Intercultural Understanding – Conducting Qualitative Research in Multicultural Settings* to be extremely helpful.³⁹ The book is helpful precisely because it positions qualitative research as a personal encounter of the researcher with the other and with otherness: “In qualitative research the researcher is a research participant no less than those whom s/he is studying. Qualitative researchers collect and analyse data through the lens of who they are. Their research journey involves both utilizing and seeing beyond their experiences, knowledge bases and values in order to arrive at understanding of the lives of the research participants.”⁴⁰ This book can help students to critically engage in the strengths and weaknesses of research designs and instruments used in actual research projects and to critically engage with ideas for research designs and instruments to be developed.⁴¹

All in all, I plead for an approach in RE faculties/programs that will help students to wait a minute. To wait a minute and give a real encounter with the object of study a chance; reflecting on how to best try to understand what is going on. To wait a minute to weigh alternatives to (RE) theories with which to understand and analyze RE practices and also to design research instruments for studying these practices.

Based on the examples of three outstanding congregational rabbis, through combining their biographical portraits with analyses based on educational scholarship, Sarah Tauber has come up with three crucial roles adult religious educators should hold: being facilitators, being co-learners, and being community builders.⁴² Although these three rabbis’ learning groups in their synagogues are different from the student community engaged in RE faculties/programs, I find this threefold teacher role inspiring for that particular context too. The threefold role mainly serves what I conceive of as learning in encounter. To be a facilitator as a teacher means, among other things, to be approachable, moderating discussion, guiding text study, and motivated by “a commitment to the dignity of every learner.”⁴³ To be a co-learner requires humility which “helps establish an inclusive and egalitarian learning environment”⁴⁴ where teachers and learners are fellow learners engaged in a transformative learning process. To be a community builder means that the learning process generated empowers learners “to contribute to the vitality of their communities”⁴⁵ by being directed toward cooperation with others and not primarily their own agency.

³⁷ Ibid., 160.

³⁸ Ibid., 172.

³⁹ D. Court, *Qualitative Research and Intercultural Understanding. Conducting Qualitative Research in Multicultural Settings* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁴⁰ Ibid., x.

⁴¹ For example, what is proposed with regard to interviewing techniques in practical theology in E.R. Campbell-Reed and C. Scharen, “Ethnography on Holy Ground: How Qualitative Interviewing Is Practical Theological Work,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, no. 2 (2013): 232–259.

⁴² S. M. Tauber, *Open Minds, Devoted Hearts. Portraits of Adult Religious Educators* (Eugene (OR): Pickwick, 2015).

⁴³ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 146.

As facilitators, co-learners, and community builders, teachers in RE faculties/programs can enhance learning in encounter, which is a creative process in research, education, and valorization. Students in these RE faculties/programs should be helped with sufficient reflexivity on normativity on different layers in the engagement with religious praxis. In my view, supporting students in their identity development process is definitely served by a thorough knowledge of and reflection on the four levels of normativity I outlined in this paper. In particular where the Religious Education program is part of a theological faculty, I believe that the theme of normativity should be reflected on with contributions from the full range of biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology, and religious studies. It is highly important to work on a sufficient understanding of the role of normativity and its different aspects among scholars in the theological faculty. As a consequence, in-depth attention to how normativity is ‘at work’ in research studies and in the personal thoughts and practices of teachers and students is critical.

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The Essential Role of Innovation for Educating in Faith and Life that Promotes Inclusion and Respectful Relationships: *Some findings from an Action Research Study of Adult Faith Education in Canada*

Abstract: *Among the findings of an Action Research Study of Adult Faith Education in Canada is the realization that innovative research and educational frameworks are – themselves – a source of hope for moving toward transforming practice that heals the division between faith and life. This paper explores how engaging an awareness-based action research approach and creative exaptation unleashes interdisciplinary wisdom from religious education, business and organizational development, and social sciences to innovate adult religious education that bridges the faith-life gap and promotes inclusion and respectful relationships - rather than divided societies.*

In the fall of 2018, I began my work as principal researcher for a qualitative research study - An Awareness-Based Action Research Project in Adult Faith Education in Canada: *Towards Transforming Practice* - in response to the ever-intensifying gap between faith and life.¹ It has been said that, “it is probably true that educating in “faith and life” was never more demanding than in our time.”² Sharing the passion and concern for this challenge that so many scholars and practitioners have demonstrated in their work over these decades, our team began to generate an empirical research design that we hoped could surface some helpful insights and responses. We also had two compelling messages from practitioners in adult faith education from across Canada driving our efforts: First, that practitioners recognize the need to move from a *program* to a *process-based approach* to adult faith education, but are struggling to know how to achieve this; second, that practitioners need resources to support this work.

Two important perspectives framed the initial stage of this initiative. First, as I designed the project, clear in my mind was an observation made in 2006 by Biola University Professor, Kevin Lawson, that shaped my doctoral research at that time: We are lacking in all forms of research in religious education and, perhaps most of all, in empirical research.³ This invited me to consider if

¹ While the reference to this divide is in the Vatican Council Document, *Gaudium et Spes* (#43) of the Catholic Church, and this paper presents perspectives drawn from qualitative research conducted in the context of religious education in the Catholic Church in Canada, it is my hope that many insights and findings are relevant for religious education in other faith traditions and locations as well.

² M. Myrtle Power, “Religious Education and Vatican II,” *Theoform*, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, 2012.

³ Kevin Lawson, “The Research We Need in Religious Education: Four Facets,” *Religious Education* (Spring, 2006), Vol. 101 No. 2, 157.

there may be a unique contribution empirical research – that recognizes observations and experiences as a source of knowledge– can make to effective practice in religious education.⁴ Second, is a view my co-researcher articulated very well, “(Not only has) the gap between faith and life identified during the Second Vatican Council increased during the last six decades; some would suggest it has grown exponentially even while work is going on in many ways to address it.”⁵ Our sense is that empirical research – that draws on our observations and experience - is greatly needed to help us better understand the faith-life gap in our current context and to point to innovative practices in adult religious education that help to bridge it. Phase I of our project has just concluded and we are excited and encouraged by the fresh understandings and practical wisdom that have emerged in our findings. They are currently being compiled into a resource that will allow us to share them with all who accompany adult faith and to open some collaborative discussions and learning spaces as well as further action research in a phase II of the project.

One of our key findings is the realization that innovative research and educational frameworks are – themselves – a source of hope for moving toward transforming practice that bridges the faith-life gap. This paper will explore how engaging in an awareness-based action research approach and creative exaptation, in our project, unleashed this generative interdisciplinary wisdom. This transforming practice promotes inclusion and respectful relationships - rather than divided societies.

The Faith-Life Gap and Divided Societies

It bears mentioning, at this point, that a connection seems evident between divided societies that lack inclusion and respectful relationships and the divide between faith and life. Thomas Groome points out in his recent review of John Shea’s new publication that, “Shea articulates what is, in fact, the existential intent of all educating-in-faith— that people may become adults who are morally responsible and fully human.”⁶ The field of transformative education offers the important insight that learning that is truly transformative in nature – marked by new ways of seeing things - is evidenced in the concrete action of the learner’s life.⁷ In other words, if someone has come to genuinely know something, then there is unity between what they know and how they live; learning is demonstrated by the integrity of who the person is becoming. Conversely, then, if our societies – and our communities of faith – are marked, not by inclusion and respectful coexistence, but by division, then we must face the painful reality that our most sacred teachings have not been genuinely learned. If respect for human dignity and human diversity, loving compassion, and our communal responsibility for each other, especially those most in need, are not evidenced in the concrete action of who we are becoming, then they are not genuinely known.

⁴ Examples certainly exist of empirical research in Religious Education. See, for example, initiatives across Europe reported in the *British Journal of Religious Education* in 1999, and empirical studies by Diane Tickton Schuster and Lisa D. Grant in *Journal of Jewish Education*, 71, 2005, 179-200. Perhaps a current trend may be emerging as evidenced by the recent Participatory Action Research by Steve Thomason published in *Religious Education* (2018), Vol. 113 No. 1, 107 and numerous publications in the *Journal of Jewish Education* since 2010, and my research project in Religious Education employing Awareness-Based Action Research.

⁵ From my research project notes; quoting my co-researcher, Dr. Miriam Martin.

⁶ Thomas Groome (2019): “Adulthood, Morality, and the Fully Human: A Mosaic Of Peace, Religious Education,” *RELIGIOUS EDUCATION* 2019, VOL. 114, NO. 1, 91–92.

⁷ Jack Mezirow, “Learning to Think as an Adult” in Jack Mezirow and Associates, *Learning as Transformation* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3-35.

Framed in this way, it seems apparent that a fundamental contribution religious education can make to the healing of divided societies is to seek transformative practices in adult religious education that bridge the faith-life gap by generating learning spaces that promote this unity between knowing and acting. In this way, religious education can help to promote inclusion and respect, rather than divided societies, by supporting adults in becoming morally responsible and fully human.

The importance of Innovation

Organizational development specialists, Nathan Furr, Jeffrey Dyer and Kyle Nell claim that the real hinderance to ideas that lead to significant improvements for businesses and organizations are biases such as, "...the tendency to overvalue things we already know...and the tendency to think new information proves our existing beliefs. As a result, we see only the opportunities related to the status quo, rather than the more-valuable opportunities just out of reach."⁸ Perhaps it is important for us to consider if this may be affecting our practice of religious education, as well. Are biases such as these hindering our advancement in religious education that can effectively bridge the faith-life gap? According to these experts, innovative approaches that "...shake-up our thinking and get us past our natural inclination to stick with what we know – to side-step our cognitive biases"⁹ are a solution to this dilemma. As Phase I of our research project unfolded the importance of innovation for surfacing new understandings and effective practices in religious education became increasingly evident.

I particularly value a perspective offered by these same specialists about the creative, generative role *exaptation* – an idea that originated in biology – can play when adopted by organizational development. Exaptation describes a phenomenon in nature where characteristics that evolve for one purpose are adapted laterally for another use. One example is feathers which originally served as a source of warmth for flightless birds and were later co-opted as the means for flight.¹⁰ Our authors suggest that if this genius can occur naturally in nature, then engaging "...human agency (in a) world of choice and imagination (points to) possibilities (that) are infinite."¹¹

While we recognize that there is already healthy interdisciplinary activity in religious education, the experience of our research team – as I will explore to follow – suggests that intentionally adopting this innovating perspective and practice in our field helps to open the way for transforming theory and practice.

The Methodology, Method and Process for Phase I of our Research Project

Action Research – a qualitative research methodology – was chosen for our project because it is designed to unleash rich, practical wisdom to help address real, concrete challenges - and this is what we need. "Meyer (2000) maintains, action research's strength lies in its focus on generating solutions to practical problems and its ability to empower practitioners, by getting them to engage with research and the subsequent development or implementation activities."¹²

⁸ Furr, Nathan, Jeffrey Dyer and Kyle Nell, "When Your Moon Shots Don't Take Off," in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2019, 2.

⁹ Ibid, 7.

¹⁰ Ibid, 6.

¹¹ Ibid, 6.

¹² Elizabeth Koshy, Valsa Koshy and Heather Waterman, "What is Action Research?" in *Action Research in Healthcare* (Thousand Oaks, California, 2010), 2.

Furthermore, since “action research always retains its focus on transformative action which is discovered and inspired by the research process”¹³ it is an excellent methodology for a project in practical theology seeking transforming practice that also holds “the wider theological remit”¹⁴ of more faithful Christian practice. As Swinton and Mowat describe, “(b)oth (action research and practical theology) use a similar reflective process¹⁵ and both contain similar action-oriented and transformatively oriented dynamics and goals.”¹⁶ In its most basic expression, action research follows the spiral in the diagram to the right, that moves from observe, to reflect, to plan, to act, to observe, to reflect, to plan to act....

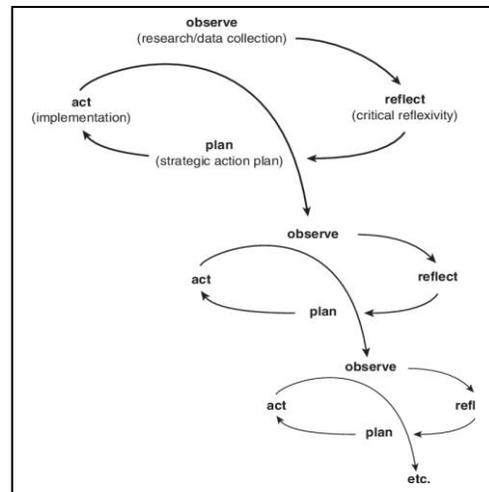


Figure 1¹⁷

A focus group was our chosen Method for the project because:

(f)ocus groups are highly regarded for the rich qualitative data they can generate: A small number of individuals, brought together as a discussion or resource group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample. Such a group, discussing collectively their sphere of life and probing into it as they meet one another’s disagreements, will do more to lift the veils covering the spheres of life than any other device that I know of.¹⁸

Our choice of members for this focus group was key: Four experienced practitioners, one from each of four regions of Canada (West, East, Ontario, Quebec), highly regarded and identified by peers/colleagues as “effectively engaged in adult faith education.”¹⁹ Each belongs to a “community of practice”²⁰ (e.g. an association, network, committee) and practice in a place (parish, diocese and catholic school/school board) committed to providing adult faith education. They joined me and my co-researcher (we are both active practitioners as well as scholars in this

¹³ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, “Practical Theology as Action Research,” in *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, (Canterbury, England: SCM Publishing, 2006), 254-56.

¹⁴ Swinton and Mowat, 256.

¹⁵ It bears noting that a spiraling process (moving from observe- to reflect- to plan -to act – to observe - to reflect to plan to act...) is the basis for processes in many domains that are designed to gain insight, engage in meaning-making, and make decisions that lead to transformative action. We’ve noticed that “learning” and “meaning-making” are often described by us and others with reference to circles and spirals.

¹⁶ Swinton and Mowat, 256.

¹⁷ Linda Dickins and Karen Watkins, “Action Research: Rethinking Lewin,” *Management Journal* (Sage Journals), Vol 30, Issue 2, 1999, figure 1.3.

¹⁸ Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research, third edition* (London, England: Sage Publications, 2006), 191.

¹⁹ I asked several pastoral leaders and some catholic educators to identify people they know with experience and key leadership positions in adult faith education whom they regard as “effectively engaged in adult faith education.” A list of potential focus group members was generated from these recommendations.

²⁰ This ensures that focus group members have a wide view of adult faith education and a place to consult in their milieu.

field) to establish a research team of six passionate, committed and competent adult religious educators.

Over a ten-month period, we moved through a three-fold process in search of transforming practice in religious education that bridges the faith-life gap. A study of this kind doesn't propose to make final statements or draw definitive conclusions. Rather, it generates fresh insights and captures *promising practices*²¹ that can enrich and strengthen our work.

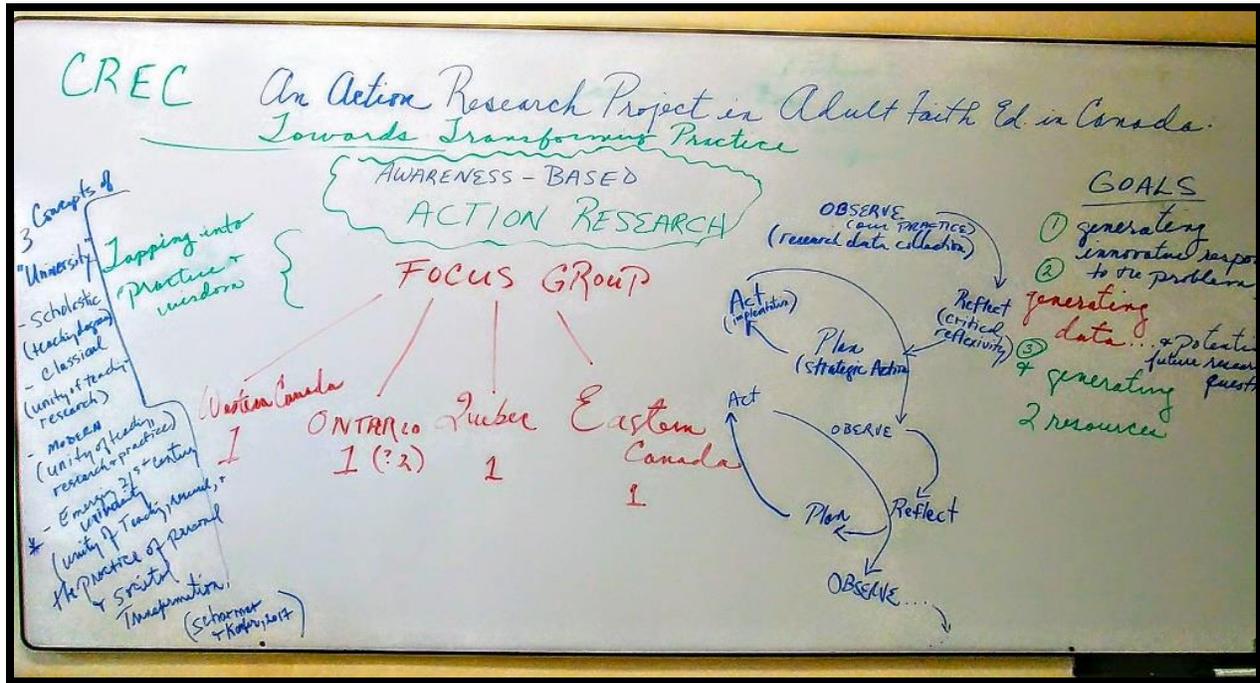


Figure 1.2 Visual Mapping of the Action research Project, Phase 1, Kuzmochka

Action research is frequently used in the field of education,²² and Phase I of our project allowed our team to experience how timely and promising it is as a research approach for religious education as well. It has the potential to generate much needed insight and contribute to innovative practice. But this is not all we discovered about this methodology. A key and surprising finding from Phase I of our project is that action research is, in and of itself, a transformative educational process.²³

Awareness-Based Action Research

It is important to mention, at this point, that we used a new and innovative approach introduced by Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer called, *Awareness-Based Action Research*²⁴ that

²¹ The term, “promising practices” can be found at this link: <https://www.cpha.ca/promising-practices-canada>. We think it is an excellent descriptor for our findings.

²² When U.S. psychologist Kurt Lewin introduced the research method in 1944 it was with the intention to engage people in the field in research leading to social change. The field of education adopted it with Lewin’s guidance.

²³ Steve Thomason presents a similar finding in his article on, “Participatory Action Research as Trinitarian Praxis and a Pedagogical Model for the Suburban Congregation,” *Religious Education* (2018), Vol. 113 No. 1, 107.

²⁴ Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, “Awareness-Based Action Research: Catching Social

integrates Scharmer's Theory U into the methodology²⁵ and is specifically designed to lead to innovative social change. It is in this choice that our innovative exaptation is most apparent: we co-opted a research method designed for organizational development and used it to research practice in religious education.²⁶ Furthermore, as we did this, we discovered that a research approach intended to facilitate movement toward transformative social change was not only an effective research approach in religious education, but also a highly effective method for transformative education for religious education practitioners as well.

Our three-fold process was in keeping with awareness-based action research: 1. First, we used intentional levels of listening - with a focus on generative discussion and outcomes²⁷ - to help us identify our experiences of effective adult faith education when we could clearly see that the gap between faith and life was closed. We held extensive generative discussions of these experiences to capture some of the principles and practices that were at work. One principle related to the ethical responsibility to provide effective adult faith education became clear very quickly. Four other principles began to take shape as we continued our levels of listening and generative conversation with an aim toward accessing a deep common understanding of practices that bridge the faith-life gap as well as reasons why the gap exists. 2. Next, we listened to others over many months - leaders and colleagues in the field, people fully engaged and those who (for many reasons) have become distant from the life of the Christian community. They spoke of experiences - often transformative - when no gap between faith and life exists, they shared their experiences - often painful - and observations about the faith-life gap in their own lives and in the lives of others around them. Our focus group met frequently to share what we were hearing, observing and grappling with to continue our intentional listening and analysis and generative discussion. This allowed two things: for our understanding of the faith-life gap to expand; for the emerging principles to gradually take on a clearer shape. 3. Finally, we took the emerging principles that were taking shape and observed/studied them further in our various places of practice by integrating them into projects in which we were involved over the season of Lent;²⁸ what more could we learn about these emerging principles when we intentionally integrated them into our practice and observed the results? Then we brought these experiences back to the focus group for further generative discussion, exploration and analysis.

Our engagement in this awareness-based action research gave us access to some current experiences of the faith-life gap that opens new perspectives and deepens understanding. And, it

Reality Creation in Flight," in Hilary Bradbury, ed., *Action Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015), 201.

²⁵ Discovering Scharmer and Kaufer's variation on Action Research was very meaningful since the Centre for Religious Education at Saint Paul University is housed within the School of Transformative Leadership and Spirituality where Theory U is well known and practiced. My co-researcher, Dr. Miriam Martin, is the director of this School.

²⁶ ²⁶ A paper that was written about integrating Theory U into Christian Education in 2014 considers the relationship between Theory U and Religious Education but from a very different perspective than that of our Awareness-based Action Research Project on Adult Faith Education in Canada (accessed at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Theory-U-as-a-conceptual-framework-for-Christian-Zeitler/013c35f42a83b748fade540a223976b3ff524d36>, June 2019).

²⁷ These are specific to the theory and practice underlying Awareness-Based Action Research.

²⁸ This is a forty-day period of spiritual preparation for Easter.

allowed five innovative, encouraging “promising practices” that can help to bridge the faith-life gap to take shape.²⁹

Innovative Exaptation: A transformative educational process

Awareness-based action research integrates Theory U which proposes that the emergence of transformative change depends upon the ability to connect with our contexts in deeper ways that allow us to *really* access our experience³⁰ by being fully present to it. This – in turn – allows us to access deeper sources of knowing. This is a key consideration for religious education whose effectiveness depends upon being able to hold together experience and faith, to bridge faith and life.

Scharmer describes the three Levels of listening that move away from downloading (simply hearing what I already know) to: *an open mind* (intentionally listening for what is really going on; engaging new ideas, insights and perspectives); *an open heart* (intentionally listening with empathy and compassion to what is going on in the context/the field); *an open will* (intentionally listening for the future that is emerging and finding the courage to act on it).³¹ Intentionally engaging these levels of listening allows us to suspend habitual behaviours that prevent us from allowing new things to emerge. Integrating this theory into action research yields a “...journey (though not necessarily sequential) through the following stages: Seeding, co-initiating, co-sensing, co-inspiring, co-creating and co-shaping.”³²

It is beyond the scope of this paper to unpack this process and how we used it in Phase 1 of our study in detail. However, it is important to emphasize that as a focus group – a community of practitioners - we found ourselves able to “capture” and name things we couldn’t capture and name before, because we used the awareness-based action research process of “reflecting on what we were doing as we were doing it.” This generated wisdom among us. No *one* of us could have learned what we did on their own.

This was, perhaps, best displayed during our final on-site working session when we engaged in an exercise to create a template for a process-based approach to adult religious education that bridges the faith-life gap. Rather than approach such a task in our habitual way, by discussing what we might say and how we would present it, we opted for an approach that allowed us to listen intentionally and to access the deeper sources under our patterns. We imagined the people with whom we wanted to share what we had learned about a process-based approach in the room with us. Rather than explaining the process-based approach in an instructive fashion, we kept returning to the question: *What are we doing with these people gathered to explore and learn together what we have learned about a process-based approach?* and listening deeply for our responses. As I facilitated this exercise, it was a struggle to help us stay in this experience and

²⁹ As mentioned previously, these findings are being released in a resource we’ve designed for those engaged in adult faith education.

³⁰ See Scharmer and Kaufer, 2-3 where Scharmer describes how he was deeply influenced by cognition scientist Varela who claimed that while everyone thinks we know how to access experience, we don’t really. From Varela’s work, Scharmer identifies three movements that open the self awareness needed by individuals and organizations to truly access experience and be able to move forward: suspending habitual ways of thinking and acting, redirecting focus from things and patterns to the sources underneath them, and letting go to make space for new things to emerge.

³¹ Scharmer and Kaufer, 2-3.

³² Scharmer and Kaufer, 9.

not revert to a more informative approach. Yet, when we did stay in this experience, the best of our wisdom was able to come to the surface. For my part, I found myself able to articulate dimensions of process that had before been simply intuitive and unidentified. Scharmer and Kaufer refer to this process as “catching social reality creation in flight.”³³ This experience also confirmed an important theme that was running through our findings; namely, that religious educators do not stand apart from the communities they lead as remote experts.³⁴ Rather, they are an integral part of the circle of learning.³⁵ This experience is a testament to the value of awareness-based action research and an example of the importance of unleashing the shared wisdom of communities of practice to help us find our way forward.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, for us as a focus group - a community of practice - the awareness-based action research process revealed itself as an example of the transforming educational process for which we were searching in our research into adult faith education in Canada. One of our focus group members described how her practice was transformed when she made the shift from a primary focus on presenting content to a process-based approach in adult religious education:

I have tended to approach formation sessions as my opportunity to tell others what I know. Since I've become more aware of the importance of listening and relationship, I'm stopping to listen and give space to others. I was (recently) very surprised when a woman I had assumed would have nothing significant to say had some very wise and insightful things to share with the group. I would not have made that space for her before. And, our formation session was greatly enriched.³⁶

This experience has inspired us and encouraged us such that we want to encourage others in religious education to consider employing this methodology as well.³⁷ Along with other topics that surfaced in phase 1 of this project, we are planning further research into the importance of communities of practice, and using awareness-based action research as a process for transformative faith education for practitioners.

Conclusion

This experience of Awareness-based Action Research methodology for the study of adult religious education in Canada has been an encouraging foray into an innovative realm in which

³³ Scharmer and Kaufer, 1.

³⁴ In his article, Steve Thomason reports a similar result from his action research study in the realization that educators are not “...remote experts” but rather part of the learning community. See, Steve Thomason, “Participatory Action Research as Trinitarian Praxis and a Pedagogical Model for the Suburban Congregation,” *Religious Education* (2018), Vol. 113 No. 1, 107.

³⁵ Parker Palmer wrote extensively about the educator as part of the circle of learning (see, for example, his book, *The Courage to Teach*, 1997). The idea of educators as “lead learners” is accredited to American educator Roland S. Barth who began writing about educators as learners in the 1990's. The term has developed common-place usage to indicate that educators are, themselves, learners and are not outside or separate from the circle of learning. Miriam Martin, co-researcher in this project, has been instrumental in introducing it into the field of faith education in Canada.

³⁶ Carol Kuzmochka, transcripts from, “A Study of Adult Faith Education in Canada: Towards Transforming Practice,” Centre for Religious Education and Catechesis, Saint Paul University, 2019.

we hope many others will join us. As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the faith-life gap is a serious problem which, I believe, contributes to divided societies where the values of human dignity, diversity, compassion and kindness have not been genuinely learned. Religious Education can contribute to the healing of divided societies by offering faith education experiences that maintain and deepen the unity between what we believe and how we live.

There is much more to be discovered about adult faith education process-based frameworks that bridge the faith-life gap. The discovery that action research is – itself – an effective transformative educational framework, and that participation in it supports and strengthens communities of practice of religious educators, should open us to an intentional search for the exaptation of other perspectives and frameworks from the fields of business, organizational and leadership development that can innovate practices in religious education.

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Challenges and Opportunities for Asian Canadian Immigrant Churches and the Educational Implications

Abstract

Although many Asian Canadian Immigrant churches (ACICs) offer concurrent English language services for their English-speaking congregants, broadly speaking, these churches are experiencing either decline or stagnation of their membership. This research therefore explores the beneficial opportunities and challenges experienced by Asian Canadian Immigrant churches (ACICs) that simultaneously house first and second-generation congregants in separate language services. This qualitative investigation uncovers critical information to help transform current challenges into opportunities, by revealing the responses required by ACICs in order to meet the needs of the two or three language congregants. At the end, this paper draws out the educational implications for these churches, in the hope of creating for them a sense of direction for the future.¹

1. Problem and Rationale

ACICs have played a significant role in immigrant history in Canada, with Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean immigrant churches in particular functioning not only as spiritual centres, but also as social, cultural, and psychological homes for these ethnic communities—the so-called “homes away from home”.² Several ACICs conduct separate services in different languages to accommodate the needs of first and second-generation members, respectively—typically a service in the mother-tongue (e.g., Korean) for the benefit of the first generation congregants, and in the English language for the second and succeeding generation congregants. That is, two or more language services are held with members of varying generational statuses under the “same roof” of a single Asian ethnic immigrant church.

The demographics of Asian Canadian immigrants have shifted in recent decades. The population of first-generation congregants has either stagnated or declined. Furthermore, the population of second generation congregants in these same churches is not increasing at a rate on

¹First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Louisville Institute for providing the Project Grant that made this research possible.

² David Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” in *Urban Studies* 45, no. 10 (September 2008), 2057-2074, 2063. Peter Cha, Steve Kang, and Hellen Lee (eds.), *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches: Ministry Insights from groundbreaking Congregations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006).

a par with the growth of this generation group nationally, despite the efforts by these churches to offer services in English. This evolving demographic shift, though gradual, has and will continue to have momentous impact on ACICs and their congregants in the present and into the future.

Henceforth, ACICs are faced with a crucial, emerging concern about whether or not their churches will remain “Asian” or “Immigrant” in the decades to come. There is currently little known about how these churches are affected by and are responding to these important sociodemographic changes. Ministry can only be implemented effectively when the context of the congregation is understood fully and critically. ACICs have gone through many significant experiences in Canada, and yet these experiences have not been critically assessed or documented. Hence this study has significant implications for ACICs, including the ever-growing numbers of Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean churches, particularly in the highly multicultural and cosmopolitan city of Toronto and its neighboring areas.

The findings of the study offer an overall picture of the issues faced by all immigrant churches, and how practically these issues might be resolved in the present, while also seeking to discern what the future of immigrant churches might look like. Such insights have the potential to benefit the Canadian/U.S. church at large, by helping other churches also envisage their future in new ways. Ultimately, this research allows us to re-imagine the future of churches in both Canada and the U.S.

2. Research Methodology

This qualitative research consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 lay adult participants (15 males and 15 females), ranging from ages 20 to 80, and 20 ministers (18 males and 2 females) from Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean churches across the GTA. Participants were recruited from diverse church sizes, denominations, and locations in the GTA. There were 15 ethnic language lay participants who were Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese or Korean speakers, and 15 English-speaking lay participants. There were also 10 ethnic language ministers and 10 English-speaking ministers.

Each interview ranged from one to two hours in length. All interviews began with 22 demographic questions, followed by 13 main interview questions. The research also allowed for improvised questions by the interviewers arising from the flow of the interviews. Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed; those conducted in ethnic languages were first translated into English and then transcribed.

Data was analyzed using QSR NVIVO 12, based on Braun and Clark’s (2013)³ recommendations for conducting a thematic analysis. Specifically, the data was first coded and analyzed with respect to the themes. Thematic similarities and differences among the Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean groups, and between the first and second generations of each ethnic group were noted for preliminary analyses. The Ethics Review Board of the University of

³ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners* (London: Sage, 2013).

Toronto approved the protocol for the qualitative research.

3. Research Findings

When conducting interviews and reading transcripts, several common themes emerged, including passion for the church, love for the next generation, fear about the uncertain future of the church, desire to navigate the future of ethnic churches, a renewed call for well-supported English ministry for future generations of worshippers in the church, and what changes, if any, are needed for congregations to remain as a church going forward. Correspondingly, some of the more common phrases and terms used in the interviews included leadership for the next generation, English ministry, and multicultural or multiethnic church.

This paper, drawn from this extensive research presents the key opportunities (benefits) and challenges arising from this demographic change, and outlines the central insights about the future of these churches as perceived and envisioned by the first and the second-generation congregants in GTA-based ACICs in Canada.

1) Key Benefits Holding Different Language Services under the Same Roof

Although the language barrier prevents different generations of family members from worshipping in the same service, most family units still prefer to stay together in the same church. According to both the lay and clergy interviewees, one of the major benefits in having multiple worship services under the same roof is the ability to **accommodate different generations, cultures and languages**. Liu noted, “Each congregation—the TM(Taiwanese Ministry) and EM(English Ministry)—can grow on its own. Congregants can choose to worship in their own language or the language of their preference. In short, congregants can worship in the language they are most comfortable with.”

Interviewees were excited to find out how the ethnic immigrant ministry as they have experienced it might evolve to meet the needs of second and third-generation congregants. In addition, ethnic immigrant churches can help address specific **ethno-cultural needs of second and third-generation children** raised in culturally hybrid or bi-cultural environments. Min Woo confirmed how holding two or three different language services meets these specific needs:

The Korean immigrant church can meet their language needs, associated ethnic sentiments, and cultural character. Although the English-speaking second generation were born in Canada and educated in the Canadian school system, they were raised in a Korean household by Korean-speaking parents. They have certain ethno-culturally specific needs that cannot be met in an English-speaking mainline church.

Another beneficial opportunity in having multiple worship groups under the same roof is that **families can come together in the same church** and worship in different rooms based on their personal preferences. This makes for an easy, convenient arrangement that renders church attendance problem-free for the entire family. Such an arrangement also helps **create important bonding opportunities between family members** while contributing to a family atmosphere at the church. Moses addressed intergenerational bonding in this arrangement, saying young people “get to see their grandparents regularly at church, which is an intergenerational bonding opportunity. Although family members may worship separately based on language preferences,

the family ties are retained through their membership in the same church.” As mentioned previously, each family member can choose a worship service based on his/her preference in language and culture. Accordingly, second-generation children often choose the English service while the first-generation parents choose the ethnic language service. Afterwards, **parents and children can join together for intergenerational fellowship. Family members feel most at home and most comfortable** if they are able to worship in their preferred language. Jae Min noted, “In attending the same church, the bond and love between family members can be strengthened. ... Having both English and Korean services helps bring families closer together because family members with different language preferences can still remain in the same church.”

Kate agreed, as follows, “The parents go to the adult congregation and the children can be in the youth service or the English congregation. They are still together even though there are different services; they’re still able to worship together in one church in a sense. It might be different services, but it is one building, one church.” Stuart expressed his joy of worshipping with his parents as follows:

I love worshipping with my parents. It is a very family-oriented thing. The other second-generation [members] have some of their parents in the church as well. ... My parents’ friends are like my friends; they are almost like my [own] parents. They saw me grow up. I saw them grow older. And I grew up with their kids and we have seen [each other] getting married and growing our families with our own kids. So we are all one big family.

The first-generation members in particular are encouraged to share stems of faith and pass on **that faith to the next generation**. As Jin Hee put it, “We can share stems of faith by staying together as a family in the same church, just as faith was passed on from generation to generation in the Bible.” The vast majority of ministers also agreed that **the transmission of faith from generation to generation** is one of the most valuable assets of offering multiple services under the same roof. Jane echoed this, saying,

I think it is a way that the first generation is able to sow [seeds] into the next generation, by leading through example, serving as credible witnesses, but also at the same time not enforcing their own language that might no longer speak to the second generation. ... It is biblical to be multigenerational, or for that relationship to continue—fostering this continuum is very important.

Another related opportunity arising from such an arrangement is that it presents **intergenerational learning opportunities that bridge the gap between different generations and language groups** sharing the same cultural roots. In addition, the ethnic church helps to resolve generational differences between family members by building mutual understanding and respect. For instance, first-generation members are called to guide and mentor the second-generation members, and not simply instruct them, through sharing common experiences, offering support, and praying together. Again Jin Hee noted,

The Korean-speaking first-generation members have a chance to learn about the younger generation’s views and values through a mutual interaction at close quarters. The Korean-speaking first-generation members can benefit further from learning about English-speaking second-generation members’ views and values, most of which overlap with those of the mainstream Canadian culture.

Ann echoed these comments as follows,

Because of different values growing up, it's nice to be able to come and talk to the kids and feel connected and find a solution together. Also some of the adults in the Chinese congregation are second generation, so talking to them really helps, because they went through it and they can give us a better perspective on our parents while relating to us.

Ga Eun and So Young stressed the importance of the bridging role of housing two or three language services. Ga Eun said, "I think being able to attend the same church and worship God together even in separate worship rooms helps bridge the gap between the first generation and second generation." So Young agreed, saying, "Older members can serve as a model of faith to younger members, and I think that is a plus. But if we have a complete separation of EM and KM, that connection will be lost and it will be like two separate entities." Susan noted that her own learning opportunity came from seeing the other generation praying, "When I see the older generation pray and the amount of prayer things that they have, it just reminds me of how important that is, and even though, yes, it's difficult and really early in the morning, you still go. So yes, I think there's things to be learned, you just have to look very carefully."

In addition, both generations see that having two or three language services **facilitates the growth of church**, since this arrangement makes it easier to reach the other generation and language group, as Seok Ho pointed out: "Non-Koreans can be invited to the church freely without having to worry about the language barrier." Brad agreed, saying, "If we are trying to reach the English-speaking second generation in the community, whose parents are either Cantonese or Mandarin-speaking, we are able to meet their different language needs and preferences at our church. The second-generation children are able to attend the same church as their Cantonese-speaking or Mandarin-speaking parents. " A few others echoed Seok Ho and Brad, saying how this arrangement helps them bring their friends and family to church.

In particular, the ethnic immigrant churches help **connect both the ethnic language congregants and English congregants to their roots** by sharing similar experiences, ethnic foods, and cultural holiday traditions, such as the Lunar New Year, and August Full Moon. **Being able to connect to ethnic roots is integral to the creation of a hybrid identity**, which helps congregants to navigate their lives in Canada outside of the church. Ruth said her church is the only place she receives cultural learning, which is an added bonus that comes from ethnic churches. She spoke of "a love for my Korean heritage, but it's definitely tied into church, because that's the only place where I get my cultural influence from ... that extra bonus of being part of a Korean church." Stuart echoed her point, speaking of the importance of "learning the significance about family and just keeping some of that [Taiwanese] culture." Ming Dao stressed, "We can still enjoy understanding life together, so we know where we are coming from."

Ji Hun noted what a benefit it is to have two language services in ethnic churches so that second and third generations can build up their hybrid identity.

They end up with a hybrid identity. As we go from one generation to the subsequent generation, the Korean immigrant churches can help make sense of this hybrid identity from combined cultural experiences – the

good, the bad, what to accept, and what to discard. ... If they want to take root, they must first understand the roots of their parents. I am not saying the second generation ought to adopt the ways of their parents. It is about making sense of who they are as second-generation Korean Canadians.

Spiritually, ethnic immigrant churches with two or three language groups make members **feel at home and more comfortable being themselves** due to the ease of communication. Given the lack of language barrier in the worship service, members are able to get the most out of sermons and actively participate in the worship. This leads to **personal spiritual growth and maturity**. Jasmin saw this as a blessing, saying: “I feel very comfortable coming and going, because I have travelled quite an amount over the years, and coming back to my present roots each time is a blessing in itself.” Lian put it like this:

The beauty of having two generations of congregants in two different languages is to provide them place for worship, gathering and fellowship, especially for the second generation. ... We have provided them an environment in which to feel comfortable to grow spiritually. Having friends is one of the important strengths (or advantages) for them, in finding companions for this spiritual walk.

2) Key Challenges Arising from Different Language Services

Opportunities and benefits that come from providing two or three language services mainly have to do with accommodating different generations and language groups under the same roof. Interestingly, the most difficult common challenges faced by these ethnic immigrant churches are the same **language and cultural differences** that make it difficult to become one church under the same roof. For instance, the Taiwanese interviewees identified the leadership erosion caused by the language barrier as one of their major challenges. While young Taiwanese members speak either English or Mandarin, the older Taiwanese members speak neither of these languages. Instead, they speak the traditional Taiwanese dialect. Most Taiwanese churches are unable to locate leaders who can speak all three languages fluently. Nor are they able to afford two ministers—one for Taiwanese, one for English—to care for the two congregations separately.

From these language and cultural barriers **communication challenges** arise naturally. This is the biggest ongoing challenge for all ethnic churches with two or three language services to date. Given the communication problems, the ethnic immigrant churches often face difficulties in holding joint services, meetings, ministry programs and activities. Although some ACICs have one joint session or board with members from all language groups, the communication challenges often make working together difficult. Sometimes, miscommunication between different language groups leads to long-standing misunderstandings. In short, there is not only difficulty in communication, but also a general lack of communication between different languages groups in the ethnic immigrant church.

As Sui Hui said, communication is a challenge for the whole church. “Communication is always a challenge, not just day-to-day talks, but in the church as a whole.” The styles of communicating in different languages are different also. Kate expressed her concern as follows: “I think how Mandarin people...communicate is very different from how Cantonese or English people do.” Communication challenges unintentionally exclude people from meetings and joint

services. Melia brought up an example of exclusion, saying, “People might get excluded just because of language, not intentionally, but I guess we forget sometimes that [in] running meetings if we don’t have a proper translator, some people get excluded because they don’t understand the content of the meeting.” Chen Yi also noted, “It is difficult because we have different languages. For instance, we have been trying to arrange some family worship in English, but [because] the parents do not understand English, they don’t go and [there is] no participation.” This communication challenge between different languages also makes people feel uncomfortable, as Ji Yang put it: “It can be a barrier because I don’t speak Mandarin, or I can understand English but not too much, then that can become a barrier between two congregations. It is quite difficult, or you know you will not feel too comfortable in communication in one of those languages.” Also, because of the language barrier between two or three congregations, the ethnic language group does not know what the English group is doing, and vice versa. Liu said, “If you are worshipping in the English congregation, you don’t even know what is going on in the Taiwanese congregation. The language barrier, coupled with the cultural barrier, doesn’t help either. This all makes things more challenging for our church.”

Not only language differences, but also cultural differences create communication challenges and misunderstandings accompanied by shocks, which can lead churches in different directions. Ji Yang said,

We should note that the “cultural differences” that feed into communication barriers are multi-faceted: While the first-generation members espouse mainly “Asian culture,” even the traditional ones, the second-generation members, identify with a hybrid of Western [Canadian] and Asian culture. Not surprisingly, these two different ways of thinking and communication have resulted in misunderstanding between the two generations, hampering not just efforts of communication, but also cooperative ministry. They are thinking differently [because] they are culturally different.

Lian echoed the point, “It is quite easy for our church to become a three-head-chariot, if we all run in different directions. That is why we seek unity, and that should not be lost from sight. However, cultural differences could be the major barrier to good communications. I always find our communications are an issue in our church.” Jane agreed, “I think the challenge is to keep the communication going, so that there is a deeper insight and understanding. Sometimes, this constant relaying of information between the EM and CM becomes quite challenging.”

Different cultures added to the generational gap makes for an even greater communication challenge. Brian expressed it as follows: “The culture ... this is kind of getting into the ethnicity, but I think ethnicity may be less important than the culture you are embedded in ... you still have a generational gap. That adds challenges. Older people have older ways of doing things; younger people may want to do things in a different way.” Furthermore, different cultural backgrounds bring different issues to the table, therefore, first and second-generations have different issues to deal with in the church. Ba Men articulated this challenge, saying,

There are some struggles in coordination and communication. As for Mandarin and English, other than the differences in language, the topic is an issue: the Mandarin group likes to talk about what happened in their mother country, including politics, which touch their feelings. But the younger generation wants to focus on what they face in social media, how to deal with drugs, school life, how to deal with parents and teachers etc.

The focus is different and their patience is also different. The English topic they like to be finished in fifteen minutes, while the Mandarin people want it longer, up to one hour, and this is a big difference. The older ones want a longer sermon also; they feel they learn more, but not the younger generation.

Although the two or three congregations often yearn to co-exist harmoniously as one united church, there is an ongoing challenge of **disconnection between generations and languages in two or three congregations**. It is problematic for the two or three different worship groups to maintain an intrinsic longing to become a unified church. Jia Xing pointed to the reduced harmony between two or three groups: “We may be more isolated because when people are not speaking the same language . . . there is a distance when you worship separately. Again, it is the problem of communication; the harmony is reduced between two different generations.” Seok Ho added, “having two separate groups under one roof weakens the notion of one unified community.” Sui Hui lamented the reality of this disconnection: “Somehow it’s an upstairs-downstairs-church, upstairs you do your things, downstairs we do our things.” Furthermore there is a mindset of “us and them.” Susan responded that in “two separate services, I think there’s [something] very like an ‘us and them’ mentality,” while Ji Yang echoed, “They are doing their own and we are doing our own.” In the end the groups look like two or three separate entities. So Young concluded, “I think the biggest challenge is the generational disconnect. Although being under the same roof is better than the complete independence of EM, there is a lack of common ground between the EM and KM. Sometimes it feels like there are two separate entities under one roof.”

Shirley described a divide of two or three groups in the same church:

So there’s sort of like a divide where we feel like we can’t bother them and we can’t really interact with them in a sense and we’re not really there together. We’re not sharing the same space at the same time either, so even though we’re under the same church, I don’t know them. I would see them and say, “oh, hi, hi” and then pass them. We have nothing to do with each other, because we don’t do the same things.

Kate uses the word “segregation” under two or three different ministers as well: between the ethnic language minister(s) and the English minister.

I have no idea what the Mandarin congregation is doing, or the Cantonese congregation. . . . I guess my focus is on the English ministry. Pastors are able to focus on their own ministries, but that in a way segregates us. I have no idea what the Mandarin deacons are doing . . . and so that causes more independence—we’re doing our own thing.

Another key challenge for ACICs comes from **leadership**—or lack thereof—in both laity and clergy. It is challenging to find, from a small pool of qualified candidates, a suitable pastor who is equipped with a sound theological understanding and a good grasp of the ethnic language to meet the needs of an ACIC. It is even more difficult for a senior or lead pastor and associate pastors to form working partnerships, due to the hierarchical power structure of East Asian cultures. Ministers serving the same ACIC may thus experience an early burnout from the double burden and workload.

Kate described leadership concerns as a whole: “[There are] so many challenges from leadership all the way down to even just lay people, and so I think leadership-wise there

definitely is a mess in terms of [what]you're dealing with. So at the senior pastoral level it's as with the Mandarin, according to all the different pastors, it's sometimes very silo'ed ministries."

Charles also noted, "I know that our pastor is very biblical in his teaching and preaching. It is hard if you are a non-Christian to even understand him, because he is very black and white." Brian has experienced a different kind of leadership challenge because of the language issues: "It is much harder to find leadership or suitable pastors. It is because we must have a [bilingual] pastor who speaks both Taiwanese and English. It is very rare to find a candidate who satisfies this condition."

Abraham has faced a different challenge of imbalanced leadership between the English and ethnic ministries: "One of the major challenges of ministering to the EM congregation is that the church is structured in a way to favour leadership on the CM side. Right now, most of the board members and deacons are from the Chinese congregation. As a lead pastor of EM, I am essentially on my own."

Liu addressed the challenges of hierarchical politics as follows: "You are not really equipped to navigate a system shaped by a specific culture. It's tough. I think this is where all the pastoral burnout comes from. Everyone I talk to—the people in the EM—are great. It is the other stuff, the hierarchical politics and associated drama within the church that causes burnout in the ministry."

Another challenge comes from **passive or inactive English-speaking second-generation congregants who lack a sense of ownership of the church**, especially given the rapidly aging demographics of Cantonese, Taiwanese, and Korean congregations. The decrease in the rate of immigration from these home countries (Taiwan, Cantonese-speaking parts of China, and Korea), coupled with the aging members of the ethnic congregations, is contributing to the declining membership of a number of ACICs in the GTA. Despite some positive projections, the overall English-speaking membership of such churches has yet to grow, and the ownership of the church by the second generation seems not quite there from the perspective of first-generation congregants. However, from the EM perspective, they feel they are considered secondary to the ethnic ministry. Jae Min articulated this challenge:

In many immigrant churches, the EM is of secondary importance to the KM. The EM is not as active as the KM at my church, so the EM is not able to carry out major mission projects or relief efforts at this time. I hope the church can raise the EM up so that it can join forces with the KM in different mission initiatives and relief efforts. One of the most pressing challenges at my church is getting more second-generation members to attend the service. ... We have actually seen church membership decreasing over time, because of the relatively high proportion of senior members, younger members leaving the church, and other factors.

Moses expressed the same concern, "While it is necessary for the second-generation EM members to take ownership of their own church, their sense of ownership—or lack thereof—is not an end in itself. Having a sense of church ownership would just help the EM congregation stay committed to this church."

There is, however, a different challenge, which comes from **unequal treatment of English**

congregants. Although they are all grown adults and professionals in society, ethnic congregants treat them as children and their ministry as secondary, in terms of allocating space and resources and running programs. Some of the English congregants expressed deep concerns that their voices are often ignored in favour of those of the ethnic language ministry, even though ethnic ministry says EM is its future. For example, the ethnic language service typically takes place in the main sanctuary on Sunday, while the English language service often takes place in the basement or auditorium. Such unequal allocation of church space, time, and resources can become a source of resentment amongst the English-speaking second-generation members. They feel that they are being treated as second-class citizens in the ACIC. Likewise, several English-speaking interviewees drew attention to the need to treat English congregants with respect and accord them equal rights regardless of age. Shirley, for example, believes the decrease in numbers is because their voices go unheard and their ministry is not prioritized.

And we are not growing anywhere in size or spiritually, or the youth. There's no youth anymore. It's diminished, that whole side. It's just gone. It's not there because we were not heard. No one prioritized the English side, which is why the English side was only decreasing in size because ... when you go to church you expect to be fed in a sense. Sometimes I feel like they're looking down on the English service, they feel like we're belittling our faith in a sense, just because we're steering away from the traditional way of worshipping.

As a first-generation interviewee, So Young agreed with Shirley, saying, "The church prioritizes the Asian ethnic language service attendees. In this case the church revolves around the Korean service members. Do you think that this makes the English service members feel excluded?"

Seok Ho, also a first-generation interviewee, agreed with Shirley.

Members of the EM want full recognition from the rest of the church. They do not want to be treated as second class citizens at the church or be regarded as rule breakers by older church members. In other words, they want equal treatment, but are often viewed as rebellious children in need of discipline by some older church members. Members of KM want to be treated with respect, regardless of age group and status within the church.

4. Critical Information and Educational Implications

Although the members of ACICs frequently feel as if the ethnic language ministry and English ministry are separate churches under the same roof, and that both language services face challenges connected to being together as one church, they still see possibilities for turning current challenges into opportunities. No one mentioned having plans to leave the ethnic church because of the challenges the church faces. They still love their ethnic churches and want to stay and work for the future as one church, even if that church might be an English language dominant church.

First, they would like to create opportunities to move forward in a multicultural or multiethnic direction, starting with having friends and members of local community join their English services on Sundays. **The multiethnic church beyond Asians**, which Jasmin aspires to

means “*more coloured faces, and different nationalities.*” This is their vision of the church for both lay and clergy in 25 years’ time. The majority of interviewees, both lay and clergy, believe that opening the church doors to all will help nurture a multicultural or multiethnic congregation, which will in turn facilitate church growth. They are not only open to diverse ethnic groups, but to celebrating diverse cultures in the church. Seok Ho envisioned, “having a separate English service at our church [that] can serve as an open invitation to non-Koreans or those of diverse backgrounds.” Biming also envisioned a multiethnic church:

Perhaps the opportunity for this church lies in expanding beyond the Chinese. I think this church has two choices: Either open a separate Mandarin language service and take in the next wave of immigrants like many other ethnic Chinese churches in the GTA, or become a multicultural Canadian church and no longer be an ethnic Chinese church.

Ruth sees the future of the church as a multicultural and thinks this is a natural evolution: “It’ll be more multicultural and that’s just natural evolution of generations. I mean, my generation. I’d say half my friends married Koreans, but half didn’t, and then our children....”

Second, in order to bring the different congregations together, congregations want opportunities for **joint worship services** with communion once a month or a couple of times a year. The regular joint worship service will help promote oneness of congregations in Christ. Sui Hui noted, “That’s why we started having combined services once a month, with the Communion service.” Melia expressed her joy from joint services, “I think for myself, a very distinct moment came for me, when we had one worship where we had Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, all worshipping together, in our languages, singing together.” Likewise, frequent interactions between the different congregations via joint church services, events and activities help both congregations understand each other better. A few churches have carried out joint programs such as mission trips, church-wide summer retreats, church-sponsored Christmas markets and so on.

Shirley shared her joint experiences in the church: “We have volunteers going over for example and it can be a mix of congregations, we can have some Cantonese or some English, or summer camps. Summer camps we have a mix of those people, individuals from different congregations coming together.” Kate also shared that “there are so many opportunities to have a more family style, or [cultural type] of event and I do enjoy those things and each congregation brings strengths and weaknesses when all the gifts are put together. ... It’s a beautiful picture of God’s kingdom.”

Third, the members of different congregations would like opportunities **to learn from each other’s strengths and mistakes.** The different ministries in ACICs can complement one another, by working together and sharing their unique gifts, talents, and professional experiences. Jin Hee described it this way: “Some older first-generation members of KM have even benefitted from learning about the conventional Canadian practices of EM, such as proper recycling and composting. In other words, they have come to accept the EM as an equal partner of our church after being better informed.”

Fa hopes the two congregations can complement one another:

The opportunity is right there, to be able to complement one another. Every culture has its own focal point and its merits. What matters is each one can take up the cultural lens of another so that each can objectively see what others see. It would be nice if one could temporarily put down one's cultural baggage and then step into other people's shoes.

Abraham saw a possibility to improve: "There is a possibility if we think of each other more, to see how we can use each other's strengths to improve our respective congregations."

For the younger generation of ACICs, the provision allowing worship in two or three languages is a model example that reflects the changing demographics of their surrounding society. They consider this an opportunity for their church to grow by accommodating different generations, languages, and ethnic groups. Despite the challenges they face from these different cultures and languages, they value coming together as family and their relations with those of the same ethnic roots. In general, the younger generation has cultivated a vision of becoming a church for all, and hopes to reach beyond their own ethnic groups. Thus, the ethnic church works to accommodate their different language needs, cultures and preferences.

This research looked for critical information to help these churches transform their current challenges into opportunities by examining the responses required to meet the needs of the two or three language congregants. Connected to opportunities to respond to challenges are significant educational implications these churches need to take seriously, especially in order to become unified churches that overcome differences.

The first educational implication concerns the importance of improving communications between different language congregants and cultures. Not only are communication skills required, but so too intercultural and intergenerational education. All the churches face a triple difficulty in communication, which arises from being made up of different cultures, languages and generations.

The second educational implication is the need to empower second generation leadership, that is, leadership for English ministry. Leadership in general requires attention. The first-generation leaders, both lay and clergy, need to learn how to communicate with the second and third-generation, how to understand their culture, and how to empower leaders of English ministries to demonstrate their leadership in the entire congregation, by giving them opportunities to initiate programs for the whole church. In particular, ACICs need to enhance women's leadership in both laity and clergy, and in both the ethnic and English ministries.

The third educational implication concerns strategies for building a multiethnic church in the future. As mentioned above, the majority of interviewees would like to move to a multiethnic church that reflects the changing society in Canada, particularly the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and also follow a biblical model of church and the Kingdom of God. This requires intentional intercultural education and practice. Many of interviewees asked and wanted to know how to become a multiethnic church, and how to move beyond their own ethnic groups or Asian-ness. This might be the future of the Asian church: i.e., not framing itself as an Asian church. Are Asians in Canada able to change the perceptions of others, in no longer perceiving an Asian church as being for Asians only? Also, can Asians resolve the dilemma between an ethnic church

rooted in their own culture and a church that is multiethnic?

This paper concludes with Melia's words about faith for the multicultural church.

I think it would be multicultural. Very multicultural ... this is kind of what I've observed. As God transforms our hearts to be more like Him, we begin to see our identity as more in Christ. And as it is more in Christ, He puts it in our hearts to open our eyes more. My heart is not only for the Asian people, it's also for all nations. And as He puts that in our hearts, our church will naturally become more and more multicultural.

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Teaching the Black Christian Story and the Revival of African-American Religious Education
within Black Pentecostal Movement:

Reintegrating the History of African Americans’ Struggle for Liberation into Efforts to Nurture
Black Pentecostal Spirituality

Introduction

From the start of the era of the forced migration of Africans to the North American continent, there have been diverse expressions of the Christian religious experiences amongst the African-American community. Out of these spiritual experiences and social dynamics, many denominations emerged within the African-American community, one branch that emerges in the early 20th century from the Black Christian experience is the Pentecostal movement. This experience preserves the expression of mind, body, soul, and incorporates music. These forms of expression directly mirror many African spiritual experiences. Within the African-American Pentecostal denominations, there has been a particular emphasis on living a spiritual life and the manifestation of God through song, speaking in known and unknown tongues, dance, and the preached word. Due to a clear need to overcome the oppressions that life brought Black American's. The Pentecostal interpretation of Black Christianity focuses on liberation from this world through a strong emphasis on the "sweet by and by"¹ and ensuring living a holy lifestyle on earth to ensure entry into the heavenly chorus.

In the Black Pentecostal church today, there is still a strong emphasis of the afterlife, sometimes a strong prosperity message, but other times overlooking the historical and social justice aspects from which the black church draws its roots. There is a robust social justice strand throughout the history of the Black Pentecostal community and its involvement in the history of the Black church in America. Therefore, the elevation of this steep history and theology of

¹ Bennett, S. F. B. S. F., Waukegon Academy, University of Michigan, & Rush Medical College. (n.d.). In the Sweet By and By. Retrieved from https://hymnary.org/text/theres_a_land_that_is_fairer_than_day_an

liberation must be changed when religiously educating within the Black Pentecostal movement. Many questions that are raised within the walls of the modern Black church, "once the singing, dancing, shouting is over, and we have a spirituality to help us through personal tests and trials, what practical tools do we have to help navigate the trails in our personal lives, home, and community? How do we address poverty and the ever-growing achievement gap between African-Americans and white Americans? Where is the church's place in addressing the violence in our community?" Of course, there is not a vast division between personal and communal spirituality in every Pentecostal church. There are many churches seeking ways to adjust to the ever-changing social realities of the twenty-first century. Enough Pentecostal communities are equipping their members to address pressing social issues in the light of Christian faith, but the misconception in the media often overlooks these realities. As it is stated in Afro-Pentecostalism," despite being the fastest-growing segments of the Black Church, it does not receive the critical attention that it deserves"².

The Black Pentecostal experience is spiritual, vibrant, and expressive through the use of song, dance, story, and the preached word from the pulpit. This tradition has been carried forward from its origins with the "ring shout," the religious ritual first practiced by African slaves in North America and the Caribbean islands, and during which worshippers move in a circle while shuffling and stomping their feet and clapping their hands. The average Pentecostal would not make the connection of the African expressions that influenced the worship experience during the time of slavery. The connections to the past have become justified through a literal interpretation of texts from the Bible. It is vitally important to recognize that within the

² Alexander, Estrelda. *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*. IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011.

Black Pentecostal religious, educational tradition, there is a lack of a full and clear explanation of the origins of its spirituality in connection to the Black experience in America. Estrela Alexander states, "African spirituality contributed a foundational worldview that opened Pentecostal believers up to encounters with the Spirit as the life-sustaining source of their spiritual and social liberation."³ Pentecostal spirituality has been separated from its historical origins and is now associated exclusively with the Bible. This problem persists because of the unique social and cultural circumstances that have shaped Black Pentecostal spirituality and why in the times of the founding of this denomination that the separation may have been synonymous to survival in a divided racial nation.

The thesis of this theological reflection is to insist on the reunification of African American religious education, historical context, and the Black spiritual Pentecostal experience. Religious educators must teach the Black Christian story in a way that re-engages the Black community at large so that the story can become a significant resource for the empowerment of African American people today. In the word of the late Maya Angelou, "if you do not know where you have come from, you do not know where you are going."

This History of Religious Education & Black Pentecostalism

Indeed, one could understand why black Pentecostalism may have moved away from the emphasis of the historical culture due to the horrific history of chattel slavery because they were more concerned about healing and liberation of the soul. The holiness movement was carved out as a space to provide Black people a space to be expressive and find the glimmer of hope in

³ Alexander, Estrela. *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*. IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011. Kindle Location 171

times of traumatic circumstances. Historically, there was a strong emphasis on living a holy lifestyle and the evidence of the Holy Spirit. The research on African American Christian Religious Education before the 1880's was buried within the systematic construction of the history of a "white-washed" religious education. The days of the trans-Atlantic slavery system brought thousands of Africans into the United States, where the Christian religion was misused and used as a fixture of oppression in such a complicated system. However, the Black experience caused Black people to realize the gospel message, and that liberation was also a part of the Christian message. Therefore, the religious system that the Africans adopted had begun to take shape over the years; as a result, the formation of the understanding of the African-American Christian experience emerged. According to Anne Pinn, "enslaved Africans recognized the contradiction between word and deed, and those who still embraced the Christian tradition moved beyond falsehood and hypocrisy. They made the Gospel of Christ a liberating religious experience by dropping the message of docility and instead of understanding the Christian life as a free existence. Those enslaved Africans who sought to shape the Christian faith in ways that responded to their existential condition and spiritual needs developed what is known as the invisible institution."⁴ Through the adoption of liberation theology, they began to separate themselves from the bondage of the "slave religion," and many ways changed the dynamics of the church at large in America.

African American Pentecostalism did not just come from conservative white spiritual leaders, but deeply rooted expressions of Black spirituality from the African continent itself. Anne Pinn stated, "the roots of African American Pentecostalism draw from the deep wells of

⁴ Pinn, Anne. *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*. MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.

African spirituality, slave religion, the independent black churches that came out of reconstruction and the nineteenth-century black Holiness movement that unfolded among free Methodists and Baptist.⁵" The other societal circumstance that has shaped the religious education of the Black Pentecostal church was the increased racial division from White Pentecostal communities. The struggle of the Black holiness movement was its diverse racial following, therefore keeping a strong emphasis on the literal interpretation of the bible allowed for a bigger tent. Over time, it was clear that the issues of the black community had to be addressed from the pulpit; therefore, over time, their White counterparts could not fathom being led by Black leaders. The appropriation of the Pentecostal movement has always been debated, but the truth is quite clear that the spiritual expressions are deeply rooted within African spirituality. Anne Pinn writes, "the racial birthright of American Pentecostalism has long been hotly contested among African American and white Pentecostal leaders and scholars, who place its beginning variably at either New Year's Day 1901 in Topeka, Kansas, under the white evangelist Charles Fox Parham, or April 1906 in Los Angeles under the leadership of African American William Joseph Seymour.⁶" Many scholars frequently elevated Parham's voice, therefore delegitimizing of the African-American voice in the Pentecostalism movement in the academy. It is unfortunate how Parham's racial insensitivity toward the interracial environment of the Azusa Street revival had handicapped the Black Pentecostal church to claim the start of a movement that was directly birth out of the reconstruction post-slavery. By solely contributing to the history of American Pentecostalism to Parham is a direct cultural appropriation and underlying racism. This division still contributes to the avoidance of the substantiation and

⁵ Pinn, Anne. *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*. MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. Loc 115

⁶ Pinn, Anne. *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*. MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002. Loc. 123

incorporation of the history of African-American Pentecostalism within the Pentecostal religious educational curriculum.

However, the most influential form of legitimation is through the religious education curriculum that has been birth by the African-American community. In many ways, it is the most complex and yet powerful movements over the centuries. Many of the great Black minds and Black thinkers of our time in American history started as theologians and religious educators. Before the modern-era, African American Christian religious education was uncategorized in whatever forms it was expressed. It was through the initial work of Grant Shockley in 1974 that highlighted and opened up the conversation about the history of Black religious education curriculum. According to Hill (Religious Education, pg.455), "moreover, his research contributed to the development of AACRE as an academic discipline. His research brought to the attention of theological educators, Black and White, the relevance of the academic study of African American religion and education.⁷" While the culmination of the religious education curriculum of the African American Pentecostal church has not occurred, there is a strong realization that the development of a space for the scholarship of the Afro-Pentecostalism in the religious education space is necessary for the academy.

There is the biblical religious education within the Black Pentecostal church, but there seems to be the removal of the Black cultural perspective in many strands of holiness and Pentecostal movements. In the modern era, there seems to be a strong resurgence of the need to

⁷ Hill, Kenneth. Religious Education in the African American Tradition A Comprehensive Introduction. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007. pg.455

reintegrate the history of the African-American struggle for liberation into the efforts to be a part of nurturing Black Pentecostal spirituality.

The Loss of the Story

Reclaiming the Black Christian story within Black Pentecostal spaces will require the acceptance of the historical connections to the cultural expression of the storytelling from the past to the present. The void that must be addressed by Pentecostal religious educators is the loss of story and history of the black spiritual experience. According to Dr. Wimberly (Soul Stories. pg.24), "story-linking has cultural roots, it is not always incorporated to any great extent in contemporary African American Christian education contexts. Christian education must offer liberating wisdom, and hope-building vocation is one that offers a process that has at its center our lived stories. Such a process should make possible our arriving at insights, intelligent choices, and making ethical decisions-wise decisions about what is right to do to promote and sustain liberation for ourselves and others. The process should also enable us to arrive at insights, discerning choices, and make the kinds of ethical decisions that lead to our involvement in a vocation that centers on and brings a sense of hope in what often seems to be hopeless life situations."⁸ Many congregants are merely looking for the spiritual experience that integrates and validates the black experience. This incorporation within the religious education of our youth and adults alike will allow the spiritual experience to be meaningful and enlightening.

⁸ Wimberly, Anne. Soul Stories: African American Christian Education. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005. pg.24

For African-American Pentecostalism, straying away from the biblical text can sometimes be a challenge because of the strong emphasis on the stories of the bible. According to Anne Wimberly (Soul Stories. pg.25), "the intent of Christian education for liberating wisdom that leads to liberation and hope-building vocation is to place us in touch with our African American forebears' faith and their experience of God's action in their liberating wisdom and hope-building vocation. Linking with our forebears' story helps to inspire us and to foster our commitment to continue on the Christian faith walk. This linkage also promotes our openness and expectation to be continually formed and informed by the Story of God and the good news of Jesus Christ."⁹ There is a depth of a spiritual experience that through the expression of the Black experience that could connect the individual to be closer to the good news of Jesus Christ.

In the biblical text of Acts 2:1, "when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."¹⁰ The essence of this scripture is the essence of the immersion experience of the African-American Pentecostal movement. The Azusa street experience was multicultural, but there was a strong push back on having a black leader over such a multi-racial and multicultural movement. This movement was addressing the spiritual and economic conditions and a need for salvation and hope. In order to truly understand the rise of the Pentecostalism movement within the black community, there must be a revisiting of spiritual and economic conditions of the late nineteenth century. Anne Pinn (Fortress Kindle Loc. 1212-1214) expresses that "anxiety over the spiritual condition of the United States dominated the thought of many evangelists during the late nineteenth century."¹¹ For example, there are individuals such

⁹ Wimberly, Anne. Soul Stories: African American Christian Education. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005. pg.25

¹⁰ Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments: King James Version, American Bible Society, 2010.

¹¹ Wimberly, Anne. Soul Stories: African American Christian Education. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005. Loc .1214-1215

as Charles Price Jones, a minister who preached to enslaved Africans during the 1800s, he promoted a sense of spiritual transformation that linked "salvation to the formation of character, which he envisioned as a more important foundation of society than family, politics, economic, or even the church (Sanders. Saints in Exile).¹²"

The loss of story of the Black Pentecostal story has pitted this denomination as part of the evangelical movement, but its roots are one of the human rights and civil rights track. The true story of the Black Pentecostal church is to have spiritual enlightenment and transformation in order to go and be the change in the world that is needed.

From the very early days of the emergence of the Black Pentecostal movement, in both proclaiming the spoken word, in deed through acts of social justice, and service to the community was very much a part of worship. Embedded within the movement is the belief in collective community building. Within the Black Pentecostal movement, there was strong preaching about the unconditional love of Christ, social change, and equality. The strength of a hopeful message was needed during the time of a building up of the black community. Despite the denominational differences of the Baptist, Methodist, AME, AME Zion, there was always a robust uniting understanding that the Black community had to stand up for what was right. Though there were some segments of the Black Pentecostal church that believed that the will of God ultimately governed politics; as a result, the growing movement of the Pentecostal church seemed to be moving away from the traditional Black social justice movement to focus on holy living in order to live life again in heaven. In the present day, the Black church has become focused on the prosperity gospel and very little acknowledgment of the Black Christian story within the religious education of their constituents. Historically, the Black church and the Black

¹² Sanders, Cheryl. Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture.

minister was the prophetic voice for hope and justice toward systematic oppression. “Among the seven historic black denominations, the Black Pentecostals have a different historical origin. Unlike black Methodists and Baptists, they trace their origins not to white denominations, but to a movement initiated and led by Black ministers. Also, unlike Black Methodists and Baptists, these Black Pentecostals began not as a separatist movement, but as a part of a distinctly interracial movement from which whites subsequently withdrew (The Black Church. Kindle Edition. Location 1592).¹³” Therefore, if there is to be a strong emphasis on Black liberation within the church community, the African American Pentecostal community can directly claim that their denomination was created as a result of liberation and freedom of expression.

African-American Social Thought and Action

It cannot be denied that as the African-American community rose out of the period of reconstruction to the present that social thought and action has become deeply embedded into the fabric of the DNA of American. The expression of social action and thought has focused on social justice, political change, and group empowerment in order to move America to live up to its constitutional standards as a democratic society. These expressions were birthed from the Black church, where many organizing meetings and even the creation of schools where political thought, policy, and protesting activity was created. In the present-day Black Pentecostal church, there appears to be a less obvious education movement and minimal social action and expression concerning social welfare within the context of the church. In comparison to the black Baptists, AME, AME Zion denominations (while there are exceptions), historically you will rarely find a Black Pentecostal leader of a social justice movement. In many respects, the present-day black

¹³ Lincoln & Mamiya. The Black Church in the African American Experience. Kindle Edition. Location 1592

church lines have started to blur in terms of expression of spirituality in the church spaces, but the aspects of social justice, service-learning pedagogy, community services perspectives through African-American social thought has not penetrated the Pentecostal denominations. There is an extreme emphasis in bringing the community to the actual church building versus being the church in the community.

There is a dissonance in the Black American experience versus the Black Pentecostal experiences in America. There is certainly a perspective in the Black social context that responded to the urgency of the social obligations to the community needs. Many times, there are unappreciated roots of service-learning and having a social action agenda that addressed the educational issues, increasing political power, and promoted racial pride. Within the message of social justice lies the intense focus on self-help, collective action, and a strong push toward education. The center of the message was always rooted in service to the community and educational advancement, which ultimately solves the economic and cultural gap that may persist in Pentecostal circles. Many social programs created from the black church created the balance of social support and spiritual support, with an integrated education component. Many times, some African-American teachers brought in the academic skills and community organizers who knew what the community issues were. While one can be "refueling" for their soul sake, there must be an interactive refueling of the community in solving the problems that persist and ensure quality education within urban communities. As a result of making the community a perspective that is present in the church, social thought and morality will be brought to the forefront in social and political spheres.

Education as the cornerstone of the Religious Education of the Black Church

The chief cornerstone of the Black church is education. In particular, the role of the Black church has been extremely significant in the fight for educational equity for the minority communities in the United States in its history. The church has always been the core of the Black communities' moral compass. While being religiously educated, they were also being educated for regular life. There has always been an awareness of the educational inequities that led to calls of action. While the fight for educational equity has come a long way, the problem persists, but in a different form. That form is called the opportunity/achievement gap. Yes, there is access to more resources and funding compared to the past, but there is a still significant educational gap that persists in communities of color. What role does the black church play concerning this modern-day issue? What impact has the Black church made for today's fight for a better educational system? How can the black church become relevant in leading this fight, when there are so many players in the game, from politicians, unions, to corporate interests? While the journey for African-Americans throughout the years has been a callous one, there has been one consistent factor, the Black churches advocacy and action in making education available and equitable has proven to be critical for dynamic change to happen.

Historically, the "Black church" has ministered to mostly African-American congregants in the United States. Free blacks created the first black congregations; many of these churches sought to educate and advocate for the freedom of African-American's. In those times, there was segregation, so worship had to be separate from whites. That separation while not ideal, actually created a safe space for Blacks to not only receive spiritual renewal but discuss the many issues that they faced, especially in the realm of education.

Over time, the Black church became the center of the community, including becoming the place where Black children were educated. According to James A. Joseph "African-Americans connection to the Black church is directly linked to "the overriding belief among African-Americans that service to God is linked to service to humanity (Ball, Erica L. "African American Philanthropy." Philanthropy.Org, 2003.pg 1).¹⁴"

In many respects, true freedom included education of the mind in order to operate in a society set-up against the success of African-Americans. There were black denominations such as the African American Methodist Episcopal Church, that made sure that in its founding documents that education of African-American's be a part of their mission toward true freedom. There were also many allies that supported the black church in its efforts to educate the community. During the 19th century, many white/black religious leaders and churches went to the south to start religious schools, open classrooms for youth, colleges (many of which are now HBC U's), and even medical schools. For instance, the first Black educational institution that the church was birthed at the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church. A Black pastor by the name of

¹⁴ Ball, Erica L. "African American Philanthropy. The Potential and Limits of Private Generosity in a Civil Society " Philanthropy.Org, 2003.

Moses Adams named the college Rust College in Mississippi, which is now the oldest Historically Black college in the state. While there were many efforts to educate the few blacks that could get access to these schools, the masses of the African-American community did not receive an education before the end of the Civil War, even before public schools were created. During the time of Jim Crow, the laws that ruled in favor of segregation, there was room to ensure that the black schools were underfunded and in deplorable conditions. In modern times, while there are still many black clergies that went through these universities, in many instances emphasis on college for the black community was crucial, but the problem is the achievement gap through the educational system prior to college in order for students to compete and thrive in these college settings. Where does the Black Pentecostal church stand on making an impact on the K-12 system?

Indeed, there have been many changes politically for African-Americans in this country since the time of 1968, and many things have not. Even in the face of having elected and re-elected our nation's first black president, the equality and equity in education for Black people is still the ultimate goal. African-American students still complete college degrees at a lower rate in comparison to white students. There were also less Black students in American with fewer degrees in comparison to white students.

Understanding the Black Experience of Living in the United States Today

The state of the Black Pentecostal church is directly mirrored in the present-day experience of the Black community. For example, the unemployment rate for black workers

stands at 7.7 percent as of January 2018, being the highest among all racial groups. The gap between white and black unemployment rates frequently are often higher during economic downturns and closer during the economic recovery. Financially, there are only 34% of black families that have a retirement account, compared to 60% of white families and 52% of all families. The Black wealth of a household is less than one-fifth of the national average. The lack of wealth has had severe financial consequences and has limited many life opportunities, such as paying for college or starting businesses. One third (which is about 31%) of black children in the United States are growing up in poverty. As a result, many of these children end up with worse health, education, and economic outcomes in comparison to other children. Unfortunately, Black people face higher incarceration rates, despite only making 13 percent of the overall national population. The Black population comprises 38 percent of the federal inmate population. Of course, there have been unfair law enforcement practices that have led to high incarceration rates, which directly impacts Black job applicants with criminal records. There are precise needs and space to not only provide support to the families who are well off but take more direct action towards engagement in all of these issues facing the Black community.

While the question of the state of the Black Pentecostal church and their impact on the educational system seems easy, there is also a struggle to address the health inequities for black people. The impact of being in a low socioeconomic group correlates to having worse outcomes. The Church has a place in addressing not just the needs of health, but also in terms of self-care, there is a need in order to cultivate an experience of empowerment and character development.

The Viability of the Black Pentecostal Movement within the Black Christian Experience in the Twenty-first century: Can the Black Pentecostal Church Educate for both Membership and Community Involvement?

The viability of the Black Pentecostal movement is very high. By reviving the secure connection and conversations to the community, it will be vital to see the continued relevance of the future Church. Within a Pew Report it states that by 2050, the percentage of the U.S. population attending Church will be nearly half of what it was in 1990 (Pew). With the grave issues that plague urban America from drugs, gangs, violent crimes, unemployment, health disparities, failing schools, many would think it is just structural issues, but there is indeed a spiritual crisis. Of course, many structural behaviors must be changed, but there is a distinct opportunity to uplift the community through self-care and empowerment. In the words of Jesus state in Matthew 4:4, “it is written that a person shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.¹⁵” It is from this viewpoint that the Church needs to infuse a moral culture and code that gives a positive perspective of salvation and values to be governed in a person's life. Being that the Church is the center for the teachings of morals in society, the change related to the activities of the Church can support in transforming lives. The Black Church can be the instrument toward seeing behavior change in the community. If the Black Church could be the backbone for the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movement, why can't it be the backbone of the Black Lives Matter Movement? If the fastest growing churches are Black Pentecostal churches, imagine the impact that could be had by taking a wrap-around services approach toward ministry. By providing directions for self-care, self-

¹⁵ Matthew 4:4. Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments: King James Version, American Bible Society, 2010.

empowerment, and community service. While morality cannot be legislated, the empowerment of the model of Christ through the efforts of the Church can improve the quality of life for the community.

In today's times, a significant portion of the black Church has seemingly, moved toward a spirit-centered approach versus a social justice movement approach. There nothing wrong with that spirit-centered emphasis, but because the black Church has become so mainstream, its involvement and pressure is absolutely needed. While it may be easy to start to talk about what the Black Church community is not doing, it is vitally important to address the reason why we do not see the type of resolve and activism that existed in the past. First, it is essential to note that the hard-fought fights of the past had become successes for the present times that we live. From Brown vs. Board of Education to the creation of school choice options for students who may otherwise be attending lower-performing schools. There had been many sacrifices that have been made to even get to the point that the educational system is right now. Second, in the years after the American Civil rights movement, it had been documented that there was a significant decline in church attendance, which resulted in a decline in membership. Also, many black churches began to sustain the older members, versus younger families who may be more active in continuing the actions of the past. Ultimately, the loss of membership means a loss in donations, and without funding, it is hard to sustain and maintain intentional campaigns toward educational equity. So, the absence of such a force has given rise to non-profits that may be funded by corporate interests who have specific agendas, therefore causing political gridlock when it comes time to fight for and on behalf of the educational equity issues in the urban centers. Of course, these types of movements can turn away Black church communities that may be involved in the

fight, but do not want to be connected to entrenched political wars that may go well beyond the issues that this discourse addresses.

Practical ways to preserve African-American Religious Education within the Pentecostal movement

The practitioners of religious education within the Black Pentecostal movement must review the methods concerning interpretations and the praxis of religious education. We must revitalize and develop curriculum in order to bridge the gap within the modern-day community. The Black religious educator's interpretation is based on the denomination of their ordination and the congregation they association. The bottom line is that there is not a curriculum that the entire African-American church uses because there are many different orientations of the Bible. Those differences can be interpreted from power dynamics, worship styles, political beliefs, race, etc.

The African-American Christian community has had a deep interest to study the Bible, but there has also been a benefit to find the essence of the Afro-Pentecostalism approach. By finding this inspiration is necessary and needed in order to present the teachings to the community. It is through the revision of religious education that can support the present-day struggles that the Black community still faces. Some of the major types of educational models that can still have a significant impact on the curriculum in religious education are Afrocentric, kerygmatic, contemplative, holiness, confessional, and liberation. It is through these lenses that the religious education of the African American church community interacts.

In conclusion, there is the liberation spectrum that seeks to reflect and seek action in order to transform society. This lens came directly from the black Christian tradition, going back to the days of slavery. Model of liberation through religious education is to uphold the Black Christian story and reflect on the actions of liberation past, present, and future. The task of Christian liberation education is continuing to improve the praxis of a critical conscious impact that would empower the people to act for social transformation in line with the prophetic witness of the gospel. Hill puts it best, "a liberation model of Christian education seeks to recover the Black church's historical relationship to social action (Hill. Religious Education. Loc. 1922).¹⁶"

Renewing Religious Education & Community Activity

In order to rejuvenate the religious education of the Black Pentecostal community, there is a need to create a curriculum for renewing religious education for the congregation and increase the community activism incorporating self-care & service learning. In many urban centers, the discussion of self-care and addressing racial trauma in the church might be foreign but revolutionary. Many times, it is virtually difficult to educate without the proper training religiously and solidifying the thoughtful revision of the curriculum. The revised curriculum acknowledges the pain of the history and trauma of the Black community through mindfulness and creating a practice of journaling.

Next, create spaces for discussion amongst smaller groups that support one another — also creating a space for professional help and resources to provide self-care. By continuing to inspire and enlighten through the preached word, the community would receive empowerment to

¹⁶ Hill, Kenneth. Religious Education in the African American Tradition A Comprehensive Introduction. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007. Location 1922

channel those issues toward productive community solidarity and support. The revisioning of a religious education curriculum for the Black Pentecostal community will ultimately create a collective positive impact. The kind of impact that would bring the broader black church community together. For instance, in the City of New Haven, Connecticut, there are over 21,000 students, majority-minority students who attend. There are at least ten black churches in the City of New Haven who came together to adopt a school. That fundamental collaboration alone was the beginnings of a movement of social activism. This movement provided the service of tutoring young people on ensuring they have the foundational basics of reading and mathematics so that they can be on par for the next grade. According to the New Haven Independent, "the main goal of the Adopt-A-School Initiative is to focus on enhancing literacy through reading, assisting in the Singapore math program, and mentoring. Lincoln Bassett plans to work closely with the volunteers and their schedules to maximize the number of volunteer hours in the classroom ¹⁷" (the primary goal of the Adopt-A-School Initiative is to focus on enhancing literacy through reading, assisting in the Singapore math program, and mentoring. Lincoln Bassett plans to work closely with the volunteers and their schedules to maximize the number of volunteer hours in the classroom). Unfortunately, this is the only school that has been formally adopted in the city by a black church in the majority black community. Also, in Oakland, California, there has been a partnership created with Black churches that involve the creation of 20 pilot academic centers at the actual churches. They would provide academic assistance to perform well on the required state exam for passing high school in order to prepare for college (KONG. Vol. 19, No. 3).¹⁸"

¹⁷ Martin, A. (2012, December 5). Churches "Adopt" Their First School. Retrieved from https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/it_takes_a_village_to_ra/

¹⁸ KONG. Black Issues in Higher Education. Vol. 19, No. 3. Kong, Deborah. "Educators want to join with churches to help minority students." March 28, 2002

Nationally, this very discourse has been studied, in terms of measuring success of the involvement of the church community in the urban centers. In Howard University's Journal of Negro Education in 2010, reported how the Black church's involvement in the school's educational success. "In Faith in the Inner City: The Urban Black Church and Students' Educational Outcomes,¹⁹" Dr. Brian Barrett, an education professor at the State University of New York College at Cortland, describes the unique contributions black churches play in cultivating successful students in the inner-cities. He observed that "religious socialization reinforces attitudes, outlooks, behaviors, and practices ... particularly through individuals' commitment to and adoption of the goals and expectations of the group" that is conducive to "positive educational outcomes." While many may begin to question how the church and state flags could be eight raised, it is vital to realize that in order to improve these schools outside resources would be crucial.

In many cases churches would naturally have social services that do not involve the use of the Christian message. Dr. Brian Barrett continues to state that, "for black inner-city youth who reported attending religious services often, the black/white achievement gap "was eliminated." Barrett reports that one of the most essential advantages of inner-city churches is that they provide "a community where Black students are valued, both for their academic success and, more broadly, as human beings and members of society with promise, with talents to contribute, and from whom success is to be expected (Bradley, Inner-city).²⁰ "Churches also affirm inner-city youth as trusted members of a community that celebrates academic success, and the practices that produce it, which overrides the low expectations communicated at school.

¹⁹ Bradley, Anthony B. "Inner-city Education Fails without the Church." Acton Institute. Accessed March 29, 2019.

Additionally, Barrett highlights how black churches, because they are equipped to deal with families, are effective at sustaining and encouraging parental educational involvement from the heart as well as providing contexts where youth can have regular contact with other adults for role-modeling and mentoring."

In conclusion, the American Black Pentecostal church is still a very in a very crucial stage of growth, but there is a need to integrate the Black Christian story and start a revival of religious education that can make an impact for genuine change to occur in our most needy communities. While many great accomplishments have occurred over hundreds of years, there is still a fight that persists. Many times, this fight goes unnoticed, but the truth is that many black communities are still being crippled by lack of opportunity and hope. The Black church and the various denominations do not have all of the answers, but it certainly can be a part of the solution. Therefore, on a macro level, it must be realized that the universal church must be involved in making an impact. While the Black church must lead the charge again on social justice, but we must revive the religious education of our congregations.

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A “Necessity of the Age”: The 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions as a Public Pedagogy of Hope

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Abstract

The 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions offered a public pedagogy of hope by promoting the idea of coexistence amidst religious diversity. The Parliament advanced the cause of interreligious dialogue as the one of the first gatherings devoted to the cause of interreligious cooperation in the modern era. This paper raises up lessons from the Parliament for the present that suggest both the challenges and the possibilities of fostering peaceful cooperation between religious traditions.

Introduction

In 1891 the Committee for a Religious Congress met in Chicago as part of the World’s Congresses Auxiliary which planned a series of Congresses to take place at the Columbian Exposition of 1893, more commonly known as the Chicago World’s Fair. The meeting was attended by local representatives of various Protestant denominations, including the Episcopal Bishop of Chicago, as well as the Catholic Archbishop of Chicago, and Rabbi E.G. Hirsh, a professor of Rabbinic Literature at the newly formed University of Chicago, whose President, William Rainey Harper, was a member of the advisory council. John Henry Barrows, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Chicago and chair of the committee, expressed the committee’s hope that the Parliament would offer a unifying vision of religion to the world. He indicated that “many” outside of the committee “felt that religion was an element of discord which should not be thrust in amidst the magnificent harmonies of a fraternal assembly of the nations.” On the other hand, those on the committee “felt that the tendencies of modern civilization were toward unity” and that “a Parliament of Religions was the necessity of the age” (1893, 5-6).

Acknowledged by historians as the beginning of the modern interreligious movement, the Parliament was “almost completely unprecedented” since “Intellectuals and leaders of the various non-Western religions had never before been invited to such a gathering” and “American Protestants had never included Jews and Catholics in a conference on religion” (Hutchinson 2003, 112). There were representatives of most of the world’s major religions in attendance, including Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Parsees, Jains, and Sikhs alongside Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians as well as Jews from various branches of Judaism. This paper explores ways in which the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions offered a public pedagogy of hope by promoting the idea of coexistence amidst religious diversity. It analyzes the Parliament’s role in advancing the cause of interreligious dialogue and its continuing legacy. And, it raises up lessons from the Parliament for the present that suggest both the challenges and the possibilities of fostering peaceful cooperation between religious traditions.

On the one hand, the Parliament represented the ebullient confidence of its age that a new era of cooperation was dawning, a confidence symbolized by the Exposition itself referred to as the “White City,” alluding to its electric lights which were seen as lighting the way toward a new future of progress and unity. In his opening remarks, George Davis, director of the Exposition captured this spirit well, insisting they were in an age when people would learn “the nearness of man to man, the Fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of the human race,” a progressive vision shared by the University of Chicago’s President, William Rainey Harper, who would go on to found the Religious Education Association (REA)

ten years later as an organization espousing similar ideals. On the other hand, inherent in the modernist impulse “toward unity” was an underlying tension. Uncritical acceptance of the “civilizing” influence of colonialism, imperialism, and white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant hegemony undermined the broader inclusivist aims of the Parliament from within, while the emergence of Protestant Fundamentalism and Catholic Anti-Modernism shortly thereafter threatened the Parliament’s decidedly liberal, progressive vision of religious unity from without. Thus, the Parliament presents a mixed legacy in promoting a fuller conception of interreligious cooperation and in realizing a wider pluralist vision. Standing at the threshold of a century of division, war, and strife, the Parliament’s overconfident optimism serves as a cautionary reminder of the tenuous edge between unity and discord. And, its very insistence on “unity” invites critical reflection on the value of diversity. Yet, despite its shortcomings, the First World’s Parliament of Religions stands as a significant step in advancing interreligious dialogue. The Parliament broadened the horizons of many Americans about the wide spectrum of the world’s religions and brought together leading figures in the emerging field of religious studies in the late 19th century with religious leaders and theologians. More importantly, by its very existence the Parliament offered a public pedagogy of possibilities by educating the public’s imagination to see the potential of religion to become a source, not of conflict, but of coexistence, cooperation, and continued hope.

Methodology

This paper utilizes a historical methodology, drawing on the published speeches, letters, and reports from the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions. It will also draw on archival material found in the Harper Papers in the Special Collections at the University of Chicago Library as well as material from the Archives of the Religious Education Association in the Special Collections at Yale University Divinity School Library and the Research Collections of the Chicago History Museum.

Background and Planning to the Parliament

In June 1891, more than three thousand copies of the Preliminary Address for the Parliament went out, outlining a plan for a Parliament of the World’s Religions to be held in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition of 1893 and inviting religious leaders from around the world to attend it. Responses were mixed. Enthusiastic responses came from scholars like Max Müller, a leader in the nascent field of comparative religious studies. He expressed hope that the Parliament would increase interest in the study of religions. He also said that the Parliament “stands unique, stands unprecedented in the whole history of the world” (Quoted in Seager 1993, 154). Others who showed interest in attending, highlighted mixed motives and interests, such as wanting to prove the supremacy of one religion over others or clarifying popular misconceptions about their own religious traditions (Braybrooke 1980, 2).

Amidst favorable responses, there were also those who rejected the idea. For example, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the denomination of John H. Barrows, organizer of the Parliament, passed a resolution condemning the idea. Further opposition came from the Archbishop of Canterbury, saying in his letter that his disapproval rested on “the fact that the Christian religion is the one religion. I do not understand how that religion can be regarded as a member of a Parliament of Religions without assuming the equality of the other intended members and the parity of their position and claims” (Barrows 1893, 20-2). In addition, the sultan of Turkey, the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Europe, and many Evangelical leaders such as D.L. Moody also opposed the gathering.

The World's Parliament

At the Parliament's opening ceremony, on September 11, 1893, more than four thousand people gathered in the Hall of Columbus. At ten o'clock representatives from different faiths marched into the hall hand in hand, while the Columbian Liberty bell in the Court of Honor tolled ten times, honoring the ten great world religions—Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The inaugural ceremony began with "an act of common worship to Almighty God," in which Isaac Watts' paraphrase of the hundredth Psalm was sung (Barrows 1893a, 66):

Praise God, from whom all blessing flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. (67)

Afterwards, Roman Catholic representative, Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore led the crowd in the Lord's Prayer, which interestingly became the "universal prayer"—to use Barrows' words—that marked the beginning of each day during the seventeen days of the Parliament.

In addition to support from Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergy, there were several other world religions represented at the Parliament: Virchand Gandhi represented Jainism. Anagarika Dharmapala represented Buddhism. An essay by the Japanese Pure Land master Kiyozawa Manshi, "Skeleton of the philosophy of religion" was read in his absence. Swami Vivekananda represented the Hindu faith. His speech began with the salutation, "Sisters and brothers of America!". To these words he got a standing ovation from a crowd of seven thousand, which lasted for two minutes. When silence was restored he began his address. He greeted the youngest of the nations on behalf of "the most ancient order of monks in the world, the Vedic order of sannyasins, a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance!" Islam was represented by Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb, an Anglo-American convert to Islam and the former US ambassador to the Philippines. Theism or the Brahma Samaj was represented by Pratap Chandra Majumdar. The Theosophical Society was represented by the Vice-President of the society, William Quan Judge and by activist Annie Besant. And new religious movements of the time, such as Christian Science was represented by Septimus J. Hanna, who read an address written by its founder Mary Baker Eddy.

Although the Parliament was dominated by English-speaking Christian representatives, who delivered 152 of 194 papers and although the opportunity for the leaders from other religious traditions was limited, it was significant; 12 speakers represented Buddhism, 11 Judaism, 8 Hinduism, 2 Islam, 2 Parsis religion, 2 Shintoism, 2 Confucianism, 1 Taoism, and 1 Jainism (Seager 1986, 87). The whole program of the Parliament was designed to provide a wide range of topics presented by a great variety of speakers. Beside a large amount of papers focused on religion per se, several papers were categorized under the rubric of "scientific section" and "denominational congress."

More than seven thousand people attended the closing session on the seventeenth day. Several Christian hymns were sung before Bonney and Barrows delivered their concluding addresses. Along with them, some representatives also spoke to express their thanks and impressions. The "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's Messiah was then sung. About this Barrows commented, "To the Christians who were present, and all seemed imbued with a Christian spirit, [the chorus] appeared as if the Kingdom of God

was descending visibly before their eyes and many thought of the Redeemer's promise—"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (Barrows 1893a, 172-3) The Parliament was officially closed with the Lord's Prayer led by Emil G. Hirsch, a rabbi from Chicago.

Discussion

John P. Burriss argues that in the Parliament "religion was perceived as the center of any given society and the most obvious aspect of culture through which the essence of a given people's cultural orientation might be understood" (2001, 123-4). The importance of culture and ethnicity was replaced by "religion" as a new central category. Consequently, the decision of which religion could reasonably be included in or excluded from the group of "ten great world religions" had put aside the categories of culture and ethnicity. By using such a conception the Parliament excluded all Native Americans and included African Americans insofar as they were converted Christians (125).

The discovery of America by Columbus, which became the *raison d'être* of the Exposition, ironically, had become the beginning of Spanish colonialism on the Indian lands. In this sense, the presence of various Native American groups in this Columbian Exposition and their underrepresentation in the World's Parliament of Religions had magnified this irony. In the Fair, they consented to be set up in "mock villages" or exhibited within the exhibition of American anthropologists without their own display as other social groups had. I agree with Burriss that this fact reveals the leitmotifs that dominated all aspects of the Fair, i.e., "the evolutionary hierarchy of cultures" (110) and "colonial illusions" (123-4). Richard Hughes Seager rightly concludes,

"The Columbian celebration claimed to be the World's Columbian Exposition, not simply white America's, and it sought to represent the entire globe in a single, unified vision. People of other colors, creeds, and ethnic traditions were not excluded, but their inclusion was based on precarious grounds which, as in the case of American blacks, placed them in a position clearly subordinate to the progressive, allegedly universal vision of the Greco-Roman, Christian White City." (1986, 51)

The officially stated objects avoided any attempt to prove the supremacy of one particular religion over others. Emphasis was placed more on searching for religious commonalities and building of "the brotherhood and man under the Fatherhood of God," through which the world's religions could make the world a better place. Neither did the Parliament aim to establish a universal religion or "any formal and outward unity." Interestingly, the importance of the comparative study of religions in order to maintain "mutual good understanding" among religious traditions was also introduced here. The statements also recommended the necessity for presenting religions as accurately as possible by those who were "competent" and "authoritative."

However, these "objective" statements did not reflect the real diverse attitudes that we find in writings and speeches throughout the Parliament. Donald H. Bishop eloquently discusses three common attitudes towards other religions occurred in the 1893 Parliament: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (Bishop 1969; cf. Williams 1993). William C. Wilkinson, for instance, proudly proclaimed in his presentation, "Men need to be saved from false religion; they are in no way of being saved by false religion. Such, at least, is the teaching of Christianity. The attitude, therefore, of Christianity towards religions other than itself is an attitude of universal, absolute, eternal, unappeasable hostility ... "(Barrows 1893b, 1249)

Pluralism's common manifestation in the Parliament was the one that emphasized more the peaceful coexistence of religions. Any superiority claim of one religion over others was rejected because "the differences between religions are mainly in externals" (Bishop 1969, 72). The best example of this attitude could be found in Bonney's opening speech,

"As the finite can never fully comprehend the infinite, nor perfectly express its own view of the divine, it necessarily follows that individual opinions of the divine nature and attributes will differ. But, properly understood, these varieties of view are not causes of discord and strife, but rather incentives to deeper interest and examination, Necessarily God reveals himself differently to a child than to a man; to a philosopher than to one who cannot read. Each must see God with the eyes of his own soul. Each must behold him through the colored glasses of his own nature. Each one must receive him according to his own capacity of reception." (Barrows 1893a, 68)

Inclusivism as an attitude toward other religions based on an underlying assumption that one's religion is superior; yet allowing openness toward other religions. While the value of other religious beliefs are undermined in exclusivism, they are respected by the inclusivists, exactly because those beliefs could be possibly included in or subordinated to the terms defined by the inclusivists without sacrificing their own religious superiority. Once foreign religions have been subordinated to the superior religion, they become "more fascinating than threatening—as objects to be played with in a game where the rules [have] been stacked against them" (Burris 2001, 127).

In the 1893 Parliament, interestingly, this attitude received its justification from the evolutionary interpretation of religious plurality. The invitation sent to the world's religious leaders said, "we affectionately invite the representatives of all faiths to aid us in presenting to the world, at the Exposition of 1893, the religious harmonies and unities of humanity, and also in showing forth the moral and spiritual agencies which are at the root of human progress" (Barrows 1893a, 10). Barrows, who in his opening address spoke about "a spiritual root to all human progress," seemingly, drafted this statement (75). According to Barrows, "human progress" would objectively reached its culmination through Christianity. As the apex of all religions, Christianity can influence other religions meaningfully, but not vice versa. This was the inclusivism par excellence. Other religions are appreciated with an open heart yet, at the same time, being subordinated to the finality of Christian answer. They could be included within the conversation with Christian faith insofar as there is nothing from them that is needed to fulfill Christian system. On the contrary, it is Christian message that could fulfill the lack within other religious systems.

For ones who adopted this position, such as Barrows, there is no tension between seeking universal religious truth and keeping the finality of Christian message, insofar as the affirmation of universal truth do not lead them to the building of a new universal religion, since it would judge Christianity as incomplete so that it should be replaced by the new one. Rather, by "universal truth" it means that the truth in other religions is considered the foreshadowing of the Gospel or the preparatio evangelium. Thus, what is important for Christians in their encounter with people from other faiths is to find the "points of contact" between Christianity and other religions. Then, we can surely find certain fundamental beliefs in Christianity that cannot be reconciled with other religious systems. Those fundamental beliefs would prove Christian supremacy over other religions. This understanding was very common within Christian missionaries who attended the Parliament, especially those who worked in India (Goodpasture 1993, 404-5).

This is exactly the background of the “silent” debate between Barrows and Vivekananda. An advocate of the Vedantic Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda believed that “every religion is only an evolving a God out of the material man; and the same God is the inspirer of all of them” (in Barrows 1893b, 977). Contradictions among religions for him were only apparent and came from the same truth “adapting itself to the different circumstances of different natures” (977). Vivekananda's ultimate goal was undoubtedly represented in his proposal of a “universal religion,” which would hold no location in place or time, which would be infinite like God it would preach, whose sun shines upon the followers of Krishna or Christ; saints or sinner alike; which would not be the Brahman or Buddhist, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity would embrace in its infinite arms and formulate a place for every human being, from the lowest groveling man who is scarcely removed in intellectuality from the brute, to the highest mind, towering almost above humanity, and who makes society stand in awe and doubt his human nature. (977)

To be sure, these statements captivated the attention of the American audience who had been influenced by the evolutionary way of thinking. As a different model of “human progress” that every religious people could dream of, it was more intriguing than that of the inclusivist model proposed by Barrows.

What Vivekananda meant by the “universal religion” was not that all religious traditions would be disappeared and replaced by a new and single religion. Rather, it would be an authentic togetherness of all religions, in which “each must assimilate the others and yet preserve its individuality and grow according to its law of growth” (in Barrows 1893a, 170). The necessity to “assimilate the others” was expressed by Vivekananda as the avoidance of the triumph of any one of the religions over others. He stated, “Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid” (Barrows 1893a, 170).

For Barrows and other inclusivists, Vivekananda's idea was certainly threatening the Christian supremacy. In his “Review and Summary” of the Parliament, Barrows seemed to attack Vivekananda directly, “The idea of evolving a cosmic or universal faith out of the Parliament was not present in the minds of its chief promoters. They believe that the elements of such a religion are already contained in the Christian ideal and the Christian Scripture. They had no thought of attempting to formulate a universal creed.” (Barrows 1893b, 1572) Barrows then continued with a Christian version of the Darwinian “survival of the fittest.” He wrote, “The best religion must come to the front, and the best religion will ultimately survive, because it will contain all that is true in all the faiths” (1572).

Legacy and Reception

Richard Seager suggests the Parliament as a “brief storm” that was “quickly banished from our collective memory” (1993, 214). During the two decades thereafter the world's optimism for global unity appeared to be shattered with the emergence of the First World War. Nevertheless, there were several legacies of the Parliament during the two decades after the Parliament and reemerging a century later.

First, it is important to highlight that the Parliament supplied—although not initiated—“a strong stimulus for the wide acceptance of the study of comparative religion” in America, especially in the academic life (Kitagawa 1987, 364). The presence of the religious others—“living forces of religions

other than Christianity” in Braybrooke's words (1980, 8)—with their fascinating beliefs and practices before the American Christian audience has raised the awareness of the value of religious plurality. Moreover, the flood of immigrants entering the USA during those times has made “religious plurality” and “multiculturalism” two characteristics of the twentieth century America. The study of comparative religion, which was tainted by the inclusivist view of Christian supremacy held by Barrows and others, has slowly been objectified within its academic environment and neutralized from any religious bias. However, Kitagawa points out that in the 1930s “the sudden decline of comparative religion was accelerated by the impact of neoorthodox theology, the depression and the impending war” (1987, 366). We should wait for its reemergence in the second half of the late twentieth century, with the 1993 Parliament as its apex.

Second, along with the emergence of the study of comparative religion, the Parliament is usually considered the cradle of interfaith movement, although no specific organization emerged in this event. The formation process of some interfaith bodies ran slowly (though recently quite rapidly) and seemed to be sporadic. The best historical exploration of the interfaith movement since the 1893 Parliament can be found in Braybrooke's works (1980 & 1992).

A third contribution of the Parliament was to the Christian ecumenical movement. According to Diana L. Eck, the Parliament itself “might be seen as one of the first events of ecumenical movement” (1993, xv). Eck is not wrong given the fact that 152 of 194 speakers were Christians (Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic) and that the “Christian flavor” was very obvious through the hymns, prayers and rhetoric during the Parliament. Barrows sometimes also discussed the necessity of Christian unity by employing the image of three concentric circle with “Christian assembly embodying its center; the American religious assembly, including Jews, comprising the next circle; and the religions of the worlds making up the outer circle” (Ziolkowski 1993, 57-8).

Among those who spoke on the subject of Christian unity, Philips Schaff was considered most authoritative (in Barrows 1893b, 1192-1201). While being critical of the organic or corporate model of ecumenism “under one government,” he argued for a federal or confederate union, in which the balance between unity and independence could be maintained. However, the relevance of the Parliament to the ecumenical movement has not been recognized fully until the 1910 Conference of World Mission in Edinburgh. Thereafter, the ecumenical movement has always been dealing with the issues of religious plurality in connection with Christian unity and mission.

World's Parliament and the Legacy of the REA

While William Rainey Harper was listed as a member of the advisory council of the World's Parliament of Religions, among hundreds of others, and most likely attended, at least, some of the sessions in his role as President of the University of Chicago, there is no indication, as Helen Allen Archibald has suggested that the Parliament inspired Harper to found the REA ten years later. Just one year after the Parliament, in 1894, Harper became the superintendent of the Sunday School at Hyde Park Baptist Church which was down the street from his office at the University of Chicago. He began a process of reforming its Sunday School program to conform with principles of modern critical Biblical scholarship. He used the newly founded University of Chicago Press to print textbooks for use in the Sunday School in hopes of starting a reform of religious education in the United States. This was in response to what he perceived to be the growing evangelical tenor of the International Sunday School Union. It was out of his work at Hyde Park Baptist Church and in his role as a leading proponent of

critical Biblical scholarship, having helped form the Council of Seventy, an organization of Biblical scholars committed to the principles of modern Biblical criticism, that led directly to the formation of the REA. In 1902, at Harper's urging, the Council of Seventy recommended a convention be held for the purpose of renewing religious education in the United States, a convention which became the inaugural meeting of the Religious Education Association. While the REA's central focus was on the renewal of religious education mostly among its overwhelmingly Protestant constituency, the REA did espouse broad-minded principles of unity and brotherhood among all religious faiths similar to those found in the World's Parliament of Religions ten years earlier.

Conclusion

Despite its historical and theological limitations, the First World's Parliament of Religions offered a public pedagogy of hope that interreligious dialogue and interreligious encounter was possible. The very fact that it was held at all became a testimony to the public optimism of the age, which, although seemingly naïve in retrospect, nonetheless, represented possibilities that later bore fruit in the development of the interreligious and ecumenical movements.

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Nurturing Coexistence in Divided Societies: A Model from Jewish Education of a Common Language for a Pluralistic Religious Education

Abstract

This article presents a study of the efforts of the Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE), later known as the Jewish Education Committee (JEC) in the early twentieth century to centralize Jewish religious education. It explores how from 1944 to 1950 Dr. Alexander M. Dushkin, President of the JEC, sought to create a common language for a pluralistic Jewish religious education that could unify multiple denominational groups within Judaism. The article also explores how Dr. Israel S. Chipkin and Dushkin proposed a common language for the Religious Education Association (REA) in order to build interfaith dialogue and thus resolve ideological conflicts between Protestants and Catholics. In the final section, the article proposes a common language for nurturing coexistence in divided societies today.

Introduction

New ideas about society, politics, and religion emerged throughout the Western world during the post-Enlightenment period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the United States at that time, ideals of tolerance, pluralism, and freedom of religion developed and had a significant influence on everyday family, work, and community life. Additionally, American Judaism birthed new denominations and religious ideologies. In particular, the

American Union of Reform Judaism was founded in 1873 and promised to be a utopia for religious freedom.¹ Then, in 1883 a group of traditional rabbis, vowed to "conserve" Judaism by creating a middle ground between Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism. They forged a moderate platform for a new movement under the motto "Tradition and Change." The platform required fidelity to Jewish law and practices while acknowledging that Judaism has always been influenced by the societies in which Jews lived. This "Conservative Movement" was officially launched in 1886 with the opening of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) in New York City.² Finally, in the early twentieth century Rabbi Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan (1881-1983) called for the reconstructing of American Judaism and founded the Reconstructionist Movement.³

Among the American Christian communities there was a multiplying of denominations that reached its peak during the early twentieth century.⁴ Some of the religious leaders of this time who were concerned about the future of Christianity, sparked an ecumenical movement to bring the various Christian denominations and groups together to dialogue about the core and unifying beliefs of the church. The Religious Education Association (REA) was established in 1903 to seek to improve religious instruction in religious communities and explore how people could bring their religious convictions to bear more fully in society. In accord with the religious

¹ <https://reformjudaism.org/rise-reform-rabbinate-rabbinic-road-out-wilderness>, visited Sep. 4, 2019.

² <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/judaism-conservative-judaism>, visited Sep.4, 2019.

³ <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/reconstructionist-judaism-in-united-states>, visited Sep. 4, 2019.

⁴ See S. E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, New Heaven, CT: Yale University Press, (2004), see also H. Mcleod, *The Cambridge History of Christianity*. Volume 9: World Christianities c. 1914-2000, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2006).

currents of the time, the REA sought to be a Christian ecumenical and interreligious organization.⁵ In 1910, when the REA was in its early stage of development, U.S. Jewish leaders founded in New York City the Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) to serve as the unifying agency for Jewish religious education.⁶ The organization was also known at the time as Kehillah, which means “Community Association” in Hebrew. It later became known later as the Jewish Education Committee (JEC). This article presents a brief look at three outstanding Jewish community leaders who contributed to the twentieth century effort to unify or centralize Jewish religious education. They are Dr. Samson Benderly, (1876-1944), and two of his devoted disciples, Dr. Israel S. Chipkin (1891–1955) and Dr. Alexander M. Dushkin (1890-1976), both active members of the REA.

The Centralization of Religious Education at the Bureau of Jewish Education

The rapid growth of diverse Jewish educational institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led many Jews to become concerned that Judaism was fragmenting and could come to the point when the various Jewish groups lacked a sense of unified vision and ethnicity. This prompted the founding of the Bureau of Jewish Education in New York City in 1910 to serve as the unifying agency for Jewish religious education.⁷ Dr. Benderly, a Palestine-born physician, who abandoned medicine for Jewish education during his internship at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Baltimore, was the first head of the Kehillah.⁸ Hospital

⁵ See S. A. Schmidt, *A History of the Religious Education Association*, Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, (1983).

⁶ A. M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City*, New York: The Bureau of Jewish Education, (1918), p100-128.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 18.

records from meetings of the board of directors state that when the medical advisory committee gave Benderly the ultimatum to forsake his involvement in teaching religion or to give up medicine, Benderly proudly replied, “You know, healers of the body there are many, but there are very few healers of the soul, and I want to try my end at that.”⁹

After his relocation to New York, Benderly reached out to many young Jewish man and woman, inviting them to become innovative educators for the American Jewry. He created a successful teacher training program which later became part of the Teacher’s Institute where he succeeded in attracting many young men and women to career in Jewish education. Samuel Dinim, one of Benderly’s disciples writes, “No single man . . . has done as much as Samson Benderly did in attracting young men to careers in Jewish Education.”¹⁰

Benderly’s team of workers at the Bureau in the 1910s included close to a hundred full and part time educators.¹¹ Jonathan Krasner in his masterpiece on Benderly, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*, notes that, “Although, Benderly’s earliest disciples included women as well as men, he called them his ‘boys’ . . . and he liked to think of himself as ‘Abba,’ or father.”¹² The Benderly Boys (they also referred to themselves by the more gender-friendly term “Bureau Bunch”) devoted themselves to what they considered to be the holy mission of bringing about a Jewish national and cultural renaissance within the Jewish community in the

⁹ Handwritten board minutes of the meeting of the Hebrew Hospital and Asylum Association of Baltimore, August 6, 1900, Vol. 7. See N. H. Winter, *Jewish education in a pluralistic Society: Samson Benderly and Jewish Education in the United States*, New York: New York University Press, (1966), p37.

¹⁰ S. Dunim, “Samson Benderly—Educator,” *Jewish Education* 20, no. 3 (1949): 33-34.

¹¹ J. Krasner, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, (2011), 5.

¹² N. H. Winter, *ibid*, p41.

United States, and especially in New York. It is no surprise that the inner circle of the Benderly Boys adopted the name *Chayil*, an acronym for the Hebrew phrase “education is our national foundation.” In Hebrew, *Chayil* means army in the plural or soldier in the singular. The Benderly boys proudly used the name to express their loyalty to fight to carry on Jewish education for American Jewry. Their mission was to create a new model of religious education whereby, as historian Jonathan Sarna notes, “United States Jews can learn how to live in two world at once, how to be both American and Jewish, part of the larger American society and apart from it.”¹³

Benderly clearly articulated his mission for a “revolutionary reorganization” of tradition and innovation for the future of American Judaism in a questionnaire he gave to prospective educators. It contained the following questions:

1. Do you believe in the future of American Judaism?
2. Do you recognize that Judaism is not carried in the bloodstream, and that it is, therefore, not transmitted automatically from generation to generation, but only through the instrumentally of education?
3. Do you agree that what is being done today in our Jewish schools is not of a quality calculated to inspire our youth to devote themselves to their people and its ideals, and therefore lacks the power to ensure the glorious future for American Jewry for which we have the potentiality?
4. If you believe in the need for a revolutionary reorganization of program and methods, do you have sufficient faith in yourself and your abilities to feel confident about the thought of your coming to work and making Jewish education your vocation, will you be able to bring this needed revolution into being—and if so, are you ready to devote yourself?¹⁴

Krasner observes that “[the enterprise of the Benderly Boys] was far more than an educational program, it was a *paideia*, a full-fledged educational initiative designed to realize a conscious cultural ideal, or what Isaac B. Berkson (himself a devoted student of Benderly) called “a vision

¹³ J. Sarna, “American Jewish Education in Historical Perspective,” *Jewish Education* 64, (Winter-Spring 1998), p9-10.

¹⁴ Leo Honor, “Our Professional Debt to Dr. Benderly,” *Jewish Education* 20, no. 3 (1949): 29.

of the rebirth of Jewish life.”¹⁵ Dushkin in an autobiographical essay presents a more mystical and messianic view of the Benderly boys, claiming that, “There was the quality of the Hasidic *rebbe* in Benderly, and he molded us into [his *Hassidim*] a camaraderie of believers. We considered ourselves a band of pioneers who were ‘hasting the footsteps of the Messiah.’”¹⁶

Benderly’s strong traditional Jewish background, coupled with his training in the field of science, equipped him to undertake the noble mission he defined for himself as a Jewish educator.¹⁷ Like a medical doctor who first examines his patients to discover the cause of their symptoms before formulating a diagnosis, Benderly first examined the needs of the Jewish community, which he outlined to the BJE board in his detailed reports. Only after rigorous investigation and analysis did he formulate his aims for a new Jewish education. Nathan H. Winter concludes his bibliography of Benderly with the following statement, “Samson Benderly was the great educational architect and experimenter of Jewish education” and the Bureau of Jewish education in New York City was the laboratory where he experimented with many new ideas about experiential education in an effort to develop a blueprint for a coherent and comprehensive system of elementary and secondary Jewish education in the United States.¹⁸

The JEC Under the Leadership of Dr. Alexander M. Dushkin

In 1939, the BJE has merged with the Jewish Education Association and became the Jewish Education Committee (JEC) and served as the centralized agency for Jewish religious

¹⁵ Krauser, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*, 10.

¹⁶ A. Dushkin, “Antaeus — Autobiographical Reflections”, in *American Jewish Archives*, Vol. XXI, Nov. (1969), No 2, p123.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, see footnote 4.

¹⁸ N. H. Winter, *ibid.*, p65.

education in New York until 1967.¹⁹ The JEC was also called in Hebrew *Vad Ha'chinuch*, meaning “The Education Committee,” and in Yiddish it was known as *Der Yiddisher Dertziung*. Although the merger was primarily for financial and practical benefits, it was also an opportunity for a new vision and leadership for Jewish education. As its first director, Dr. Dushkin, followed the vision of his teacher, Dr. Benderly, of revamping Jewish education in the United States He also sought to lead the JEC to new heights.

The JEC was comprised of many professional staff and consultants. Drs. Chipkin and Dushkin were the two major figures whose leadership and mentorship helped shape Jewish religious education in New York in the later part of the early twentieth century. Chipkin, like Dushkin, was a disciple of Benderly. Dushkin, with Chipkin’s assistance focused his efforts on centralizing Jewish religious education among the diverse Jewish communities. Dushkin’s loyalty to Benderly’s mission is best expressed in his own words as follows: “He [Benderly] recognized the pluralistic character of American Jewry and created the first exemplary community Bureau of Jewish Education as a ‘roof organization,’ aiming to bring some unity into their variety.”²⁰ Like Benderly, Dushkin devoted much time and effort to examining the current trends of Jewish religious education and the needs of the Jewish community in New York at that time. He published his results in a large volume of almost six hundred pages titled *Jewish Education in New York City* (1918) and he dedicated this book to “My teacher and friend Dr. Samson Benderly, A dauntless pioneer in American Jewish education.”²¹

¹⁹ After 1967, the JEC went through many transitions under the leadership of the Unite Jewish Associations (UJA). They first evolved into the Board of Jewish Education (BJE) and then as the Jewish Education Project (JEP).

²⁰ A. Dushkin, “Antaeus — Autobiographical Reflections”, *ibid*, 129.

²¹ A. M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City*, New York: The Bureau of Jewish Education, (1918).

Dushkin emphasized that the Bureau's effort to establish a nonpartisan Jewish education was its top priority by placing it first on his outlined list of the eleven accomplishments of the Bureau: He wrote: "It [the Bureau] is the first agency created by the Jews of America to deal with the problem of Jewish education in a comprehensive, nonpartisan way."²² Dushkin adopted Benderly's principle that "the future of Judaism in America belongs to no one party, and the problem of Jewish education will not be solved along party lines."²³ Dushkin asserted that religious education, and Jewish education in particular, should be non-ecclesiastical, "not confined to the synagogue, but that it is as broad as the life of the people itself."²⁴ In discussing Jewish education he states: "It makes clear the conception of the *Congregation of Israel* (*Kenesseth Israel*) in its largest sense, is synonymous with the *Community [or Catholic] of Israel* (*Zibbur, or Kahal*),. Jewish education is, therefore, not denominational education but communal education."²⁵ Dushkin's main agenda for the JEC was to foster a unified Jewish education by shifting the educational focus from denominational to communal identity. He articulated his vision for a new JEC clearly in his fourteen-page memorandum to the JEC board on September 18, 1939, focusing on the motto, "Unity within diversity."²⁶

²² Ibid., 127.

²³ S. Benderly, *Jewish Teachers*, Vol. 1, 1-1:27; Jan. (1917).

²⁴ Ibid., 139.

²⁵ Ibid., 139.

²⁶ A. M. Dushkin, "Next Decade of Jewish education in New York City," *Jewish Education* 12 (September 1940): 68-71. See also A. M. Dushkin, "Memorandum on Implementing the Program of the New York Committee for Jewish Education," September 18, 1939, 7, box 3, folder 1, BJENYP, AJA.

Finding a Common Denominator

As a seasoned religious educator, Dushkin formulated a pluralistic agenda for Jewish religious education. He created the slogan “unity within diversity” as the motto of the JEC. Dushkin thought that the key to fostering unity was to find a common denominator that everyone can agree on. He accepted the fact that Jewish schools and organizations were very diverse, with each school and organization having its own ideology, methods, textbooks, curricula, and teachers. At the same time, he drew attention to the one thing they had in common. They were all committed to preserving Jewish tradition and culture. Additionally, the members of the JEC board were comprised of a variety of educational supervisors and consultants, each one representing one of the diverse groups within the Jewish community. Dushkin embraced the complicated task of getting this diverse group to work together.²⁷

The functions of the JEC’s board included organizing teacher training, school curricula, and teacher conferences. They held their meetings bi-weekly and sometimes weekly. In 1944, in addition to their regular “consulting meetings,” Dushkin established a special committee to address the urgent need for pluralistic Jewish education. The committee included at least one representative from each group. Dushkin arranged for a series of meetings of the special committee at which the conversation would be focused on creating a centralized mission for Jewish education by outlining a list of “Common Elements of Jewish Education.” In his address to Jewish educators, Dushkin observed that while the goal of the Kehillah since its formation in

²⁷ The assorted minutes of the Consulting meetings from 1944 included the following names of participants: Mr. Bortniker, Dr. Chipkin (past Executive Director of JEC), Dr. Dushkin, Mr. Edelman, Dr. Edidin, Mr. Pilch, Mr. Gingold, Dr. Goulub, Mr. Horden, Miss Kelper, Mr. Kusselowitz, Mr. Mark (supervisor of the Yiddish Shules/schools), Dr. Nardi, Dr. Rudavsky, Mr. Ruffman, and Mr. Whitman (Supervisor of the Talmud Torah Association and Secretary of the Hebrew Principals Association).

1910 was to create a unifying organization for Jewish education, there were several phases in its development. He characterized them into two general phases: phase 1–1910-1930, with an agenda of strengthening the Zionist and Orthodox schools, and phase 2–1930-1944, with a pluralistic agenda of reaching out to all groups within Judaism.²⁸ In another public address “*Pirud un Achdut in der Yeddisher Derzieung—Unity and Diversity within Jewish Upbringing*” Dushkin laid out his agenda for a third phase for the JEC and designated “unity in diversity” as the guiding theme for the phase. He asked the members of the JEC to concentrate on building bridges among the diverse groups within the Jewish community. Dushkin also presented a first draft proposal of the seven common elements for Jewish education in the United States.²⁹

The Journey in Search of Common Goals for Jewish Religious Education

Intensive analysis of numerous documents from the archives of the YIVO Institute, at the Center for Jewish History in New York, reveals a new understanding on the JEC’s mission to formulate a unifying language that expressed the “Common Elements of Jewish Education.”³⁰ This mission was launched on April 24th, 1944, when Dr. Chipkin, then secretary of the JEC, sent out a memo to the “Pedagogic Consultants” of the JEC outlining the agenda for the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Pirud un Achdut in der Yeddisher Derzieung,” “Unity and Diversity within Jewish Upbringing.” This document contains a speech written in Yiddish by Dr. Alexander Dushkin, (seemingly delivered on November 11, 1945), Records of the Jewish Education Committee; RG 592; folder # 50; YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY.

³⁰These documents are part of *Record RG, #592, Title: Jewish Education Committee 1939-1967 Creator: Jewish Education Committee of New York*, at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, at the Center for Jewish History, New York, NY. Future biographical and historical description of these notes could be found on the online archive for The Center for Jewish History, http://search.cjh.org/primo_library/libweb/action/display. (Last visited 05/17/18). This archive was collected by Dr. Yudel Mark, who also served as a board member of the JEC for many years and at some point as its secretary (1945-). Dr. Yudel was very influential in the Yiddish Schools movement and served as their supervisor and consultant. Special thanks to Mr. Marik Web, former chief archivist of the Yivo Institute, for his assistance in discovering these documents.

remaining several meetings of that school year. He articulated the core agenda of these meetings as follows:

In this discussion, our attention would be concentrated on the elements which unite us rather than those which divide us. This does not underestimate the importance of the elements in Jewish education which divide the groups. This discussion is intended to focus our attention on the common elements that unite us as Jews, with a mindset to formulate a program which could be presented for further discussion to other groups besides our own, among them to the gathering of Judaic scholars from the various parties in Jewish life.

Clearly, the main focus of their conversations was to be on uncovering the elements they could all agree on in order to formulate a unified common language for Jewish education. The group intended eventually to expand their conversation to include others, especially Judaic scholars and local journalists. Given their theological differences, strong commitments to conversation, intense collaboration, and maintaining unity were crucial in working to formulate a unified educational vision. The minutes of the meetings show that Dushkin, the facilitator of the group, worked to maintain a balanced and unified atmosphere.³¹

It took several sessions of interactive conversation to formulate the first draft of the Common Elements. Multiple versions were presented before they finally narrowed the ideas being considered down to seven core elements: 1) Torah, 2) Jewish life, 3) Hebrew, 4) Jewish cultural identity, 5) The land of Israel, 6) Our role in American Jewry and 7) Faith in a better world and the divine purpose for it. The minutes show that five meetings were held on the following days in 1944: Thursday, September 28; Thursday, November 2; Thursday, November

³¹Ibid.

9; Wednesday, November 15; and Wednesday, November 22. All the meetings were led by Dushkin and their sole agenda was to create a list of common elements for JRE.³²

In order to reach neutral, common ground, Dushkin proposed a two steps strategy: first, to define the two most extreme opposite views for each element, and then second, to avoid any extreme approaches. For example, for the first element of Torah, the two extreme views on the subject were: 1) the extreme Orthodox view that every letter of the Torah is sacred and part of divine revelation, and 2) the opposite extreme view of the Reform and cultural Jews who consider the Torah to be a cultural development of the Jewish people, subject to the same laws of social change and expressions as other cultures. Dushkin proclaimed that only after eliminating the extreme views on the subject could the group endeavor to create a common language.

The process of developing the seven Common Elements was a very complex journey. The conversation became intense at times, especially when dealing with such theological topics as Torah, Hebrew, and Jewish identity, about which there were many differing and controversial points of view. However, the greatest challenge was how to get all involved to agree on a common language. Dushkin was able to attain common ground while creating a safe space by assuring the members of the committee that each Jewish group would have the freedom to determine the measures and manner for how to implement each of the common elements based on their own theological and religious inclinations. It is not surprising that Dushkin, repeatedly, had to remind the board to focus the discussion towards finding a middle ground by avoiding any extremes. Ironically, at first, Dushkin, himself (as a devoted Zionist) struggled to maintain a middle ground when dealing with the element of Hebrew. He expressed his Zionist position

³²Minutes of Discussion on Common elements in Jewish Education, (Fall 1944); Records of the Jewish Education Committee; RG 592; Folder # 50; YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY.

stating, “that schools that reject the teaching of Hebrew in any form should not be included as part of the JEC.” It was Dr. Chipkin who expressed a more neutral position and who advocated for the inclusion of all Jewish schools that could agree with the general concept of the importance of Hebrew within Judaism and who were open to introducing more Hebrew.³³

Overall, Dushkin skillfully created a safe space for each member of the group to express his views freely, while at the same time keeping diversity in balance by having the group focus on the end goal of developing a common language. He also stated that he wanted the conversation to be open and ongoing. He firmly believed that the discussion about defining a common language for the seven elements should extend beyond the walls of the JEC. He wanted each group of Jewish educators in the United States to have the freedom to express their own point of view about each of the elements and how to implement them. Therefore, Dushkin suggested the following two strategies be considered by each group regarding all the elements: 1) internally — collect feedback by inquiring how each group is actually teaching and implementing each element, and 2) externally — encourage each group to further expand their discussion of common elements beyond the walls of their community by inviting journalists, scholars, etc. into the conversation. Dushkin also affirmed that the seven elements should be open ended and that each group should have the freedom to incorporate the common elements in a way that was in accordance with their own core beliefs. Both Chipkin and Dushkin urged the members of the board not to exclude anyone as long as they could agree on maintaining a positive attitude towards these elements even if they did not fully participate in their practice.

³³ These meetings took place before the establishment of the modern state of Israel. Modern Hebrew became more popular in the following years, as the Zionist movement was emerging.

There is an old saying, “When you have five Jews, you have ten opinions.” The fact that the board was able to reach a general agreement and produce a first draft on such controversial and complicated elements as Torah, Hebrew, Jewish identity, and Zionism in just five sessions was a miraculous accomplishment.³⁴ Hence, Dushkin succeeded after much wrangling in creating a tentative formulation of common elements, which he presented at the Nineteenth Annual Conference of the National Council for Jewish Education, on June 4, 1945. He then published his committee’s statement in the November 1945 issue of *Jewish Education* magazine.³⁵ The following February, a symposium was held on Dushkin’s “organic conception of the American Jewish curriculum.”³⁶

Dushkin, in his address on the seven Common Elements, summarized his leadership of the JEC as follows: “The goal of the JEC is to continue the golden chain of Judaism and to preserve the old heritage of our prophets in creating a better world for ourselves and others.” He likened the JEC to the human body as being composed of various limbs. While each limb is uniquely different in its shape and purpose, all of the limbs share in creating a wholesome body, and only by attending to all of them can a person be healthy and whole. Similarly, he concluded, the JEC represents the diverse groups within the Jewish community and it must be sure to

³⁴ While these meetings took place before the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, the Zionist movement was on the rise and very popular within Jewish circles. For a better overview on the history of the development of the early Zionist movement see W. Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel*, New York: Schocken Books, (2003), see also <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zionism>.

³⁵ A. M. Dushkin, *JE*, 17, (November 1945). See editor's note “earnestly” inviting the readers to send in their “reactions and suggestions.” See also A. Dushkin, *Living Bridges: Memories of an Educator*, Jerusalem: Keter, (1975), p147-148.

³⁶ Jonathan Krasner, *Ibid.*, 342. See also J. Hartstein, “Traditionalist View: Symposium on ‘Common Elements in Jewish Education’,” *JE*, 17, (February 1946), 40-41, on the Orthodox reaction to the common elements.

include everyone in order to present a full and integrated understanding of the meaning of Judaism and Jewish religious education.

Dushkin's resigned from the JEC in 1948 and took on the leadership of the John Dewey School of Education at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel. Chipkin then assumed the head leadership of the JEC. He reissued a final version of the core elements in a pamphlet titled *Jewish Life in America: A Discussion of Some Contemporary Problems*.³⁷ It was published by the National Council of Jewish Women—Committee on Education and Social Action of New York (a sub-committee of the JEC).

The pamphlet was designed to be presented in several local schools as part of an evaluation report of Jewish education. The first part of the pamphlet was on educational theory. It provided a historical overview of Jewish education in the United States focusing on New York City, and discussed the different types of schools, their curricula, and their common elements. In addition, it was intended to be a helpful tool to spark conversation regarding the needs of Jewish religious education at that time and to foster greater awareness among lay leaders and educators of the ongoing progressive development of Jewish religious education. The second part was on educational practice. It was included in order to collect feedback from its four-page questionnaire, which each school was to complete and return to the national JEC office. The instructions in the report contained the following:

Part One

- a) Participants must review the report about Jewish education in the United States.
- b) They must provide a report about the educational resources in their community.

³⁷ "Jewish Life in America: A Discussion of Some Contemporary Problems" (1950); Records of the Jewish Education Committee; RG 592; Folder #173; YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, at the Center for Jewish History, New York, NY.

- c) Participants must visit a school, participate in teaching sessions, and present a report during the second session.

Part Two

For presentation of the brief reports on the subjects taught in the Jewish schools, the following questions might be discussed:

1. How do these subjects help prepare children to face the problems of living as Jews in a modern American community?
2. How do they help them in their relationships with other children in public school?
3. In view of the discussion of the above questions, would you add or subtract anything from the school curriculum and why?
4. In what ways can the school system in your community be improved?
 - a. Should more funds be provided?
 - b. Should there be improved teacher training?
 - c. Should there be improved teacher materials?
5. Is there a need for adult Jewish education in your community? How is it being met?

It is significant to note that in their discussions of the seven core elements of Judaism both Dushkin and Chipkin highlighted the historical outline of the changes and progress of Jewish education in the United States focusing on New York. They both thought that every participant in discussions about the core elements should be aware of the changes in Jewish education that occurred in the early twentieth century so that they could draw insight from the collective wisdom of the Jewish community in the past as they helped to chart the future of Jewish education.

Final Version of the Common Elements

Chipkin presented a final version of the seven common elements in a pamphlet. He wrote:

1. **Torah**—Torah represents the accumulated literary and spiritual heritage of the Jewish people through the centuries. Beginning with the Pentateuch and continuing through many languages, especially Hebrew, Torah gives expression to the way of life and to the social ideals of the Jewish people.

2. **Personal Jewish Living**—This involves applying Torah as a way of life. It requires obedience to the moral law as well as observance of Jewish customs and laws.
3. **Hebrew**—Hebrew is the historical, classical, and modern language of the Jewish people.³⁸ It has served as the repository of literary treasures and the vehicle for rich cultural expression. It is still needed today for the recital of prayer in the synagogue, for the study of the classics, and for reading the modern book or newspaper in Israel.
4. **The Jewish People**—This involves cultivating a Jewish identity that includes both the individual Jew and corporate Israel and acceptance of national responsibility between himself and other Jews. Knowledge of the past and present of the Jewish people allows for a more informed development of personal and group responsibility and preservation of spiritual heritage.
5. **The land of Israel**—like the Hebrew element has been identified with the Jewish people, its past and present.
6. **The American Jewish Environment**—Every Jew living in the United States must acknowledge and embrace both American and Jewish cultures. This includes knowing the history and development of the Jewish community in the United States, participating in institutional and communal activities, contributing to the cultural and spiritual welfare of the American commonwealth, and preserving the equality of the American Jew.
7. **Faith**—The seventh element deals with faith in a living God and in the Divine purpose making for the improvement of world and man, involving the human obligation to strive toward a better, more informed democratic world order.³⁹

Chipkin asserted that the order of these elements is not immutable, that is, that they are not necessarily related and may appear in any of the subjects studied. He emphasizes that the treatment and interpretation for each element will vary with each school. He also offered two assumptions underlying the teaching of these common elements in all the Jewish schools. They are:

1. The desire to help preserve the Jewish people and Jewish spiritual assets regardless of ideological differences, and
2. The readiness to make adjustments to the environment regardless of the method of interpretation by the group.⁴⁰

This final version of the seven elements, while based on Dushkin's works on the Common

³⁸ This final version was published in 1950 after the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11-12.

Elements of Jewish Education, presents a more crystallized, theological, and pluralistic understanding of the elements of a contemporary Jewish education in the United States. Like Dushkin, Chipkin emphasized the crucial role of conversation in shaping and transforming Jewish religious education. He included a survey in his pamphlet on the common elements in order to open the conversation about the elements to all school personnel and parents. In doing so, Chipkin reached beyond the walls of the JEC and expanded the number and range of people involved in shaping and re-shaping Jewish religious education.

The Influence of John Dewey in Creating Common Elements

Dushkin was greatly influenced by the teachings of John Dewey (1859-1952), renowned American philosopher and educator. In fact, Dushkin was the first person to write his doctoral dissertation on the subject of Jewish education under the direction of Dewey at Teachers College Columbia.⁴¹ His writings are saturated with Dewey's ideas about education being a process of democratic socialization. He writes how "the tendencies in Jewish education can be best understood in the light of the two universal ideas which have profoundly affected all of modern life, mainly, Science as a Method, and Democracy as an aim."⁴² Dushkin was concerned about Jewish survivorship in particularity in preserving its traditions and identity in the United States, and in considering the issue he concluded that U.S. Jews needed to embrace democratic values and principles while at the same time adhering to their ancient culture and tradition. In discussing the benefits of democratic freedoms Dushkin wrote that they permit "each of its individual

⁴¹ A. Dushkin, "Antaeus — Autobiographical Reflections", *ibid*, 127. See also *ibid*, 126, for a detailed description of Dewey's role on American Jewish education. He writes: "He spoke fondly and proudly of our group as his 'Jewish boys.'"

⁴² A. M Dushkin, *Ibid.*, 140.

citizens to share his interests and experiences with other citizens, outside of his particular group or class, so as to make possible broad and free choices of individual development.”⁴³

The process Dushkin crafted for forging the common elements of Judaism was a democratically inclusive process. All of the diverse Jewish groups were invited to be part of the process, and Dushkin sought to expand the conversation about the common elements to as many people as possible within and beyond the Jewish community. Moreover, the goal of the process was to forge by democratic means (namely, conversation and the free expression of ideas based on mutual respect) a sense of unity within the Jewish community. Dushkin, like his mentor Dr. Benderly, believed that if Judaism in the United States was to become truly reflective of the principles of an American democracy, it must be guided to develop following a democratic patterns, that of “diversity within unity.”

Dushkin presented the following Deweyan outlook for Jewish education:

No single definition of Jewish education will cover the whole field. It may be best, therefore, to define it objectively from various aspects:

1. Psychologically, Jewish education is the process of enriching the personality of American Jewish children, by transmitting to them the cultural heritage of the Jews, and by tracing them to share in the experiences of the Jewish people, both past and present.
2. Sociologically, Jewish education has two meanings:
 - a. It is the transmission of group consciousness by Jewish fathers [and community] to their children, so as to preserve Jewish life.
 - a. It is the mental and social adjustment of the American Jewish children, so that by preserving the values of their people, they may be able to live the completest, and, at the same time, the most cooperating lives.
1. Religiously, Jewish education may be defined as the training of Jewish children to understand and obey the will of God as it expressed itself in the history, literature, and laws of their people.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26-27.

Dushkin and Chipkin both strongly believed that “the communalization of Jewish educational endeavor means the reorganization of Jewish schools on a democratic basis.”⁴⁵ They were committed to the centralization of Jewish education and formulated the seven elements around the key question of the time: “How can Jews live a Jewish life in the United States?”

Taking The Model Beyond Jewish Religious Education

Looking beyond Jewish education, I contend that the pioneering work of Dushkin and Chipkin in creating a common language for a pluralistic Jewish religious education presents a viable model of how to educate for coexistence in divided societies. An analysis of their journey shows how to create an educational framework based on democratic values and principles for creating common elements and fostering “Unity within diversity” in a religiously pluralistic social context.

Specifically, I present the following guidelines based on Dushkin’s and Chipkin’s work for creating a common language for fruitful dialogue and nurturing coexistence in divided societies:

- a) **agenda** — set the focus on finding a common denominator,
- b) **openness** — make room for differences,
- c) **examine** — define the two extreme positions on each side of the conversation,
- d) **middle ground** — avoid any extremism,
- e) **centralize** — focus the conversation on formulating a centralized viewpoint,
- f) **common core** — create a common language that all can agree on, and

⁴⁵ Ibid.

g) **dialogue** — expend the conversation within the community and beyond the walls of the community.

A Common Language for Interfaith Dialogue

Stephen A. Schmidt, in his history of the REA, notes how on several occasions both Dushkin and Chipkin were involved in easing tensions between the Protestants and the Catholics within the REA. For example, Schmidt reports how, during a REA board meeting in the 1940s, one board major suggested that the often used metaphor “democracy of God” placed “faith in man” rather than God. Alexander Dushkin, founder of the College of Jewish Studies, Chicago, weighed in to modify the “sentiment indicating that in rabbinic thought the emphasis was upon a ‘partnership of man with God.’” When Steward G. Cole countered him, it was board member Rabbi Israel Chipkin, director of the American Association of Jewish Education who attempted to moderate the resulting dispute.⁴⁶ Schmidt writes that “Throughout that entire report there is indication that the Jewish view seemed to negotiate between the religious position of God’s transcendence and the other liberal Protestant ideal of God’s imminence. But in such a way as not to threaten the traditional religious education alliance between Reform Jews and mainline liberal Protestant educators.”⁴⁷

Schmidt also references another incident that directly correlates with the common elements. Schmidt reports how earlier that same year in another meeting, Herbert Seamans raised the issue of whether or not Catholics could participate in the REA. Schmidt writes that “His question was straightforward. ‘How can you possibly reconcile the difference to bring about

⁴⁶ Schmidt, *Ibid.*, 118. Interestingly, this is the first time where reference is made to Chicken as rabbi. Perhaps it was merely the personal impression of the secretary of the Board who took the notes.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

real cooperation when Catholic education inevitably results in attitudes of intolerance?”⁴⁸ Here again, it was Chipkin (the Jew) who served as key negotiator of the group by outlining an agenda for creating dialogue among various groups of religious progressives.⁴⁹ Chipkin encouraged the group to build the conversation around a common denominator in order to be able to continue the interfaith movement. He then proposed a similar strategy to the process used to forge the seven common elements of Jewish religious education. He suggested that the REA build conversation around core elements. He then outlined the following six core elements: “God, Brotherhood of Man, Dignity of the Individual, Democracy, Peace [and] Social Justice.”⁵⁰

Conclusion

The great educational philosopher of the twentieth century, John Dewey, wrote, “Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues, but of signs and symbols without which shared experiences is impossible.”⁵¹ This article is an in-depth study of the creation of a new consciousness among Jews in the United States through their participation in a process aimed at forging via conversation a common language for a pluralistic Jewish religious education. The article suggests how religious educators can today overcome the signs and symbols of Babel that separate us and our religious communities and keep us from finding a common denominator and articulating a new unifying language for the shaping and

⁴⁸ Ibid, 119.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ J. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, Chicago: Sage Books, The Swallow Press, Inc., (1927), p142.

refashioning of a great community. This author advocates utilizing a conversation about common elements to build bridges among diverse religious groups and forging a new language of interfaith dialogue. Such a process should not aim to produce substantive agreement about religious issues. Rather, it should focus on sharing and respecting diverse views and be focused on how such respect can provide a foundation for uncovering shared, common elements while at the same time honoring the diversity of religious perspectives found in the world today.

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Mine Eyes Do Fail with Tears: *Antisemitism and the Christian Response*

Abstract

Anti-Semitism is on the rise in the United States and Europe. There has been an alarming increase in the number of hate crimes targeting Jewish people. Currently only twelve states in the U.S. mandate education on the Holocaust, leading to a profound lack of awareness of the effects of anti-Semitism. Sadly, Christian attitudes toward Judaism over the centuries have strongly contributed to anti-Semitic behavior. It is imperative that Christian congregations provide opportunities to educate about anti-Semitism and to establish and strengthen empathic relationships with Jewish congregations.

Shortened Title for Running Head
Antisemitism and the Christian Response

Mine Eyes Do Fail with Tears: *Antisemitism and the Christian Response*

In 1938, Marc Chagall's *White Crucifixion* was displayed in Paris. This painting was the first in a series that depicted Jesus as a Jewish martyr using the Crucifixion as its central theme. Chagall created the painting as his artistic response to the horrific events of the *Kristallnacht*, in which synagogues were a principal target of the Nazis. Over one thousand would be damaged or destroyed in Germany during this attack while the police were ordered not to intervene. *Kristallnacht* or the 'Night of Broken Glass,' would serve as the catalyst for the Nazi's systematic persecution of the Jews, ultimately leading to the Holocaust.

Chagall sought to intertwine the Jewish heritage of Jesus with the symbol of the cross, central to Christian understanding of suffering, sacrifice and redemption. "While Chagall included many recognizable elements of the traditional Christian iconography on the canvas, he combined them with markers of Jesus's Jewish identity. His loincloth is made from a ritual Jewish prayer shawl, or *tallit*. The mourning angels that are typically seen in Crucifixion images here become three biblical patriarchs and a matriarch, all dressed in traditional Jewish garments." (Chagall Homecoming, 2016) In this way, Chagall brought the suffering and persecution of Jesus on the cross into a direct comparison with the tragic circumstance of the Jews living under the control of the Third Reich.

With this painting, Chagall hoped to raise the awareness of Christians to the dire situation that was Jewish existence under the Third Reich. He endeavored to remind them of their roots in the Jewish faith. "He did not have to explain to Jews what was happening — they already knew. Instead, he wanted to explain the deeper meaning of events in Germany to Christians, and to do so he decided to address them in their own symbolic language, through the use of the Crucifixion." (Amishai-Maisels 1991, 151) Chagall took on the complicated and difficult relationship between Christians and Jews, seeking to bring the deeply rooted Judaic tradition of Christianity into focus. Chagall's *White Crucifixion* was an attempt to bring hope to a situation fraught with peril by "stating that what was happening in Germany was a re-crucifixion of the Jewish Jesus, an act that only a world forgetful of Christ's teaching could tolerate. He wanted this message to be understood by the Christian world, and to have a positive effect on that world's behavior." (Amishai-Maisels 1991, 153) *White Crucifixion*, the favorite painting of Pope Francis, is once again a reminder of the need for Christians to remember and cherish our Jewish heritage and to work toward a time when antisemitism is relegated to the past.

In order to develop a Christian response to antisemitism it is necessary to explore the reasons for its current rise. The White Supremacy movement and its intrinsic relationship to Nazi doctrine will be examined. The legacy of the Holocaust and the impact of Christian prejudice against the Jews will be surveyed. With the ability to learn from the past, the possibility for a way forward for Christians to respond to antisemitism in our time will be presented.

It should be stated that Christians have made great strides to correct the sins of the past. By the 1960s the notion that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus finally receded. The Holocaust was the watershed event that brought about a strong desire to foster understanding between Christians and Jews. Since the end of the Second World War, there has been a concerted effort on the part of mainline Christian denominations to establish meaningful dialogue and bring about positive relationships with Jewish congregations. As the number of antisemitic incidents continues to rise exponentially, Christians must take the responsibility to educate their congregations about the effects of prejudice and hatred directed toward the Jewish people. “Treating other people as if they were just objects is one of the worst things you can do to another human being, to ignore their subjectivity, their thoughts and feelings.” (Baron-Cohen 2001, 7-8) As Christians, we must be able to raise awareness of the need to confront dehumanization.

Antisemitism is a symptom of the desire to hate, and to degrade. It arises from a darkness in the human psyche that must be addressed. After the horrors of the Holocaust, it is a wonder that antisemitism did not finally become a specter of behavior that was utterly deplored and abandoned. This was not to be. “Of those perpetrators actually brought to court in the Federal Republic of Germany before the end of the twentieth century., only 164 individuals were eventually sentenced as perpetrators of murder, rather than for lesser crimes. In view of the hundreds of thousands of individuals who have been involved in the machinery of mass murder and the six million people who had died in what we now call the Holocaust, 164 convictions for murder is not an impressive total.” (Fulbrook, 2019, 356) Antisemitism is poised to resurface since it never was truly reckoned with.

Current Rise of Antisemitism

Antisemitic acts of violence have increased exponentially not only in the US but worldwide. “In 2017, anti-Semitic incidents surged nearly 60 percent, according to the 2017 ADL Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents. This was the largest single-year increase on record and the second highest number reported since ADL started tracking such data in 1979.” (“Anti-Semitism in the US 2017.) There has been no respite since the ADL Audit.

An almost inconceivable event occurred when a disturbing antisemitic cartoon appeared in the New York Times International Edition on April 25, 2019. It featured Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu as a guide dog wearing a collar with the Star of David being walked by President Trump wearing a skullcap. This cartoon was grossly antisemitic and its appearance would not have been out of place on a white supremacist website. It is beyond comprehension to realize that it was allowed to be published by the New York Times International Edition. The apology for this gross error was not immediate. All the more perplexing considering the gravity of the situation. “The Times apology came Sunday afternoon after it issued an earlier statement

saying it was wrong to run a cartoon that contained "anti-Semitic tropes." But that statement did not contain any apology." (Isadore & Stelter CNN Sun. April 28, 2019)

Antisemitism has been embedded into the fabric of our society and attempts to eradicate it have never been close to successful. The Christian antipathy toward the Jews has endured throughout the existence of the faith. Philosophers in the Age of Reason and beyond contributed to the marginalization of the Jewish people. This form of behavior is not an aberration but is reflective of an ingrained pattern of thinking that arises from suspicion of "the other" and the Jews are often the first target. The Holocaust could not have been realized only from the musings of a madman and his henchmen. It was, according to historian David Nuremberg, "the product of a history that had encoded the threat of Judaism into some of the basic concepts of Western thought, regenerating that threat in new forms fitting for new periods, and helping far too many citizens of the twentieth century make sense of their world. We will fail to understand those terrors or their effects if we sunder them from what came before." (Nirenberg 2013, 459) This is a difficult concept to accept because of the very nature of its context and yet, it is vital to understand how antisemitism continues to exist. It is ingrained in our social construct.

Antisemitism and White Supremacy

The cries of "Jews will not replace us" during a torchlight parade in Charlottesville, provided a haunting reminder of the reality of antisemitism being alive and well in the United States. "One of the most disturbing recent manifestations of anti-Semitism in the U.S. was the alt right "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017, where hundreds of marchers threw Nazi salutes, waved swastika flags and shouted "Sieg Heil." (Antisemitism in the US 2017) This event demonstrated that "...the more this kind of invective is repeated, the more it has a way of bleeding beyond its original borders and becoming part of the national discourse. As that happens, ideas that were once considered to be outside the pale of civil conversation become mainstreamed." (Lipstadt 2019, 41) This incident was emblematic of the need to scapegoat Jewish people as an antidote to the fear and uncertainty engendered by the rise of globalization. The perceived loss of national identity for groups threatened by changing demographics and cultural shifts provide a catalyst for extremist behavior. "White supremacists have committed at least 73 murders since Charlottesville, 39 of which were clearly motivated by hateful, racist ideology. These numbers include the deadly white supremacist shooting rampages in Parkland, Pittsburgh, Poway and El Paso, the deadliest white supremacist attack in more than 50 years." (Antisemitism in the US 2017)

Economic consequences brought about by cultural shifts that create a feeling of insecurity can also contribute to the rise of antisemitism. Witness the resurgence of a document entitled, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The Protocols "describe a secret Jewish plan for global domination and was first published in Russia in 1902." (Neuberger 2019, 19) Although discredited as a hoax in the 1920s, this text was embraced by Henry Ford and distributed throughout the United States in 1920. It continues to stir conspiracy theories on the internet and the dark web. "The Internet has dramatically increased access to the Protocols. Even though

many websites expose the Protocols as a fraud, the Internet has made it easy to use the Protocols to spread hatred of Jews..” (“The Protocols of the Elders of Zion”) The Protocols inspired those who organized and participated in the Charlottesville Rally.

Holocaust denial is another component of white supremacy. It manifests itself in a myriad of forms. The aspersions are cast on whether the Holocaust was an enormous hoax designed to engender sympathy for the Jews. Often the death tolls are blamed on typhoid epidemics or as the expected casualties of war and nothing more. Nazi atrocities are downplayed to make the ideology more palatable and acceptance more plausible. “Examples of denying the Holocaust abound in neo-Nazi circles. On the Daily Stormer website, founder and editor Andrew Anglin has described the Holocaust as a “ridiculous fake shower room bug-spray death chamber hoax” that forms “the core of [Jewish people’s] identity.” His vitriolic antisemitism alleges that white people are being duped into complacency under a Zionist-controlled government.” (Holocaust Denial splcenter.org) Holocaust denial supports the outrageous claims of Jewish controlled media and the Jewish conspiracy to control the world espoused in *the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

The act of Holocaust denial is an act to erase memory. To revise history in a deliberate and manipulative manner supports and agenda of hate. “They deny the Holocaust not because they believe it never happened but precisely because they know it happened: they do not initiate but rather *continue* the war against the Jews in the mode of a war against memory.” (Patterson 2015, 326] This desire to reframe history is perhaps the most dangerous action the white supremacy movement undertakes. “The Holocaust denier does not hate the Jews because they allegedly lie about the Holocaust; rather, he lies about the Holocaust because he hates the Jews. Antisemitism, then , is not caused by context or contingency, but rather the context or contingency occasions its manifestation.” (Patterson 2015, 327) There is an explicit danger in the act of Holocaust denial. It creates a hermeneutic of suspicion regarding the murder of six million Jews. Elie Wiesel lamented, “To forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.” In order to confront the false narrative of white supremacy, it becomes imperative for Christians to be aware of its ramifications and to repudiate this egregious aspect of antisemitism.

A Framework for Virulent Christian Anti-Judaism

The complicated relationship of Christians and Jews throughout Christianity’s history has been fraught with attempts at marginalization at best and extreme cruelty and injustice at its worst. From the beginning, the emergence of the new faith struggled with coming to grips with its Jewish heritage. Christianity was birthed from the Jewish religion and this foundational faith tradition is forever intertwined with it. Embracing this legacy adds a richness and depth to the Christian understanding of who Jesus was in his context. “When Jesus is located within the world of Judaism, the ethical implications of his teachings take on renewed and heightened meaning; their power is restored and their challenge sharpened.” (Levine 2006, 21) It is imperative for Christians to fully engage with the Hebrew Testament since it formed Jesus. When this engagement has not been realized, it has brought about misunderstandings and

heightened antagonisms that have resulted in “the creation and perpetuation of millennia of distrust, and worse, between church and synagogue.”(Levine 2006, 21)

Understanding how the hatred of Jews permeated the Christian story is imperative to dealing with antisemitism in the current context. A verse found only in the Gospel of Matthew states, And all the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children.’ Matthew 27:25 NIV. This verse has predicated egregious suffering upon the Jewish people. “From this verse, generations of Christians over hundreds of years concluded that all Jews for all times, and not just those present on that fateful day, bore special responsibility for the death of Jesus. The guilt is inherited; it is a stain on Jewish identity; all Jews are “Christ killers.””[Levine 99] This verse gave license to centuries of abuse. “Only in the twentieth century did the view of “Christ killers” begin to wane.” [Levine 2006, 101]

There are numerous incidents that have occurred in Christian history that have had a very negative impact upon Jewish people. The specter of these events loom large in white supremacist thought and action. Blood libel and Martin Luther’s essay *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies* continue to motivate white supremacists hundreds of years after they were conceived. Accusations of ritual murder were prevalent beginning in the late 12th century and spread throughout Europe. “In 1255, a five-year-old boy was found dead in a well in Lincoln, England..” (Goldstein 2012, 82) Christians were convinced the boy had been murdered by the Jews. A Jew named Copin, who lived in the vicinity was accused of the murder and tortured until he confessed. “King Henry III traveled to Lincoln to order Copin’s execution. Henry also imprisoned all of the other Jews in Lincoln in the Tower of London. Sources suggest that as many as 100 Jews were held there and at last 18 were hanged.” (Goldstein 2012, 82) The child, Hugh, would become an unsanctioned saint. His story is included in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*.

Tales of ritual murders would foster the anti-Jewish propaganda of blood libel. This defamatory deception claimed that Jews murdered Christian children and used their blood for religious rituals. The story of William of Norwich would spawn a web of similar falsifications that would continue into the twentieth century with echoes still sounding in the twenty-first. “On Good Friday in 1144, a forester stumbled upon the corpse of a young boy named William in a woods just outside of Norwich, England.” (Goldstein 2012, 75) The cause of William’s death was undetermined but became the cause of much speculation and rumor. William worked in the tanning trade and closely associated with the Jews near his home. The day the body was discovered, the commemoration of the death of Jesus, contributed to the mystery surrounding his death.

Five years after William’s death, Thomas Monmouth, a monk, wrote about the missing boy and had his work published. His account included descriptions of a ritual murder that detailed injuries that were extremely similar to the crucifixion of Jesus. According to Monmouth’s account, “William’s murder was the fulfillment of the Jewish community’s annual practice of selecting one Christian child to murder during Passover. That child’s blood would be

used to make matzah (unleavened bread) for Passover.” (Moffic 2019, 114) There was a portion of the Christian community that all too readily accepted this tale as truth. “As a result of the “blood libel” and other lies, Christians in Europe in the thirteenth century and beyond increasingly saw Jews as a depraved and evil people. In many countries, Jews were now required to live apart from their neighbors and wear distinctive badges or clothes that alerted strangers to the “dangers” they posed.” (Goldstein, 2012, 91) Blood libel would become integrated into the fabric of anti-Jewish propaganda and would be incorporated into the lexicon of hate by the Nazis. Antisemites still remain attracted to this insidious concept.

One of the most Martin Luther’s essay *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies* was written in 1543. This document was a radical shift in his attitude toward the Jews which originally was conciliatory and accepting. “Luther’s rage and increasing religious and political power were accompanied by a program for protecting Christian society from Jewish influence and contamination by burning or razing synagogues, destroying Jewish homes, confiscating Jewish holy books, banning Jewish religious worship, expropriating Jewish money, and deporting Jews.” (Marans 2017) This essay, written in the final years of Luther’s life, was the result of his anger at the Jews because they did not conform to his plan for their conversion to Christianity. “The aging Luther worked tirelessly to achieve the elimination of these enemies, this misfortune, from German lands. He did not seek the Jews’ conversion, since he now believed that Jews could become true converts only at the apocalypse. In the interim, he once suggested, the only effective way to baptize them was in rivers with millstones tied around their necks.” (Nirenberg 2013, 266) The vitriol exhibited in Luther’s essay is deeply shocking, but it goes beyond repellant. This dreadful polemic brought about consequences that Luther could never have imagined. The Nazis seized upon this document and used it as a blueprint for their extermination of the Jewish people.

The scope of anti-Judaism throughout Christian history is not commonly recognized or known by most Christian communities. It is imperative to understand how pervasive it has been and how the legacy of this hate continues to do harm. The Holocaust brought this tortured history into the Christian consciousness.

Christians in the Shadow of the Holocaust

What would I have done? This question haunts any Christian confronted with the horrors of the Holocaust. The desire to do everything possible to challenge and resist the Third Reich’s agenda should have been the impetus of every Christian. Tragically, this was not the case. The situation was much more dire.

Historians generally agree that the Third Reich’s agenda, motivated by Hitler’s pathological zeal, was a racial issue. “Traditional anti-Semitism had been based on religion. If the Jews converted to Christianity then they had a chance of escaping persecution. But the idea that ‘Jewishness’ was something inherent in an individual - that it was present, as the Nazis came to believe, in the blood - meant there was no escape. Your ‘race’, over which you had no control,

was your destiny. “ (Rees 2017, 8) The desire for the racial purity of the Aryan nation required that the preservation of German bloodlines be of utmost priority. Jewish bloodlines were an anathema and therefore, the Jews needed to be eradicated. Therefore, conversion from Judaism to Christianity did not allow Jews to be accepted into the realm of the Third Reich. Nazi racial policies were eerily similar to actions taken against European Jews in previous centuries. Spain, England and many parts of Germany expelled the Jews for long periods of time. Parsing out the distinction between religious and racial persecution against the Jews was a difficult proposition. “Some of the ideas to be found in Nazi antisemitism had their roots in particular historical aspects of Christian thought. Purity of the blood became a key part of Nazi ideology, and may have had its roots in a concept that originated in fifteen-century Spain.” (Neuberger 2019, 32) It called into question the authenticity of the conversion of Jews who had chosen to be baptized Christians. It was stated that, “Anyone can change religion, but a person cannot change his or her “blood.” (Goldstein 2012, 106) Jews were expelled from the Spain in 1492. The religious identity of the Jews was already a cause for prejudice and hatred throughout Christian Europe and now, bloodlines were factored in.

In Germany, there was great consternation following World War I. War reparations caused a great strain on the country’s economic recovery. Nationalism was on the rise and the hope for relief was attached to the rise of the völkisch movement, which would become intrinsic to the belief system of Hitler and the Nazis. Völkisch ideology “meant the almost mystical connection a group of people, all speaking the same language and possessing a shared cultural heritage, had with the soil of their native land.” [Rees 2017, 3] Jews were not considered native to the country but of a distinct race that did not originate in Germany. They were, therefore, excluded from the Nazi system of government. Jews were now scapegoats because their heritage and bloodlines called them into question. “The old Christian-based prejudices against German Jews did not disappear as the völkisch movement grew, but were reinforced.” [Rees 2017, 5] The Third Reich gained dominance and Christians were either silent or complicit. The völkisch movement was popular with the German people and offered a respite from the shame and disgrace brought about by the aftermath of the Great War. Many Christians were willingly swept up in this tide of nationalism.

Although Germany was a predominantly Christian nation when the Third Reich rose to prominence, people of faith acquiesced to Nazi ideology by their silence or their consent. Various factors motivated Christians to look away from the abuses being perpetrated against their Jewish neighbors. Fear of reprisals that would be exacted upon anyone who dared to defend the Jews was the grim reality. Nazi oppression was not subtle and opposing it meant imprisonment, exile or death. Financial gain and power for those willing to be complicit was also a powerful incentive. If a Christian could attain status and power with the Nazi regime it meant the possibility of economic security and safety from Nazi terrorism. Since the Third Reich seemed destined for incredible success acquiescence seemed a prudent choice. In either case, there was a moral decision to be made for those who had a conscience. “Witnesses to the cruelty were attempting “to eliminate “cognitive dissonance”—mental anguish caused by the divide between one’s beliefs and one’s behavior—the human response is to rationalize one’s choices as quickly

as possible. If someone was not disposed to think ill of the victims because of pre-existing prejudices—perhaps that “they” even “deserved” their treatment—Nazi leaders and propaganda provided ample reasons to help them, with time, to come around to this point of view.” (“Causes and Motivations”) The insidious nature of Nazi force was not hidden or implied. It was overt, oppressive and designed to control. “This was a distinctive form of violence: not individual acts of violence arising from personal motives but rather collective violence initiated, sanctioned and ordained from above and enacted, carried out, and in many ways enhanced by initiatives from below. Moreover, this was violence that was not hidden from sight, tucked away in faraway places, but all around and plain for all to see, even within the heart of the Reich.”(Fulbrook, 2019, 22-23) Succumbing or accepting Nazi rule was facilitated by the predisposition to accept a framework of anti-Jewish prejudice imbedded in the religious and cultural narrative. While there was no shortage of reasons for Christians to succumb to the Nazi policies of hatred, there were Christians who sought to resist this evil. Many stories of valor, selflessness, and compassion can be related about them. The following example of those who lived in a remote French village is a narrative worthy of emulation.

The people of the village of Le Chambon, located in rural south-eastern France, united to provide sanctuary to Jews fleeing the Nazis. Their faithful witness provided shelter, food, clothing and protection to all who came pleading for help. They engineered escape routes for Jewish refugees to find sanctuary in Spain and Switzerland. “According to one estimate, some 5,000 Jews passed through Le Chambon and the surrounding villages until liberation. The people of Chambon acted on their conviction that it was their duty to help their "neighbors" in need.” (the Village of Le Chambon.)

The Protestant church in Le Chambon under the leadership of Pastor Andre Trocmé and his wife Magda refused to capitulate to the Vichy government. He stated, “These people came here for help and for shelter. I am their shepherd. A shepherd does not forsake his flock... I do not know what a Jew is. I know only human beings.” Neither the authorities’ pressure nor the security agents’ searches diminished the resolve of the Trocmé and their team, and their activity did not cease.’ (The Village of Le Chambon) The people of Le Chambon and its environs used non-violent resistance to save the Jews in their care. The risk was formidable. Pastor Trocmé’s cousin and Roger Le Forestier, the village physician were executed and ultimately, Pastor Trocmé had to go into hiding. His wife continued to coordinate rescue efforts. “Trocmé urged the congregants to “do the will of God, not of men” and stressed the importance of fulfilling the commandment in Deuteronomy 19:2-10 concerning the entitlement of the persecuted to shelter.” (“Under the Wings of the Church”) No citizen of Le Chambon ever revealed the whereabouts of those being hidden from the Nazis. They remained steadfast in their quest to shelter and save all who came in need of help. “When Magda Trocmé reflected on her choices years after the war, she said, “When people read this story, I want them to know that I tried to open my door. I tried to tell people, ‘Come in, come in.’ In the end I would like to say to people, ‘Remember that in your life there will be lots of circumstances where you will need a kind of courage, a kind of decision on your own, not about other people but about yourself.’ I would not say more.” ” (“Le Chambon: A Village Takes a Stand”. 2019.) This courage of conviction

came out of the authenticity of their Christian faith. The ability to live into the conviction that all people are children of God brought about their ability to withstand the fear and anxiety of the evil that surrounded them. Many children were taken into care by the people of the Le Chabon. One of them was Elizabeth Koenig-Kaufman. She recalled that "Nobody asked who was Jewish and who was not. Nobody asked where you were from. Nobody asked who your father was or if you could pay. They just accepted each of us, taking us in with warmth, sheltering children, often without their parents—children who cried in the night from nightmares." ("Le Chambon - Sur- Lignon") The empathy and compassion demonstrated by Le Chambon illustrates what is possible when people of faith respond with a resolute will that puts others above the interest of self. "Without empathy we risk the breakdown of relationships, we become capable of hurting others, and we can cause conflict. With empathy we have a resource to resolve conflict, increase community cohesion, and dissolve another person's pain." (Baron-Cohen 2001, 183) The people of Le Chambon epitomized empathy and the Nazis demonstrated what happens when it no longer exists.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was asked "how God could have allowed the murder of so many innocent people. He replied that the Holocaust is not a problem for God. It is a problem for human beings. It was human beings who murdered one another. It was human beings who destroyed the image of God that reside in every human being." (Moffic 2019, 180) This is the crux of the matter. Human beings must take the responsibility to care for one another. Seeing other people as God's creation, taking the time to listen to another's narrative, finding ways to express compassion are all ways to form authentic relationships between Christians and Jews. The tragic consequences of a seldom examined or questioned Christian past have left a legacy of brokenness and sorrow. We can learn from the past but it requires the desire to bring about transformative change.

A Way Toward a Christian Response

Jesus was a practicing Jew and his religion is intrinsic to the Christian faith. The aftermath of the Holocaust has caused Christians to reflect deeply upon the implication of how Judaism is understood. The restoration of the deep connection between Christianity and Judaism offers rich ground for exploration and understanding. Much effort has been directed toward a better comprehension of the Judaic context of Christian scriptures. Educating Christians to better understand the Hebrew Testament must be embraced. "Today's interfaith conversations are at a critical point. We have acknowledged the problems of the past; we have realized the major points of contention for the present; the next step is to see what solutions we can bring to the concerns of the future." (Levine 2006, 226) Instructing Christians about Judaism and anti-Semitism will foster the possibility for meaningful dialogue and mutual understanding.

Education, however important, is the beginning of dialogue and not the summation of the process of understanding. Rabbi Evan Moffic states, "I began to understand that we cannot erase hatred with reason or by simply teaching tolerance. Thinking and learning from others is

essential. Yet, a faith—a commitment to a set of values with human dignity at its core—matters more.” (Moffic 2019, 179) This is the essence of fostering understanding, respect and compassion. Recognizing one’s shared humanity with another establishes empathic relationships. Even if a Christian congregation is miles away from a Jewish congregation, the ability to connect through websites and social media can be facilitated. In this way, empathic relationships are formed.

Education about Judaism, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust will provide the foundation for establishing understanding and empathy. For far too long the Jewish people have had to carry the primary responsibility for defending against anti-Semitism. The Christian community must learn how to provide support to Jewish communities and be a source of compassionate action.

Film, art, music and theatre provide a narrative for Christians to understand and engage the Jewish experience. “There are many everyday opportunities to develop and maintain empathy. Indeed, empathy is promoted whenever we reflect on the human experience, read a novel, act in a play or watch a movie. The recognition that a strong empathic sensibility, whether emotionally or cognitively inspired, tends to make us more moral, pro-social and community minded and has encouraged many people to seek its promotion in both children and adults.” (Howe 2013,160) A production of “The Diary of Anne Frank” or watching the film “Schindler’s List” or the “Woman in Gold” are just some of the examples of bringing the Holocaust experience into perspective. The outstanding documentary “Defiant Requiem” is also a powerful resource.

There are outstanding materials sources for Holocaust and antisemitic education. The Southern Poverty Law Center, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Anti-Defamation League and Facing History provide detailed and accessible study materials for congregational use. It should be noted that “Only 25% of the states in the US require mandatory education on the Holocaust. Recently, a Florida High School Principal, in a state that *does* require Holocaust education stated, “I can’t say the Holocaust is a factual, historical event because I am not in a position to do so as a school district employee.” (Will 2019, July 9) This is unacceptable. Christian congregations need to be diligently working toward informing their members about antisemitism and the Holocaust. A yearly commemoration with a liturgy on or near the Shoah is a way to raise the awareness of the narrative of suffering that haunts the Jewish people. It is the moral imperative of Christian congregations to eradicate antisemitism. In the words of Rabbi Moffic, “We have seen the rise of extremist religious groups. They have proved, as history has shown so many times, that religious ideals bring forth sacrifice from their believers. Secularism does not. Consumerism does not. Without a foundation in faith, the culture of freedom and human dignity forged in the West will diminish.” (Moffic 2019, 226) As a review of the bibliography of this paper will demonstrate, the materials cited are predominantly from sources produced in the past five years. That these books must still be written is an indication that the Christian call to eradicate antisemitism has never been more urgent

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be nutrient
gaps in
your diet.

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One A Day
can help
fill them.

(Vitamins A, C, E, B, & K)

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Sacred, Revolutionary Teaching: Encountering Sacred Difference and Honest Hope

Abstract

Sacred teaching takes many forms across religious traditions, focusing on creation and sacramentality in Christianity, God's nature and God's creation of human beings in Judaism, and spiritual and social practices in both. At the heart of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions are accents on the sacredness of life, creation in the image of God, and human dignity. This essay analyzes the three traditions to discover the rich textures of sacrality and the many faces of sacred teaching and learning. Can such teaching be revolutionary in divided contexts? The paper explores the potential of spiritual practices and pedagogies of difference to cultivate radical compassion, openness, humility, and hope.

A student speaks out in a class discussion, saying, "I hate all of this. I hate the ideas and I hate what they are doing to me." Weeks later, the student shares a theological break-through, having wrestled hard with personal and social history, new theological ideas, and long-held beliefs and values. The student expresses a new-found freedom to explore theology that asks the hardest of questions and opens continually to new questions, discoveries, and commitments.¹

Another student glows with excitement in sharing a personal discovery evoked by class readings, discussions, and experiences, and then finding voice to express the discovery. The person, with abundant gifts and successes, describes a frequent sense of disquiet as a person of color living and serving in a minoritized ethnic community. In the context of a class, the person has taken time to dive deeply into haunting questions. As if by miracle, the person has discovered a new wisdom to value his/her/their cultural context, to speak boldly from it, and to speak to it. The journey has been long, but new moments have already opened a greater sense of self and cultural values, as well as new directions for future actions.²

A group of students travels to the Arizona-Mexico border to walk the paths and listen to the stories of persons who are seeking asylum in the United States, but encounter the ravages of capture, harsh living conditions, legal charges, fear for their families, and uncertain futures. The students walk and listen ... walk and listen and reflect. They observe legal hearings, listen to social service workers who are working with asylum-seekers to humanize their immediate living conditions, and advocate for longterm social and political changes. In the days and weeks after this class, students and faculty return home to say that they will

¹ Shared and retold with permission.

² Shared and retold with permission.

never be the same. Some students say that the travel seminar has changed their entire vocational direction and, years later, the graduates have done exactly that.

These stories reveal the existential importance of teaching and learning in people's lives. Education is not limited to classrooms and courses, but it breaks forth transformatively even in structured and semi-structured classrooms, immersions, and travel seminars. The stories here awaken listeners to the depths and wonders people encounter in their quests for meaning, cultural and intellectual understanding, and purpose. The stories resonate with many others that I have observed or heard, so they are not one person's story. They are unique but not siloed experiences. Part of their power is to reveal the sacredness and revolutionary nature of teaching. The first story reveals the deep questions evoked when someone engages challenging ideas; the second story, when a person asks existential questions of "who am I, who are my people, and what is my distinctive voice"; and the third story, when people experience the realities of others who are living threatened lives. All of these are situations permeated with difference, which can be jolting, disruptive of all that one has known, frightening, joyful, and, most important, sacred.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the personal and social value of sacred teaching, as illuminated by the wisdom of three religious traditions, in this case three Abrahamic traditions. More specifically, it poses two central questions. (1) In what ways does the wisdom of these theistic traditions contribute to deeper understandings of the sacred and revolutionary aspects of teaching? (2) What hope do these traditions offer as people face sacred difference? The first question is theological: Is sacred, revolutionary teaching a valuable concept and practice across traditions and to what extent might it be informed by religious and interreligious theologies? The second question is practical: How might we practice teaching that engages people in sacred values and practices for the sake of revolutionary change in the world? Such questions become especially urgent when the human family faces daunting existential issues, such as dehumanization of immigrants and people of color or minority tribes across the world, ecological degradation and injustice, spiritual yearnings, and/or life-threatening controversies and conflicts. To what extent is sacred teaching meaningful as a spiritual and life-changing practice within diverse traditions and across traditions?

I have been asking these questions since I completed *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Moore 2004). I completed the last revision of that book during a 5-week period when I was living in my mother's hospital room and communicating my love and care for her in every way I could imagine. I worked on the manuscript when she was sleeping, and I clicked "send" the day before Mother breathed her last breath. The sacred context of living with my mother in those Holy days imbued the topic of sacred teaching with even deeper significance for me; its power has not let me go. Over time, I have become more convinced that sacred teaching and sacred living call for interfaith attention and for expanded practical enactments.

To begin that process, I will share a personal example here and move to a more globally urgent situation in the last section. One of my Holiest experiences in the past few years was in a celebration of Passover in the home of a Jewish family who deeply value their Passover traditions, while also valuing friendships with people in other traditions. The family had gathered people at their table that year who were largely Jewish, but also Christian and Muslim. The celebration was traditional in food and ritual form, and we all ate and prayed and followed the

Haggadah, pausing frequently for serious reflection on hard questions. The celebration was sacred to all of us (albeit in diverse ways). For me, the intimacy, hospitality, teaching, reading, and reflecting were spiritually rich and powerfully centering. Even my experience of Easter a few days later was deepened by that sacred meal, not because of historical connections between Judaism and Christianity, but because of the wonder that Passover, as Passover, evoked in me.

I have shared living stories to ground this essay in the textures of ordinary life, and particularly educational life, whether in classrooms, travel seminars, contextual experiences, and/or human interactions in families and neighborhoods. Moving to a more theoretical level, the sacredness described in these stories reverberates with pedagogies of liberation, encounter, and transformation – pedagogies that engage people with the depths of religion and haunting issues in the world. Such pedagogical theories focus on the understanding and transformation of realities that oppress, destroy, and denigrate; they are revolutionary. When the pedagogies are also religious, they engage with Holy traditions, values, and possibilities. This article explores theistic and humanistic traditions in particular, but it points to the possibility of expanding the scope in future research.

The questions posed by this essay are especially urgent in the present moment. The human family faces life-threatening realities in the explosion of racist and homophobic attitudes and ideas that intensify and justify violence by individuals and whole societies. They create a climate for the uncensored abuse of persons with lesser power, whether they are immigrants, victims of trafficking, or people who have been oppressed in their own lands and families. We also face a climate crisis that human beings are largely responsible for creating and now largely responsible to halt or reverse. People want to hope, but they do not want false hope; they seek threads of honest hope that they can hold in their hands and weave into larger hopes. To glimpse such hope, people in theistic traditions usually turn to God and the relationship between God and God's creation.

People in these traditions are often limited, however, in their embrace of God's good gifts of difference. Many people avoid differences as frightening or destabilizing for themselves and their communities. In the public square, the dynamics become even more terrifying as polarized voices set the stage for debates and arguments in the form of a battle, described as a chasm by Hanan Alexander (2019). With that realization, how can we develop teaching that engages people with diversity in ways that genuinely respect differences, prepares people in the ways of dignity, and engages communities in honest hope and real transformation? This question-posing preview leads to the heart of the article – the power and possibilities in sacred, revolutionary teaching. The next section reflects on the riches of religious wisdom, and the final one identifies educational and social psychological grounds for sacred, revolutionary pedagogy. The essay concludes with practices of sacred teaching (Moore 2004) informed by interreligious wisdom and a focus on the particular issues of immigration in the present global context.

The Wisdom of Three Traditions: Creation in the Image of God

God is Mystery beyond definition in words, images, analogies, or conceptual frameworks. Even so, the traditions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity seek to express the inexpressible at the same time recognizing that those expressions are never adequate or even

close to describing the Holy. God, Y-H-W-H, Allāh is the Source of love and devotion, and is simultaneously Mystery. God calls forth meditation and prayer, ritual and art, and patterns of living; these practices enable people to dwell with God but never to define or capture the Holy. God is beyond expression, yet God reveals Godself in creation and in every human being – each and all created in God’s image. The three focal traditions of this essay all highlight the image of God as a defining feature of the God-human relationship. It is the source of human dignity, and the signifying mark of each being. If God so loved humanity as to create each one in God’s own image, then each and all are precious in God’s sight and should, therefore, be precious in ours.

These are counter-cultural ideas. Dominant cultures often cement their dominance by naming some people as better than others, and some as not only inferior, but even less than human. Dominated peoples often follow a similar pattern (albeit a far more defensible one) to seek their own wellbeing by posing themselves over against the dominant “other.” The counter-culture of the *imago Dei* disrupts cultures of scapegoating and disrupts pedagogies that set out to prove that some cultures, values, and religions are superior to others. Genuine learning takes place when people are freed to explore their deepest intellectual, existential, and social questions, as seen in the opening stories. Sacred teaching has revolutionary potential to cultivate deep awareness of and respect for difference – awareness of the sacrality of difference that inspires ethical visions and actions. To recognize the sacredness of difference runs counter to human tendencies to categorize, bifurcate, and denigrate “others.” Instead, sacred teaching honors difference as a reality and a gift. It recognizes the power of spiritual and social awakening to bring people closer to God (for those living in theistic frameworks) and closer to the heartbeat of the human family and the whole creation. Finally, it cultivates qualities and practices of radical compassion, openness, humility, and hope, which can contribute mightily to the capacity of people to live justly, compassionately, and peacefully in divided societies and contexts.

The three Abrahamic traditions emphasize the relationship of God with the sacredness of the world, which includes the sacredness of human beings and the dignity that flows from them into the world. They also emphasize the significance of the God-human relationship for ethical practice. Arthur Green (2003, 47) explicates the preciousness of every person from a Jewish perspective, “The person – each person – is an earthly replica or small repository of the fullness of divine energy and blessing.” In a similar spirit, Hanan Alexander makes a case that Jewish education is a reclaiming of goodness through a spiritual quest (2001). He thus emphasizes the close relationship between spirituality and ethics (2004), and the importance of education that is shaped by pedagogies of difference and spirituality (2015). In Islamic traditions, John Valk, Halis Albavrak, and Mualla Selçuk (2017) explicate the Muslim emphases on the sacredness of life and the depths of human dignity, all in relation to social values, such as openness, equality, and environmental care (127-156). As noted above, I have earlier described Christian religious education as a sacramental practice of mediating God’s grace for the sake of human sanctification and the flourishing of all creation (Moore 2004, 221). These are pointers to the larger traditions of sacrality that awaken people to the values of sacred teaching and learning, and to the potential of differences to teach people to value and build a more just and compassionate world, especially where divisions tear people and lands apart.

These theological ideas are all urgent for public life. Valk, Albavrak, and Selçuk (2017) make a case for sacrality in relation to public action, arguing that human dignity and sacredness

of life evoke the values of equality and openness, which are critical in a democratic society. Similarly, Hanan Alexander, concerned with the “growing chasm among diverse religious, spiritual, cultural, political, and other orientations” seeks a way out of the morass by appealing to “the uniqueness, not uniformity, of each individual person” (2019, 421). He appeals to the recovery of humanism” (2019, 421; 2018). In so doing, Alexander does not appeal to the image of God, but that connection is developed well by others.

In both Jewish and Christian traditions, the image of God is central to being human; thus, people can actually experience God as they relate with others. The Jewish mystic Art Green says, “We encounter the Divine through relationship with another person” (2003, 47). This perspective leads to a simple but challenging idea. When you and I recognize the image of God in others and ourselves, we can proclaim that God’s creativity is alive in the human family, and God’s aliveness calls forth responsibility to care for one another. For Green, this insight speaks loudly of diversity, both in revelation and in the human expressions of revealed experiences:

Divine speech is made accessible to us only through the human vessel, one that embodies it and hides it at once. Human languages are many, each of them bespeaking the divine encounter in its own voice, hiding-revealing the One in its own way (116).

He goes on to say that the divine life is “open to all and goes beyond the language of any tradition” (ibid). His explanation is directly related to diversity: “The divine light shines on all without distinction; it is only the differences in our own cultural settings that make for religious difference ...” (ibid).

Rabbi Green speaks boldly to the consequences of such thinking in relation to interreligious understanding. He asks the question:

Can we imagine a God so arbitrary as to choose one nation, one place, and one moment in human history in which the eternal divine will was to be manifest for all time? ...

How can a God who visits only Israel deliver a message for all of humanity whose spiritual traditions have nothing to do with Sinai and its legacy? (118-119)

Green’s view is particularly significant in this discussion because he draws deeply from the Torah, the rabbis of old, and the spiritual experiences deep within Judaism.

In Christianity, the emphasis on *imago Dei* arises from Genesis 1:26-27: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness;’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’” (NRSV). Here the focus is on God’s creation; the plural nature of human creation (“according to *our* likeness” and “in the image of God he created *them*”); and the responsibility given to human beings as a result of being created in the image of God. Theologians over the millennia have emphasized different interpretations, and these include Martin Luther’s accent on human responsibility for creation; Elizabeth Johnson’s and Rosemary Radford Ruether’s questioning of the image of God as male; Jurgen Motlmann’s insistence on the connection between the image of God and human rights; and Pamela Lightsey’s (2015) declaration that Black queer women are created in the image of God, as is *everyone*. What is important to all of these is that God created humanity in God’s image to be in relationship with God and creation; to be treasured as sacred beings; and to be stewards of God’s creation.

Human life is also considered sacred in Islam, as found in the Quran in which dignity is attributed to all humans, understood as an inherent right; thus, Muslims often identify human dignity as the base for human rights. Masataka Takeshita (1982, 111) describes the complexity of these ideas in Islam, in which the idea of God creating Adam in God's own image has raised some confusion. To address this challenge, he turns to the theologian Ibn 'Arabi, who distinguishes between the image of God in sense perception and the image of God as paradigm. To speak of the image of God "means that God Himself is the paradigm of man and the universe" (1982, 118). Ibn 'Arabi thus identifies human knowledge of the self with knowledge of the universe and with knowledge of God, both of which emanate from Allāh (120). Takashita connects this idea with the hadith, "Whoever knows himself knows his Lord ..." (120). This means that God is the paradigm of human beings and the universe, including the riches of human differences. For Ibn 'Arabi, this also means that to know self is to know God, but not to hold *all* knowledge of God: "the God which we can know through our self-knowledge is different from the absolute transcendent God which has no image nor positive attributes (120-121).

One finds more attention to the image of God in the mystical Muslim traditions of Sufism, but I have shared only briefly here. My intention is to offer sufficient complexity to indicate that Christian, Jewish, and Muslim views of the image of God are not the same, but they similarly point to the sacred dignity of human beings. With such an emphasis on the sacrality of human lives and their dignity, the grounds are cultivated for emphasizing human rights, the sacred value of each and all beings, and the sacred responsibilities that they carry. The emphasis is on gift – God's gift of sacredness, which people do not earn but receive, albeit with high expectations for people to live faithfully with God and all of God's creation. This is itself a sacred task, calling people to appreciate the sacred in themselves and recognize the sacred in every other person. Such a theological orientation leads naturally to sacred, revolutionary pedagogy.

Practicing Sacred, Revolutionary Pedagogy in a World of Diversities

The traditions presented briefly above communicate deep connections between sacrality and the capacity to live compassionately and justly with others in the human family and in God's larger family of creation. These traditions are deep streams from which flow the personal, social, and revolutionary values of sacred teaching. We turn now to religionists and psychologists who emphasize the importance of drawing from the deepest roots of one's tradition in ways that respect differences and serve the wellbeing of all people and creatures.

Consider, for example, the social activist David Jaffe (2016), who discovered that activism leads nowhere if not nourished by spiritual roots, at least for him. This led him to the study of Torah and immersion in Jewish practices so his activism would be rooted more deeply in the sacred. Similarly, Dorothee Soelle (2001) discovered that mysticism and spiritual experience are at the root of radical living, and Katie Geneva Cannon (1995) found life and courage to reshape ethics from her roots in the Black church and with the wisdom of Black women. Eboo Patel (2013) claimed his place in social transformation by reclaiming his Muslim roots and engaging directly with the challenges of diversity. Ada María Isasi-Díaz (2005) turned to Latina women to anchor her wisdom and courage, and Thomas Porter (2010) found his way in

conflict transformation and restorative justice by studying the ways of Jesus. These are a very few classic figures, but they point the way to sacred and revolutionary transformation, a cornerstone for education.

Consider also the work of educators and psychologists, who have focused on the sacred in religious learning and public witness (Patel 2013; Alexander 2004, 2017; LeTran 2017). Their research illumines connections between a sense of the sacred and a welcoming engagement with diversity, not as a source of novelty, but as a source of life and revolutionary practices of human community. Psychological research in relational psychology informs this further, revealing the role of humility in cultivating commitments to social justice and intercultural competence (Bell, Sandage, Morgan, and Hauge 2017) and the especially challenging and unique forms of cultural humility engaged by people of color (Moon and Sandage 2019). Further, psychological research in relational spirituality reveals a close relationship between spiritual depth and a mature sense of alterity in ministry leaders (Choi, West, Sandage, and Bell 2018).

All of these studies, emerging from diverse disciplines, cultures, and religious communities, point back to the importance of dignity in encounters with difference and in the birth of honest hope. Encounters with difference can be very superficial, leading either to a reveling in diversity or to judgments on beliefs, values, or practices different from those of oneself and one's people. While curiosity can draw people into relationships, it is never enough to touch the sacred fibers of human relationships. While the practice of making judgments is a critical dimension of human relationships and serves to guide ethical practice, it does not serve well as the beginning or end of human relationships.

What people need is encounters with difference that begin and end with dignity. Donna Hicks has been particularly important in highlighting the negative consequences when dignity is violated (2011), as well as the potential of "dignity consciousness" in leadership (2018). More recently, she has underscored the ways in which dignity plays a role in conflict transformation and building human connections (2019). Reflections on dignity circle back to theologies of the image of God. When Judaism, Christianity, and Islam recognize the strong emphases on God's creation of human beings in the image of God, they open the way to recognize dignity in themselves and in others – even in the most feared and antagonizing others. Such dignity consciousness does not magically resolve hard issues, but it offers a starting place, a cornerstone. It also opens paths to sacred teaching that honors the image of God in everyone and creates space for a raw and honest search for hope. Out of these movements, revolutionary changes can be wrought.

I conclude with an experiment in building on my earlier work in sacred teaching. As described above, I have been aware that I am not yet finished with the work I did in *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (2004), so I return to it. I especially want to explore the potential of sacred teaching as an interreligious phenomenon, and as a practice that contributes to human engagement with the most pressing of our planet. Thus, I turn to the six movements of education that I identified in that book, testing the potential of these movements, especially in divided contexts, to cultivate radical compassion, openness, humility, and hope. For the sake of focus, I will develop these practices briefly in relation to immigration and the seemingly intractable

global issues that magnify human oppression, violations of human rights, and threats to wellbeing.

- (1) Expecting the Unexpected – The unexpected is God’s surprising movements in the midst of turmoil. With an “image of God” frame, people might expect not only for God to break into the dualistic, “us vs them” debates over immigration, but for people created in the image of God to break through with wisdom not yet expressed or valued. Such breakthroughs can awaken people to the gifts (and not just challenges) of difference and can spark creativity to imagine alternatives beyond the restrictive, life-destroying policies that are presently practiced in many national and communal settings around the world.
- (2) Remembering the Dismembered – To explore the “issues” of immigration and migration, people need to awaken to the realities of “the dismembered,” the victims of ill treatment and harsh policies. Much study is needed into migrations of the past, as recorded in religious texts, history books, and patterns of human life from the Bronze Age forward. People also need to study the migrations of the past 50 years and give special attention to those who suffered most from the migrations themselves and from the conditions that forced the movements of people from one country or region to another. People need to know more than facts and figures because the large, data-documented patterns of migration are inscribed in human lives and passed down for generations. Thus, sacred teaching also involves listening closely to human stories of oppression, fear, and loss.
- (3) Seeking Reversals – To seek reversals is to give great attention to immigrants, refugees, policy makers, and policy enforcers to ponder their wisdom, hurts, and fears and potentially break open stereotypes and discover countercultural and alternative views of policies and actions. Seeking reversals can reshape the very practices of engaging people in conflict, even in violent, situations. The practice can include fresh, questioning readings of religious texts and traditions for “reversal” wisdom. It can include gatherings of “enemies” to do the hard work of listening to deep hurts and of seeking new options for change.
- (4) Giving Thanks – To give thanks is to recognize the movements of God in the midst of the hardest situations of conflict over immigration and to see movements of God also through people seeking to bear love and justice, even in very different, oppositional ways. Giving thanks is a discipline that awakens people to the smallest and most obscure gifts in a situation. It awakens people to Divine presence in hard conversations and interactions, which can potentially open eyes to the harshness in immigrants’ life situations, the fears of people who have long lived in a country or region, and the prejudices that exacerbate the situation for all.
- (5) Nourishing Life – To nourish life is to act with compassion for all persons caught in the web of immigration – to care for basic needs of food, shelter, health care, and family and communal relationships. Sacred teaching is a way to identify those needs and create pathways for responding and nourishing human lives. Sacred teaching nourishes life within and far beyond local communities for the sake of honoring and caring for the sacred in God’s creation.
- (6) Reconstructing Community and Repairing the World – Finally, sacred teaching asks people to explore and act toward radical transformation, both within local communities and in response to an aching world. If human beings are created in God’s image, their revolutionary analyses and actions will be reflections of God’s work, though permeated by the limitations of human compassion, knowledge, and courage. People will thus

communicate, distort, and miscommunicate the stirrings of God. At the same time, people need to attend closely, engage, correct, and move beyond the limits of any person's or group's perspective, recognizing the dignity of each, even while critiquing, upturning, and reconstructing the paths proposed. As reflections of the Divine, people deserve the listening and recognition of others; they also deserve in-depth engagement with people whose views and actions are quite different from their own. Such engagement has to be exercised in ways that disrupt the power of some over others and the focus only on persons in power positions. What is needed is awareness of Divine presence and movements in and around the people themselves, made possible by practices and attitudes that open space for God to lure the community beyond the limits of any one or any group. What is needed finally is for communities to live toward a more just approach to immigration and the human lives that are at stake.

In the context of our REA discussions, I look forward to the wisdom of colleagues and the opportunity to learn, correct, and reshape the insights shared in this essay. The stakes are indeed high as we live in a world that fears difference and uses it as a wedge to build power and thus to oppress human beings and their communities and even the ecosystem that are precious gifts from God.

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Contingency Sensitivity as Basis of Religious Education in Plural Societies

1. Introduction
2. Primary Features and Basic Conditions of Religious Education in Schools in Austria
3. Common Starting Points for Interreligious Cooperation from a Muslim and Christian Perspective
4. Principles of a Contingency-Sensitive Religious Education
5. Concluding Remarks
6. References

1. Introduction

In recent years, the situation and role of religious education in European countries has rapidly changed. Above all, migration and globalization has contributed to increasing religious plurality and diversity of worldviews in Europe. In Austria, the number of people who feel overwhelmed by these changes has been on the rise, and uncertainty is continuously gaining larger parts of the society. This development also poses new challenges for religious education, the management of which is of enormous importance for the preservation of a pluralistic democratic society. Above all, it requires innovative conceptions of and approaches to religious education, which are able to deal constructively with religious pluralism.

An example of such an approach is the concept of a contingency-sensitive religious education, which will be illustrated in the present paper. Building on previous research, I will outline the content-related and methodological prerequisites that are indispensable for developing an inter-religious pedagogy that values and promotes religious diversity and plurality of worldviews. With this approach, diversity should not be understood as a threat, but instead recognized as an enrichment and the foundation of an open democratic society.

Religious education constitutes an important component of education in the sense of the German term 'Bildung'. Despite existing differences regarding perspectives and approaches (about, from, in), schools and religious institutions in various countries offer religious education as a subject in most cases. In Austria and Germany, the principle of denominational religious education at school prevails. For this reason, religious education in these countries had been offered for a long time only by the two major Christian churches. As a result, religious education had been almost entirely Christian dominated and focusing on the inner perspective. Ecumenism was only occasionally discussed in order to bring the Christian denominations closer together and to strengthen denominational religious education in public schools, which had been increasingly questioned in light of the social changes initiated in the 1960s.

More recently, however, this situation has been rapidly changing in some European countries. Above all, migration and globalization have contributed to the increase in religious plurality and diversity of worldviews in Europe. This new situation has overwhelmed many people and led to uncertainties in society. Additionally, the many religiously motivated terrorist attacks in recent years have intensified already existing fears and skepticism towards plurality and otherness.

This development also poses new challenges for religious education. Managing and overcoming the fears and skepticism towards plurality is of enormous importance for the preservation of a democratic society. Above all, it requires innovative conceptions of religious education, which – despite, or perhaps because of, their religious affiliation – not only tolerate plurality, but also consider it to be important prerequisites for or constitutive elements of possible trans-religious education and cultivate them from their own sources.

An example of such an approach is the concept of contingency-sensitive religious education, on which I shall in the present paper. It is an approach that is fundamentally committed to denominational religious education at school. It stands out for its openness to dialogue with other traditions, religious beliefs and worldviews.

My paper is based on the joint interreligious research and teaching that we have accomplished at the Institute for Islamic Theology and Religious Education together with our colleagues from the Department of Catholic Religious Education at the University of Innsbruck over the past couple of years. As a first step, I shall start by outlining the main features of religious education at school in Austria. Following that, as a second step, I will deal with the epistemological foundations of a plural religious education. This is because interreligious cooperation requires reaching an understanding with the religious counterpart regarding mutual starting points in anthropology, theology, and education. In this context, I will discuss similarities and differences between Christian (Catholic) and Muslim perspectives. Special attention will be paid to the image of mankind, createdness, human dignity, reason, theology and education.

In a third step, principles of contingency-sensitive religious education will be presented. In this context, the task of religious education is to deal with contingency in such a way that the consciousness of one's own limitations is not judged as deficient, but is instead rendered productive. Unlike an understanding of religion that is focused on coping with contingency, contingency acknowledgement and contingency encounter open up new religious philosophical and theological points of view and perspectives.¹ Recognition of contingencies and initiation of encounters can be labeled as contingency sensitivity or possibility sensitivity.

Of particular importance for contingency sensitivity is the understanding of truth. Particularly in the interreligious context, the concept of truth, as well as the claims associated with it, are continually present and are employed in argumentation, or (tacitly) presupposed.² In this context, many questions arise, such as, among others, the following: Is every religion 'true'? Do the 'truths' of different religions include or exclude one another? How can different 'truths' and truth claims

¹ Cf. Wuchterl, Kurt 2011: *Kontingenz oder das Andere der Vernunft. Zum Verhältnis von Philosophie, Naturwissenschaft und Religion*. Stuttgart, 40; Kraml, Martina 2013: *Dissertation gestalten im Raum der Möglichkeiten. Eine theologiedidaktische Studie zu Dissertationsprozessen mit besonderer Aufmerksamkeit auf die Entwicklung empirischer Forschung* (unpublished postdoctoral thesis). Innsbruck, 499.

² Cf. Sejdini, Zekirija / Kraml, Martina / Scharer, Matthias 2017: *Mensch werden. Grundlagen einer interreligiösen Religionspädagogik und –didaktik aus muslimisch-christlicher Perspektive*. Stuttgart, 116.

coexist or exist alongside one another? Whether interreligious collaboration can be made fruitful for all depends on our understanding of truth and how we deal with truth claims.³ Therefore, an examination of this topic in the context of a possibility sensitive interreligious religious pedagogy and religious didactics is essential.

2. Primary Features and Basic Conditions of Religious Education in Schools in Austria

The foundation stone of religious education in Austria was laid with the signing of the Concordat by the Holy See and the State in the year 1933. The Catholic Church was thus guaranteed the right to offer denominational religious instruction in all public primary and secondary schools in Austria, to impose religious exercises on Catholic students, to supervise and guide religious instruction and to appoint teachers of religious education.⁴ Until today, the Concordat has served as a benchmark for the relationship between the Austrian State and all state-recognized religious communities.

In Austria, sixteen churches and religious societies are currently recognized, according to their legal names, including the Islamic Religious Community in Austria (IGGÖ). As a result of this recognition, the Islamic religious society has also been endowed with the right to offer its own denominational religious education. It has been offered in Austria since the school year 1982/83.⁵

Denominational religious education is offered in public schools throughout Austria. It takes place as a compulsory subject in the context of public school education and is funded by the state. Students can opt out of religious education, or can be withdrawn from it by their parents, if they are under the age of fourteen. The religious community is responsible for appointing teachers and issuing curricula, as well as the inspection, supervision, content and methodology of religious education. Religious education is supervised by the state exclusively when it comes to school organizational and disciplinary aspects.⁶ Religious education teachers are trained in confessional pedagogical colleges (KPH) or universities. New Teacher Education – PädagoginnenbildungNeu — has strengthened cooperation among pedagogical colleges, which are responsible for primary education, and universities, which are responsible for secondary education.

³ Cf. Sejdini, Zekirija 2016a: Zwischen Gewissheit und Kontingenz. Auf dem Weg zu einem neuen Verständnis von islamischer Theologie und Religionspädagogik im europäischen Kontext. In: id. (ed.): Islamische Theologie und Religionspädagogik in Bewegung. Neue Ansätze in Europa. Bielefeld, 15-31.

⁴ Cf. Khorchide, Mouhanad 2009a: Der islamische Religionsunterricht in Österreich (ÖIF-Dossier No. 5). Vienna, 16.

⁵ Cf. Strobl, Anna 2005: Der österreichische Islam. Entwicklung, Tendenzen, Möglichkeiten. In: SWS-Rundschau (Vol. 45, No. 4), 520-543, here 524.

⁶ Cf. Khorchide, Mouhanad 2009b: Der islamische Religionsunterricht zwischen Integration und Parallelgesellschaft. Einstellungen der islamischen ReligionslehrerInnen an öffentlichen Schulen. Wiesbaden, 43-49.

Interreligious forms of education do not exist due to the principle of religious denomination. The extent to which interfaith learning plays a role in curricula and in religious education depends on the faith community and the individual teacher. Due to the expanding need for interreligious collaboration, particularly in the field of education, and the related demands of a religiously plural society, interreligious collaboration has been taking place at the University of Innsbruck for several years, with components of the curricula of Catholic and Muslim religious education being held together.

It has been determined that interreligious collaboration takes place at different levels and includes various areas. On the one hand, it covers two internships in religious pedagogical education, each of which includes accompanying training courses both in schools and at universities. On the other hand, there is an interreligious cooperation in numerous religious didactic courses.⁷ Additionally, both Catholic and Muslim students have the opportunity to attend courses that teach authentically about the theological foundations of the other religion.

In addition to many other factors that shape this collaboration in teaching and research, a contingency-sensitive and opportunity oriented approach to educational processes is a central principle that is particularly relevant in terms of religious education and didactics. The basis and the characteristics of this principle, will be explained in the following sections.

3. Common Starting Points for Interreligious Cooperation from a Muslim and Christian Perspective

The legal situation in Austria, as already indicated, led to the fact that the denominational form of religious education established itself and religious education is understood and operated denominationally. In view of the already described increase in religious and ideological plurality, the question arises regarding how the associated organizational and content challenges can be overcome. On the one hand, given the ever-increasing number of recognized faith communities, it is becoming more and more difficult for schools to offer adequate space to different denominations. On the other hand, confessionality, which is required by law, must be re-understood and re-interpreted under the current conditions, so that, despite its attachment to religious authorities, it provides a solid basis.

Our previous research in this area has shown above all that, for an interreligious perspective in denominational religious education, like ours, it is first necessary to achieve an understanding of, or a minimum consensus on certain key issues, which can be expanded or refined as a result of the

⁷ Cf. Kraml, Martina / Sejdini, Zekirija (eds.) 2018: *Interreligiöse Bildungsprozesse. Empirische Einblicke in Schul- und Hochschulkontexte*. Stuttgart.

process. This is not an easy task. Although interreligious work is now also booming in education, it requires a preliminary understanding of certain topics and terms in order to enable meaningful interreligious learning. The urgency of this step soon became clear in the course of our interreligious collaboration between Catholic and Islamic religious education.

In order to limit the sheer variety of concepts that could be dealt with in this context, we have looked at certain topics that, from our point of view, have a fundamental character for a pluralistic religious education and are therefore indispensable. They include anthropological and theological questions. It is crucial to clarify which human image and understanding of createdness, human dignity and reason, as well as which theological and educational understanding are necessary, so that interreligious educational processes have a chance to succeed. In what follows, common starting points of interreligious cooperation from a Muslim and Christian perspective are presented.

Image of Mankind

An important topic area in this context is anthropology and the underlying image of mankind. Since the image of mankind implicitly or explicitly forms the basis of every intended and unintended educational process, how to educate a person is very closely related to what people understand. The question of the essence of man arises in different scientific disciplines and can therefore be examined from different perspectives. Since this article is about interreligious education, the focus is on theological anthropology. In this context, the question arises as to which images of mankind should be assumed, so that a framework can be created that enables the initiation and cultivation of interreligious educational processes. Following the basic tenets of Catholic and Islamic theology, we have agreed that, above all, createdness, human dignity, and reason are central aspects that play an important role in both religious traditions and need therefore a common framework to make the interreligious education processes successful.

Createdness

A basic anthropological experience that is shared by the Christian and Islamic traditions is the createdness of humankind and the world. In contrast to a naturalistic understanding of the world and humankind, religious people derive their insight from the belief that they are not living on their own, but rather are based in a reality that transcends the human being and the world. In different religions, a human being's existence is associated with the recognition of a divine reality in various ways. The transcendent reality is related to the human being and, at the same time, it is deprived of its access and remains the ultimate secret of life.

This is evident in the Qur’anic⁸ and Biblical texts. They tell of the creation of humankind and the world through the one and only God of free divine decision.⁹ Regardless of how differently the source texts on God’s creation have been and will be interpreted within these religions and between them, the recognition of a good creation of man and of the world is a fundamental connection between them.

The biblical texts, from different times and places and in different literary forms, tell of the free and good creation of God. The core of the biblical understanding of human beings, which is metaphorically expressed in the texts of creation, is the image of the breath of God (*ruach*) in the human being. God breathes his breath into the ‘earthling’, making him a living human being (see Gen. 2:7). The relatedness of man cannot be expressed more primordially: God breathes and lives in him.

Human being’s createdness is also of central importance in Islamic anthropology. In a world in which everything (apart from God) is contingent, that is, possible and not necessary, and thus fundamentally different from God as a necessary being, the connection to the Creator constitutes an important anthropological basis from the Islamic point of view. God created human beings from different elements and the creation had to go through several development stages¹⁰ before it became a being by breathing in the Divine Spirit.¹¹ Thus, the creation transformed, from a pure, wet clay mass, or from a physical into a spiritual being, in other words, into a ‘new human being’, who is endowed with Divine Spirit and mental and spiritual faculties and to which nothing needs to be added.¹² The breath of the Divine Spirit filled the mere form with life and gave it the potential to be used as a governor (*khalifa*)¹³ of God. This is also the basis of the special position of human beings within all of creation.

Human Dignity

From the theological-anthropological perspective, createdness is based on the relationship between the creator and the creature. This also establishes the dignity of man. From Muslim and Christian perspectives alike, human dignity as an anthropological basis is beyond question.¹⁴ Thus, in the Christian as well as in the Muslim sources, numerous passages are found in which the dignity of

⁸ For citations from the Qur’an, the translation and commentaries of Muhammad Asad (Asad, Muhammad 2011: Die Botschaft des Koran. Übersetzung und Kommentar [2nd ed.] Ostfildern) were consulted.

⁹ Cf. Qur’an, 2:30-35; cf., among others, both creation texts, Gen. 1:1-2, 4 and Gen. 2:4-25, and the so-called Creation Psalm 104.

¹⁰ Cf. Qur’an, 15:26; 32:7; 76:1-2; 96:2.

¹¹ Cf. Qur’an, 38:72; 32:9; 15:29.

¹² Cf. Hajatpour, Reza 2014: Mensch und Gott. Von islamisch-philosophischen Menschenbildern. In: Behr, Harry Harun / Ulfat, Fahimah (eds.): Zwischen Himmel und Erde. Bildungsphilosophische Verhältnisbestimmungen von Heiligem Text und Geist. Münster, 77-90, here 79.

¹³ Cf. Qur’an, 2:30.

¹⁴ Cf. Bielefeldt, Heiner 2015: Menschenrechte in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft. Plädoyer für einen aufgeklärten Multikulturalismus. Bielefeld, 41.

man – and the equal dignity of man and woman – are highlighted. Some of them specifically address the topic of dignity, while others can be interpreted as such. The central passage of the Qur'an, which can be understood as a direct indication of the divinely given dignity of all people, is found in Sura 17:70.

In addition to this central point, there are many other references in the Qur'an that point to the dignity of man, including the creation of man in the best possible form (32:7), the breathing in of the divine spirit (32:9) and the appointment of man as God's governor on earth (2:30) (see Sejdini 2019).

The Bible also contains a rich body of statements about human dignity. Genesis 1:27 states that man is God's image. This depiction contains the inalienable dignity of man. According to Psalm 8, man is endowed by God with "glory and honor": "You have made him little less than God" (Ps. 8:6). In the New Testament and in the Christian tradition in general, it is the attitude adopted by Jesus to encounter and identify people, especially the disadvantaged and the persecuted ones. It is he who restores the trampled dignity of men and women (Lk. 7:36-50, Lk. 19:1-10, John 8:1-11, and others). The double commandment of love (Mt. 22:36-40) also expresses the value of a human being. This concerns the dignity of women and men in the same way.

To summarize, it can be said that the respect for human dignity and the recognition of human rights are inseparable. They are a fundamental requirement for the equal rights of all people and thus also form the basis of any (interreligious) education.

Reason

In the same manner as the createdness and dignity of a human being, reason also plays a central role in theological anthropology and thus represents an important prerequisite for interreligious religious pedagogical and didactic concepts. The scriptures of both religions show that reason is an essential human characteristic that determines relationship and constructs and expresses relatedness. Therefore, reason is above all a prerequisite for communication. Theologically, it enables people to communicate with God, fellow human beings and the natural environment. This empowerment enables people not only to receive the divine message passively, but also to be addressed, to respond and to participate. This communication is not limited to individuals' relationship to God, but it also applies to the human community as a whole. Thus, humans are challenged to communicate with each other, to gain new insights and, in turn, to use their newly acquired knowledge to improve their living together. The Qur'an encourages therefore people to use reason.¹⁵

The Bible refers less explicitly to reason and instead more directly to understanding, insight, etc. By analogy, one could view the creation of man in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and man's duty

¹⁵ Cf. Qur'an, 2:164, 39:9, 2:44, 59:2.

to take care of life and the world (Gen. 1:28) as a mission to use his reason to give all creatures a good life. By reason, or rational action, the Bible understands, above all, the orientation of life towards God, or actions that are directed towards God. Therefore, the biblical text rarely makes a distinction between reason and faith.

According to the Qur'an, God, the Creator, created man in the best of forms, breathed His own spirit into him, endowed him with dignity and appointed him governor of the earth. In addition, man, according to the Qur'an, was given the most varied capacities for the administration of and proper dealings with his environment, to which, in particular, the mind belongs.¹⁶ The core of Islamic anthropology with religious pedagogical relevance are the verses in the second Sura (2:30-34), which deal with the creation of Adam and God's conversation with the angels about his purpose.¹⁷ Man is portrayed in these Qur'an verses as a peculiar being who – despite his potential to cause mischief which has also been recognized by the angels – is entrusted by God, on account of the peculiarities given to him by God, with the honorable task of serving as God's governor on earth. Although there are differing ideas about what characterizes human dignity, it is important to note in our context that human dignity, regardless of man's potential for mischief mentioned above, is something substantial and inviolable to every human being.¹⁸

Moreover, man is described in the above-mentioned verses of the Qur'an as a being capable of learning. According to Muhammad Asad, "knowledge of all names" referred to in them, denotes man's capacity for "logical definition and thus conceptual thinking"¹⁹. Kenneth Cragg also sees in the Qur'anic account mentioned above signs of human being's superiority over angels, since, according to him, naming is a classic Semitic representation that is characteristic of sovereignty.²⁰

The special position of humans within the creation constitutes an appreciation of humans, but it is also associated with a great responsibility towards God, since creation has been entrusted to humans and they are held accountable for their dealings with creation in the Hereafter. Cragg expresses it clearly when referring to the Qur'an as "privilege", "trust", and "gift", rather than "possession", "prerogative", or "right"²¹.

¹⁶ Cf. Sura 39:9.

¹⁷ More on the topic of Islamic Anthropologie can be found in the following publications: Hajatpour, Reza 2013: *Vom Gottesentwurf zum Selbstentwurf. Die Idee der Perfektibilität in der islamischen Existenzphilosophie.* Freiburg; Renz, Andreas 2002: *Der Mensch unter dem An-Spruch Gottes. Offenbarungsverständnis und Menschenbild des Islam im Urteil gegenwärtiger christlicher Theologie.* Würzburg; Wielandt, Rotraud 1994: *Der Mensch und seine Stellung in der Schöpfung. Zum Grundverständnis islamischer Anthropologie.* In: Bsteh, Andreas / Hagemann, Ludwig (eds.): *Der Islam als Anfrage an christliche Theologie und Philosophie. Referate – Anfragen - Diskussionen,* Mödling, 97–105; Bouman, Johan 1989: *Gott und Mensch im Koran. Eine Strukturform religiöser Anthropologie anhand des Beispiels Allah und Muhammad* (2nd ed.). Darmstadt; Habibi, Muhammad 'Aziz Al 2010: *Der Mensch: Zeuge Gottes. Entwurf einer islamischen Anthropologie,* Freiburg i.Br.

¹⁸ Cf. Sura 17:70.

¹⁹ Cf. Asad 2011, 34-35.

²⁰ Cf. Cragg, Kenneth 1968: *The Privilege of Man. A Theme in Judaism, Islam and Christianity.* London, 28.

²¹ Cf. Cragg, Kenneth 1999: *Readings in the Qur'an.* Brighton, 73.

Theology

The foregoing section has repeatedly referred to the reason why the understanding of theology is necessary for interreligious educational processes to be successful. The first question is the specificity of the theological. In many cases, a purely substantive material understanding is associated with it. That is, the theological is understood as a clearly circumscribable and explicitly religious subject area, such as, for example, beliefs, explicit theological concepts, religious rites, actions of the church or religious community, etc. Such an understanding is too brief from the point of view of an experiential religious education, as the interreligious cooperation at the University of Innsbruck defines itself. In this point of view, the theological is found more in the perspective of taking a look at something.

When it comes to content orientation, the question of God is at the center of theological attention. It is in the background of any theological and thus also of any religious educational debate. The question of God may take different forms, depending on how God is addressed, or how we think he can be addressed. The way in which the question of God is determined in terms of content always has to do with the question of man and his situation. It is therefore about a theology, which is linked to humanity and not exclusively to what the teachings on faith, doctrine or tradition envision, but instead to the human being with his needs, longings and hopes. One consequence of this is that the goal of theology should be a good life for all people.

Basically, theology is to be understood as a science that cannot count on ‘safe ground’ and ‘solid houses’. It must not take the place of the truths of faith and should always only understand knowledge as such. In this sense, theology could be characterized more by a questioning of scientific nature and – as Fritz Simon formulated it – by being aware that knowledge limits the sense of possibility.²² In spite of all these peculiarities, subjectivity, and provisional nature, theology is nonetheless challenged: its scientific character in the sense of traceability and intersubjective verifiability of findings and results has to be maintained.²³

Education

In addition to anthropological and theological approaches, the understanding of education also forms one of the foundations of interreligious religious education or religious didactics. It raises the question as to how we understand the term ‘education’ and how it relates to what we have previously discussed.

Thus, we begin fundamentally from a broad, complex and process-oriented understanding of education, which includes one’s own self, the relationship with others, the examination of the

²² Cf. Simon, Fritz 1999: Die Kunst, nicht zu lernen. Und andere Paradoxien in Psychotherapie, Management, Politik. Heidelberg, 133, 157.

²³ Cf. Schärtl, Thomas 2004: Wahrheit und Gewissheit. Zur Eigenart religiösen Glaubens. Kevelaer, 164.

purpose, the objective content and the surrounding context.²⁴ According to Reinhold Boschki, religious education is both a way and a goal:

“A way since the creative and existential engagement with traditional religious forms and content is a process that affects the human person as a whole. The goal is religious education insofar as it is oriented towards religious maturity, self-determination and self-responsibility of the learning subjects.” (Boschki 2017: 78)

Crucial for the interreligious character of education is an educational understanding that is relationship-oriented and deals with the other. Rainer Kokemohr views education as “a process [...] that is challenged by a foreign claim.”²⁵ Similarly, the idea of the ‘boundary’ in the context of education includes: education happens in stepping out, in opening, in risk-taking, in encounter and relationship with the other person and in allowing oneself to be subjected to the self-assertion of the other. Wherever we reach our limits, we are confronted with the unfamiliar, the unknown, the unavailable and the uncertain.²⁶ It increases the contradiction and resistance that renders one’s own blind spots visible. Just confrontation with it opens up the possibility of “creative experiences”²⁷. Henning Luther, quoting Paul Tillich, speaks of the fact that the border is “the truly fertile place of recognition”²⁸. By contrast, an uneducated person, who does not expose him- or herself to encounters and confrontations on the edge/at the border, or who has not been exposed to them, can easily be ‘coded’ and manipulated in such a way that independent thinking and the rationalization of one’s own interactions disintegrate or are never constructed.²⁹

4. Principles of a Contingency-Sensitive Religious Education

Following the anthropological foundations and the understandings of theology and education, fundamental principles of a contingency-sensitive religious education characterizing interreligious collaboration at the University of Innsbruck will be presented. For this purpose, I will set forth three central aspects: firstly, the difference between coping with contingency and...; secondly,

²⁴ Cf. Lederer, Bernd 2012: Kompetenz oder Bildung? Eine Analyse jüngerer Konnotationsverschiebungen des Bildungsbegriffs und Plädoyer für eine Rück- und Neubesinnung auf ein transinstrumentelles Bildungsverständnis. Innsbruck, 309-311.

²⁵ Kokemohr, Rainer 2007: Bildung als Welt- und Selbstentwurf im Anspruch des Fremden. In: Koller, Hans-Christoph / Marotzki, Winfried / Sanders, Olaf (eds.): Bildungsprozesse und Fremdheitserfahrung. Beiträge zu einer Theorie transformatorischer Bildungsprozesse. Bielefeld, 13-68, here 14.

²⁶ Cf. Kraml, Martina 2003: Grenzgänge. In: Scharer, Matthias / Kraml, Martina (eds.): Vom Leben herausgefordert. Praktisch-theologisches Forschen als kommunikativer Prozess. Mainz, 159-179.

²⁷ Schratz, Michael / Schwarz, Johanna / Westfall-Greiter, Tanja (eds.) 2012: Lernen als bildende Erfahrung. Vignetten in der Praxisforschung. Innsbruck.

²⁸ Luther, Henning 1992: Religion und Alltag. Bausteine einer Praktischen Theologie des Subjekts. Stuttgart, 60.

²⁹ Cf. Arendt, Hannah 2011: Eichmann in Jerusalem. Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen. Munich, 56.

dealing with truth and truth claims; and thirdly, contingency-sensitive approaches to religious education processes.

Coping with Contingency and Contingency Encounter

There are different understandings of contingency. First of all, it is possible to characterize two aspects of contingency. Quite often, especially in the classical logical sense, contingency is understood as a counterpart to the concept of necessity: contingent is that which is not necessary or could happen. This potential is linked to the real in many philosophical and theological directions: Something can be possible only if it can really be. In our understanding, we delimit ourselves and understand what is possible, regardless of what is real.

In the context of interreligious religious education and religious didactics, a further distinction must be addressed, which refers to dealing with contingency. With the boom of the concept of contingency in the second half of the 20th century, the notion of coping with contingency was particularly shaped with regard to the function of religion. According to Kurt Wuchterl, an attitude towards the fundamental recognition of the contingent and contingency for a life appropriate to man and his contexts is inevitable. However, he argues further, it should not remain at the mere appreciation level. Rather, people are challenged to encounter and enter into confrontation with contingency. Thus, in terms of religious philosophy, Kurt Wuchterl is interested in contingency encounter and not in coping with contingency.³⁰

Unlike an understanding of religion that is focused on coping with contingency and sees it as a central function of religion in society, appreciation of contingency and contingency encounter open up new religious-philosophical and theological perspectives. This religious-philosophical view of contingency leads directly to theology: in this sense, God is no longer the guarantor that contingencies will be removed, but instead would be the reason for human appreciation of contingency and human encounter with contingency. I refer to the appreciation of contingency and the encounter with contingency as contingency sensitivity or possibility sensitivity.

Truth and Truth Claims

Dealing with contingency in the sense of appreciativeness of contingency and contingency encounter touches on central questions of interreligious religious education and didactics. The position you take to answer these questions shows which option you chose: contingency denial or constructive contingency encounter.

In the interreligious context, the concept of truth and truth claims associated with it are constantly present and are used in argumentation or (tacitly) presupposed. The concept of truth or truths in plural raise many questions, such as, among others, the following: Is every religion ‘true’? Do the

³⁰ Cf. Wuchterl 2011, 40-42.

‘truths’ of different religions include or exclude those of the other religions? How can different ‘truths’ and truth claims exist in unison with or next to one another?

Whether interreligious cooperation can be made fruitful depends first and foremost on what understanding of truth is used and how truth claims are handled. Therefore, an examination of this topic in the context of a possibility-sensitive interreligious religious pedagogy and didactics is essential. In this context, ‘truth’ plays a crucial role: is one’s understanding of the truth absolutized, or are other approaches to the truth acknowledged?

First of all, it must be acknowledged that ‘truth’ is an ambivalent and ambiguously used word: we can speak of the truth from different scientific perspectives, such as, for example, the scientific, the philosophical or the theological truth. Even within the philosophical and theological perspectives, there are different theories and approaches to truth. In fact, individual thinkers and scientists are characterized by different or sometimes contradictory approaches. Thus, objectivist approaches assume that the truth can be seen by looking at the objective world and truth is found to be static, while others, such as for example constructivist understandings deny this, and conceive truth as a construct that depends on perspectives, locations, and contexts.

Our central concern in the development of interreligious religious education is not the definition of truth in terms of content, but the debate about the ways in which truth is claimed and represented in relation to the other. This makes questions of ethics and theology relevant.

From a theological point of view, we are less concerned with giving up or annulling truth claims. For example, Klaus von Stosch points out that the contingency of religious beliefs does not automatically mean that they are arbitrary.³¹ Consequently, the focus is less on relativizing one's own claims to truth, but rather on relativizing one's own claims to absoluteness. In this context, the emphasis on contingency should make the limitations, fragmentedness and provisional nature of human thought and action visible against the background of the question of truth.

From what has been said, it becomes clear that it is crucial to distinguish between truth and truth claims, and that truth claims are always perspectival and guided by certain interests. This implies that human ways of thinking, speaking and acting in relation to truth are power-laden. This ‘occupation with power’ is also carried out with the distinctions, classifications and categorizations, which in our view are unproblematic, if they are introduced and used unilaterally and with an essentialist and objectivist claim.

³¹ Vgl. von Stosch, Klaus 2003: Was sind religiöse Überzeugungen? In: Joas, Hans (ed.): Was sind religiöse Überzeugungen? Göttingen, 103-146, here 139.

When we look at the ambiguous sides of truth claims with the concerns of interreligious religious education, we must ask ourselves which truth concept is a prerequisite or which truth concept we must base our truth claims on, so that we can live and work together in an interreligious manner.

A characteristic of an interreligious, sensitive existential-theological concept of truth is the conviction that truth and certainty remain ultimately withdrawn from us. Milad Karimi describes this with the words “truth as longing”³². It means that speaking and thinking about existential truth always leaves a remnant that can never be captured and is unavailable. This conviction of the unavailability of the truth is not only a theoretical matter or a matter of consciousness, but also a matter of performative action. This addresses a central moment, namely the correspondence of content and form, which goes hand in hand with an attitude of credibility. ‘Truth’ can be said in a way and with an attitude that makes it unbelievable. All forms of indoctrination fall into this area. Anyone who preaches or explains God or the truth in a way that makes the search process for truth no longer visible and perceptible, avoids the truth. He or she lacks therefore humility towards the truth that we never have nor possess. This humility promotes the attitude of the constant seeker and makes the indispensable provisional nature of truth claims bearable.

Contingency-Sensitive Approaches to Religious Education Processes. Or: Living in the Borderland

One of the most important attitudes in the field of interreligious religious education and didactics is certainly the openness to the other, the unknown and the supposedly foreign. The conditions of learning undoubtedly include the courage to look beyond one’s own nose. This view requires courage, because it can create insecurity, uncertainty, and unpredictability regarding that which is one’s own. Even if this vacillation in one’s own belief or perspectives is indispensable for education in a pluralistic context, it is often seen as deficient. Especially in some religious and philosophical-theological contexts, which promote a ‘firm ground’ for undeniable personal competence, as well as one’s own undeniably secure body of knowledge, which distinguishes itself from others in every respect, including implicitly devaluing others.

However, in interreligious religious education and didactics the willingness to leave one’s own shore is a basic prerequisite for fruitful common work. On the one hand, this attitude makes it possible to get to know and understand the other, but on the other to be able to see one’s own from the perspective of new experiences and thus to recognize the potential or the limitations of one’s own perspective. For only when ‘other continents’ are discovered can ‘one’s own shore’ be adequately considered and categorized at a ‘global’ level: Those who have left their shores and found new opportunities to live in the midst of religious plurality and diversity of worldviews will appreciate the plurality of conceptions of life and religious approaches as expressions of liveliness

³² Karimi, Ahmad Milad 2016: Wahrheit ist Sehnsucht. „So wetteifert um die guten Dinge.“ In: Langthaler, Rudolf / Tück, Jan Heiner (eds.): „Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette“. Lessings Ringparabel – ein Paradigma für die Verständigung der Religionen heute? Freiburg i. Br., 278-292.

and enjoy it as a special gift from God. At the same time, one sometimes has the feeling of leaving an old homeland to enter a new territory. It can be frightening and lead to loneliness. Because there is a considerable difference between on the one hand those who think they know everything about religions and worldviews, but they stay in the ‘safe haven’ of their own beliefs, and on the other, those who are actually looking for new experiences in direct encounters with people of other religions and with other beliefs. The attitude of knowing everything (about the other) in the interreligious encounter and keeping it as clear as possible and under control should be opposed to an attitude that finds suitable expression and equilibrium based on Michael Nausner with the metaphor “living in the borderlands”³³.

Borderland is, however, not a closed territory or spiritual space. Rather, it is a network of the tracks and footprints all around it, including those of the ancestors. The fact that, in the present, a community can no longer presume “that cultures, ideologies or territories are homogenous entities that must be clearly divided”³⁴ is hereby taken into account.

Borders, even boundaries between denominations and religions, do not have to be understood as rigidly delimiting. Rather, they can be understood dynamically, opening up new spaces and possibilities. To move in the borderland, to consider the borderland as the actual homeland, transgress the boundaries of the other and undermines the superiority complex, which puts the self above the other. Such an attitude, in which new spaces open up in the borderland, is by no means free of fear. The encounter with the other is always a risk, especially in the interreligious realm. Despite all good will, excessive truth and control claims could hurt or muzzle the other. The sense of being able to be quite different in our own religion and among ourselves, while being at home in different religions, can overwhelm me and others more than most people, and perhaps I myself, think. Living in the borderland is therefore a risk, the outcome of which is highly uncertain. A contingent-sensitive attitude, which is associated with life in the borderland as a ‘new ground’, does not shy away from the risk of courageously approaching the unknown anew, which opens up the encounter of religions, despite all the fears associated with it.

5. Concluding Remarks

The plea for contingency-sensitive treatment as a prerequisite for interreligious work is novel. Especially in religious contexts, where the question of the truth dominates, there is a danger that this approach will be seen as a kind of dilution of one’s religion and will be rejected without further ado. In the following, one example is given to show difficulties but also some possibilities that

³³ Nausner, Michael 2013: Heimat als Grenzland. Territorien christlicher Subjektivität. In: Nehring, Andreas / Tiesch, Simon (eds.): Postkoloniale Theologien. Bibelhermeneutische und kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge. Stuttgart, 187-202.

³⁴ Nausner 2013, 202.

arise when a contingent-sensitive posture is adopted. Although a contingency-sensitive attitude at first glance appears to be extraordinary (especially in the religious field), it nevertheless represents a maxim of every theological and religious pedagogical reflection that sees its primary task in understanding one's own religion as a special way of being human. In this sense, Islam should also be understood as one of the outstanding possibilities and ways of "being human"³⁵. The fact that the development of contingency sensitivity, despite all the difficulties, is feasible, is demonstrated in an impressive way by the thoughts of a shaman. I would like to quote his words at the end of my contribution:

“Question: Why should one follow a spiritual path if one ends up with the knowledge that one knows nothing?

Shaman: There is a beauty in this kind of lack of knowledge. It is a conscious lack of knowledge and not an ignorant one. And, over time, you get to a point where you make friends with the idea that you do not know anything. You have evolved so far that this lack of knowledge is actually a pleasure since it leaves you open to constantly expanding your perception. It's like a dance to be steady and open at the same time. It is a really interesting dance, since it is a skill. Everyone can learn a skill, but this type of skill is very hard to learn because it is so contrary to our usual way of thinking. You have to accept that you basically know nothing and are satisfied with it. In this way, you always remain open to mystery. In my view, that's what every good spiritual path should teach.”³⁶

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³⁵ Smith, Wilfred C. 1981: *On understanding Islam*. The Hague, 12.

³⁶ Kalisch, Sven 2010: *Religion und Gewissheit – Anmerkungen zu einem epistemologischen Problem und eine schamanische Lösung*. In: *Werbick, Jürgen / id. / von Stosch, Klaus (eds.): Verwundete Gewissheit. Strategien zum Umgang mit Verunsicherung in Islam und Christentum*. Paderborn, 31-52, here 51.

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The Ecology of Religious Education to Consider Carefully the Pedagogy of Difference in the Korean Context

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Abstract

This study aims to consist of a human rights education program for children to encourage teacher-child interactions as liturgical practices in light of the pedagogy of difference. The liturgical practice for children means constitutive practices to reconstruct the relationship between adults and children and then to produce a transcendental difference as God’s children in Christian faith lives. The researchers consist of the sacred and secular examples for the pedagogy of difference in Korean contextual environment, using the qualitative and quantitative studies.

The Pedagogy of Difference at Jangdaehyun School for North Korean Refugee Students in South Korea



Jangdaehyun School

The Jangdaehyun School in South Korea is the alternative school for the young refugees from North Korea. The Demilitarized Zone lined after the Korean War (1950-1953) divided currently the worldview, ideology, the way of life, traditions and customs between North and South Koreas.

The curriculum of the Jangdaehyun School focuses on the educational goal for young North Korean refugees to prepare the unified Korea. The Jangdaehyun School recognizes seriously the qualitative differences of culture, value, and ideology which young North Korean refugees experience in South Korean society in order to reestablish free North Korean society after the unification of North and South Korea. Therefore, the supplementary after school program and parent educational class by the Jangdaehyun considers carefully the pedagogy of cultural and ideological differences between North and South Korea in Christian educational environment on the basis of Ruth and Naomi's identity recovery program in the Bible. This identity recovery program will provide the Korean model of religious education as a pedagogy of difference to consider thoughtfully cultural, ideological, economical, and political diversity. Here the pedagogy of difference means an alternative way of life to initiate and respect learners' liberal choices in mutual encountering between the self and the other (Alexander 2015, 136-137).

At Jangdaehyun School, the unification of the Korean Peninsula can be understood in the perspective of vocation. The young people in that school understands the unification in the time of *kairos* in which it can be attained purpose and idea in our lives. Baker and Mercer understood a period of *kairos* as the time to recognize "God's presence and calling" in which they encountered with their "sensitivity and openness" toward God (2007, 155). The young students in Jangdaehyun understand that a true harmony in the relationship can be arrived at through recognizing the difference with other. They recognize the separation between South and North Korea after the Korean War (1950-1953) as suffering injuries of the peoples who are living in these lands. The teachers and students in the Jangdaehyun solve the problems of difference through realizing the cooperative and mutual dialogues in their learning environment. Especially, the unification education of that school becomes the agent for such dialogues. We need to consider Susanne Johnson's insight to find the image of God in the "conduct of mutually respectful dialogue" (Johnson 2018, 280). The mutual dialogue to "heal enmity, reduce prejudice, foster mutual understanding, and cultivate a more civil society" is therefore very effective for the unification education at Jangdaehyun School (Johnson 2018, 280). In such educational environment, any conceptual differences can be understood as the momentum of dialogue rather than its barriers.



Principal of Jangdaehyun School, Dr. Changho Lim

The Principal of Jangdaehyun School, Dr. Changho Lim, who is Vice-President at Kosin University in Busan, South Korea and Professor of Christian education, manifests that the educational purpose of that school is toward North Korean children as well as South Korean students such as the following:

Not only is Jangdaehyun School for North Korean children, but it is also open to South Korean students who wish to prepare for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

Jangdaehyun School aims to educate student at their individual level and teach them to serve the world with love and Christian faith. As a boarding school, the students' daily lives consist of a well-rounded curriculum and communal living experience based on respect, cooperation, trust, and love. While continuing to uphold excellence in core academics, a balance of art, music, and physical education electives are a priority as well.

We have prepared an educational curriculum that meets the standards of globalization. Native English speaking teachers will also take part in school life with the students, increasing their sense of the international world. By inviting prominent guest speakers to share their experiences, the students have ample opportunities to broaden their perspectives and challenge their vision of leading a unified Korea in the future.

Through Dr. Changho Lim's contributive works, Jangdaehyun School was chosen as notable school by the State Department in Washington D.C., the United States of America on January 12-17, 2016 and was firstly designated as a North Korean refugee students' school for Fulbright ETAs (English Teaching Assistants) by the State Department, too. In order to effectively support Jangdaehyun School, Dr. Lim had already established The Alliance of Action Movement for North Korean Human Rights and Democratization, Foundation (NKHRD) and received the approval from the Ministry of Unification of the South Korean Government on December 10th, 2012. For Jangdaehyun School, Fulbright ETAs Program is working as the global networking channel. In addition, Mr. Walter Douglas, who is Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the United States of America, encouraged Jangdaehyun School's global challenging, visiting directly that school in Busan, South Korea on May 3rd, 2016. The Principal of that school, Dr. Changho Lim's educational intention for globalizing Jangdaehyun School can be understood in a concrete practice of the pedagogy of difference. Dr. Lim does not confine Jangdaehyun School's students and teachers' perspective within the local horizon and let their "desires, beliefs, and behaviors" encounter the liberty in the global openness and relativity. Hanan Alexander describes how religious traditions are working as the agents for encouraging the teachers and students' democratic capabilities such as the following:

Traditions of this kind are not merely stagnant bodies of knowledge and culture to be transmitted, but dynamics and evolving webs of belief and behavior to be transformed; and in the process of transformation they form and reform the teachers and students engaged in the pedagogic process. The citizens that emerges from such an education are nor mere reproductions of that which came

before, but autonomous selves capable of the responsible and creative decision making that liberal democracy and open society require. (Alexander 2015, 105)

In fact, Kosin University led by Vice-President Dr. Changho Lim is famous for very conservative and foundational Presbyterian heritage. For example, Dr. Changho Lim who teach the academic courses of Christian education at Kosin University has strongly evangelical confidence in Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch in the Bible. Jangdaehyun School in which both foundational fundamentalism and globalized liberalism are mingled in the pedagogy of difference therefore shows the crystallized consequence of religious education for liberal democracy and open society.



Teachers and Students of Jangdaehyun School

The Pedagogy of Difference in Early Childhood Education

The second part of this paper focuses on human rights education program for children in light of the pedagogy of difference. The researchers start their study with a presupposition that the human rights awareness of early childhood teachers may be working as a significant influence for social rights, liberty, and equality of the child. They aim to design the draft of teacher training program for encouraging children's human right. In addition, this program entails the transformative change of early childhood teachers' attitude and awareness about children's human rights. Such change is closely related to the vocational transformation to regard "children as agents, children as participants, and children as *already* expressive of the purposes of God" (Mercer 2005, 67). That teacher training program consists of four educational resources: teachers' self-understanding as a subject, understanding of children as other, understanding of children's human right, and improvement in teachers' sensitivity to children's human right. The teaching and learning process of that program considers thoughtfully the diverse educational methods such as lecture, presentation, discussion, and group activities. Most of all, in order to study early childhood

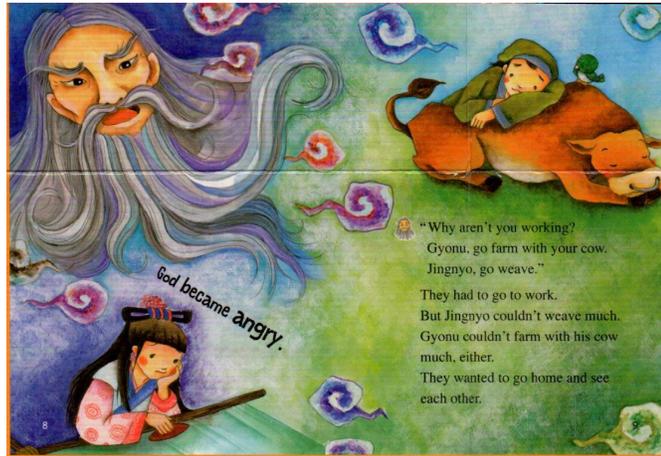
teachers' human right sensibility and perception for children, the researchers will conduct the questionnaire survey in child care centers located in Seoul, Daejeon, and Jeonju. These three cities have each distinctive characteristics to describe South Korea for foreigners. The metropolitan city of Seoul is the capital and the center of culture, economy, politics, foreign affairs such as New York in U.S.A., Daejeon is the center of administration such as Washington, D.C., and Jeonju is the traditional center of South Korea such as the regions of New England.

In August 2019, the researchers visited two kindergartens in the cities of Sejong and Daejeon in South Korea. These early childhood's educational institutions are educationally administrated by Korea Baptist Theological University/Seminary in Daejeon, South Korea. One is *Allgoun* Early Childhood Learning Center in the city of Sejong and the other is *Chimshin* Kindergarten in the city of Daejeon. The Korean word of *Allgoun* means "to be always good and kind" and the word of *Chimshin* is the Korean characters to designate "Baptist Theological" in the school name of Korea Baptist Theological University/Seminary. It takes 10 minutes by car from Sejong to Daejeon where these cities are located in the central part in South Korea. The Sejong is the city to be newly designed for the administrative-intensive affairs of the Korean Government. Therefore recently many administrative ministries and institutions are moving into the city of Sejong from Seoul Metropolitan City in South Korea. It takes two hours by car from Seoul to Sejong. Even though both cities of Sejong and Daejeon are sharing many roles of city due to their close distance, the city of Sejong records the first rate of increase in population in South Korea. But it does not doubt that Daejeon has the distinctions of old city areas. For the basic study about children's human rights, we implemented the quantitative survey with 5 or 6 years children in these two kindergartens, using the Korean traditional folk tale, *Gyonu and Jingnyo*. The following is the simple story of *Gyonu and Jingnyo* to share with these kindergartens' students:

There was a woman in Heaven. Her name is Jingnyo. Jingnyo was a beautiful woman. She was good at waving. She wove beautiful clothes. Many stars came to see her clothes. Sometimes she was bored of weaving. Then she looked outside the window.

There was a man in Heaven. His name was Gyonu. He was a handsome man. He farmed with a cow in Heaven. One spring day, Jingnyo was looking out of a window. She was Gyonu walking with a cow on a hill. He saw her, too.

Gyonu and Jingnyo fell in love at first sight. They loved each other and got married. They always wanted to stay together. Gyonu stopped farming with his cow. They became short of food. Jingnyo stopped weaving. They became short of clothes.



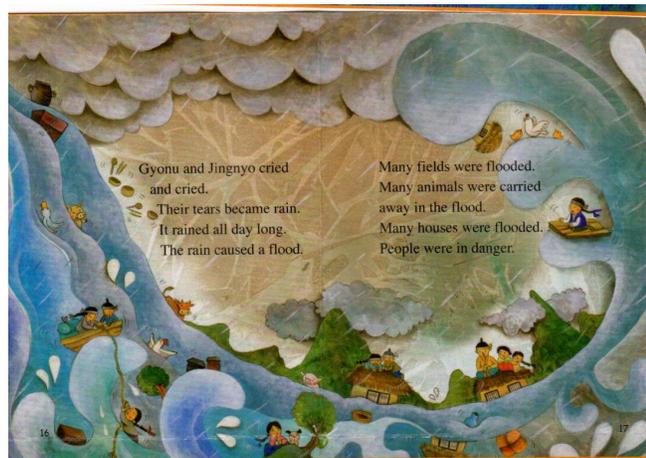
God became angry. "Why aren't you working? Gyonu, go farm with your cow. Jingnyo, go weave." They had to go to work. But Jingnyo couldn't weave much. Gyonu couldn't farm with his cow much, either. They wanted to go home and see each other.

God became very angry. "Why didn't you listen to me? You can't live together. Gyonu, go east. Jingnyo, go west. And work hard there. You can only meet on July seventh." God forced them out of Heaven.

Gyonu had to go east. He had to farm with his cow there. Jingnyo had to go west. She had to weave there. They missed each other very much. They waited all year for July seventh. Because they could only meet then.

Finally, it was July seventh. Gyonu ran to Jingnyo. Jingnyo ran to Gyonu. But they couldn't get to each other. There was a big river between them. But no bridge was over the river. They couldn't cross the river. They became very sad and cried.

Gyonu and Jingnyo cried and cried. Their tears became rain. It rained all day long. The rain caused a flood. Many fields were flooded. Many animals were carried away in the flood. Many houses were flooded. People were in danger.



Tiger says, "Why has it been raining all day long?" Magpie responses, "Gyonu and Jingnyo are crying." Tiger asks, "Why are they crying?" Crow says, "They can't cross the river." Rabbit

questions, “Why don’t you make a bridge for them?” Magpie says, “How?” Rabbit responses, “You can make a bridge over the river with your bodies.” Crow agrees, “That’s a good idea.”

The magpies and crows flocked to the river. They made a bridge by connecting their bodies. Magpies and crows say, “Step on our bodies and go see each other.” Gyonu and Jingnyo crossed the bridge of magpies and crows. Finally, they met. They cried with joy.

It is rainy or cloudy every July seventh. Do you know why? The reason is that Gyonu and Jingnyo are crying with joy. Magpies and crows have no hair on their heads. Do you know why? The reason is that Gyonu and Jingnyo step on their heads every year.

After reading this Korean traditional folk tale, the researchers suggested some questions in order to check kindergarten children’s human rights awareness. About our questions, children can express their responses from 1 scale (strongly disagree) to 5 scale (strongly agree), putting on their stickers on the board.



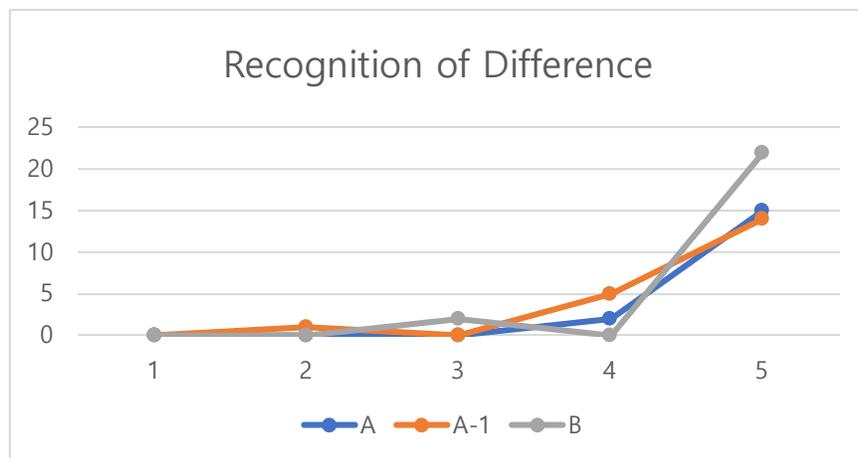
The first question is to look into children’s attitude about Jingnyo’s weaving work to be understood in the perspective of self-awareness. The following is each class respondents’ number table in two kindergartens:

Class	Kindergarten	Respondents’ Number
A	<i>Allgoun</i>	17
A-1	<i>Allgoun</i>	19
B	<i>Chimshin</i>	24

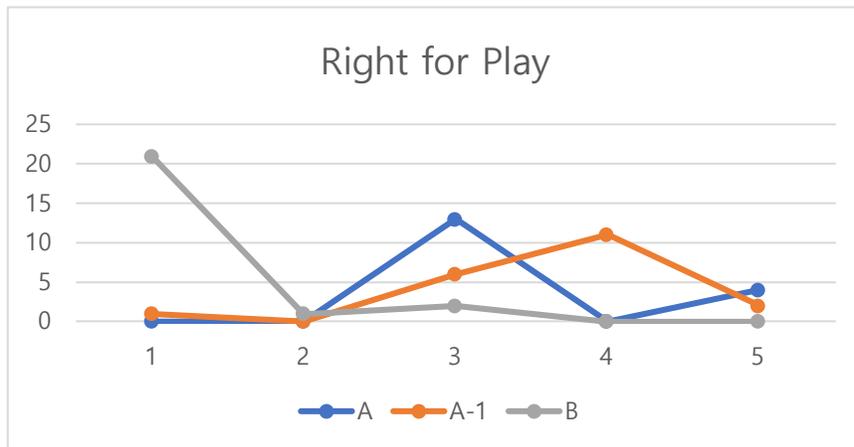
The kindergarten students’ attitude about the 1st question to consider their self-awareness scale shows the similar pattern in two preschool institutions such as the following:



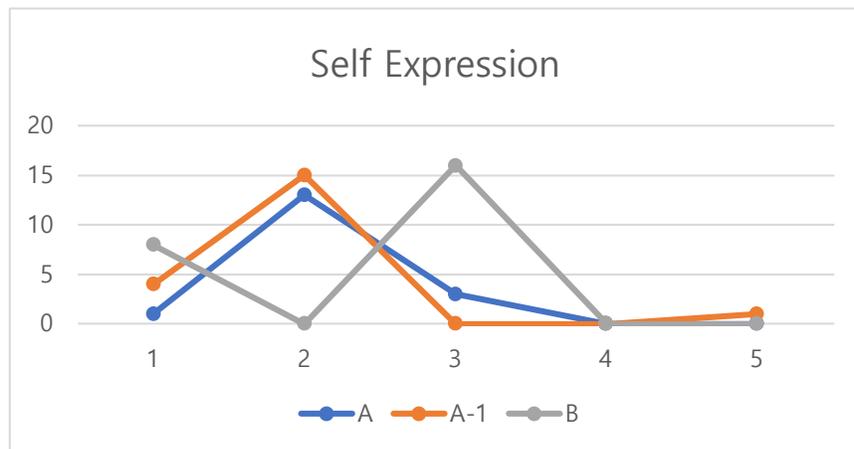
The researchers have the basic understanding that preschool children also recognize labor as the sound channel to realize their selves. In the second question about their works' difference between Gyonu's farming and Jingnyo's weaving, they shows the similar pattern's respond with the 1st question. The researchers interpreted these children's responds as the harmonious balancing attitude toward gender difference. In addition, children generally recognized Gyonu's farming and Jingnyo's weaving as the importance of labor itself.



However, in the third question to ask children's belief that Gyonu and Jingyo fell in love and were absorbed in play but stopped each farming and weaving, two kindergartens' patterns were different such as the following figure:



Lots students in *Chimshin* Kindergarten chose Gyonu and Jingyo’s responsibility of labor rather their right for play. Instead, many children in *Allgoun* Early Childhood Learning Center regarded Gyonu and Jingyo’s right for play with the positive perspective. The contrary belief between *Chimshin* and *Allgoun* early childhood institutions can be found in the index of “self-expression,” too such as the following figure:



With Gyonu and Jingnyo’s separate scene, the researchers provided the question about self-expression of sadness. In that question, students in both early childhood learning institutions could choose the properness of self’s emotional expression about sadness. In the above figure, children in *Allgoun* institution understood that not to express the sad emotion in such situation was not proper but children in *Chimshin* institution favored that not to express the sad emotion was better. The researchers interpreted both institutions’ difference with the perspective of rightness about God’s judgement. We recognized that Christian religious education in *Chimshin* had been practiced in the conservative and evangelical perspective. But *Allgoun* did not provide students with religious education due to the public issue about the separation between the State and the Church.

In the end, we recognized that children in *Chimshin* expressed more sensitive response about God's judgement due to their religious education. And we could recognize that such attitude influenced the basic human right for children such as the right for play. Moreover, our research shows that the pedagogy of difference for the human rights for children needs to be encouraged in Korean religious educational context.

Furthermore, in this study the researchers will include the correlational analysis between early childhood teachers' awareness about children's human rights and four factors' teacher-child interactions: emotional, linguistic, behavioral, and spiritual interactions, using the statistical analysis methods. And they will suggest a human rights education program for children with five phases of analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation to encourage children's human rights consciousness and to provide the larger world of human social interaction as "liturgical practices" for children (Mercer 2005, 223). The alternative practical model in the pedagogy of difference reflects critically some pattern of "cultural homogeneity" which is a stereotype of adult as a leader and children as followers (Beaudoin and Turpin 2014, 267). The ecology of religious education as liturgical practices for children that guarantees children's participation and does not marginalize them therefore can be regarded as the alternative practice to deconstruct "exclusionary or oppressive social practices" (Mercer 2005, 224). The pedagogy of difference encourages a narrative immersion of encountering between myself and the other (Alexander 2015, 137). In this ecology of religious education, the "powerlessness, dependency, vulnerability, and weakness" of children can be understood as "the nature of humanness" in God's image rather than as the other of consumerism to be abused (Swinton 2014, 448).

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Reflections on the Tree of Life:

Noah, the flood and the Tower of Babel

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Writing in celebration of the 1967 Woodstock concert, Canadian songstress Joni Mitchell wrote these words:

Well maybe it is just the time of year
Or maybe it's the time of man
I don't know who I am
But you know life is for learning
We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden

The misguided innocence of Woodstock is long past, and since that time terrible wars have come and gone, millions of precious human beings have had their lives devastated by other human beings, and the environment is being damaged at an astonishing rate. It would seem that we have truly lost our way. But despair is no way forward. We are nothing if not resilient. Countless acts of goodness, great, small and usually uncelebrated, are carried out every minute of every day, and despite the real existence of evil in this world, God gave us good hearts, souls that are a little flicker of His light, and the intelligence with which to choose which paths our lives, and thus the world, will take. We are stardust, we are golden. God also gave us religions, and to each religion, holy books, sources of wisdom from which we can learn and gain insight about how to live and what to do.

The conference theme this year is big, far reaching: "Coexistence in Divided Societies: Pedagogies of the Sacred, of Difference, and of Hope." This is nothing less than a call

for us to repair the world through education, to devote our vocations to getting back to the garden. When I first saw the theme, I was both inspired and intimidated. It seemed too big, too much for me, for us. But then I thought, each of can look to the scriptures of our traditions and find wisdom and sparks of light to carry us forward. Surely this is what religious education is about.

The famous verse from Proverbs (3:18), recited every time Jews return the Torah scroll to the Ark at the end of reading from it, says: "It is a tree of life for those who hold fast to it, and all who cling to it find happiness. Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace." Trees of Life exist in most religions and cultures around the world, symbolizing variously the connection between earth and Heaven, the connectedness of all living things, and the true order of the world. Trees of Life are found in shamanic, Hindu, Egyptian, Sumerian, Toltec, Mayan, Native, Norse, Celtic, Judaic, and Christian traditions (Graef 2015).

In Judaism the tree refers specifically to the Torah and the infinite wisdom contained therein. I believe that each of us can view our religion's scriptures as Trees of Life. Jews read the entire Torah during one year, reading a portion each week. We finish the whole Torah and start a new cycle after *Simchat Torah* (the joy of the Torah). "Torah" essentially means a teaching or guide, and each week's portion sheds light on our lives, often on ethics and morals, and sometimes uncannily offers insight into current events. Every week people in Jewish communities give *divreh* Torah, words of commentary and interpretation, that reveal meanings and provide insight into the *parasha* of that week. One of the main points of these homilies is to connect the lessons in the Torah portion to what is going on in the community and help people to learn from these lessons.

At the time of the REA conference we will have just read the first portion of the Torah, the story of the Creation, and of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, where the Tree of Life grew. For the week of the REA conference the second portion, Noah, is read. This portion not only tells the story of Noah and the flood, but also the story of the Tower of Babel, before the building of which "The whole earth was of one language and of common purpose" (Genesis 11:1).

Taking the Tree of Life to heart, and following the tradition of searching for insight in the weekly Torah portion, this presentation will bring commentaries on the stories of Noah and the Tower of Babel, finding relevance to the conference theme. Just as the Tree of Life is a universal symbol, it is significant that as well as Judaism and Christianity, Islam, too, shares the stories of Adam and Eve, and of Noah, albeit with differing details. This modest presentation, from someone who is by no means a Torah scholar, is intended to engender discussion of how all of us, regular people from diverse backgrounds, can connect with our own traditions' scriptures and find direction there. I hope that we can draw some common insights, and that people who choose to come to this session will bring commentaries and ideas from their own traditions, Christian, Muslim and others, as well as personal thoughts about the relevance of scriptural study to some of the big issues raised by the conference theme.

The story of Noah

"Noah was a righteous man, wholehearted in his generations; Noah walked with God." (Genesis 9.6). Some commentators take this as a favorable evaluation of Noah's character: he lived at a time when humankind had become corrupt, yet Noah still managed to be righteous. Other commentators interpret the meaning to be that in comparison to his corrupt contemporaries, Noah was righteous, but had he lived in a time when there were other righteous people, he would have been unremarkable. Noah is compared to Abraham. Noah "walked with God," but to Abraham God said "Walk before me, and be thou whole-hearted" (17.1). Regarding the different levels of Noah's and Abraham's closeness to God, the great Biblical commentator Rashi says that Noah needed God's help. He had the desire to extricate himself from the corruption around him but lacked the strength to do so. God saw his desire and helped him, saying "Walk with Me." But Abraham walked in righteousness by himself, and God said to him, "Walk before Me." Because of their different levels of spirituality, "Noah was singled out for survival, Abraham for a mission" (Leibowitz 19: 64). Martin Buber says that "Noah stays put in nature; a man of the soil is rescued from the deluge. Abraham is the first to make his way into history as a proclaimer of God's dominion" (Buber 1968: 35). In the context of this REA conference, and in general, of religious education, I believe that we can see this as a

source of hope. Most of us are likely closer to the level of Noah, who was in some ways just a poor *schmuck*, struggling, with limited capacity, but with desire for good. God was listening to Noah and He is listening to us. If we turn to him, he will respond.

We cannot really compare our generation to the generation of Noah. In our time there is misunderstanding, hatred and prejudice, but there is also goodness and the desire for dialogue and for creative and compassionate coexistence. Our time is mixed, with suffering, unfairness and cruelty, but also with good people doing good work. The many corruptions of the generation of Noah were widespread and extreme. They are variously described by commentators as sexual corruption and social crimes such as robbery, but all the commentaries agree that the most terrible human crime was violence, which dominated society, and only violence is referred to by God when He tells Noah that he is going to destroy humankind: "And God said to Noah, the end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them" (6.13). One commentary on the topic of violence says that "he who prays to God with hands soiled by violence is not answered" (Shemot Rabbah). Yet, in the story of Noah, God gives humankind numerous chances to repent, while the ark is being built, and when the rains begin. In fact, Rashi states that at the beginning the rains were gentle, they descended with mercy, so that if people were to repent, the rains would be a blessing. Only after the people still turned away from God did the rains become a deluge.

Violence is a corruption of the divine nature God gave us in the Garden: "So God created man in His own image; In the image of God He created him; male and female he created them" (1.27), and participating in violence further corrupts us. And while we could endlessly debate kinds and levels of violence, from outright murder to violent speech and even not speaking while violence at the hands of others continues, the element that disrupts and often prevents violence, is our ability and desire to listen and talk to one another. We must try to relate across our differences, and across some canyons that may seem unbridgeable. Life is complex, moral decisions are often difficult, the lives of humanity are not painted in black and white. Though Gandhi would disagree, a life of absolute non-violence may not be possible in our time. Sometimes violent action becomes necessary, such as in the waging of wars that must be fought in order to

vanquish great evil at the hands of corrupted individuals and societies who have no interest in listening and talking unless it is to get their way, and who aim to kill innocents. Even with these people, before fighting we attempt to engage in dialogue. Some wars must be waged, with the caveat that first "When you draw near to a city to wage war against it, you shall call out to it for peace" (Deuteronomy 20.10). In the story of Noah God patiently waited for humankind's repentance before finally sending the flood. We, who are indwelt with tiny sparks of God's light, must emulate this patience. And when violent response to violence is absolutely necessary, we should still remember the words of the prophet Habakkuk: "In wrath, remember compassion" (3.2).

After the flood there is a rainbow, a sign that in some way signifies the Divine promise never to destroy humankind again by means of a flood. Commentators provide various explanations for the shape of the rainbow. One explanation is that the bow is like the shape of a bow from which arrows are shot, but it is not aiming towards earth, it is upturned. This symbolizes that "retribution and anger...are being replaced with an era of love and peace" (Leibowitz 1954, 2019: 86). Other commentators are not satisfied with this explanation, because in fact hatred and violence had not and have not been eliminated. They say that the rainbow is a reminder which does not require interpretation. We are simply to see the rainbow and remember God's kindness, patience and mercy.

Noah and his family are tasked with rebuilding a ruined world. Interestingly, they are given something that was never given to Adam: the right to eat meat. Commentators have suggested reasons for this dramatic change after the flood. The Ramban and others say that since Noah and his family saved the animals on the ark and worked so hard to keep them alive, people earned the right to consume them for food. R. Hirsch says that mankind was weaker after the flood, as reflected in shorter lifespans, and needed the greater nourishment that meat provides. On the other hand, Rav Kook, one of the great rabbis of the 20th century, says that once the perfection of the Garden had been lost, and the world had become filled with violence, it was too late to go back to an absolute prohibition of killing; humankind could not return to that ideal level. The flood washed away the evil people and their deeds, but humankind had nevertheless been lowered by violence and could not completely return from it. After the flood God permitted people to

kill animals for food, but not to kill human beings, the implication being that the violent (carnivorous) part of humanity would express itself in the killing and eating of animals. Rav Kook sees this as a temporary, transitional stage until the Messiah comes and the world is perfected. According to Rav Kook we will then no longer kill and eat animals.

The tower of Babel

The generations after the flood are recorded in considerable detail, with people being, for a time, equal: "The whole earth was of one language and of common purpose" (11.1) until "Cush begot Nimrod; he was the first to be a mighty man on earth. He was a mighty hunter before God" (10.8-9). Then "equality of all men was replaced by oppression, brotherhood by tyranny" (Leibowitz 1954, 2010: 91). Nimrod and his followers sought power. Humanity's creative genius had led to technical advances that freed them from the work of day to day sustenance that made them dependent on the natural environment. People were now able to build cities even in places where there was no stone: "They said to one another, 'come, let us make bricks and burn them in fire.' And the brick served them as stone, and the bitumen served them as mortar" (11.3).

This is a conundrum faced in every age, and perhaps never more so than in ours. Technical and technological advances in many ways make our lives better, but there is always the danger that we will, in effect, come to worship the technology, forgetting our spiritual nature and its source. In the case of Nimrod and his followers, who could now make bricks, and thus buildings and towers, and settle anywhere they chose, "demoralization sets in very quickly. This technical mastery gives way to overweening pride and self-confidence" (Leibowitz 1954, 2010:102). This is a common theme among Bible commentators, that technological advances lead to lives of increasing comfort and dissatisfaction with a simpler life based on the bounty of the natural world, and to the danger of forgetting that we are not the masters of the world. This does not mean that we should not use our God-given abilities to discover and create. In many places in the Bible we are told that we are supposed to work and follow our talents and creativity. In Deuteronomy (14.29) it says clearly that "God will bless you in all your handiwork that you will perform." There is even a commentary in the *Midrash*ⁱ (Bereshit Rabbah 11.7) that "Whatever was created during the six days of God's handiwork required working

on." Our job is, in effect, to complete the job God began. We are His partners. Diseases have been cured by human creativity and ingenuity, and many wonderful inventions and discoveries have allowed us to live longer and better. The danger seems to be that our egos take over and we begin to think that we alone are the creators, and we do not need God.

In the time of our story in Genesis, building cities and towers led to the acquisition of wealth, the creation of a class system, and unequal distribution of wealth and power. "Come, let us build a city, with a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11.4). Commentators say that Nimrod planned to build a tower so high that it would reach to Heaven, where Nimrod and his army would wage war against God, and their names would rival or be greater than God's. The word Babel in Hebrew is *bavel*, from the verb *lebalbel*, to confuse. God dealt with the people's arrogance by dispersing them and destroying their ability to understand one another, splitting them into different tribes and nations, with seventy different languages. The lust for power and the unequal treatment of people led to this genuine loss. Today even those who speak a number of languages still do not understand most of them.

In our time, despite a multitude of languages, cultures and religions we can and must work towards understanding one another, trying by small acts of kindness, courage and communication to repair the world. We must never stop hoping for and working towards the day when suffering, evil and misunderstanding will end. Perhaps on that day we will once again be able to speak to and understand one other without confusion: "For then I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent" (Zephaniah 3.9). Whether that will mean one religion is neither here nor there. All our religions are branches of the Tree of Life.

Closing thoughts

During the time that I was writing this paper the *parasha* of the week was the final section of Numbers (33.38), in which the Israelites' journey from Egypt during the forty years they wandered, is recapitulated, marking the places they travelled through and some of the events that occurred. This passage contains the only reference in the entire Torah to

the date of a particular person's death, the only *yartzeit* that is marked. The death is Aaron's. Why is Aaron's death marked and remembered? Not Abraham's, not Moses', not any of the great prophets. Only Aaron's. The commentators say this is because Aaron spent his whole life, all one hundred and twenty-three years of it, seeking to make peace between people. Between husbands and wives, between neighbors and tribes engaged in dispute. He worked tirelessly to bring peace between persons and their fellows. He embodied compassion, empathy and kindness. And it wasn't easy – he was dealing with a pretty contentious and obstreperous bunch, who built the golden calf to worship not long after they had seen God face to face at Mount Sinai, and who complained and bickered all the way from Egypt to Israel! Aaron specifically worked at the level of person to person interactions. He was not a politician or a policy maker.

With this I would like to close. It seems to me that this is something REA has always known, and what this conference and the other activities of the REA strive to enable: person to person interactions, the chance to hear and know the other, and to find common ground in our shared humanity. It isn't easy, it will never be easy, but this is one important role of religion and religious education. Religious education usually aims to inculcate new generations into a particular religion, but not only that. All religions preach peace, and that means listening to the voice of the other, reaching across to those in other religions and to those who profess no religion, working to communicate across differences. We are told in Ethics of the Fathers (1:12) that each of us should become "a student of Aaron." May we in our own lives and in our teaching be students of Aaron, and may our work truly contribute to bridging (not eliminating) differences, and to furthering creative, compassionate co-existence in our divided society.

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ⁱ The Midrash is a collection of ancient commentaries on the Hebrew scriptures. The earliest Midrashim come from the 2nd century CE, although much of their content is older. Shemot Rabbah and Bereshit Rabbah, mentioned in this paper, are Midrashim.



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**How do you teach it (In our day)?
Examining Portrayals of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Religious Education.**

Abstract

Today, more than 50 years after the Second Vatican Council issued *Nostra Aetate* (1965), how well do Catholic RE curricula present Jews and Judaism? To answer that question this paper examines Catholic RE curriculum documents from 2 jurisdictions. It finds that their representations of Jews and Judaism, no matter how well meaning, rely on structures of thought, reinforced by normative Catholicism, that enable the conditions to reproduce supercessionist thinking and attitudes. Its conclusion argues that current Catholic RE curricula must confront the question of how to coordinate strong and generous presentations of Jews and Judaism with Christian teachings on fulfillment. No less, they must also confront the question of how to consider Judaism and Christianity as different only in kind, and not by degree.

Introduction

Contemporary Catholic religious education (henceforth: RE) sits within a context where the Church's attitude toward Jews and Judaism has changed. Possibly the greatest informant of Catholics' contemporary attitudes toward this relationship extends from the Second Vatican Council's (1962-65) *Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate* [henceforth NA], 1965). This document sets aside past attitudes that disparaged Judaism and emphasizes instead that "God holds the Jews most dear," there is a common "spiritual patrimony" between them and Christians, and "the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures".¹ The educational implication here is that Catholic school curricula should present Jews and Judaism generously and in their strongest forms, but one of the challenges to meeting that goal involves confronting the topic of *supercessionism*.

The term *supercessionism* descends from the Latin phrase "to sit upon".² In the context of Jewish-Christian relations, that phrase applies to claims that Christianity has "'sat upon' Judaism by claiming to be the 'true Israel.'"³ Its "hard" form boldly claims that Christianity is the "true

¹ NA, #4.

² Vlach 2009, 58.

³ Carroll 2001, 58.

Israel”⁴ and has supplanted Judaism, the now allegedly “false Israel”.⁵ Its “soft” (or “mild”) form, by contrast, relates a belief that “God has not annulled his everlasting covenant with the Jewish people, neither past nor present nor future”.⁶ While Catholic teaching follows the “soft” variety, supersession remains problematic because no matter how one conceives of it, all varieties retain some notion that Christianity is an evolutionary graduate of Judaism.

The Catholic Church’s⁷ supersessionist views, and its authorizing their expression in Catholic school curricula, is of interest to Jews, Catholics, and religious educators. They concern Jews because supersessionism depends on Catholic-centered portrayals of Judaism that impede considering how Jews define themselves.⁸ This concern, in turn, obstructs Catholics’ ability to encounter Jews as religious persons, and so sits in tension with their institutional Church’s hope to engage Jews in inter-religious dialogue. Supersessionist content may be relatively subtle, as are claims that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament (henceforth OT), or it may be as strong and explicit as what the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith states in its document, *Dominus Iesus*:

This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifferentism “characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that ‘one religion is as good as another’” (*Redemptoris Missio*, #36). If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.⁹

As will be shown below, this attitude follows an assessment that Judaism is holy but purportedly ‘stalled’ behind Catholicism on the single path toward (Catholic-defined) salvation. Adopting this point of view, both within RE and beyond it, makes Catholic-initiated dialogue with Jews a disrespectfully one-sided proposition.

Catholics today are participants in today’s inter-religious world. This fact strongly implies that the most epistemically and morally adequate Catholic RE needs to attend directly to its inter-religious dimension. If Catholic RE proceeds without recognizing how Catholicism’s normative supersessionism positions Catholics in relationship with Jews, then Catholic RE risks falling into a soggily maintained pluralism. This paper examines two curricula from distinct contexts within

⁴ Michael 2008, 5.

⁵ Michael 2008, 20.

⁶ Novak 1999, 17.

⁷ In this paper I use *church* to indicate its institutional expression through documents and authoritative offices. This delimitation excludes the whole People of God as another and distinct conception of *church*, and so does not answer the empirical question of how much and in what ways Catholics and sub-groups within Catholicism are aware of and respond to these institutional expressions.

⁸ This point follows Mary Boys’ criticism of how *The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* treats Jews and Judaism (2013, 102).

⁹ CDF 2000, #22, italics original, my underlining.

English-speaking Catholicism where Catholic schools receive public support: the Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Education curriculum from Australia,¹⁰ and the Ontario Elementary and Secondary Catholic Religion curriculum from Canada,¹¹ for the purposes of comparing and contrasting how two different approaches to religious education encounter supersessionism. The close reading of these documents examines when and how they introduce Jews and Judaism, with what purpose, with what effect, and whether they present Jews and Judaism in their strongest and most generous terms. The findings from this examination lead to a conclusion that Catholic RE curriculum needs to be more attentive to supersessionism and its consequences.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In her 2016 lecture, *Foundations and Debates in Anthropology*, anthropologist Paige West describes the major shift her field took away from comparatively ranking cultures and toward studying them in their own right.¹² This shift – *the ethnographic turn* – includes rejecting evolutionary frameworks that elevate the colonizer’s viewpoint and culture over Others. She relates an historical account of several thinkers whose models grade cultures from less to more ‘advanced,’ including proposals that they evolve through distinct stages of *savagery*, *barbarianism*, and *civilization* and cannot regress along this sequence: that is, they “are either moving forward or stalled” in their condition.¹³ Anthropologist Catherine Pelissier shows how these modes of thought found congruence with Darwinism: “Judgments of superiority (of Western modes of thought) on the one hand, and deficiency or irrationality (of ‘primitive’ modes), on the other ... were part and parcel of evolutionary frameworks that employed the comparative method, whereby existing ‘primitives’ were held to represent our ancestors ... [who] are capable of ‘evolving’ to a ‘civilized’ state.”¹⁴ One famous example of these models is Auguste Comte’s belief that cultures progressed through three theological stages – fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism – for explaining temporal phenomena before moving on to metaphysical and finally scientific modes.¹⁵ William Hart observes a similar hierarchy in philosopher Georg Hegel’s pre-Darwinian belief that:

... Judaism is the Sublime Religion and Christianity is the Consummate Religion. Before and behind these religions, to the south and to the east, are the pre-Christian religions: (1) “Immediate or Natural Religion,” where Spirit has yet to extricate itself from nature—Spirit being the proper measure of “man”; (2) Mediated Religion, where the spiritual is elevated above the natural; and (3) Consummate Religion,

¹⁰ Brisbane Catholic Education (henceforth *Brisbane*) 2019. Brisbane Catholic schools receive approximately 80% government funding (Brisbane Catholic Education 2014, 2).

¹¹ Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (henceforth *ACBO*) 2012 & 2016. Ontario Catholic schools receive 100% government funding.

¹² West, 2016.

¹³ West, 2016.

¹⁴ Pelissier 1991, 1991, 76-77.

¹⁵ Macleod 2019, 148.

“religion that is for itself,” which is self-conscious, which can take itself as an object of inquiry.¹⁶

Pelissier attributes the turn away from these modes to Franz Boas’ revolutionary contention that cultures should instead *be understood in their own terms*, rather than in terms of grand narratives like evolution.¹⁷ This revolution does some work to disrupt and displace Euro-centrism, and when applied to Christian-centric comparative understandings of religions (or what colonizers sometimes mistook as religion), it problematizes Christianity’s supersessionist claims.

Analyzing Supersessionism

The distinction between “hard” and “soft” supersessionism, introduced above, can be analyzed further. Hard supersessionism has two kinds: *punitive* and *economic*, while *structural* supersessionism aligns with “soft” supersessionism.¹⁸ Punitive supersessionism relies on a belief that “God has rejected the Jews because of their disobedience and their rejection of Christ,”¹⁹ while economic supersessionism, by contrast, holds that Israel expires only because Jesus *arrives*, and not because he was *rejected*,²⁰ hence asserting Judaism’s irrelevance post-Jesus.²¹ Finally, structural supersessionism “renders the Hebrew Scriptures largely indecisive for shaping Christian convictions about how God’s work as Consummator and as Redeemer engage humankind in universal and enduring ways.” Within Catholicism this feature is consistent with the fact that the Second Vatican Council rejected “[t]he notion of two independent paths to salvation.”²² Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt thus maintain that: “Keeping with this [supersessionist] theology, the Christian exegesis, liturgy, and catechesis have represented the relation between the first and second testament in terms of old and new, temporary and definitive, shadow and reality.”²³ However, this implication is problematic because it takes for granted a static, first-century CE conception of Judaism. David Novak points out that today’s Judaism is different from the Second Temple Judaism of Jesus’ time: “In truth,” he writes, “*both* Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism come out of, and thereby supersede, a religion based on the Hebrew Bible, plus ... Second Temple theology ... [that] could be called ‘Hebraic Monotheism,’”²⁴ hence Jews and Judaism are not ‘stalled’ anywhere.

Analyzing Normative Catholicism

In light of the above exposition on supersessionism, this following presentation of three documents issued in 1974, 1985, and 2015 by the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (henceforth CRRJ) represents the normative Catholic view toward Jews and

¹⁶ Hart 2002, 564.

¹⁷ Pelissier 1991, 77.

¹⁸ D’Costa 2017, 101.

¹⁹ Vlach 2009, 61.

²⁰ Vlach 2009, 62.

²¹ D’Costa 2017, 100.

²² D’Costa 2017, 101.

²³ Moyaert & Pollefeyt 2010, 159.

²⁴ Novak 2019, 30.

Judaism. These documents have lengthy titles, and so for the sake of brevity I refer to 1974 as *Guidelines*, 1985 as *Notes*, and 2015 as *Reflection*.²⁵ To varying degrees, all three place Judaism within an evolutionary framework that depends on some kind of supersessionism. *Guidelines* reinforces NA's rejection of punitive and economic supersessionism and echoes its caution against misinterpretations of the OT that lead to distortions of Jews and Judaism: "The Old Testament and the Jewish tradition founded upon it must not be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism, with no appeal to the love of God and neighbor (cf. Deut 6:5, Lev 19:18, Mt 22:34-40)."²⁶ It goes on to present a portrait of Judaism which is notable for acknowledging its ongoing vitality but then qualifying it against a distinctively Christian belief: "The history of Judaism did not end with the destruction of Jerusalem, but rather went on to develop a religious tradition. And, although we believe that the importance and meaning of that tradition were deeply affected by the coming of Christ, it is still nonetheless rich in religious values."²⁷ This phrasing sustains NA's remarkably fresh and positive change away from centuries of Christian anti-Judaism. At the same time, one should not allow its welcoming language to numb their critical reception; while this perspective acknowledges Judaism's holiness and prominent place in Christianity's past, its allusion to Jesus' profoundly changing that rich tradition retains the stance of structural supersessionism.

Notes continues using welcoming language to express sensitivity for Judaism as a living religion: "This concern for Judaism in Catholic teaching has not merely a historical or archaeological foundation. As the Holy Father [John Paul II] said, ... 'To assess [Judaism] carefully and in itself and with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people *as they are professed and practiced still today*, can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church.'"²⁸ Alongside this statement, however, the CRRJ strongly rules out any idea of multiple paths toward salvation, stating: "Church and Judaism cannot then be seen as two parallel ways of salvation."²⁹ This position becomes clear in the next section, which provides a Christianized teleology for Jews by stating: "the definitive meaning of the election of Israel does not become clear except in the light of the complete fulfilment (Rom 9-11) and election in Jesus Christ."³⁰ Then later, it states that both Christians and Jews are preparing for this same event, where "the people of God of the Old and New Testament are tending towards a like end in the future: the coming or return of the Messiah, even if they start from *two different points of view*."³¹ Here it is imperative to see how acknowledging "two different points of view" is consistent with rejecting the "two parallel ways" proposition. This linear formulation, where both members are at different places on the same path, can only work if one member sits closer to the path's end. Understanding the difference between Judaism and Christianity in this way – by *degree* instead of by *kind* – plainly aligns with an evolutionary model.

²⁵ See full titles in the bibliography.

²⁶ CRRJ 1974, 7; see NA, #4.

²⁷ CRRJ 1974, 7; see also CRRJ 1985 at #15.

²⁸ CRRJ 1985, I at #3, emphasis added in original; see also IV at #1F.

²⁹ CRRJ 1985, I at #7.

³⁰ CRRJ 1985, II at #1.

³¹ CRRJ 1985, II at #10, emphasis added.

Reflection is the only one of these documents that grapples directly with the supersessionism topic. Following NA, it disavows the punitive and economic varieties of this concept,³² but its other statements remain consistent with *Guidelines*' and *Notes*' implications of structural supersessionism. *Reflection* also clearly reinforces *Notes*' rejection of the "two parallel ways" suggestion, stating that, "there are not two paths to salvation according to the expression, 'Jews hold to the Torah, Christians hold to Christ.'"³³ Although the Commission does not go so far as to announce its evolutionary commitment, other parts of *Reflection* easily reveal it. For instance, its article #32 argues that the OT presents a history of covenants that progressively supersede each other, from the Noahide to Abrahamic to Mosaic and the prophets.³⁴ The covenant of Jesus would simply fall naturally into this line, with the glaring fact that Jews do not adopt it. The Commission speaks to this fact by simply stating: "That the Jews are participants in God's salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable mystery."³⁵

The most generous assessment of this weak appeal to "mystery" is that the Commission is unaware of its evolutionary attitude, and so struggles in this way to express its understanding of Judaism. Alternatively, it is also certainly possible that the CRRJ is aware of its evolutionary mindset but also recognizes the theological, moral, and political imprudence of declaring it. In this frame, it is notable that when considering "The Church's mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism," the Commission writes: "It is easy to understand that the so-called 'mission to the Jews' is a very delicate and sensitive matter for Jews because, in their eyes, it involves the very existence of the Jewish people."³⁶ In this context, that use of "unfathomable mystery" in reality only euphemistically disguises the Commission's supersessionist attitude. So sadly, Christians who assent to this document's teaching must either approach Jews with a determination to share this unwelcome judgment with them, or else paternalistically withhold it while tacitly allowing it to guide their attitudes and actions in relationship. Neither way is honourable.

Methods

My close reading of the Brisbane and Ontario curricula analyzed them for three features. The first two are specific references to OT and World Religions (henceforth WR), and the final is what I term supersessionist *crisis points*. As the treatment of OT text is also treatment of the Hebrew Bible, these curricula's approaches to it strongly indicate their approach to Judaism.³⁷ The more each curriculum treats the OT in its own terms, the more this treatment implies a commitment to considering Judaism in its own terms. Treating it in Catholic terms and framing it as inevitably leading toward New Testament (henceforth NT) and Catholic teaching, by contrast, implies a tendency toward a (stronger) supersessionist ideology. This interpretive approach also guided the references to WR. Presenting Jews and Judaism in their own terms

³² CRRJ, 1985, #17.

³³ CRRJ 2015, #26.

³⁴ CRRJ 2015, #32.

³⁵ CRRJ 2015, #36.

³⁶ CRRJ 2015, #40.

³⁷ See notes 23 and 26 above.

suggested an effort to avoid supersessionism, while framing them in terms that led toward Catholic teaching as the lesson's goal, or as secondary features of a lesson where Catholic teaching is the primary topic, suggested a (stronger) supersessionist approach. Finally, the *crisis points* indicate moments where the curricula find that their efforts to treat Jews *in their own terms* or *with respect* clash with topics like fulfillment and inter-religious dialogue. The findings presented here do not exhaust all instances, but were selected to reflect the clearest examples of how each curriculum treats each feature.

Findings

Archdiocese of Brisbane P-12

Of the two curricula, this one represents the most careful approach to presenting Jews as they define themselves. It places much emphasis on grounding students' knowledge of Catholicism in terms of the scriptural and the historical contexts of the Ancient Near East. It presents OT material in every year, and connects its concerns with parallel contemporary events and students' experiences.³⁸ It also contains a significant WR strand for all years that even focuses exclusively on Judaism until Year 6. This focus is particularly important for complementing and supporting the OT strand. The Prep Year³⁹ clearly states that students will learn that "Jesus was a Jew. He lived in a Jewish family and Mary was his mother."⁴⁰ The Prep and Year 1 objectives then move into anthropological territory, asking students to "Investigate and report what Jewish families were like in the time of Jesus" (Prep)⁴¹ and "Explore and record some aspects of Jewish daily life at the time of Jesus (including meal times, leisure times, observing the Sabbath, praying, food laws)" (Year 1).⁴² In Year 4 the curriculum makes a strong effort to avoid any reductive portraits of Judaism, and instead stresses its vibrancy and internal diversity: "Judaism is a dynamic religion. Groups within first century Palestine reflected the dynamic nature of Judaism."⁴³ This orientation recalls Novak's point (above) that today's Judaism is not the same as that of the first century CE. The OT strand in Year 8 clearly extends early Christianity's Jewish context past Jesus' lifetime: "Some early followers of Jesus, as depicted in the Acts of the Apostles, continued Jewish practices as part of their way of imitating the life and teaching of Jesus."⁴⁴

The OT and WR strands also focus strongly on the *covenant* topic. The Year 2 objectives relate this as Judaism's ongoing lived experience: "The Jewish people are a covenant people. Their relationship with God is expressed in their daily lives,"⁴⁵ while in Year 3 students focus on its scriptural record, learning that "The Jewish people have a special relationship with God. This

³⁸ Brisbane 2019, Prep Year Achievement Standard; STNT6.

³⁹ Early childhood education in Australia that is equivalent to Kindergarten.

⁴⁰ Brisbane 2019, BEWR1.

⁴¹ Brisbane 2019, BEWR1- Skills.

⁴² Brisbane 2019, BEWR2 - Skills.

⁴³ Brisbane 2019, BEWR5.

⁴⁴ Brisbane 2019, STNT18.

⁴⁵ Brisbane 2019, BEWR3.

relationship is revealed through the stories, people and events recorded in the Torah, or written law.”⁴⁶ The Year 8 OT strand continues this topic, where students learn that “The theme of covenant, as unique relationship between God and God’s people, is central to understanding the Old Testament.”⁴⁷ This topic is very prominent here, for as it encapsulates all the past years’ learning about the Jewish historical context before the time of Jesus, it also carries a greater burden of extending into students’ ongoing learning about the NT and encountering the fact that Christians live according to that covenant, while Jews do not. As Christians believe that the OT is a necessary precursor to the fulfillment Jesus offers, this curriculum frames the OT as apparently insufficient in itself and even outdated in places: conditions that reveal structural supersessionism, and that enable its different treatment from the NT. An example of this difference emerges in Year 10 when students consider the various OT portrayals of God. Under the “skills” section for this objective, the curriculum asks students to “Reflect on, endorse, or *refute* different Old Testament representations of God, in order to evaluate their application for a modern Australian context.”⁴⁸ This remarkable appearance of *refute* opens a formally endorsed path for students to repudiate scripture. While this objective has secular merit, and is also consistent with Church teaching that prohibits coercion in matters of belief,⁴⁹ its efficacy for engagement with and critical thinking about scripture raises parallel questions of whether students could be invited to refute NT content or even Church teaching in the same way. Those objectives do not exist in this curriculum. Perhaps this curriculum’s authors grant students more freedom to refute the OT conceptions of God because Catholicism’s normative conception of the Trinity claims to have supplanted them, and so such actions therefore do not threaten the New Covenant.

In addition to its laudable presentations of the OT and Judaism, however, the Brisbane curriculum nonetheless contains moments where supersessionism plainly emerges. This curriculum’s *crisis points* present features of Christianity that stand in sharp contrast with the curriculum’s concurrently generous, welcoming presentations of the OT and Judaism. The critical points here converge on the claim that Jesus and the NT are the fulfillment of the OT, because it implicitly raises questions regarding Christianity’s relationship with Jews and Judaism. The first crisis is in Year 6, which states that “For Christians, the New Law as given by Jesus is a law of love, a law of grace, and a law of freedom.”⁵⁰ The independent merits of this claim notwithstanding, the fact that it relies upon an unstated parallel claim about the Old Law, raises the question of whether students are supposed to infer that it has no messages about love, grace, and freedom. For example, in earlier years students have learned ‘The Greatest Commandment’ (Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:26-28)⁵¹ and ‘Good Samaritan’ stories (Lk 10:25-37).⁵² Revisiting those stories in light of this lesson about love, grace, and freedom could establish the OT and Judaism – including its 613 *mitzvot*, Pharisees, Priests, and Levites – as the legalistic, outdated, and caricatured foils from (and against) which Christianity evolves.

⁴⁶ Brisbane 2019, BEWR4.

⁴⁷ Brisbane 2019, STOT13.

⁴⁸ Brisbane 2019, STOT 15 – Skills, emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Vatican Council II 1965b, #2.

⁵⁰ Brisbane 2019, CLMF10.

⁵¹ Brisbane 2019, Prep STCW1; CLMF1.

⁵² Brisbane 2019, Prep CLMF1; Year 4 STNT10.

Within the same year 6, though, students concurrently learn positive messages about the OT that emphasize its historical context and uplifting messages. It asks students to “Communicate an understanding of some key Old Testament prophets, taking into account their context,” and offers examples of their messages that are congruent with Christianity, like “repent and turn back to God, act justly, care for others in particular the poor and marginalized, observe the Law, God is compassionate and forgiving, God is always faithful.”⁵³ This fact raises a concurrent problem of coordinating the 2 covenants: *How is the OT necessary but allegedly insufficient?* A teacher may offer some answers to that question during their interactions with students in Year 6, but from a documentary perspective, the normative Catholic answer to that question of sufficiency arises only in Grade 8. There students are asked to “interpret Old Testament covenant narratives and the actions and messages of some Old Testament prophets; identifying the unique relationship between God and God’s people ... [and] select evidence from Scriptural texts to show how God’s saving plan for all creation was accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁴ Here the curriculum remains silent on its parallel assumption that because Jews do not participate in this saving plan, they remain ‘stalled’ in a praiseworthy but relatively deficient state on this point.

Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario 1-8 (2012) and 9-12 (2016)

This curriculum sits in 2 separate but mutually consistent volumes for the elementary (2012) and secondary (2016) levels. Where Brisbane’s approach tends, however imperfectly at points, toward the disinterested study of religion, Ontario’s is predicated upon promoting belief in Catholicism, and is grounded in the Church’s program of “New Evangelization,” which is intended to re-invigorate the Church,⁵⁵ but which relegates to second place any learning about how Jews define themselves.

The elementary curriculum is organized according to 6 strands: Believing, Celebrating, Living a Moral Life, Living in Communion, Living in Solidarity, and Praying,⁵⁶ and of these 6, 3 are of interest to this study. First is *Believing*, which encompasses study of scripture from the perspective that as “a primary source of God’s revelation, the Bible records the covenantal relationship between God, the Jewish people and the Christian Church,”⁵⁷ and so for comparative purposes stands in parallel with the Brisbane curriculum’s OT strand. Second, the *Living a Moral Life* strand is of interest because its concern is religious pluralism, where “the modern world is characterized by a multiplicity of values, philosophies, and ideologies. In the democratic, pluralistic, society that is Canada, these perspectives may creatively interact and reinforce one another, or they may compete with and contradict one another.” While the Church embraces diversity, this embrace is qualified by a concern that “What is potentially lost amidst this plurality is the singular revelation of God through Jesus Christ and his Church,”⁵⁸ a stance that depends on refuting relativism, which Ontario’s Catholic schools perceive negatively

⁵³ Brisbane 2019, STOT10.

⁵⁴ Brisbane 2019, BEHE8.

⁵⁵ ACBO 2012, 2-3; 2016, 6-10.

⁵⁶ ACBO 2012, 24.

⁵⁷ ACBO 2012, 26.

⁵⁸ ACBO 2012, 28; 2016, 28.

pervading contemporary society.⁵⁹ Finally, when describing the *Living in Solidarity* strand, the curriculum states that “In teaching children the importance of witnessing to the faith, ‘it is also necessary to address interreligious dialogue if it renders the faithful capable of meaningful communication’ (General Directory for Catechesis, #86) ... the diversity of Canadian society demands we educate children and youth *to respect* and appreciate the good that is within all religions.”⁶⁰ The five strands of the secondary curriculum follow a similar pattern: Scripture, Profession of Faith, Christian Moral Development, Prayer and Sacramental Life, and Family Life.⁶¹

The elementary curriculum emphasizes being Catholic and learning Church teachings, but does not contain the same direct emphasis on the OT and WR that the Brisbane curriculum does. If these are present, it is not for their intrinsic value, but to lead toward an eventual understanding of Catholicism. In grade 1 students learn OT content as a means to the end of knowing they have a relationship with God. Its *believing* strand uses OT references to state: “God reveals himself [*sic*] to humankind in creation, our first parents, in the promise of salvation and in his covenant with Noah, Abraham and Moses.” Notably, that statement is oriented in progression toward a subsequent objective, where students eventually learn that “The fullness of God’s self-revelation is manifested in the incarnation of God’s Word; the person of Jesus who is truly God and truly human.”⁶² This structure spirals into grade 8, where students learn that “In the New Testament, Jesus the Messiah fulfills the Covenant of the Old Testament,” and they do this by “Explain[ing] the theological connection between the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament (Christ fulfills the promise of the Covenant).”⁶³ This spiraling continues throughout the secondary level. The grades 9 and 12 scriptures strands reinforce the message that the various OT covenants lead to the NT covenant.⁶⁴ This is a worthy objective, but it comes at the expense of learning about the OT in its own right.

The elementary curriculum discusses WR under the strand “Living in Solidarity,” and the secondary level contains a whole course on this topic in Grade 11 called *Faith and Culture: World Religions*. In all cases, the curriculum’s mission to evangelize causes it to see other religions only in Catholic terms. Beginning in grade 4, and repeated in grades 6 and 7, this strand follows the general themes that “God has placed the desire for God in the human heart and calls all people to God,” and that “People of various Christian churches and other religious faith traditions share a desire to deepen their relationship with God the Creator of all.”⁶⁵ From one perspective these statements inclusively welcome Catholic students’ encounters with religious Others, and especially coordinate with their learning that “as Christians we can enter into dialogue with the world’s major religions concerning common elements (i.e. sacred space –

⁵⁹ Mulligan 2005, 74-5. See McDonough’s (2018, 232) critique of how normative Catholicism conflates relativism with pluralism.

⁶⁰ ACBO 2012, 32, emphasis added. See note 68.

⁶¹ ACBO 2016, 66.

⁶² ACBO 2012, 63.

⁶³ ACBO 2012, 172.

⁶⁴ ACBO 2016, 72-3; 195 & 199.

⁶⁵ ACBO 2012 166: see also 117 & 149.

places of worship, rituals, prayers, symbols and beliefs).⁶⁶ However, they also elide the questions of ‘whose God’ or ‘whose conception of God’ informs these objectives, which leaves untroubled the fact that the God spoken of here is the Catholic one, and that initiating inter-religious dialogue under that pretext is problematic. Consistent with the curriculum’s evangelizing aim, the WR course teaches students to know religious Others in Catholic terms. Perhaps the most explicit statement of this fact sits on page 138, which offers a research topic of the student’s choosing, but with one criterion for its worthiness as a selection being, “Does this topic correlate to the Catholic faith and its tradition?”⁶⁷ As not all students in Ontario’s Catholic schools are Catholic, Christian, or even religious, this question would require them to orient any work on their own tradition or beliefs within the school’s dominant evangelistic framework.

The grade 4 strand of “Living in Solidarity” presents objectives that first universalize Jesus’ message within the evangelization context, teaching students to “Understand that God wants all people to receive the gift of salvation (i.e. Jesus Christ, the Gospel) and in order to do this we are *to respectfully* invite other religions to know Jesus.”⁶⁸ Alongside the tasks of identifying the biblical justification for those statements, students are also asked to prepare an evangelization plan, where they “Describe how God can help people who do not know Christ to develop a faith in God and Jesus Christ (through signs and other diverse religious practices) and suggest ways Christians can help people of other faiths to come to know Jesus (by openly sharing what we believe, through small acts of charity, through acceptance and friendship, by praying for their conversion to Christ).”⁶⁹ Within the scope of this study, the problems here are the epistemic one of why a Jewish person should accept a claim that Christianity is preferable to their own tradition, and the moral one of how one can genuinely respect Jews while leading them toward the Gospels and praying for their conversion. Consistent with evolutionary supersessionism, this conception of *respect* is at best a paternalistic condescension to those whom this curriculum’s authors can only regard in a state of religious deficiency. Based on these documents alone, one can only speculate as to how much, if at all, the 9 and 10 year olds who will learn this topic in grade 4 (and the 11 and 12 year olds who receive it again at its spiraled recapitulation in grade 6)⁷⁰ could be critically aware of these objectives’ implications. Where the Brisbane curriculum encounters crises at moments where generously presenting Jews clashes with Christian beliefs about fulfillment, the Ontario curriculum has crisis moments where its evangelization aim crosses its admonition *to respect* other religions and cultures.⁷¹ In short, this clash calls into question how *respect* coordinates with a view that Judaism and other religions are deficient, and hence whether the ultimate purpose of evangelization and inter-religious dialogue could be anything other than converting students to Catholicism.

At the secondary level, the problem of supersessionism emerges most strongly in Grade 12. It is at this level, for 17 and 18 year olds, where the curriculum introduces a teacher prompt where they may ask students, “How would you respond to those who say that Jesus’ death was

⁶⁶ ACBO 2012, 167.

⁶⁷ ACBO 2016, 138.

⁶⁸ ACBO 2012, 118, emphasis added. Recall note 60.

⁶⁹ ACBO 2012, 119.

⁷⁰ ACBO 2012, 151.

⁷¹ ACBO 2012, 106, 117-19, 133-4.

for nothing?”⁷² This prompt is interesting because it indirectly quotes chapter 2 of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, which shows that supersessionist claims are as old as Christianity itself and have scriptural backing. In that chapter, Paul emphatically argues against Jewish law, claiming: “we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ ... because no one will be justified by the works of the law” (Gal 2:16, NRSV). His argument concludes by tying this faith to the meaning of Jesus’ crucifixion, “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, *then Christ died for nothing*” (Gal 2:21, NRSV).⁷³ Of interest here is that students who agree with Paul have ready access to scriptural and formal institutional support, consistent with Catholic evangelization. Others would be free to disagree,⁷⁴ but to support their views they would have to rely on extra-curricular sources, which would only re-inscribe their religious deficiency from a normatively Catholic perspective.

Discussion and Conclusion

The facts that both curricula have bishops’ approval, and they clearly diverge on their treatment of Jews and Judaism, indicates significant interpretive variations within the Catholic magisterium about what is important within Catholic teaching and how that importance influences pedagogical purposes. The Brisbane curriculum evidently takes pains to present Judaism from a perspective that avoids Catholic-centrism, and the fact that this approach suddenly breaks down at certain crisis points only indicates its authors’ otherwise attempt to steer it away from supersessionism. The Ontario curriculum’s evangelistic approach, by contrast, mitigates against awkward surprises like Brisbane’s, because it consistently presents Jews and Judaism in Catholic terms. Its internal consistency and lack of a ‘Brisbane break down’ on this score is not a substantive credit, but only a consequence of its stronger supersessionism.

This study finds that colonial structures remain a prominent feature of normative Catholicism’s attitude toward Jews. Despite the major changes NA announced, Catholicism’s institutional post-conciliar attitude consistently claims that Judaism is deficient. The curricula examined here do not exhibit any punitive or economic supersessionism of the pre-conciliar time, but they do reveal the softer, more subtle structural supersessionism expressed through the language of fulfillment. The general implications are that the authors, teachers, and students of these curricula must realize how some aspects of Catholicism remain structured on a colonial epistemology, and that this fact should cause them to ask what it means to be Catholic person today in relationship with non-Catholic Christians, non-Christians, and non-religious persons.

There are two further specific implications for students’ lives. The first concerns life in school, where students who are non-Catholic, non-Christian, or non-religious will immediately (Ontario) or eventually (Brisbane) encounter a presentation of their religious tradition’s deficiency. Catholic students in Brisbane will engage with a curricular structure that eventually sets them up for the bewildering task of coordinating positive pictures of Judaism on its own

⁷² ACBO 2016, 203.

⁷³ Emphasis added.

⁷⁴ Vatican Council II 1965b, #2; see also note 49.

terms with talk of a fulfilled covenant in the NT. Any Jews present in Ontario's Catholic schools will learn that they believe in something Catholicism considers only a tentative good that awaits acceleration into something better. Catholic students in Ontario will receive a message that they possess the superior belief, and should approach religious Others with a view that condescendingly 'respects' them. If their exposure to this curriculum is their only or best source of information on how to relate to religious Others, these Catholic students will unfortunately develop a learned deficiency in this area because their inter-religious attitude will be hampered by an outlook of superiority that is unable to appreciate how religious Others define themselves.

Ultimately, this study points to larger questions of what it means to be Catholic in our time, and more specifically, how is it possible to regard Judaism and Catholicism as different only in kind, and not by degree, when the institutional Church currently does not support this orientation. These questions are both theoretical and empirical ones that are beyond the scope of this paper. They are nonetheless important to state here for showing both how the Church's normative commitments have great implications in practice, and how simply ignoring them will present an inaccurate picture of what the institutional Church actually believes.

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**Will You Talk With Me?
 Welcoming the Faithful and the Skeptical
 in an Undergraduate Religious Studies Course**

Catholic universities, indeed most religiously affiliated universities, find that religious belonging cannot be assumed and that many students are skeptical of faith. This challenges the religious studies instructor who assumes her task is to provide a summary of Christian faith. This paper argues for shifting the focus away from this approach and to one that engages students in dialogue about humanity's core questions using texts from the Christian tradition. This pedagogical change can lead to more critical engagement and even to more curiosity about the Christian tradition.

Introduction

"I was baptized as a Catholic, but we only went to church on Easter." "We went to church a lot when I was younger, but then I started playing sports and we just kinda stopped going." "My grandparents are really religious, but I don't really understand what it is they say that they believe." "I went to a Catholic high school and I feel tired of being forced to do all that religion stuff." "I believe in science." "I believe in a higher power, but not necessarily in God." "I believe in God, but I disagree with the Church's teaching on LGBTQ issues." "When my parents divorced, I really started questioning whether God cared about me and my family."

At the beginning of each semester teaching an introductory religious studies course at a small Catholic college, I ask students to tell me about their religious background and belonging.¹ Generally speaking, in a class of 25 students, I will have two or three who profess religious belief (they believe in God), maintain religious belonging (they go to church regularly), and are knowledgeable about their religious belief (they understand, at least in general, what Christianity claims about God and humanity). Another small minority of students claim to be atheists or agnostics. The majority of students in my class fall somewhere in the middle. They have a family or cultural connection to Christianity, often with grandparents who are religiously observant and parents who are a bit more laissez faire about religious activity. They have a vague sense of being Christian, but are unclear about what that means, both in terms of the core beliefs of Christianity and how those beliefs might impact the day-to-day life of the individual and the community.

In addition, many students choose my small Catholic college because of its pre-professional programs. They come to major in nursing, education, criminal justice, or business, and they have very clear career goals; they want to get through college with the degree that will equip them to get a good job as a nurse, a teacher, a police officer, or in a corporate office. They come to this college because it offers them a good way to accomplish these goals; the fact that it is a Catholic college does not usually a key factor in their decision-making process. Therefore,

¹ At my university, the vast majority of students identify, at least nominally, with Christianity. Many are Catholic and others come from various other Christian denominations. There is also a small minority of students who identify with a religion other than Christianity, usually Hinduism or Islam.

many of them are somewhat taken aback when they discover that students are required to take religious studies courses.² Most students are ambivalent about this – they’ve never studied religion or theology – and they are a bit reluctant – they complain that these religious studies requirements take time away from their chosen major. A small minority of students are hostile; they see no point in studying religion and resent being forced to do so.

All of this presents a challenge to me as a teacher of a required undergraduate religious studies course in my Catholic college. How do I approach the teaching of a religious studies course in which the majority of my students are only loosely affiliated with the Christian tradition and are relatively uninterested in taking a religious studies course? This is a challenge that is not unique to me and my institution, of course; since all Catholic colleges and universities have some sort of required religious studies or theology curriculum and since all Catholic colleges and universities are drawing from the same generational cohort, we are all facing similar challenges. And, I would venture to guess, the same is true, at least in part, at colleges and universities affiliated with other religious traditions, especially in the United States.

This paper delves into this tension by exploring both the nature and role of the Catholic university in “a secular age” and some pedagogical commitments that can enable an instructor to find a way to balance the need for rootedness in the Christian tradition and the need for an openness that welcomes students who are hostile, skeptical, and accepting of religious faith and practice. In particular, the paper advocates for a shift away from viewing these introductory religious studies courses as opportunities to summarize the Catholic faith and towards using them as a chance to engage students in an intellectual dialogue with a selection of thinkers from the tradition. By shifting away from an implicit assumption of shared faith and to a model of dialogue with the tradition, students are invited to find wisdom in the Catholic tradition, regardless of their personal appropriation of it.

The Context: Teaching Religious Studies in a Secular Age

Philosopher Charles Taylor proposes a way of understanding “secularity” that he believes is more adequate for our contemporary Western culture and better reflects the history of Western civilization. Taylor argues that there are three ways that “secularity” can be defined. First is the historical understanding of the term: secular referred to that which was not sacred, that which pertained to the temporal or “earthly” realm.³ The second, and more common, understanding is that the secular refers to an a-religious or non-sectarian standpoint; it is what remains when our culture has moved beyond its reliance on the myths, magic, and superstition of religious belief.⁴ In contrast to these understandings, Taylor proposes a better way of thinking about secularity; for him, a secular age is one in which religious belief is understood as one option among many and, therefore, up for debate. This understanding of secularity indicates “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”⁵ Taylor’s account of

² As is typical of many Catholic colleges and universities, students are required to take a first-year introductory religious studies course, one upper-level religious studies course, one philosophy course, and one elective in either religious studies or philosophy.

³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1-2.

⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2-3.

⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3. This vision of a secular age accounts for both the decline in religious participation and allegiance in, for example, Europe as well as the continued religious fervor and relatively high participation rates in the United States. In both places, religious faith is seen as one option available to people; one that is still chosen in the United States and one that is generally not chosen in Europe.

secularity proposes that an exclusive humanism – an entirely immanent worldview “accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing”⁶ – is now possible and is, in fact, one often chosen.

Taylor argues that this third understanding of secularity reflects a significant shift in what he calls the conditions of belief – the underlying presumptions that make religious belief plausible or not. His question, then, is “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”⁷ It is the conditions of belief that have changed such that religious faith itself is contested and seen as optional. This shift in the conditions of belief reflects a significant shift in our social imaginary.

As defined by Taylor, a social imaginary is “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations;” it is the “common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.”⁸ The social imaginary refers to the largely un-reflected-upon understanding that the people in a society have of the way things work.⁹ And, Taylor argues, it was a shift in our understandings of the way things work that underlies the shift in the conditions of belief that underlie his understanding of secularity.

Our contemporary secular social imaginary has been shaped over what Taylor calls the “long march” from the late Middle Ages until today; in order to arrive at our modern secular social imaginary, three major shifts are made.¹⁰ First, the “long march” was a march from a world where time and place were enchanted to an embrace of a disenchanted world and a buffered self; the world is no longer governed by forces beyond our understanding and the self is now seen as insulated and autonomous.¹¹ Second, there is a shift from a world seen as primarily social to one seen as primarily individual. In a modern social imaginary, rejecting belief is an individual decision; in earlier times, disbelief had communal repercussions.¹² Third, in a disenchanted world, time becomes flattened. Not only do we lose the connection between “sacred” and “secular” time, we lose the grounding of the “secular” in the transcendent. Whereas human flourishing, in times past, was assumed to have its end in some transcendent reality, in the modern social imaginary, this connection to a transcendent end has been lost and human flourishing in the here-and-now becomes the only goal.¹³ In a disenchanted and buffered

⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 18.

⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

⁸ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

⁹ Sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann are helpful here: “Only a very limited group of people in any society engages in theorizing, in the business of ideas... But everyone in society participates in its ‘knowledge’ in one way or another. Put differently, only a few are concerned with the theoretical interpretation of the world, but everybody lives in a world of some sort” (Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 15).

¹⁰ To the three considered here, Taylor adds two more: 1) a shift from a fullness of time (where “higher” time and mundane time interact) to a uniform, univocal secular time; and 2) a shift in the way we view the natural world – from a cosmos (an ordered world in which the natural and the transcendent are layered together) to a universe (an entirely immanent order that is autonomous and independent of any transcendent meaning). See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 55, 60.

¹¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 38-39.

¹² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 42.

¹³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 50.

world where disbelief no longer has social consequences and simple human flourishing has become the goal, choosing against belief in God has become a thinkable option.

One of the ways that this shift in our social imaginary and the rise of secularity is seen is in process of religious disaffiliation, especially among young adults. Much has been written about this phenomenon, tracing the demographic trends and suggesting potential responses from Christian churches.¹⁴ Speaking from my own context as a Catholic theologian teaching at a Catholic university, I want to focus on this trend of disaffiliation in the U.S. Catholic Church, but this context mirrors the trends in religious disaffiliation in general in the United States and Europe. In 2017, St. Mary's Press and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University published the study, *Going, Going, Gone*, which traces the demographic dynamics of disaffiliation among young adult Catholics in the United States. According to the study authors, "Disaffiliation from the Church is largely a thoughtful, conscious, intentional choice made by young people in a secularized society where faith and religious practice are seen as one option among many... An accumulation of unresolved discrepancies ultimately lead to the conclusion that 'none of it makes sense' or 'I just don't buy it anymore' so 'why stay?'"¹⁵ Some young Catholics leave the church because of negative experiences – disruptions in family life or ecclesial practice that lead to a questioning of religious belonging.¹⁶ Others drift away; rather than pointing to a precipitating event, they note a generalized dissatisfaction with religious belonging and, over time, opt out of religious faith and participation.¹⁷ A final group of disaffiliating young Catholics are those who dissent from Church teachings, usually around a moral issue.¹⁸ In addition to young Catholics who have disaffiliated from the Church, the study also notes the presence in the Church of "sorta-Catholics" and "almost done Catholics" – those who still formally identify with the Church, but who feel like a marginal member of the community, who are unknowledgeable about the Christian faith, or whose parents are only loosely affiliated with the Church.¹⁹

Both of these trends – the move to a secular social imaginary in which religious belonging is seen as optional and the taking up of this option not to belong to a religious tradition by many young adult Catholics – have implications for the teaching of religious studies at a Catholic university. Some Christian groups respond to this modern social imaginary by rejecting it and operating as if we still lived in the enchanted world of the late Middle Ages. While there is some appeal in the simplicity of this approach, it is not ultimately successful because it fails to

¹⁴ See, for example: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Nones" on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation (October 9, 2012), <http://www.pew-forum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx>; Stephen Bullivant, *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain and America since Vatican II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Henri Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Heinz Streib and Ralph Hood, *Deconversion: Qualitative and Quantitative Results from Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and the United States of America* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009); Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and the Theological Roundtable published in *Horizons: The Journal of the College Theology Society*, 40, no. 2 (December 2013): 255-292, with contributions from Thomas Beaudoin, Patrick Hornbeck, and William Portier.

¹⁵ Robert J. McCarty and John M. Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2017), 11.

¹⁶ McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone*, 14-17.

¹⁷ McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone*, 18-20.

¹⁸ McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone*, 21-24.

¹⁹ McCarty and Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone*, 9.

provide people with a way of understanding their faith in a way that takes secularity seriously. What is needed instead is an approach that deliberately brings the present context of teachers and learners into conversation with the Christian message.²⁰ It is an approach that takes the secularity of the modern social imaginary as seriously as it does the content of the religious studies classroom.

Rethinking the Introductory Religious Studies Course

In the United States there are 238 degree-granting Catholic colleges and universities enrolling nearly 900,000 students.²¹ Many were founded by religious congregations and dioceses as ways of educating Catholic young adults in a Protestant culture that was viewed as hostile toward Catholics. However, since the 1960s, Catholic universities have joined the mainstream of higher education²² and students choose these universities for reasons not always connected to the Catholic identity of the university. At first, this provoked something of an identity crisis among Catholic universities as many of them developed “a tendency to minimize Catholicism in their self-descriptions developed in order to attract a more diverse student body, gain financial support, or out of fear that the school be seen as ‘unwelcoming’ or ‘oppressive’ for others.”²³ More recently, these universities have focused on renewing their Catholic identity through, among other initiatives, faculty formation in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the appointment of administrators tasked with a focus on mission and ministry.

Given this context in which Catholic universities are thinking about and recommitting to their Catholic identity while, at the same time, facing an increasingly secular cultural context and a disaffiliating student body,²⁴ the question of the purpose of the Catholic university and of the teaching of theology within the Catholic university remains important. In his classic, *The Idea of a University*, John Henry Newman argues that a Catholic university should be committed to a broad and liberal education that includes a wide range of disciplines. This equips students with flexible and transferable skills that enable them to think critically, which he sees as an end in itself. He says:

²⁰ This is by no means a unique idea. Among others, Thomas Groome’s Shared Christian Practice approach is one that takes the historical and cultural context of the learner seriously and invites learners to reflect on their own lives and experiences and to bring those into conversation with the Christian Story and Vision. See, Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011).

²¹ Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, “Catholic Higher Education FAQs,” accessed September 14, 2019. <https://www.accunet.org/Catholic-Higher-Ed-FAQs#HowMany>.

²² Thomas P. Rausch, *Educating for Faith and Justice: Catholic Higher Education Today* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 1. Rausch argues that, particularly in the period after the Second Vatican Council, Catholic universities grew in numbers (from 92,000 in 1945 to 430,000 in 1970 to today’s enrollment of nearly 900,000) and adopted the scholarship and teaching standards of other universities. “Standards were raised for students and faculty. New graduate programs were added, including an increasing number on the doctoral level. Faculty members were now expected to do research and publish. Core curricula were revised, dropping specifically confessional courses. Religion departments were transformed into more academic departments of theology or religious studies. Lay men and women were brought into positions of responsibility in university governance, while the 1967 Land O’Lakes statement, hammered out under the leadership of Notre Dame’s Father Theodore Hesburgh, affirmed the principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom” (1).

²³ Rausch, *Educating for Faith and Justice*, 2.

²⁴ Like the disaffiliated young adult Catholics described in the *Going, Going, Gone* study, the Pew Forum has noted that “one third of those raised Catholic no longer identify with the church. Other Christian churches have experienced even greater losses” (Rausch, *Educating for Faith and Justice*, 2).

It is the education which gives a man [*sic*] a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgements, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them. It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical, and to discard what is irrelevant.²⁵

Newman also believed that theology had an important role to play in the liberal education provided by a Catholic university. He suggests that “all science being connected together, and having bearings one on another, it is impossible to teach them all thoroughly, unless they are all taken into account, and Theology among them.”²⁶ In other words, theology functions as a way of knowing about the world and, as such, a student’s knowledge about the world would be incomplete without theology as a part of their liberal education. For Newman, a Catholic university “cannot teach universal knowledge if it does not teach Catholic theology.”²⁷

If Newman is correct in proposing that the purpose of an education at a Catholic university is about developing the critical thinking skills needed to participate thoughtfully in the world and that theology is a necessary part of developing these critical thinking skills, then it is important to consider how we go about this task as teachers of theology and religious studies in Catholic universities. Because teachers of religious studies can no longer assume that our students enter our introductory courses with either basic knowledge about Christian faith or with a personal history of having practiced Christian faith, we cannot expect them to think critically about a faith that they do not understand, are skeptical of, or reject entirely. Therefore, many religious studies instructors view the introductory course as necessitating a summary of the faith.²⁸ We approach our teaching as if we need to outline the content of Christian doctrine. Some take a historical view, tracing how the faith developed from the preaching of Jesus through history to our modern theological concerns; others take a topical approach, outlining the key theological concepts of Christianity: Trinity, salvation, revelation, eschatology, and so on. But, even in these approaches, we are tending to focus more on knowing about and understanding the Christian faith (both skills relatively low on Bloom’s taxonomy²⁹), without encouraging the

²⁵ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 134. Newman continues with this description of the liberally educated person: “It prepares him to fill any post with credit, and to master any subject with facility. It shows him how to accommodate himself to others, how to throw himself into their state of mind, how to bring before them his own, how to influence them, how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them. He is at home in any society, he has common ground with every class; he knows when to speak and when to be silent; he is able to converse, he is able to listen; he can ask a question pertinently, and gain a lesson seasonably, when he has nothing to impart himself; he is ever ready, yet never in the way; he is a pleasant companion, and a comrade you can depend upon; he knows when to be serious and when to trifle, and he has a sure tact which enables him to trifle with gracefulness and to be serious with effect. He has the repose of a mind which lives in itself, while it lives in the world, and which has resources for its happiness at home when it cannot go abroad. He has a gift which serves him in public, and supports him in retirement, without which good fortune is but vulgar, and with which failure and disappointment have a charm” (134-135).

²⁶ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 74.

²⁷ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 163.

²⁸ I am not suggesting that this summative approach cannot be effective, that teachers of these courses aren’t cognizant of cultural factors like secularization and disaffiliation, or that these approaches don’t lead to the development of critical thinking skills. Rather, I want to suggest that this approach is not the only way to find a balance between the need to be rooted in the Christian tradition and the need to acknowledge the context from which students are coming.

²⁹ See, for example, Lorin W. Anderson and David Krathwohl, eds., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Longman, 2001).

higher-order thinking skills, such as the analysis and evaluation that becoming a critical thinker about religious studies would require.

I want to suggest that one way of engaging critical thinking skills in the introductory religious studies classroom is to shift away from the perceived need to summarize the Christian faith and to an approach that invites dialogue with the tradition. This approach operates on the assumption that our students can find wisdom in a religious text even when they do not hold a religious faith. This means moving away from a teacher-driven lecture and discussion format – where I tell you what’s important about St. Augustine, Martin Luther, or Elizabeth Johnson – to a student-driven conversation in which we discover together why St. Augustine, Luther, and Johnson are so influential in Christian theology. This is not to say that the instructor has no role in guiding the conversation and in being the expert in the room; rather, it is just that the instructor takes as equally important what the students want to talk about and what she wants them to know.

Educator Paulo Freire suggests that dialogue is a pedagogical approach that engages students and teachers in the shared experience of creating meaning. And, in this process, students are invited to think critically about their own context – their experiences, their assumptions, their prior knowledge – in conversation with the content of the curriculum – in this case, the two-thousand-year tradition of Christian reflection.³⁰ In her book, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, bell hooks similarly suggests that in conversation, in “learning and talking together, we break with the notion that our experience of gaining knowledge is private, individualistic, and competitive. By choosing and fostering dialogue, we engage mutually in a learning partnership.”³¹ This partnership is founded on what Freire calls “reading the world and reading the word,”³² a conversation in which the student, the teacher, and the text all bring their voices to the conversation in the search for understanding. hooks makes the important point that conversation or dialogue in the engaged classroom embraces a diversity of opinions.

In classroom discussions that are not conversations there is often a sense that argument and negative contestation are the only ways to address relevant issues. Negative conflict-based discussion almost always invites the mind to close, while conversation as a mode of interaction calls us to open our mind. All too often, professors have feared that if a conversation begins in the classroom that it will foreclose discussion of assigned reading material, of what matters, at least to them. However, mindful conversation, talking that is powerful and energetic, always spotlights what really matters. When conversations in the classroom lead to intense dialogue, students bring a heightened awareness to their engagement with assigned material.³³

hooks also notes that conversations about what she identifies as spirituality are an important part of her understanding of conversation in the engaged classroom. Even when students do not claim a particular religious tradition, conversations about religion and religious belonging cultivate critical thinking. “It enables students to better recognize the interconnected nature of life and by so doing brings them face to face with the sacred. They find themselves capable of a conscious process of watchfulness that is mindful and aware.”³⁴

³⁰ Paulo Freire, “Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed” in *The Paulo Freire Reader* ed. Ana Maria Araujo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (New York: Continuum, 2001), 263.

³¹ bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 43.

³² Paulo Freire, “Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” 238.

³³ hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, 45.

³⁴ hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, 149.

From this perspective, teaching the introductory religious studies course is the exploration of the deepest questions that humanity asks, rather than a summary of the content of Christian faith. Teaching religious studies can become a privileged opportunity to talk about these deepest questions with students; this means facilitating a dialogue between the questions that students are asking and the ways that the Christian tradition has sought to address those questions. Dialogue – conversations founded on mutual respect and curiosity – creates a classroom dynamic where teachers and students are learning together. The practice of dialogue opens up the conversation so that everyone can participate, explore new ideas, and name for themselves their personal commitments. In addition, the practice of dialogue promotes the inclusion of a wide variety of voices in the academic conversation. Because each participant in the dialogue has her or his own perspective that is shaped by many different aspects of their personal story, including, but not limited to, gender, race and ethnicity, class, and age, each student can contribute to the development of a profoundly educative dialogue in the religious studies classroom.

One Pedagogical Technique: Text-Based Reflection

In what follows, I want to describe my own approach to fostering such conversation in my introductory religious studies classroom with a goal of engaging students in a reading of the world and a reading of the word. In my experience with my students, this is an approach that honors the two cultural trends noted above – of increased secularization where religious belief is one option among many and of increasing numbers of students who are skeptical of faith or have disaffiliated from organized religious practice. It is also an approach that contributes to the development of critical thinking skills, which, as Newman suggested over 150 years ago, is a necessary part of a Catholic university education. This is also an approach that, because it is focused on the facilitation of conversation in the classroom, has the potential to engage students in thinking critically about their own religious questions and to find, in dialogue with religious texts, some answers for themselves to the questions that humanity has perennially asked.

I should note that this is not the ultimate answer for what to do in a religious studies classroom in a culture characterized by secularity and disaffiliation. As with any pedagogical technique, it is merely one tool in my toolbox that I use in combination with other strategies, including lecture, small group discussions, project-based learning, and more. Nevertheless, it is one technique that I have found to be particularly helpful in drawing students into the study of theology even when they are initially disinterested or dismissive. A second caution is that this is a pedagogical technique that must be learned by students. As hooks and other theorists note, students do not automatically know *how* to engage in a conversation about religious ideas.³⁵ So, time must be spent helping students to understand how an academic conversation is different from (and yet related to) casual conversation, debate, argument, and problem solving. As the instructor, it is my responsibility to help my students develop the skills they will need to do what I am asking them to do.

Having acknowledged these cautions, I want to describe my approach to fostering conversation around religious ideas and how this approach is received by my students. First,

³⁵ hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, 44. “Those of us who recognize the value of conversation as a key to knowledge acquisition also know that we are living in a culture in which many people lack the basic skills of communication because they spend most of their time being passive consumers of information. Both television and computers help promote passive learning... Conversation is always about giving. Genuine conversation is about the sharing of power and knowledge; it is fundamentally a cooperative enterprise” (44-45).

student preparation of assigned readings is a key aspect. I want students to engage in dialogue with each other, with me, and with a text on a religious idea; without preparation of the readings, our conversation will not have this crucial foundation in the text. When I assign a reading, I tend to keep them relatively short (no more than ten or fifteen pages) and I require students to submit a reading reflection before class. In these reading reflections, students choose two quotations from the reading that “jump out at them” – one that resonates with them and one that challenges them – and write a short paragraph on why they chose it and what it means for them. This not only ensures that students are doing the reading, it is asking them to have a personal reaction to the reading. While I do want them to learn content from the reading, I also want them to engage it on a more personal level, asking themselves what they found that affirms what they already think or believe and what they found that pushes them to think about things in new ways.

I have been assigning this type of reading reflections for a couple of semesters and I am amazed at what students say in these reflections. Because their reflection is focused on a quotation from the text, they have to engage what the author is saying. And, because their reflection asks for their reaction to the quotation, they have to bring their own perspectives and experiences into the conversation. A couple of examples:³⁶

- In this paragraph, a student is reflecting on a reading from Terrence Tilley’s *Faith: What It Is and What It Isn’t*.

“Learning how to love is an accomplishment.”

This is a short and simple quote, however it spoke volumes to me. I was brought up in such a loving family that I never had to question what it felt like being loved. For as long as I can remember I have always felt loved and have loved the ones around me. Learning how to love was an accomplishment and I have been able to use it all throughout my life. Sadly, I know I was very lucky to grow up in the family I did because not everyone gets to experience love. For some, it is hard to love and accept love. This quote just made me step back and understand why others could be more “uptight”. They just haven’t reached that accomplishment yet, because their path to love had more roadblocks.

- Here, two students chose the same quotation from Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” but had different things to say about the quotation.

“Moreover, I am cognizant about the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Student One: I resonated with this quote because it directly relates to what we discussed in our last class. There are so many different challenges faced every day in the United States. The example brought up in class was abortions. Several states in the south are starting to make abortions illegal for women. This was absolutely horrifying for me to hear and even though I don’t live there my heart aches for those women. When King says injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, I immediately thought of the new abortion laws down south. Not only are the laws not right but they may also have a

³⁶ Student names have been removed from these as have some identifying information. It should also be noted that these reading reflections were written towards the end of the semester, when students were familiar with the process and with how our in-class conversations would be conducted.

spiraling effect on other states. Just because it is not directly happening to women in New England, does not mean that it couldn't one day in the future. If something is not right in one part of the United States, we should be standing together to fight for the cause. We are called *united* for a reason.

Student Two: This quote, stood out to me as something that challenges me, as I'm sure challenges many others. I believe that, as King states, injustice of different communities are interrelated to each other. As Americans, if an injustice happens in one area, we should all be concerned as if it was happening to us. I think this is something that tends to be lost in today's society. Even with myself, I can watch something on the news, and even if I think to myself "that's sad", or "that's unfair", I will turn off the news and continue about my day. This reminds me of a painting that correlates with a story we talked about in my literature class. The painting entitled, "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. In the painting, Icarus fell from the sky and landed in the water. There were people around him, but no one seemed to notice Icarus struggle. The message of this painting was that everyone is so focused on themselves, we tend to overlook those who need our help. King, on the other hand, took action instead of looking the other way. He thought less about himself, and the possible repercussions, and gave a voice to those who needed his help. I think that I, and everyone else, can learn from King's actions.

Second, the way that we use these reading reflections in class is structured. Using them in our class discussions reinforces that doing the reading and the reflections is not just busywork, that it lays the foundation for what will happen in the classroom. But, more importantly, having these quotations that they have already had the chance to reflect on means that students are ready to participate in a conversation that is grounded in our common text and that engages students in a discussion on that text. These class discussions always happen with students and myself sitting in a circle so that we can see each other. Each student has their first name on a table tent in front of them enabling all of us to call each other by name. To get the conversation started, we pick names out of a hat; when a student's name is chosen, they share one of their quotations and a bit about why they picked it. This then becomes the conversation starter and other students are invited to respond – they can agree and build on what a student has said, respectfully disagree, offer a different interpretation, suggest a related quotation from the text, tell a story that illuminates a point, and more. When a topic under discussion peters out, we choose a new name from the hat.

As the instructor and the subject area expert in the room, I come to class with some topics from the reading that I think we need to be sure to discuss. Sometimes, I will offer my own quotation just as students do; sometimes I will specifically draw their attention to a particularly important point that the author is making. But more often than not, the conversation ends up raising most of what I wanted to be sure to discuss. In addition, I do function both as conversation leader – ensuring that we don't get too far off track in the conversations – and as the expert in religious studies, providing clarification of ideas or explanations of Church teachings. During these conversations, especially at the beginning of a semester, there can be periods of awkwardness. Students need time to develop their conversational skills and to learn how to think critically about a text and their own experiences; and this pedagogical approach asks them to learn these skills by doing them, which can be halting and strained, at least at first. In addition, good conversation requires good thinking and this means that there are often times of

silence. The silence that happens while students think about what a student has offered in their quotation can, at first, feel awkward, but it is a necessary part of the process.

In general, students have responded very well to this pedagogical approach. In particular, they have noted two positive aspects to this format for class conversation. First, they appreciate hearing what their classmates think and how it kept their attention focused on the topic under discussion. “These discussions were great in helping us learn more about one another and this course.” “It was nice to know people’s personal opinions.” “Most people were engaged and, even if not talking, were listening.” “I loved these, getting many ideas, opinions, and having discussions that were independent yet guided.” “This made people participate and I liked it because the quiet people usually have the best ideas.” “I saw how when reading the same text, many people had different interpretations based on their backgrounds.”

Second, students note that they were able to engage questions of faith in ways that felt natural and honest to them and that balanced a sense of rootedness in the Catholic tradition and was welcoming of all forms of belief or non-belief. “I think these were valuable discussions throughout the semester that made me think about my faith and my life.” “I learned that religion can be more about life and not just what the Church says.” “I am not particularly religious, but still found the class to be welcoming.” “People were free to bring their own beliefs into a conversation without feeling like they were being forced to.” “I have debated my religious beliefs for a long time and this class helped me realize religion is more than what they preach at church.” “I learned how opening my mind to the different topics discussed made me more interested in religion.” “I have a new appreciation for God and how and where God is when we are suffering with something.” “I’m not really religious, but I enjoyed hearing the different perspectives of theologians. I feel like I am more open-minded now.”

Beyond the positive reactions of students (which, in a university culture that emphasizes student evaluations, is nice to hear), I would draw attention to a third important outcome. It is my experience that students become better critical thinkers about religious texts over the course of a semester. Because this process requires students to read a theological text and respond to what resonates with them or challenges them and because they engage in conversation about these points of resonance and challenge, they learn how to and then become more comfortable with seeing these religious texts as partners in the conversation. The readings are no longer simply sources of information (although they are that, too) and participation in class is no longer simply learning facts about Christianity to be presented back to me on a test. Rather, the theologians that we engage in our conversations become learning partners and students begin to see themselves as learning, not just from me as the instructor, but also from each other and from the text. And, when the text and classmates become conversation partners, students start to engage in evaluation, analysis, and application of these texts – developing the kinds of critical thinking skills that a university education should enable. And, because students have something to contribute to the conversation regardless of their personal appropriation of or belief in the Christian faith, they find themselves opening up to the possibility that Christianity might be a source of wisdom for them and their lives.

In the quest to find a “coexistence” between rootedness in the Christian tradition and the need to honor the context of secularization and disaffiliation among students in the teaching of introductory religious studies courses, this paper traces one pedagogical approach that seems to engage students in thinking critically about a religious text and talking thoughtfully about their responses to the text and each other. While this is not the only pedagogical approach that would

work, it is one that recognizes what students are bringing (or not bringing) to the religious studies classroom and yet engages them in a process of thinking critically about Catholic theology, a core mission of any Catholic university. Students report that they appreciate this approach as one that honors their various levels of believing, doesn't "force religion down their throats," and engages them in thinking critically about the faith-claims of the Catholic tradition. A number of students report that they find themselves reevaluating their skepticism about faith and being more open to religious belonging. Instead of focusing on information about the Christian tradition, this focus on conversation about a text from the Christian tradition seems to encourage practices of evaluation and analysis. But perhaps more importantly, it seems to encourage respect, open-mindedness, and a thoughtful "reading [of] the world and reading [of] the word."³⁷

³⁷ Paulo Freire, "Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed," 238.

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Coexistence in Divided Societies:

Pedagogies of Difference - (secularized) Christian and Islamic Perspectives

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Abstract

Societies with open, pluralistic, liberal democracies aim to promote civilization in which people who follow diverse ideas, religious and cultural paths, can live together and share the same public domain. In those societies religious education might become an auxiliary discipline next to citizenship education by on the one hand articulating differences and at the same time in a dialogical approach serving as a bridge across. Well aware of the intersectionality of a range of aspects, like political ideology, social stratification, and ethnicity, resulting in polarization and radicalization, in this contribution we first present a conceptual analysis of ‘education’. After that we focus on processes of polarization and radicalization. We compare Islamic and Christian education and their pedagogical strategies, as well as the way they contribute to prevent radicalization and support learning processes of peacefully living together in societies characterized by plurality. Based on theoretical and empirical research (literature review, and interviews with youngsters respectively) we conclude our contribution with an outline for a dialogical model for the development of mutual understanding in a societies at risk for radicalization.

Key words: (Inter) Religious Education, (secular) Christian Pedagogy, Islamic Pedagogy, plural society

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Introduction

Western Europe is fallen under the spell of the issue of Islam on a so far Christian continent. This is not a new topic, already in the ninety's of the last century, when Christian and (neutral) state schools were confronted with Muslim pupils, the question was raised about the religious identity development of these children. In the Netherlands different pedagogical approaches were developed, varying in the range from exclusion to reluctantly inclusion of Muslim children (Miedema, 2000). Whereas at the beginning 'guest workers' as well as 'host country' were of the opinion that Muslim children would only temporarily be part of the school population, at the end of the day – becoming aware of their permanent stay - exclusion could not be at stake anymore. The permanent presence of Muslim children in the classroom urged for new pedagogical strategies, not at least for the subject of religious education. In this contribution we explore in what way Christian and Islamic pedagogy contribute to religious education in a plural context – a context in which learning to live together is a main goal in education.

We start our contribution in the first paragraph with a conceptual analysis of the concept of education. Then, in the second paragraph, we describe separately Christian and Islamic education and their pedagogical strategies regarding religious identity development and the encounter with the other. With a comparison of both we conclude the second chapter. In the third chapter we develop our ideas on dialogical faith education, based on preliminary results of a pilot study among 21 Muslim youngsters. Their commitment to Islam and the Dutch society urges for a pedagogical strategy, concretised in an outline of a playful way to strengthen religious identity development and open up for 'the other'.

1. The concept of education

Since education is a core concept in pedagogy, in this first part we distinguish a broad and a restricted understanding of this concept. This distinction is based on the conceptual analysis of Steutel & De Ruyter (2019). Let's start with some statements in which the concept 'education' is used, like: "An authoritarian way of education is better than no education", "Education in the Netherlands is pillarized", "He is a product of his orthodox Christian education" and "Both parents are responsible for the education of their children". In these statements 'education' is used as an umbrella concept, covering all activities from early childhood to adolescence aiming at the development of the child to become a responsible adult (Steutel & De Ruyter 2019, p. 56). In some cases these activities are categorized according to their content, like when we speak about an Islamic or a Christian education. In other cases the focus is on the style, for example a friendly, a traditional, an authoritative or an over-concerned style of education. Sometimes these two, the content and the style, are taken together. That is the case when the education is characterized as narrow minded or rigorous. In everyday language Steutel & De Ruyter observe one more way of the use of 'education', as is noticed in the following two examples: "In such a situation there is a need for education" and "Take away his mobile phone – that is what education is". Used in this way education's focus is on an individual action in a particular situation. Education in this kind of

situations refers to “command and forbid, advise and summon, warn and reprimand, stimulate and discourage” (ibid., p. 57). According to Steutel & De Ruyter ‘education’ can be understood in a broad and in a restricted way. For this broad understanding in English the concept of ‘upbringing’ seems to be adequate; for the restricted understanding of ‘education’ the concept of ‘discipline’ probably comes closest to what is meant.

In the process of *disciplining* it is an adult who is educating and the child who is educated. The aim of the process of disciplining can refer to adequate behavior, like eating with fork and knife, or brushing your teeth before going to bed. The aim can also be to tell the child *not* to do certain things, like eating while smacking one’s lips and burking. Conscious behavior of the adult is not an intervention just for that moment, but aims at sustainable behavior of the child, sustainable and wished for by the child her/him self. The aim of ‘disciplining’ may be (more) knowledge, (improved) competencies and (strengthening of) willpower.

The noun *upbringing* refers to the content of all activities facilitating the development from childhood to adulthood. We speak of a ‘humanistic education’ and of a ‘Christian education’ or ‘Islamic education’. We only speak of a ‘good education’/‘good upbringing’ in case the child was well prepared for the status of adulthood, according to the criteria of the society s/he lives in (ibid., p. 67). The preparation for adulthood is not restricted to concrete behavior, but includes also the cultivation of certain attitudes and convictions, that are at the base of a person’s will to behave in an expected way. In their conceptual analysis of education, Steutel & De Ruyter pay attention to life orientation, including moral norms, the acceptance thereof and the willpower to live accordingly (ibid., p. 69). This guidance may be open, supportive, closed, and sometimes compelling in particular when educators expect their child to adhere to the same (religious) life orientation as the one the educators adhere to (ibid., p. 70).

Disciplining and upbringing can only take place when the child understands the educator. In other words, the educator must adapt to the level of understanding of the child. The educator should be aware of her/his own value orientation and ideals that are at the base of the education and that make education a normative process.

1a. Education of the fanatic

John Hull, the British pedagogue of religion, dedicated one of his many articles to the religious education of radical youngsters – named by him as fanatics. Characteristic for fanaticism is that it is othering the other (Hull, 2007, p. 49). Radicals are non-hermeneutical in their approach of religious texts (ibid., p. 50). Following Hull the fanatic believer takes religious scriptures in a literal sense. These scriptures and other founding narratives are understood word-for-word and are practiced accordingly. For a radical person *development* of a religious tradition or of a person is a non-issue. Tradition, given in Holy Scriptures to be understood literally, must be transmitted, accepted and obeyed (ibid., p. 52). Characteristic is the rigidity in mind; a radical person cannot live with any doubt.

What is required to challenge a fanatic way of dealing with religious texts, according to Hull (2007), is a kind of religious education from a historical-contextual perspective, which increases the students' competency for dialogue, stimulating the construction of experiential knowledge of each one's personal religious or secular worldview and life orientation.

Hull describes four characteristics of a kind of religious education that might prevent youngsters from radicalizing. First of all, Hull states, we should not forget that the radical(izing) youngster is a faithful person, not an irreligious person. S/he highly values the religious tradition, so in religious education we should "show respect for the conservation of the traditions of faith" (ibid., p. 52). Religious Education as a subject (RE) should acknowledge and develop the tradition the children are raised in at home. RE should "emphasize the diversity within each major tradition and should focus upon the creative personalities of the tradition, selecting those who are admired but who were inspired by different aspects of the faith" (ibid., p. 53). Hull is well aware of the "considerable demands upon the personality, the belief structure and the spirituality of the teacher" (ibid., p. 54). We will come back to this in the concluding paragraph.

The focus of RE in Hull's view should be on dialogicality and questioning. In the next paragraph we elaborate on the concept of dialogue, and explore the way dialogue is included in Christian and Islamic pedagogy.

2. Pedagogy and Dialogue

A dialogue according to Hubert Hermans & Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka

"(...) refers not only to productive exchanges between the voices of individuals but also between collective voices of the groups, communities, and cultures to which the individual person belongs. (...) It implies a learning process that confirms, innovates, or further develops existing positions on the basis of the preceding exchange. As a learning process it has the capacity to move the self to higher levels of awareness and integration. (...) Dialogue is one of the most precious instruments of the human mind and is valuable enough to be stimulated and developed, particularly in situations where learning is hampered by monological communication" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 6).

With this definition of the concept of dialogue in mind, below the dialogical quality of Christian and Islamic pedagogy is explored. We take our starting point in one of the 'principle pedagogues', Jan Waterink for Christian pedagogy, and the qur'anic pedagogy for the Islamic thoughts on religious education.

2a. Dialogue and Christian Pedagogy

In this section we describe developments in Christian pedagogy. First (in 2a.1) we describe the developments in the protestant tradition of religious education. In the next paragraph (2a.2) the focus is on the developments in the roman catholic tradition of religious education. In both cases

we present the ideas exemplary theologians – Jan Waterink for the protestant tradition and Frans de Hovre for the roman catholic tradition.

2a.1 Christian pedagogy in the protestant tradition

One of the influential theologians who dedicated him self to the field of formal and informal Christian education is Jan Waterink. His pedagogy is rooted in the idea that “God Himself is the great educator, who sets the goals, who gives the means, who clarifies the spirituality of the child and who appoints the persons to concretise his will in education.” Waterink was far ahead of his time when he states that every single part of creation is interrelated with other parts since they all belong to the one and only meaningful creation. Waterink illustrates this by a well-known statement: “In nature it is not stamina and not pistils that grow and develop, not petals and sepals: God created flowers (Praamsma, 2004, 102).

For Waterink the child is a creature of God, but also sinful and by consequence should be guided to respond to God’s expectations. The aim of education is for the person to become “self-confident and autonomous, God and his word obeying personality, competent and ready to use all the qualities received from God, to His honour en the wellbeing of all creatures, in the relationships s/he is positioned in by God” (Praamsma, 2004, p. 112; Rietveld-van Wingerden et al. 2002, 2013). Doubt in Waterink’s view is a positive aspect of religious education, appreciated by him as an invitation to the educators to clarify a new – and probably in a way better adjusted to the child’s understanding - their own positionality. Forcing a child to be obedient in the sense of “you *must* belief” or “you *must* put your faith on God” threatens the child’s religious development and is a hindrance for the child to become a faithful adult (Praamsma, 2004, p. 109).

Waterink was very influential in particular because of his practical directions for education. His publication ‘*Aan moeders hand tot Jezus*’ (Mother’s guidance to Jesus) was his most well known work in the field of Christian pedagogy.

In the 70’s the Calvin oriented normative pedagogy is enriched with new pedagogical insights as leading perspectives for the teaching-learning situations in the classroom. General accepted is that religious education is impossible without taking into account the stage of development of the child (Kuindersma & Miedema, 2004, p. 156).

2a.2 Christian pedagogy in the roman catholic tradition

In 1919 – one hundred years ago – the Flemish roman catholic philosopher Frans de Hovre founded the educational journal *Vlaamsch Opvoedkundig Tijdschrift* (Flemish Education Journal) (van Crombrugge, 2004, p. 118). De Hovre was op the opinion that education as a science should explore education practices to arrive at insights into the heart of the matter. De Hovre states that in earlier ages people developed insights that transcend the historical context, insights that are of great value for and important to be integrated in elaborations of later generations. By consequence the very

first ideas about education – for example by the Greek philosophers – were elaborated upon in later ages. For De Hovre the Greek philosophers, the Bible and the church fathers are the foundation for a deductive line of thought on education. It is De Hovre's opinion that all developed educational ideas can be brought together under the umbrella of the comprehensive perspective of a roman catholic pedagogy (ibid., p. 120). In principle roman catholic pedagogy is open minded, favouring a dialogical encounter of theoretical frameworks and strategies.

Roman catholic pedagogy, according to De Hovre, should be rooted in tradition. Education according to De Hovre comprises all activities that enable the child to participate in a given organic order, created by God. Plato's saying '*traditio lampadis*' (tradition is the torch of life) is a beloved saying in roman catholic pedagogy in the first half of the 20th century (ibid., 126).

Also in the second half of the 20th century, in the roman catholic educational elaborations religious education remained of great importance. A deductive approach was characteristic. The belief system of the roman catholic church was presented as a given to be accepted by the child. In the sixties, and related to Vaticanum II, this changed and the focus from then on was on the personal experiences of children. In times of ongoing processes of secularization, for religious education it was thought necessary to adapt its pedagogical strategies to the latest insights from psychology. A subjective personal religious development of the child was at the centre of attention (Hermans 2003, 2007).

2a.3 Christian pedagogy - merging perspectives

Pluralisation of (sub-) cultures resulted in the 80's in a change from mono-religious (=roman catholic) religious education in multi-religious education. This approach is labelled as teaching and learning *about* religions (ibid., p. 138). Despite the difference in both denominations of the Christian tradition, concepts like 'the hermeneutics of experience' and 'interpretive approach' were influential in the discussion on religious education in a plural and secularizing world. The 'hermeneutic-communicative model' for religious education is put forward as an innovative approach. Characteristic for the teacher religious education (teacher RE) in the hermeneutic-communicative model is s/he being a *Getuige*, a *Specialist* and a *Moderator* (GSM; a witness, an expert and a moderator).

At the turn of the century instead of informing about religions the search for meaning becomes centre stage in religious education. The concept of 'religious education' changes in 'world view education'. Recently the concept of 'life orientation' was introduced to replace 'religion' and 'worldview' (Van der Zande 2018). The search for meaning in a plural classroom opens space for diversity and conflict. The pupil is invited to position her/himself amidst the plurality of (religious and secular) life orientations. The concept of teaching and learning *from* religion(s) is used to describe this new situation, both in roman catholic and in protestant reflections on religious education. Recently the concepts of teaching and learning *in the presence of the other* and inclusive education are added to respond to a plural classroom (Roebben, 2012).

Starting point these days in pedagogical strategies is the position of the pupil-in-context – that’s where the process of religious education begins. The teacher facilitates the search for new questions that may arise from ‘age old answers’ as they are given in the tradition “believing in a truth that always is greater than the human answers under construction” (Pollefeyt 2004, p. 145). The pupil nowadays is expected to actively participate in the process of education; they are *partners in dialogue*. Pupils’ search and their interpretations of given ‘age old answers’ from different religious and secular worldview traditions make the curriculum open ended. It is in the process of education that its aim is realised.

In his public lectures Siebren (Miedema, 2003, 2012), concluded that in each and every curriculum at all schools ‘life orientation’ should be part of the curriculum, with a focus on the development of the competence of dialogicality between adherents of different religious and secular worldviews. Elaborating on his ideas Miedema’s plea recently is for ‘religious citizenship education’ (2013; see also ‘normative citizenship education, Ter Avest 2017).

2b. Islamic Pedagogy and dialogue

The present section discusses the concepts of education in Islam supporting learning processes of peacefully living together in societies characterized by plurality.

2b.1 Islamic education

In a description of Islamic religious education the role of the religious community cannot be underestimated. To start with teaching and learning of children took place in the mosque, starting at a very young age, to learn the Qur’an by heart. As Ibn Khaldun stated: “The Qur’an became the basis of instruction, the foundation for all later habits and customs. The reason to start at an early age is that what is taught in childhood will be(come) deeply rooted in one’s life” (Meijer 2006, p. 73 ff). Thirty years ago Sajidah Abuds Sattar pointed to the importance of Islamic religious education for muslims in diaspora (Sattar 1990). *Tarbiyah* (pedagogy), *ta’līm/tadrīs* (teaching), *ta’dīb* (moral disciplining), *talqīn* (instructing), *tazkiyah* (purifying), *iṣlāḥ* (reform) and *sulūk* (psycho-spiritual formation) are the concepts to describe different aspects of the educational process. Among them, the Arabic word *tarbiyah* is the most commonly used concept to express the educational process in Muslim culture. The word also is related to *Ar-Rab*, the creator (Al-Iṣfahānī, 2003; Ibn Manzūr, 1989). *Tarbiyah* also described as the physical, psychological, spiritual and moral development of an individual according to the will of Allah (Budak, p. 4) and the one’s upbringing from birth to all his life physically and spiritually (Sahin, 2013, p. 182).

The Islamic perception of *tarbiyah* reflects strong contextual elements: it responds to the specific needs of their interlocutors such as their social and economic status, gender, ages, environments, intellectual capacities (6:92) and puts forward a gradual and dialogical principle to solve their individual and social problems (2:219). The Qur’an recognizes the change inherent in human life; when necessary and replaces them with a better or more fitting one (2:106; 16:101). The Quran

emphasizes that the aspects of human nature are the developmental processes active in both the physical and spiritual.

The human self (*nafs*) holds the capacity for choosing good and bad even though created in the state of purity (*fiṭrah*). These motivations form the subjectivity and enables an individual for continual growth as well as regression (91:7-11; 95:4-6). Consequently, the human capacity for faith (*īmān*), like human cognitive capacity (*ilm*), is developmental and dialogical, as it is a part of the human condition (58:11). Self (*nafs*) goes through stages of spiritual and cognitive growth, thus actualising its potentials (*aḥsan al-taqwim*) by experiencing maturity into selfhood and faith (*yaqīn, itmi'nān*). However, the *nafs* may experience a regression into the lower levels of being (*asfal al-sāfilīn*) as it has selfish tendencies (12:53). Therefore, care for the self includes nurturing trust and confidence in one's self so that healthy self-criticism facilitates maturity and growth into faithfulness (Gürpınar & Kenar, 2016).

The works of Al-Ghazālī provide a fertile ground for a variety of motivations, cognitive styles and contents of Islamic beliefs and practices, and also form an important example to explain intra-dimensional aspects of Islam as well as premises for the application of a critical and dialogical Islamic pedagogy (Gürlesin, 2018). Characteristic of Al-Ghazālī's work is that he links the details of the Sharī'a to the insights of the spirituality. One of the prominent feature of Al-Ghazali's thinking is the model of the dialogicality between exoteric (*zāhir*) and esoteric (*bātin*) interpretations of the Qur'ān and of reality in general. These are different cognitive styles that lead to different religious orientations. They are likened to general knowledge of an object vs detailed knowledge of an object, in so far as the latter is gained through 'verification and experience' (*tahqīq wa'l-dhawq*). General knowledge can be likened to acquiring the husk of a grain (*qishr*) while detailed knowledge can be likened to acquiring the germ (*lubāb*), terms found frequently in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* (Whittingham, 2007, p. 59).

Al-Ghazali also highlighted few important operations with regards to *tarbiyah*: premise of ability of changing character through self-discipline (*riyāda*), illustration of the ways of moral acquisition, methods of knowing the details of refining morality (*taḥdhīb*), and premises of purification (*mujāhada*) (Ghazālī, 2005, p. 929).

Other conceptions related to *tarbiya* is the classification of *īmān, islām, iḥsān*. *Īmān* and *islām* literally mean that one submits one's self to the Creator to achieve states of peace, security and harmony in life. *Īmān* is faith as a human act and is subject to the psychosocial cognitive process and Islam is the manifestations of these beliefs in the individual and the societal context. The Arabic term *iḥsān* means spirituality in English (Renard, 2005, p. 226). The root of this term is *ḥ-s-n* which means beauty, to be or to become beautiful (Badawi & Haleem, 2008; Lane, 1863, vol. 2, p. 570). The Prophet is advised to pray to God with the words: "My Lord increase my knowledge (and understanding)" (20:114). Similarly, Muslims are encouraged to grow into their faith at the spiritual level, a new type of experiential spirituality and awareness of God (*taqwā and iḥsān*) (8:2; 45:4; 58:11).

According to Muslim scholars, the process of *tarbiya* needs to combine both individual and social aspects since the individual aspect develops the process of maturity integrally with the relations in the community (Alkouatli, 2018; Halstead, 2004; Waghid, 2014). Until now, spiritual and internal aspect of *tarbiyah* is tried to be introduced. From now on, the study will try to emphasis on social and external aspect of this concept.

In the Quran, differences in the communities are perceived as an opportunity to engage with the dialogic process of 'knowing one another and learning from each other' (*ta'āruf*) (30:19-26; 49:13) in the hope of developing a holistic perspective (*tawhīd*) on life. One of the references in the Quran states that;

“O humankind! Surely We have created you from a single (pair of) male and female, and made you into tribes and families so that you may know one another...”

The prophet brought new understanding of social relations and showed examples of how to interact with others in his time. In that sense, the core of his prophetic mission is interpreted by many scholars as to be educational “role model”⁵ with his behaviour and attitudes in the society. Whenever the prophet witnessed harsh treatment of people, he reminded his Companions that “he was sent as a mercy to humanity” (21:107).

The aim of Islamic education according to Van der Meijl (2012, 2017) cannot be defined in isolation, but has to be contextualized. According to him “Muslim pupils can only become well prepared for their future role in society when modern scientific insights are – in some way or another –brought in accordance with Islamic life orientation” (Van der Meijl 2012, p. 93). A point of severe debates is the theory of evolution, by some Muslim scholars interpreted as conflicting with the religious narrative of creation. As a result of Van der Meijl’s research on ‘science and religion’ in Islamic primary schools, he notices that inclusion of the theory of evolution in RE classes is wished for. However, there is a lack of expertise on this subject among the RE teachers, and to date no adequate teaching material is available. His recommendation therefore is to include the theory of evolution in classes Biology and reflect upon this from an Islamic point of view in RE classes. Preconditional is schooling of RE teachers and development of teaching material (ibid., p. 98-101).

Studies on religiosity demonstrated that considerable amount of young Muslims wanted to learn Islam through mere questioning and exploration. They expressed that the instruction-memorisation- and teach centred Islamic education did not answer their various motivations of religiosity such as verification (*tahqīq*) of beliefs, which includes doubt (*irtiyāb*) and questioning (*tafakkur*) (Gürlesin, 2019).

This section has discussed internal and external aspects of Islam and its importance for the application of *tarbiyah*. A critical and dialogic Islamic pedagogy that can respond adequately to

⁵ Ibn Sa‘d (d.845) (1968, v8, p. 235) narrates that when Āishah, the Prophet's beloved wife, was asked to describe his personality and manners, she replied: “He was the living Qur'an”. Thus, the religious authority of the Prophet has strong educational and pedagogic dimensions.

the Islamic educational needs of Muslim young people can provide esoteric religious knowledge which embedded in the exoteric religious knowledge and help youngsters the reflective and dynamic processes of faith development.

2b.2 Islamic pedagogy 'on the move'

Many studies on the religiosity of Muslim young people in both minority and majority Muslim social contexts reveals that young Muslims are considerably diverse in their sense of religious identity (Cesari, 2009, 2015). The popular religiosity characterized by stability of belief, uncritical type of knowledge, undifferentiated mode of religious experience was predominant, and appeared to be informed by complex psycho-social and cultural dynamics (Gürlesin, 2018). The empirical data presented in the many studies illustrate that a considerable number of young people express the need for a dialogical space to explore religious issues for themselves and the desire to acquire adequate knowledge and understanding of their faith. Findings of field researches strongly indicate that existing Islamic cultural and educational institutions need to nurture the spiritual side of religiosity and exploratory mode of Islamic subjectivity so that young people have the chance to construct their sense of religious belonging (Akdağ, Gürlesin, Ter Avest, & Alasağ, 2018).

In the work of Mualla Selcuk (2017) the core aspects of an Islamic pedagogy are further explored. Islamic Pedagogy is characterized by the exploration of the context of the Holy Scriptures, the different interpretations of texts and their meaning for Muslims today. For this also a dialogical attitude is emphasized. An attitude that is inherent in Islam, as Wilna Meyer (2006) convincingly described. The starting point in Islamic pedagogy is a natural familiarity with the Qur'anic texts, and in addition to that an understanding of the difference between what is written and what the meaning thereof is – in those days and in our days (ibid., p. 137).

In order to engage with the above issues, Muslim educationalists suggested to create a dialogical space and to rethink traditional Islamic education, particularly its teacher, text and pedagogic discourse.

2c. Christian and Islamic pedagogy in dialogue

From the descriptions given above we see that in both traditions education and pedagogical strategies take their starting point in their respective Holy Scriptures and the way they understand men's interrelated position in the whole of creation. Christian and Islamic pedagogues from thereon reason in a deductive way formulating their aims and strategies in education. In both tradition we might speak of a paradigmatic turn from a deductive way of reasoning to an inductive way of reasoning, taking actual daily experiences of pupils/students and their psychological stage of development as a starting point. From thereon pedagogues adjust their strategies to reach their aim. To what extent this meets the need of youngsters is a question we try to answer in the next paragraph.

3. Muslim youngsters' religious positionality

How do Muslim youngsters experience their position as a religious citizen in the Netherlands? To answer this question we developed a 'questionnaire' based on the dialogical self theory (DST) (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) and its self-confrontation method (SCM) (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). In this questionnaire youngsters are asked to score on a scale of 0 – 5 (zero – five) their feelings regarding verbal expressions. These expressions, so called 'valuations', are based on three rounds of interviews with Muslim youngsters age 12-29. "I as a Muslim in the Dutch society", "The duty of daily prayers", "I participating in Iftar supper with non-believers", and "New interpretations of the Qur'an" are a few of in total 20 'valuations'. Each of the 16 emotion related feelings has to be connected with each of the 20 'valuations'; with positive as well feelings, like 'joy' and 'commitment', and negative feelings like 'angryness' and 'guilty'.

A first preliminary impression is that this group of young people feels positively connected with the Dutch society. They are not worried, nor about their present position, nor about their future position as Muslims in the Netherlands. Praying is a source of self-awareness, a feeling of being a valuable person. Being obedient to Allah makes them feel connected with the larger Muslim community and causes feelings of inner calm.

Most of this group of 21 persons experiences strong feelings of belonging with Muslims and non-believers, for example during an Iftar supper. The guaranteed freedom of religion in the Netherlands is a source of joy. Being obedient to Allah makes them feel connected with the larger Muslim community and causes feelings of inner calm.

In this group being confronted with friends who do not fulfil their Muslim duties causes feelings of angeriness and powerlessness. The same holds for some of these youngsters when they reflect on the imam and his way of responding to their questions. Conversations with friends who don't adhere to Islam causes feelings of sorrow. Being together with a muslim friend who does not pray 5 times a day, makes them feel guilty and powerless, although at the same time they have strong feelings of friendship and connectedness.

From this first impression of preliminary results of the filling in of the developed SCM-based questionnaire by 21 students, we conclude that it might help youngsters to explore in more detail their negative feelings, like feelings of sorrow, angeriness and powerlessness, and assist them in formulating their experiences in questions to be explored together with class mates in formal or informal education.

Taking as a starting point that youngsters like to explore their questions, since this is a characteristic of their age (Bakker & ter Avest, 2008; Marcia, 1980). we developed a game as a space for conversations about these and other existential questions. Below we give a short impression about that game – a playful pedagogical strategy to facilitate youngsters religious development, taking as a start their questions and its relationship with core values of Islam.

4. A dialogical intervention

Based on the interviews with youngsters and the preliminary results of the developed questionnaire, we present an outline for a playful dialogical model for the development of mutual understanding in a divided society.

On the game board of this game squares of virtue are for example: faith, reliability, generosity, knowledge, and asceticism. Squares of vice or evil are for example: disobedience, vanity, theft, lying, rage, greed, pride and lust. The board depicts 'ladders' pointing upwards and 'snakes' pointing downwards. The 'ladders' and the 'snakes' connect two specific squares with their respective virtues or vices. The virtues are understood as stimulating religious development, and pull a person upwards to her/his ultimate communion with the divine, while the vices drag a person down and force her/him to reflect and reconsider her/his behaviour. The words of the virtues and vices on the board are adapted to the contemporary language of young people. Generosity, for example, is reworded as 'returning a favour'; 'asceticism' is reworded as 'opting out.' The discussions taking place during the game result – under the guidance of the teacher – in an awareness among the students of their personal positioning in the field of religious and secular life orientations.

It is our contention that this game – integrating recently developed (secularized) Christian and Islamic pedagogical principles and strategies - responds to the requirements of stimulating an authentic and autonomous religious life orientation, that is “a practice of existential and identity constructing re-orientation” in a plural world that includes an active, dialogical exploration for understanding beyond the boundaries of difference” (Alma 2018, p. 96-97), aiming at a meaningful life nourished and imbued by social/cultural/religious imaginaries of ultimate truth and the good life (ibid., p. 64).

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***Worldview Literacy in the Academy and Beyond:
Advancing Mutual Understanding in Diverse Societies.
Valk, Selçuk and Miedema***

Abstract

Diverse societies face increasing racial tension, social divide, religious illiteracy, and secularism. What role can education play in confronting these challenges? Universities generate scientific knowledge but less so the search for meaning. Worldview Studies encompasses both views of life and ways of life. Exploring various worldviews becomes a search for meaning and a journey into knowing self and other. This paper seeks to engage multiple partners to develop teaching pedagogies, curricula and educational tools to enhance greater knowledge, awareness and understanding of various worldviews.

Introduction

Certain phenomena are creating challenges in our modern and diverse societies. Increasing individualism, secularism, and consumerism are *views of life* that vie for the hearts and minds of many. They have brought numerous benefits but at the same time lead to *ways of life* that become worrisome today. More worrisome is a rise in Islamization, racial tension, and social divide, as domestic strife, economic imbalances and immigration test national and regional levels of tolerance, openness, and compassion for the other. But no less worrisome to religious educators is an increase in religious illiteracy and the rise of religious “nones”, where past social cohesiveness grounded in common visions of meaning and purpose have been shattered if not

truncated and are replaced by what could best be characterized as new forms of pillarization and segregation. Adding to all of this is a public square where discussions and debates become increasingly polarized and vociferous, as civil society as an encompassing entity begins to lose any sense of its meaning. What role can education play in confronting these challenges?

In the past century or more, universities increasingly shifted focus to that of science-based knowledge, with a stress on what has become known as STEM programs – science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Knowledge from such programs has benefitted numerous societies, both East and West, with innovative advancements in travel, medicine, communication, and technology that have added ease, comfort and opportunity to many worldwide.

Yet in all these advancements a sense of meaning and purpose appears to allude all too many. The search for it, however, continues unabated in society at large and can be seen in numerous self-help, group-help and even substance-help programs and initiatives that proliferate in the land. But the search for meaning and purpose from religious institutions seems to have minimized, and in many cases even abandoned (Clark, 1989). There is decreased involvement and membership in traditional religious organizations, and not least that of the younger generation, many of whom prefer to call themselves “spiritual but not religious.” Yet they have interest in religious and spiritual questions (Bentall, 2008; Young, 2003). Further, the social and natural sciences have challenged traditional religious perspectives on many aspects of life. This has resulted in some down-sizing of religious education programs and even departments in the academy. In that sense, religious education faces a dire future.

Religion will, nonetheless, survive in this new state of affairs. It is not the first challenge religion has faced and overcome in its long history. Religious education too will persist in the

face of this new reality, but its success may be limited. Its exclusive and narrow focus on religious traditions alone may become its own undoing. In a time when the search for meaning continues unabated in an increasingly secular society fewer and fewer seek it from religious institutions, or even Religious Education. Yet Religious Education needs to speak again to faculty and students so as to overcome the increasing challenges facing us today, and not least the Islamization, racial tension, and social divide that perplexes so many (Valk & Selçuk 2017). But it cannot do so in its current rendition.

A new paradigm is needed for this diverse and divisive age – worldview education. Knowledge and awareness of the various worldviews, both religious and secular, and how they impact self, others and societies at large can lead to greater understanding of differences, so that focus can shift to tensions that become creative rather than divisive (Valk, 2010). In essence worldview education is a journey into knowing self and others (Selçuk, 2015).

That new paradigm may need to have its beginning in reimagining Religious Education as Worldview Education, or Worldview Studies. This will be a bold step for those steeped in this field of longstanding, but it might be a necessary one in terms of where we are today. Yet, it needs to go beyond the mere name change of a traditional program. It needs to extend into education in general, so that worldview literacy spills out into the larger academy (Valk, 2017). And further, it needs to spill out into the public square (Valk, 2009a). Let us spell out why this might be the case.

Current Challenges to Religious Education

Religion has an image problem – in the media, the academy and in the public realm. The media is more inclined to mention its failures than its contributions and is prone to offer its

essential teachings in trivial sound bites (Marshall, Gilbert and Ahmanson 2009). Politicians in general are reluctant to link their private beliefs to their public policies (Lerner 2003; Carter 1994). In the academy, it “waters religion down to the point where faith makes no actual difference” (Hart 1999, p. 12), and where Christian scholarship is considered outrageous (Marsden 1997). In the general public, it has been “denounced as the greatest plague of mankind” (Clark 1989, p. 182), though to “poison everything” (Hitchens 2007), and its God as “the most unpleasant character in all fiction” (Barker 2016). While such comments may be rather extreme, religion nonetheless has a imagine problem.

But so does the academy, if not more so. One of those problems has to do with its current STEM focus, which is under scrutiny. Some are insisting that its focus should be STEAM, rather than STEM, so that the Arts, itself under scrutiny, remain a crucial aspect of a university education. This issue has resulted in no small number of debates, and at very high levels.

Not lost in some of these debates, but often under the radar, is that the large questions of life continue to be raised by students, though more reluctantly engaged in by faculty (Connor 2006; Chickering, Dalton & Stamm 2006; Young 2003). All too often, unfortunately, these questions and interests are consigned to Religious Studies or Religious Education departments, which are themselves increasingly placed at the margins of academic inquiry (Jacobsen & Jacobsen 2007; Connor 2005). When issues about faith and beliefs, about stories of God and gods, about rituals and symbols linked to them are focused on traditional religions, it cloisters them into narrow academic sectors, communicating to all too many that these are optional compartments of life. Not only is the richness of religious traditions cloistered, a wide array of life’s questions and issues are viewed in terms of exclusive perspectives (Joas, 2008; Smith

2001). Both become isolated from learning as a whole, from mainstream society in general, and from their contributions to dialogue in the public square in particular (Valk 2009a; Miedema 2014). They fall off the radar screen for all too many educators and students, whose interest in religion in particular becomes narrowed, waned or hostile as a result (Connor 2005). Today students can graduate today with the highest degree the academy offers without having rubbed two religious or existential thoughts or ideas together (Hauerwas 2007; Burtchaell 1998; Marsden 1994). Small wonder that a growing religious illiteracy has surfaced in society (Prothero 2007).

Limiting or cloistering some of life's most important questions and issues leads to another problem – the uncritical acceptance of other perspectives: other beliefs and values that hold great sway in the public academy if not the public square. Other perspectives or worldviews, most particularly secular ones, with markings and traits similar to those of traditional religions – metanarratives, teachings, symbols, rituals and more – come to dominate the public square and influence the lives of younger and older alike, often without a broader sense of how, where and why. A focus on worldviews or “Worldview Education”, rather than only religions or “Religious Education”, can turn matters around. Various perspectives and viewpoints, both religious and secular, are given greater exposure, leveling the playing field when it comes to competing for the hearts and minds of people, and seeing the extent of their reach in the public square. It also presents an opportunity to compare and contrast, to see where and how an awareness of other worldviews might broaden and deepen one's own – a journey into knowing self and others.

Worldview Studies, rather than Religious Studies, opens up many new possibilities (Van der Kooij, De Ruyter & Miedema 2013; 2017; McBain 2003). It is inclusive of all traditions –

religious and secular. While numerous and competing differences exist between them, each has its own richness, beliefs and values. Each can contribute meaningfully to discussions in the public square, which is increasingly multi-cultural and multi-faith. An awareness of them leads to an increased awareness of them at play in politics, media, economics, the academy and more. Not to be minimized is the further awareness that we all have a worldview – a view of life that gives shape to a way of life. The search for meaning and purpose is a search or exploration of our own worldview, and those of others. Above all, it leads to increased literacy. It is a recognition that various views and ways of life are portrayed and depicted in film, music, poetry, novels, and more. Education is enhanced when there is awareness that worldviews, traditional or alternative, come in many different shapes and forms (Gardner, Soules & Valk 2017; Valk 2017b).

Worldview Education: Challenges and Opportunities

Use of the concept “worldview” brings certain challenges. It is often inadequately used, casually used, and even inaccurately used. Students, scholars and members of the larger public would benefit from a more robust discussion to uncover its value, especially for education as it increasingly engages plural voices. Its implication and implementation for schools and institutions of higher learning are beginning to surface as multiple perspectives now challenge education and educators. In this, a great opportunity arises to uncover its value for enriched dialogue in the academy and in a diverse public square, where meaningful engagement with the other becomes increasingly important.

A first opportunity begins with worldview education itself, but it also comes with a challenge. The challenge is to avoid or move away from an exclusive focus on the worldview of

the self – worldviews explored only in terms of one’s own personal beliefs and values. It remains, in effect, an exclusive study of “the self”. Such a focus becomes attractive in a society increasingly beset by an individualism, where personal formation, personal identity, and personal well-being draws great attention. In itself, such focus has importance and is necessary, potentially spawn creativity, imagination and independence in terms of the self. But in the end, it is insufficient, leading to a privatization of one’s faith and beliefs; a fulfilment of an individualized self that fits nicely with today’s post-religious, post-secular and individualistic culture. The self can remain disconnected, isolated from the other, from a sense of community, and from the rich traditions of the past and present – from the “wisdom of the ages”. Worldview education offers an opportunity for the individual to study and engagement with larger entities, larger collectives, with longer histories of communal care and thoughtful responses to some of life’s big questions, giving opportunities to compare one’s own percolating thoughts and ideas with others. All worldviews, and no less traditional religious worldviews, have creative forms, innovative expressions, artistic outlets, and engaging theologies, to offer richness to individuals while developing their own views of life.

The second opportunity is the flip side of the first, with the challenge to overcome that of a sole focus on the worldviews of others, especially more longstanding religious worldviews. Study of the various religious traditions that have greatly influenced and shaped humans since the dawn of time can be intriguing, especially in an era where secularization has taken a strong foothold. But such individual interest easily treats them as entities of the past – museum pieces -- that hides a secular-centric view of life. These forms of museologization fail to tap religious worldviews that are experiential and dynamic. These worldviews are alive and well today, able to assist students and others in the development and formation of their own worldview. Study of

the self and of the other go hand in hand. Worldview education provides an opportunity to explore the other – their beliefs and values, sources, rituals, where they stand on certain issues and why. Questions asked of others quickly become questions asked of the self. Knowing self necessitates knowing others.

A third opportunity comes in overcoming disciplinary isolation, an increasing challenge to the modern academy. Worldview education by its nature is interdisciplinary. It cannot be confined to one discipline, for it touches on all disciplines. Worldviews are *views of life* – our beliefs and values – and *ways of life* – our behaviours and actions. Various disciplines – psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, theology – all deal with aspects of how beliefs and values impact behaviour and action – individually and collectively. These scholarly areas have individually rendered valuable insight into various aspects of individual and collective life – our narratives and metanarratives, teachings, ethics, ontologies, epistemologies, cosmologies and more, past and present. An interdisciplinary approach to worldviews gives opportunity to explore these in greater depth, revealing the breadth and richness of human thought, ideas, imagination, creativity and innovation.

The fourth opportunity is the most daunting and with the greatest challenge. It is entering into the public square so that an exchange of different views and ideas of the world we want can lead to robust discussions and interactions. Public policy, economics, environmental concerns, communal care are rooted in individual and collective starting points, in essence one's worldview. The public square is finally the place where worldviews should be engaged critically, so that a secular public square is not mistaken for a neutral one (Habermas & Ratzinger 2006).

Initial grounding endeavours

The waters of worldview education have already been tested by some who have ventured in its direction. The successes experienced by their initial endeavours indicate that students and others have gained considerably in greater understanding of their own worldview, those of others, and how worldviews impact what we think and what we do, both in the past and in the present. These grounding initiatives suggest that further study and engagement of worldview education bodes well for the future. Four initial endeavours will be described that will ground the project envisioned below.

1. Exploring Worldviews In and Around: A Journey into Knowing Self and Others.

This forthcoming book arose from an undergraduate university course taught numerous times over the span of almost 20 years at the University of New Brunswick. Its initial endeavours have been described earlier (Valk, 2009b). Further research has indicated that it opened the minds, and hearts of students to recognize the prevalence of worldviews, and their impacts on economics, public policy, education and more. It also led to an enhanced exploration of the impact of worldview study on education (Valk & Tosun, 2016). The forthcoming interdisciplinary book is a more comprehensive study of the concept worldview and explores various dimensions of both religious and secular worldviews. It reveals that worldviews impact numerous disciplines and reach all aspects of life and society. This book will serve as grounding for a larger study on developing pedagogies and curriculum.

2. An Islamic Worldview from Turkey (Valk, Albayrak & Selçuk, 2017).

This book resulted from a group of younger and older scholars from Ankara University. Through a number of workshops held for a period of five years, it engaged these scholars using a comprehensive approach of self-exploration of their understanding of Islam. The approach used allowed members to think systematically, creating new areas of thoughts and ideas. Many gained a stronger connection to their faith tradition and beliefs through the process. Asking the right questions served to provide new insights about self and others. Aspects of this methodological approach is now used in developing further pedagogical approaches and curriculum for teaching religious education in Turkey and elsewhere.

3. The Merits of Using 'Worldview' in Religious Education.

A number of related studies address the meaning of the concept worldview, the merits of exploring worldviews, its impact on Religious Education, its relevance in fostering tolerance, its importance in religious identity formation, personal worldview formation, exploring the self in the context of larger worldviews, and inclusive pedagogy in the context of worldview education (Bertram-Troost & Miedema, 2017; Miedema, 2017a; 2017b; 2018; Vander Kooij et al., 2013). These studies give greater pedagogical detail on the use of worldviews in education, especially religious education, and its impact on personality formation, increasing tolerance and awareness of the worldviews of others, thus keeping the individual and the social aspect together.

4. Coming out religiously! Religious Educators as Public Intellectuals

Taking religious education out of the academy and into the public square is a major step facing worldview educators. Discussion of worldview in the academy is necessary but not sufficient. What is also needed are religious or worldview educators acting as public intellectuals in the public

square, joining forces with different societal stakeholders with whom they share similar aims. Religious or worldview educators are to be challenged to also take roles and functions as public intellectuals for the benefit of children and youngsters, supporting them in becoming responsible in developing their self-determined personhood in education in general and in worldview education in particular. Religious or worldview educators are, with a few exceptions, virtually invisible in the public arena, one so often characterized by clashes of knowledge-politics (Foucault 1980).

It might be argued that the need for worldview education embedded in a holistic view of personhood formation is self-evident and does not require attention in the wider public. Worldview educators need to voice their views in the public square, however, in part to counter the voices of others, most particularly the small minority of vociferous secularists, who increasingly dominate the scarce public space (Miedema, 2019).

In Summary

The methodology ensued thus far engaged literature review and analysis, conceptual analysis, and insights from communities of students, scholars and practitioners. Some pedagogical methods have been explored and implemented. Some curriculum materials have been developed and implemented. But a more comprehensive strategy is needed. Something new is being envisioned.

Enhancing worldview literacy and fostering worldview personhood formation in education is of benefit to all. Advancing mutual understanding in diverse societies encourages universities to teach students to be responsive to different views of life and ways of life – their own and those of others. Enhancing worldview literacy in the larger society affords an

opportunity to overcome social divisiveness, racial tensions, religious illiteracy, and an uncritical acceptance of any one dominant worldview. It creates an opportunity to explore the richness of numerous worldviews and how they can contribute to an open and robust public square that creates space for those from multiple perspectives who seek to contribute to a freer society (Miedema, 2014; 2019)

The above four models have paved a way for moving in this direction. There may be others. We seek now to move to the next level and to engage multiple partners from multiple nations in a large research project. That project seeks a variety of partners to develop teaching pedagogies, curricula and educational tools to assist students younger and older alike to enhance greater knowledge, awareness and understanding of various secular and religious worldviews as a journey into knowing self and others. Further, it seeks to develop synergy projects to provide support for small groups of principal investigators to jointly address research problems that would otherwise be difficult to do individually. Lastly, it seeks strategies for engaging the public to increase worldview literacy in the public square as one way to overcome social divide and racial tensions. Engaging religious and worldview educators is the first step in that larger journey.

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How do Students of Minority Religions Engage with their Faith During College?:

A Review of the Literature

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Abstract

The purpose of this research interest group is to understand how college students practicing minority religions are engaging with their faith during their undergraduate years. Major themes throughout the paper will explore how students are developing their religious identities and how student affairs professionals and faculty members are aiding in students' religious identity development. This literature review analysis will explore what colleges are doing to support students of minority religions and pose solutions so that all students can feel safe to practice their faith on campus.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

How do students of minority religions engage with their faith during college?:

A Review of the Literature

Religion is a complicated identity. It is personal, providing values and core beliefs that dictate a person's decisions and influencing their worldview. Religion is also systemic and governs many societies' calendars, laws, and cultural norms. For these reasons, people find talking about religion to be challenging, especially when a person may have to confront the privilege of adhering to the dominant faith group in the United States, Christianity. Separating one's personal experience with their religious beliefs from the systematic oppression of Christianity is difficult. The purpose of this literature review is to seek to understand how students of religious minorities engage with their faith during college. Below is a list of research questions:

- What are the experiences of students of minority religions on college campuses?
 - How do students practice their faith?
 - How do students experience personal growth in their religious identity and faith?
- What are colleges and universities currently doing to provide support to student who practice minority religions?

In order to begin this process, recognizing that within the context of the United States, Christianity is the privileged and dominant faith group needs to be acknowledged as a truth. As a result, all other religious identities are oppressed within the context of the United States. This literature review will not include the experiences of students who identify as Atheist or Agnostic because these identities are without religion or faith. These students are also marginalized because they are seen as having no core values or moral compass (Goodman & Mueller, 2009; Mueller, 2012).

Historical Context

The first colleges in the United States were built for training new clergy and had a religious affiliation as a result. The significant growth of higher education was due to Protestant faiths wanting to build their own college (Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2011). As colleges received increased federal funding, they felt pressure to adhere to the "separation of church and state" and shed their religious affiliation. As a result, colleges and universities became more secular in their iconography, curriculum, and research (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015). Not only have universities changed, so have the students who attend them. The number of students who identify as Atheist or Agnostic has increased significantly in recent years (Bowman, Felix, & Ortis, 2014). Additionally, the college student demographic has become more racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse. More students come to college identifying as Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Mormon, Unitarian, and others than ever before.

Experiences of Students of Minority Religions

Because religion is a personal experience, everyone experiences their faith differently. Having similar or different rituals influences how faith is felt and perceived. This is true across religious identities and faith practices. In the same vein, experiences of oppression and marginalization can be different but have similar effects and elicit similar feelings. This section will examine several religions including Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

Islam

Islam is the second most practiced religious identity in the world and the third most practiced religion in the United States of America (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010). Considering Islam is the fastest growing religion globally (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010), one may think plentiful resources are available on college campuses for Muslim students. In reality, most Muslim students experience Islamophobia through micro-aggressions, fear, and distrust (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Joshi, 2013; Mir, 2014; Rockenbach, Mayhew, Bowman, Morin, & Riggers-Peihl, 2017). Additionally, Muslim students tend to be more socially conservative (Bryant, 2006) per their religious teachings of modesty (Mir, 2014) and acceptable Godly behavior (Rockenbach et al., 2017). Islamophobia fueled stereotypes and misinformation about Muslim people, which then trickled into college communities. As a result, many campuses are at best host to a chilly and unwelcoming environment for Muslim students (Rockenbach et al., 2017) and at worst are places where students experience violence (Joshi, 2013). Most Muslim people living in the United States also identify as being a person of color. The intersection of race and religion also plays a role in the general distrust and unwelcoming environments that Muslim Americans face (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Rockenbach et al., 2017).

Eighty-five percent of Muslim students report engaging in the act of prayer, and 57 percent engage in prayer daily. Almost all Muslim students report a belief in God. Many believe that the purpose of religion is to find answers to life's mysteries, and their greatest spiritual quest is to follow the plan that God has for them (Bryant, 2006). Cole and Ahmadi (2010) found that Muslim students are more likely than their Jewish and Christian peers are to attend diversity and cultural events. Given their participation, presence, and oppression on campus, providing Muslim students with resources, prayer space, and religious role models will increase their engagement on campus and religious identity development (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Rockenbach et al., 2017). Embracing Muslim students will create more inclusive campus environments (Rockenbach et al., 2017).

Judaism

One of the first lessons Jews learn about themselves is that people want to kill Jews (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009). Jews have been persecuted for centuries. They have been expelled from many communities because of their differing beliefs from Christians (Hilberg, 2013). Most students know about Jews because they were the victims of the Holocaust (Blumenfeld & Klein,

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2009). Historically, Jews are perceived as religious and cultural outsiders, and with recent expression of anti-Semitism on college campuses and an resurgence of “Neo-Nazism” in the media, they continue to feel unwelcome (Mayhew, Bowman, Rockenbach, Selznick, & Riggers-Piehl, 2018).

Jewish students struggle to find opportunities to learn about themselves and their culture outside of historical accounts of atrocious violence (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009). Compared to other religious groups, Jewish students are the most likely to perceive anti-Semitism on college campuses. Additionally, students of other religious beliefs are more likely to have hostility towards Jewish students if they believe the stereotypes about them (Mayhew et al., 2018). Goren (2014) discusses the problematic nature of having to qualify religious leaders by putting a religious identity in front of their title. To call someone a “Jewish Chaplain” calls attention to its otherness, as if to say “Chaplain” automatically implies Christianity. In this way, colleges and university signal to students of minority religions that they are outsiders who do not belong.

Another challenge that Jewish students face is the notion of race. Ashkenazim Jews are from Eastern Europe and tend to be white, but “Jewish” has been identified as a race. Because of the Jewish Diaspora, Jewish people are many races across the globe. Identifying with a “Jewish race” is empowering for some Jewish people and for others, acknowledging a “Jewish race” provides justification for the Holocaust (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009). This complex racial identity adds to the confusion that Jews and others have about culture and religious practices. Blumenfeld and Klein (2009) report that many college administrators are ignorant about Jewish practices, and Goren (2014) indicates Jewish students feel excluded from fully participating in their college experience because of their religious holidays and the difficulty of finding a Jewish community. Christian symbolism and school calendars are ways in which Jewish students are marginalized by Christian hegemony (Goren, 2014).

However, Goren (2014) argues that while Jewish students face oppression, they also have privileges afforded to them that students with other religious identities are not. One of these privileges is a birthright trip to Israel. Jewish students travel to Israel with other Jews to connect to their culture free of charge. Some institutions have started offering college credit or money to Jewish students who come to Jewish classes to learn Hebrew and cultural values. Lastly, many schools are actively trying to recruit Jewish students to their universities (Goren, 2014).

While Jewish students may have an “advantaged marginalization” (Goren, 2014), they still require religious support, opportunities to practice their faith on campus, and spiritual leaders to aid in their development (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009; Goren, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2018). After all, Jewish students who participate in Hillel feel a greater sense of belonging to their institution than those who do not (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009).

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Buddhism

Buddhist persecution in the United States took place in the 1940s when Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps. Many white Christians believed that practicing Buddhism was un-American, and as a means of survival, many Japanese Americans converted to Christianity and destroyed their Buddhist possessions (Williams, 2013). Buddhist students experience the intersection of their race and religion, and Western Christians make them feel like an outsiders because their religious beliefs and practices are unknown (Joshi, 2013). Another challenge that Buddhist students face is finding communities to practice their faith, and will often move to places that have a support network nearby (Amorini, 2016).

Buddhist students indicate high self-rates of compassion and believe their greatest spiritual quest is to discover who they are (Bryant, 2006). As a result, many scholars found that Buddhist students strive to find purpose in their life and then work towards that purpose. Buddhist students are goal oriented and choose career paths that involve helping others (Amorini, 2016; Sharma & De Alba, 2018). They believe their greatest purpose in life is to contribute to world peace and bring happiness to humanity (Sharma & De Alba, 2018). Buddhist students manage their stress well because their religious practice of mindfulness helps to keep them grounded in the present. They acknowledge their thoughts and recognize them as distractions from their daily lives. Being able to meditate helps Buddhist students persist to achieving their goals (Amorini, 2016; Sharma & De Alba, 2018).

Hinduism

Hindu students often feel like outsiders because their religious beliefs and practices do not fit into any of the understood values of Christianity. Often, Hindu practices are “Christianized” so that Westerners can make sense of their faith traditions (Chander, 2013; Joshi, 2013). Many Hindu students are first generation Americans, immigrants, and not white, so the intersection of race and religion amplifies the oppression they face on a daily basis (Joshi, 2013).

In order for Western Christian students to make sense of Hinduism, Hindu students’ practices are boiled down into concepts such as “mass”, “hymns”, and “Chaplains”. Hinduism is not a monolith, and there are different cultural norms in how Hindus practice their faith. Christianizing the faith makes it challenging for Hindu students to explain their beliefs to their peers (Chander, 2013). Often, Hindu students are asked if Diwali, the festival of lights, is like Christmas (Chander, 2013; Joshi, 2013). Because Hinduism is not an Abrahamic faith, it is seen in opposition to other faiths (Chander, 2013).

Analysis

The purpose of this analysis is to highlight the similarities and differences of students of religious minorities. Because students of minority religions are not a monolithic group, this analysis will highlight some of the major themes found within the research regarding students of minority religions.

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Historical impacts. Several historical events trigger systemic oppression of students of minority religions. Jewish people endured expulsion from their holy lands and the Holocaust (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009). Japanese American Buddhists endured internment camps (Williams, 2013). Muslim Americans still face Islamophobia in the aftermath of 9/11 (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010). In all cases, these events serve to cause fear of the other and uphold the default religion as Christianity.

Christian hegemony. Regardless of the number of students who practice each religious faith, Christian dominance is pervasive throughout students of minority religions' collegiate experiences. Holidays do not align with the Christian calendar, so many students must choose between attending class and paying respect to a holiday (Goren, 2014). Buddhism and Hinduism are not part of an Abrahamic faith system, so these faiths are Christianized for Christians to make sense of the practices (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009; Chander, 2013; Goren, 2014; Joshi, 2013; Williams, 2013). A lack of understanding about faith traditions leads to a lack of university support (Blumenfeld & Kelin, 2009; Bryant; 2006; Chander, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Goren, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2018; Rockenbach et al., 2017; Sharma & De Alba, 2018).

Outsiders in their own land. Students of minority religions often have the grapple with the intersectionality of their race and religion. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Jews experience racism but in different ways. Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists are usually not white, so Westerners assume they are immigrants who do not belong (Joshi, 2013). Jews, who have a range of racial identities, must navigate the complex racial identity of being Jewish and something else (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009). Regardless, to be non-white and non-Christian in the United States is to be un-American (Williams, 2013).

Role of suffering. Bryant (2006) found that all students of minority religions indicated "pain and suffering are essential to becoming a better person," (p. 20). Between half to 70 percent of within groups believed this to be true (Bryant, 2006). Buddhist students are most likely to buy into this concept, and many scholars discuss struggle being integral to faith and spirituality development (Amorini, 2016; Sharma & De Alba, 2018).

Importance of community. Every piece of scholarship around the experiences of students with minority religions highlights the important role that institutions can play in making students feel like they matter and belong. Additionally, scholars indicate the importance of having a faith community where peers can rely upon each other. Students are more likely to experience spiritual development if they have a faith community and spiritual leaders they can trust (Amorini, 2016; Blumenfeld & Kelin, 2009; Bryant; 2006; Chander, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Goren, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2018; Rockenbach et al., 2017). College administrators need mass education around the beliefs, values, and practices of students of minority religions. By understanding the basics of each faith practice, administrators can support students through challenging times. Lastly, institutions need to create spaces where students can practice their faith together and provide programming and human resources to support students in their

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spiritual and faith developments (Blumenfeld & Kelin, 2009; Bryant; 2006; Chander, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Goren, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2018; Rockenbach et al., 2017).

Religious Identity Development

This section will look at how college students develop their religious identity. I will explore what students are specifically doing to engage with their faith and what those faith practices look like. This section will focus on the individual experience of faith identity development to understand the diversity within their experiences.

Personal Growth and Development in Religion

Most people consider themselves spiritual beings, and religious beliefs help people manage multiple stressors (Reymann, Fialkowski, & Stewart, 2015). Understanding how students of minority religions make meaning of their religious identity during college will allow faculty and staff to understand how to provide support.

Students of minority religions experience a decrease in their religious engagement during their undergraduate years. Scholars Bowman and Small (2010, 2012, 2013) have found through multiple studies that students practicing minority religions do not feel as strong of a sense of belonging as Christian students. While they may not be as engaged as Christian students may, they seem to accept their minority status. Students of minority religions usually experience their minority status prior to college, which leads to such responses (Bowman & Small, 2013). Not surprisingly, Catholic students at Catholic universities experience the greatest religious support and engagement (Bowman & Small, 2013), whereas students of minority religions were most likely to have greater gains at secular institutions where they are free to explore their options, and are not likely in the majority (Bowman & Small, 2010). Overall, students who identify as religious gain the most religiously and spiritually when attending non-Catholic Christian institutions (Small & Bowman, 2012). A lack of opportunity to discuss religious identity on campus leads many students to feel this way.

Ultimately, students need to feel like people care about them, including caring about their religious identity. Reymann, Fialkowski, and Stewart (2015) stated the possibility that students connected to God or the divine feel they have a greater purpose in life, while Bryant, Choi, and Yasonu (2003) report that students want to be spiritual regardless of declared faith, and that “religious participation and spirituality tended to predict one another,” (p. 738). Institutions can improve ecumenical campus climate by encouraging faculty to engage in dialogue with students and for students to have a space and place to practice spirituality and religiosity (Small & Bowman, 2012). Because religiosity is so personal, students need academic role models to aid in their faith development and academic purpose, therefore faculty need to be engaged in students’ religious identity development (Bowman & Small, 2010; Bowman & Small, 2013; Reymann et al., 2015; Small & Bowman, 2012). Self-understood spirituality increased through activities, and professionals are encouraged to provide opportunities for students to connect and have dialogue

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around religion and spirituality (Bryant et al., 2003). Professionals are encouraged to create spaces on campus for students to practice religious and spiritual rituals so that they may have an opportunity for growth (Bowman & Small, 2010).

Another interesting finding is that women and students of color experienced more ecumenical worldview because they used spirituality to be connected to their experiences. Some speculate that people who have marginalized identities are more likely to do this because of how they engage with the world on a regular basis (Mayhew, 2012). Reymann and colleagues (2015) hypothesize that women experience greater faith maturity than men, and state that institutions should be prepared to assist students to mature in their faith tradition by encouraging ecumenical development.

Faith Engagement and Practices

Engagement is a theoretical term used by many scholars. In the context of this paper, engagement refers to the amount of time and effort invested by a student and the resources and the invested human capital into learning opportunities for the students (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). In their implications for future practice, several scholars point to the importance of colleges and universities developing resources for students to talk about religion, faith, and spirituality (Hartley, 2004; Koenig, 2015; Rennick, Toms-Smedley, Fsher, Wallace, & Kim, 2013). This indicates that many institutions do not have such resources available for students to engage in dialogue. Hartley (2004) explains the history of religion within the context of higher education. While first colleges intended to provide religious education, they moved towards a secular vision. Now that students are looking to their institutions to provide religious and spiritual development, the structures are no longer in place.

As students move through their college experience, they are less likely to engage in religious actions (Hartley, 2004; Rennick et al., 2013). Students living on campus are less likely to attend church services regularly than students who live with their parents and commute to classes (Hartley, 2004). Koenig (2015) identified that students' belief in God also decreases during their collegiate years. However, students increasingly identify with being spiritual and express a desire to explore their spirituality (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Hartley, 2004; Koenig, 2015; Rennick et al., 2013).

Students' ability to learn may be impacted but their faiths' teaching about the world, especially in cases of science and sociology (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018). They identified five educational functions of religion that can influence how a student learns and connect faith to learning. They encourage faculty to implement these techniques in their classrooms to increase students' open-mindedness and critical thinking skills (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018). Mvududu and Larocque (2008) used Hope Theory to determine if students engaged in religious practice were less anxious when taking a statistics course. While their data was not statistically significant enough to make a claim in either direction, they did indicate that internalized religious commitment leads to lower levels of anxiety when taking courses (Mvududu &

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Larocque, 2008). Some scholars are indicating the importance of integrating faith teachings into coursework to increase learning and decrease anxiety (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018; Mvududu & Larocque, 2008).

The connection between faith and spirituality directly translates to students' spiritual development. One of the benefits of spiritual development is increased cognitive development and open-mindedness (Astin et al., 2011; Koenig, 2015). Rennick and colleagues (2013) found that students with different intersecting identities have different needs in their expression of their religious and spiritual development; therefore, institutions need to have multiple means of supporting this development. Additionally, marginalized students have the greatest connection to their faith as a means of peace and hope (Hartley, 2004). Spiritual development is a process that must be supported for it to grow (Koenig, 2015).

Student Success and Engagement: Religious Perspective

In order to understand how students of minority religions are engaging with their faith effectively on college campuses, knowing how the college is engaging these students is important. Student affairs professionals work in multiple functional areas across campus to engage students to ensure their success. This section will look at what colleges and universities are doing to engage students who practice minority religions and what students within their groups are doing to support each other.

Engagement of College Administrators

One pitfall that administrators can fall into is putting "religious minorities" in a group and treating them as a monolith. Students of minority religions experience discrimination, but in different ways with different struggles; therefore, grouping students of minority religions in the same category is problematic (Bowman et al., 2014). Students of different faiths have different needs including dietary accommodations, prayer space and rituals, class exemption during holidays, and many others (Bryant, 2010; Johnson & Lawrence, 2012; Kocet & Stewart, 2011; Patel & Giess, 2016). In order for the university to properly engage with students of minority religions, college administrators should have a better understanding of different religious beliefs (Kocet & Stewart, 2011), and they should work to adhere to the needs of their students. Patten and Rice (2009) found that students who felt more spiritually integrated into a college campus were more likely to persist from the first to second year of college. There are several ways administrators can be more engaged with creating a campus climate where students of minority religions feel like they belong and have a support system, including increased dialogue about religion and creating space for students.

Increased dialogue. Often, campus climate is a measure to recognize if students are experiencing positive or negative influences related to their religious identities (Burchell, Lee, & Olson, 2010; Mayhew & Bryant, 2013; Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). Many scholars discuss the importance for increased dialogue regarding students of minority religions as a means of

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having a better understanding of students' beliefs and experiences (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015). Intergroup dialogue and spirituality discussions are suggested methods to increase on-campus dialogue pertaining to students of minority religions. In the same vein, student affairs professionals should be able to cultivate an environment where students practicing a non-Christian religion feel welcomed and integrated.

Intergroup dialogue is discussed in multiple ways throughout the literature. Edwards (2017) and Fairchild and Blumenfeld (2007) encourage true theoretically based intergroup dialogue where students unpack their understanding of personal identity, privilege, and oppression. This is challenging for many students because understanding their privilege and oppression for one identity does not equate to understanding their privilege and oppression for all identities (Edwards, 2017). Because religion and worldview are discussed so infrequently, many students do not get to fully explore and reflect upon their personal beliefs and worldview commitment by the time they graduate from college (Mayhew & Bryant, 2013). Correctly performing intergroup dialogues and systems of oppression regarding Christian hegemony, religious minorities, and non-religious identities can lead to understanding and open-mindedness; however, when identities are unexplored, students of minority religions may still feel marginalized in the process (Edwards, 2017). Other scholars took a broader approach to the concept of dialogues and felt that campus roundtable would be suitable to address stereotypes and stigma related to religious minorities (Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). As a result, most researchers suggest that students should spend more time exploring their religious identity.

Student affairs professionals spend a large amount of time and have one-on-one encounters with students, which allows time for dialogue regarding religion. That said, because of the notion of separation of church and state (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015; Burchell et al., 2010; Patel & Giess, 2016; Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016), many professionals take a hands-off approach to discussions of religiosity and spirituality for fear of pushback or crossing a legal line (Burchell et al., 2010; Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). Many professionals however felt comfortable talking to students about religion if the student brought it up or their shared similar beliefs, but often felt that their department chairs would not be accepting of the discussion (Burchell et al., 2010).

Creating space for religious minority students. Many institutions are working hard to create space, literally and figuratively, for students of minority religions. Johnson and Lawrence (2012) found that some institutions were developing and reutilizing physical space on campus to develop multi-faith religious spaces for students of all faiths to have a place of worship. They found that if spaces connote a feeling of spirituality without a specific religious practice, the space could be manipulated in a way that students of all religions could utilize the space for meditation and prayer (Johnson & Lawrence, 2012). Seeing the need for a better understanding of religious and spiritual development, Kocet and Stewart (2011) developed a competency for student affairs professionals, using the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion competency as a framework. They argued that many professionals were poorly equipped to help students in

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understanding their religious and spiritual development and that spirituality can exist outside of organized religion. They hoped to bring more clarity to the importance of this identity through an additional competency (Kocet & Stewart, 2011).

Student Success and Well-being

Students engage with their religious identity in many ways throughout college. According to the Higher Education Research Institute (2005), many undergraduates (81%) report attending religious services once a month. One could speculate this has a large part to do with the influence of their family unit. Students' religious beliefs affect their success and well-being in different ways. Much research connecting religious worldview and academic success or well-being is inconclusive (Bowman & Small, 2012; Li & Murphy 2018). Some results indicate there is potential for a connection between identity and outcome, but so many other environmental factors play a role in the outcomes, pinpointing conclusive evidence that religious identity impacts well-being or academic success is challenging (Bowman & Small, 20012; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Li & Murphy, 2018).

Success on campus. Preliminary research indicates that a student's religious affiliation influences success and well-being outcomes. For example, students who practice Christianity are better supported by their peers, do well academically, and have better mental health than students who practice a minority religion or students who do not affiliate with any religion (Bowman & Small, 20012; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Li & Murphy, 2018). Negative speech pointed at students of minority religions has the greatest negative impact on sense of belonging (Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016).

More specifically, Li and Murphy (2018) found that religious affiliation does not have any positive or negative effect on academic performance, but rather being religiously active has differing outcomes on academic performance depending on a student's faith. The students who experience the most positive impact on academic performance practice Christianity. Students who practice Judaism, Buddhism, or Hinduism experience no impact in their academic performance, while students who practice Islam experience a negative impact in their performance. Bowman and Small (2012) found that students who practice minority religions are more likely to struggle on their college campuses than students who practice Christianity and students who do not have a religious identity. The authors' understandings of this is that Christian students get to choose how actively religious they are without having their identity questioned, whereas students of minority religions are stereotyped and more likely to be openly questioned in their devotion by their religious peers. In addition to lower levels of academic success, students of minority religions are more likely to encounter poorer physical and mental health (Bryant & Astin, 2008).

Struggle and pluralism. One of the greatest benefits of college for students is being able to interact with people who have different worldviews. While Bryant and Astin (2008) found that students whose identities are on the margins are more likely to experience spiritual struggle,

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another study found that students who interact with people who have differing worldviews are challenged to reconsider multiple perspectives and truths (Rockenbach, et al., 2014). Students experience spiritual struggle when they have difficult life circumstances that do not align with the teachings of their faith, including systemic oppression, social identities, and political issues. Women, students in the LGBTQ+ community, and students of minority religions are more likely to experience spiritual struggle than actively religious Christian students (Bryant & Astin, 2008), but Christian students are more likely to question their faith when they interact with students who practice a minority religion (Rockenbach et al., 2014). These articles demonstrate that students across the spectrum of religiosity experience struggle within their identity, but can all benefit from the power of dialogue.

When students experience spiritual struggle, it is often because they feel abandoned or unloved by God(s), or inflicted by the Devil or demons, and this has a negative effect on those students' self-esteem, confidence, and mental health (Bryant & Astin, 2008). If students have support systems such as interfaith dialogues or religious counseling available at their campus to talk about their feelings and concerns, they are more likely to develop a positive relationship with their well-being and religious engagement (Bowman & Small, 2012). Additionally, exposure to worldview diversity can lead to openness about other religious faiths and increase dialogue across students practicing them. Student affairs practitioners can create encounters to foster greater empathy building across religious worldviews (Rockenbach et al., 2014). Students can learn how to engage with difference and find similarities across religious experiences. Ultimately, students should feel challenged to accept others' religious beliefs, in addition to their own, as truths.

Conclusion

Students of minority religions combat systemic oppression through Christian hegemony every day. They must navigate their religious identities with their other social identities and constantly feel like an outsider. The greatest means of helping students in their faith development is by engaging in interfaith dialogue groups, providing events that celebrate minority religions' holidays, and educating others on the beliefs, values, and practices of students of minority religions. College administrators can support students of minority religions by learning more about their religious practices and engaging in discussions around faith during office hours.

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Deliberative Democratic Theological Education:
A Proposal for Youth Ministry that Builds Peace

Abstract

Our current context of political division requires that we help students learn how to empathize with people from different perspectives, engage in conflict constructively, resist either/or thinking, overcome disempowerment, and understand the impact of beliefs on their actions. Young people are already leading movements to transform the violent cultures around them — most prominently, the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school, and the originators of both the Standing Rock protests and the Black Lives Matter movement—*but churches are notably absent in supporting and mentoring such leaders*. Yet, Christian tradition and practice has the depth of wisdom to equip young people to resist apathy and despair and become active in transforming violence and oppression as part of their Christian vocation. Young people can be peacebuilders—engaged citizens who address the root causes of hatred and abuse of power in order to build more just and peaceful communities. Drawing on research in deliberative pedagogy, this paper will develop in depth one piece of a larger project that envisions peace education as an essential component of youth ministry. The paper proposes a sacred pedagogy that engages theological concepts through deliberative, democratic discussion, teaching young people skills in engaging across difference as well as habits of deliberative theological thinking for a lifetime of spiritual growth. The specific example of engaging the problem of how we imagine Jesus will serve as an illustration of the potential for a series of curricular materials for use in congregational youth settings.

Introduction

As director of the Youth Theological Initiative (YTI) for the past twelve years, I have had the privilege of walking alongside hundreds of young people from a wide range of geographic, cultural, racial, gender, affectional, theological, political, and socio-economic experiences and identities. By bringing together a diverse group of young people and adult mentors to explore questions raised by Christian tradition, scripture, and experience, we have successfully cultivated an ethos of theological reflection that can, in the words of this year's call for proposals, "foster dialogue across deep religious, political, and other difference." However, my current research in the field of civic engagement and deliberative democracy has pushed me to develop the YTI approach beyond its current context. According to Peter Levine, the practice of deliberative democracy "gives individuals the chance to live (however briefly) and to experience (however artificially) the essential meaning of democracy: free and equal citizens with an equal opportunity to participate in a shared public life and to shape decisions that affect their lives."¹ Levine et al go on to outline ways civic groups can design deliberative democratic engagements

¹ John Gastil and Peter Levine, eds., *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2005), 30.

in order to make informed decisions collaboratively. What if young people, as part of the process of developing a mature faith, could use some of these tools in order to make informed decisions about what to believe and how to act, based on deliberative discussion with each other, with their adult mentors, and with scripture and tradition? What if they could learn to empathize with people who hold different views, considering these views both appreciatively and critically without resorting to *ad hominem* attacks or suppressing legitimate concerns? What if they could arrive at their beliefs through a process that pushes them to make informed decisions about the impact their beliefs might have on their own behavior? What if they could be invited into a communal process of theological discourse that affirms questions and doubts—and yes, disagreement? By focusing on deliberative democratic practice, this proposed sacred pedagogy lifts up the deliberative character of the Christian tradition itself—following Jesus’ own model, Christian theology questions, debates, negotiates, and questions anew the articulations and applications of doctrine and practice, based on new encounters with the world, each other, and God—and leverages the wisdom developed in civic renewal and social justice movements to *teach theology democratically, and democracy theologically*.

Deliberative Theology as Christian Discipleship

Our only canonical story about Jesus as a teenager comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter two, the story of Jesus in the Temple. Though many of us who work with youth might wish that we had more stories of Jesus from this age, Luke sets this story up to underscore its importance, and the details give us much to consider. To set the context, recall that Luke gives the reader great detail about Jesus’ birth and his childhood, more so than any other gospel. He then ends his account of Jesus’ first phase of life with the phrase, “The child grew up and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God’s favor was on him” (Lk 2:40).² Luke closes out the second phase of Jesus’ life with similar words by stating, “Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people” (Lk 2:52). These two verses bracket the story in between them, highlighting Jesus’ time in the Temple as a critical moment of his growth in wisdom and favor.

The story of Jesus in the Temple can easily be told as a story of Jesus’ precocity. Of course, as the Son of God, we should not be surprised that Jesus is wise beyond his years and amazing the people around him; indeed, this is a common trope for hero stories that Luke’s readers would recognize. But, this story gives us more than a sneak peek into who Jesus will become when we meet him again after his baptism and temptation in the desert. It shows us a few things about what a teenager who seeks to follow Jesus can do *as a teenager*. First, when Jesus’ parents find him in the Temple, they discover him “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them” (2:46). In other words, Jesus is *learning through deliberative discussion*. There is a give and take—he is asking questions and listening to what the others are saying. Second, he is doing this *with adults*. He is sitting among the most learned in his faith tradition and seeking to grow in wisdom through this process of give and take with those who are taking him seriously as an interlocutor. Third, he is doing this *in public*. The story suggests there are many around who overheard these conversations, and were paying close attention, since they were “amazed” by what they saw. Fourth, this was not just any public space, this was the Temple in Jerusalem, the *seat of power* for his religious community. Jesus the teenager makes a point of engaging in serious theological study, through dialogue, with adults, in

² All biblical quotations are from the Common English Bible.

public, in the center of power. He is *not* lecturing, or passively receiving a lecture, and he is not off in a separate room away from where the adults are studying. He is where the action is, and the action is doing theology through deliberation and dialogue.

In *How to Think Theologically*, Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke insist that doing theology is at the core of what it means to be a Christian, and doing deliberative theology is the responsibility of all conscientious Christians.³ For them, every Christian, regardless of age or educational background, is a theologian—“there are no exceptions.” When we claim the identity of Christian, we are proclaiming that our lives in some way reflect a set of beliefs. Of course, our actions often do not reflect what we aspire to when we say we want to follow Jesus, but our actions do reflect something—what Stone and Duke call an “embedded theology.” Embedded theology is “the implicit theology that Christians live out in their daily lives.” It includes “the theological messages intrinsic in and communicated by praying, preaching, hymn singing, personal conduct, liturgy, social action or inaction, and virtually everything else people say and do in the name of their Christian faith.”⁴ Because embedded theology is implicit, we are often not aware of how it shapes our actions, but it does. This is the theology we see most often when people argue with each other in social media about abortion, or LGBTQIA+ rights, or the death penalty, or what to do about refugees and immigrants. It is often the theology that informs how and whether we vote, how we engage our families and friends, and the decisions we make in our work and play. We learn it by seeing, hearing and doing from the moment we join a Christian community—in children’s sermons and baptismal liturgies, in retreats and mission trips, in prayers and taking communion, by watching our pastors and the other congregants, by reading the Bible through the lens of our community.

Deliberative theological reflection is a process of asking critical questions about our embedded theological convictions, and it is a challenge for many Christians to undertake. Deliberative theologians examine what they have taken for granted, consider the widest possible range of alternative understandings, and seek to articulate the meaning of their faith, clearly and coherently, in light of what these new understandings lead them to conclude. It requires humility, for such theologians must be open to the possibility that they can learn from sources they might not have considered before. It requires curiosity, for such theologians must be eager to learn and explore. It requires trust, for such theologians trust that God is with them on this journey, even when doubts threaten to shatter deeply-held beliefs and complexity makes them grieve over a lost simplicity. And, it requires community, for such theologians cannot discover the full range of alternative understandings without dialogue partners from among the Christian tradition as well as supportive friends and mentors around them.

In our work at the Youth Theological Initiative, we encourage young people to join us in the practice of deliberative theological reflection. For many years, our tagline was, “Exploring Questions that Shape Us.” In the application to our program, we ask youth to name any theological questions they would like to explore while participating in our program. There are a variety of answers, but the vast majority are questions that really smart, deeply faithful Christians have been wrestling with since the church began: Why is there suffering and injustice? What happens after we die? What does it mean to lead a good life? What is God’s will for my life? Will my Muslim/Jewish/Hindu/Atheist friend go to hell? The joy of doing theology is the realization that once you embark on this deliberative process of asking the harder questions, you

³ Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2013), 1-2, 20-21; 25.

⁴ Stone and Duke, *Think Theologically*, 15.

don't have to do it alone. As Stone and Duke note, "To engage in theological reflection is to join in an ongoing conversation with others that began long before we ever came along and will continue long after we have passed away."⁵ Theology is a "perpetual conversation," and you—yes you, that young person with questions and doubts and frustrations with the surface level conversations happening around you—get to be part of it.

Deliberative theological reflection is a process, and Jesus the teenager shows us how to do it. Duke and Stone describe deliberative theological reflection as a process that is,

...linked by two common techniques: *listening* and *questioning*. Listening involves an active waiting that allows new information in, is prepared to be surprised and remains open to the illumination of the Spirit. Questioning is a corrective to complacency—the danger of becoming satisfied with old answers and preconceptions... The aim of listening is receptivity; the aim of questioning is honesty. (xiv)

When Jesus is sitting in the Temple, Luke describes him as "listening" and "putting questions" to the scholars around him. By both listening and questioning, Jesus the teenager models for us the deliberative posture Duke and Stone encourage conscientious Christians to adopt. By doing this while sitting among the teachers, Jesus the teenager shows us that deliberative theology is not to be done by ourselves, but with others who take us seriously as dialogue partners. By doing this in the Temple, Jesus the teenager shows us that this work is so important, it must be done at the very center of our institutions, in public, and where the action is.

Deliberative Pedagogy as an Approach to Theological Reflection and Faith Formation

While Duke and Stone describe their method of doing theology as deliberative, and suggest that the core of deliberation is listening and questioning, the field of deliberative pedagogy offers some further refinement of what the practice of deliberation can mean. *Deliberation* is distinct from both *discussion* and *debate*. According to the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service, "the goal of discussion is to learn more about a particular topic and strengthen interpersonal relationships," and involves "maintaining a cordial exchange of ideas...and accepting the views of others without questioning or confrontation." Because a central aim is to get to know each other and build community, discussion will always be an important part of youth fellowship, and is often the general process used in bible study and small groups in churches. Debate, on the other hand, focuses on "exploration of two different positions, characterized by searching for weaknesses in the other's position, defending your position, [and] valuing the solution to the problem as more important than the relationship between the debaters." The goal of debate is to have a clear winner and loser. In the church, we see this practice used most often when large numbers of members gather to make decisions about policy and church positions on social issues (e.g. conferences, assemblies, conventions). While it does have its value in making it fairly efficient to make a large number of decisions in a concentrated period of time, anyone who has attended a large church gathering where serious disagreement about church policy is present knows that relationships among members suffer greatly in the midst of this process. Deliberation, however, seeks to bring the best of discussion and debate together by "working together to make a decision," using a process that searches for "value in alternative views of the issue." This process enlarges or even changes participants'

⁵ Stone and Duke, *Think Theologically*, 4.

understanding of the issue, acknowledges “that many people have pieces of the answer and that together participants can develop a workable solution,” listens “to understand the priorities and values of others,” and weighs the drawbacks and benefits of the various approaches, thus arriving at a goal of finding common ground for action.⁶ In other words, deliberation seeks to make significant decisions for action while attending to relationship and learning more about each other and about the topic at hand.

Deliberative pedagogy is a specific set of teaching practices inspired by the goals of deliberation and deliberative democracy.⁷ From middle school students discussing what to do about bullying, to high school students wrestling with public policy options for reducing greenhouse gasses in their environmental science class, to college students leading forums with their peers on the challenges of diversity on their campus, young people are participating in democratic experiments as part of their education. In *Deliberation in the Classroom: Fostering Critical Thinking, Community, and Citizenship in Schools*, Stacie Molnar-Main describes what it looks like to teach deliberation with students:

In classrooms where public deliberation is practiced, learners engage in inquiry about complex issues and participate in deliberative discussions. During deliberative discussions, students consider different perspectives on a social problem, identify and work through tensions related to different approaches to addressing the problem, and attempt to arrive at reasoned judgment together. In contrast to processes that encourage consensus or compromise, the goal of deliberation is not to produce complete agreement among participants. The broad goals, among other curricular goals, are to promote improved understanding of the issue, awareness of the consequences of various responses, and recognition of commonly held values that can inform future action.”⁸

Molnar-Main points out that, without intentional introduction of deliberative practices in the classroom, “it is quite possible that a child could grow up without experiencing an example of democratic politics in which people of different viewpoints work together for the common good.” Unlike the toxic spaces on social media, on cable news, in the halls of government, and even in the gatherings of our denominations, the classroom—and perhaps, the youth group room—can become a space for diverse individuals to come together to identify common ground, and connect their learning to civic action.⁹

⁶ Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service, “The Three D’s: Discussion, Debate, and Deliberation,” cited in Stacie Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom: Fostering Critical Thinking, Community, and Citizenship in Schools* (Ashland: Kettering Foundation, 2017), 62-63. Accessed September 10, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷ The deliberative democracy movement comes out of a larger concern about civic engagement and renewal. Scholars such as Theda Skocpol have documented the decline of civic engagement by masses of people involved in membership associations that met regularly for social purposes but also became resources for political life. Calling this a “diminished democracy,” Skocpol traces the trends away from membership towards management—the professionalization of policy making, including think tanks and lobbying groups, which no longer need to engage large numbers of citizens in order to shape legislation. See Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civil Life*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003. Peter Levine draws on this and other scholarship to develop a proposal for civic renewal based on gathering citizens together for public deliberation on issues facing their communities. See Peter Levine, *We are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise of Civic Renewal in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁸ Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 14.

⁹ Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 17.

In addition to the topic under consideration, participants in deliberation learn skills essential for citizens who want to overcome paralysis or complacency and transform the dynamics of violence around them. With practice, participants in deliberation learn to think more flexibly and interdependently, to make personal connections to the issues they discuss, to appreciate others' concerns and experiences, to argue for and evaluate different approaches to problems, to practice agreement and disagreement with others, to find common ground with those who have different views and experiences, and to maintain their own views about an issue, even if they hold views different from others around them.¹⁰ As Molnar-Main notes, young people engaged in deliberative classroom practices “not only practice the skills of listening, speaking, and disagreeing respectfully, but they also learn an approach to problem solving that prepares them to find common ground amid differences.”¹¹ They develop capacities for empathy that we often hope for in discussion and dialogue, while at the same time learning how to articulate and make reasoned arguments for the positions they take, what we hope for in encouraging debate. What's more, they can deliberate courses of action they can take to make positive change, expanding their idea of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic system.

Molnar-Main describes six key characteristics for good deliberative learning. First, the subject matter should be “an issue of significance to individuals and society,” and, ideally, of significance to the students themselves. Second, the process of deliberation must be interactive and discussion based. This is different than presenting students with a range of perspectives in a lecture format. Third, the teachers and students should share responsibility for learning, with teachers remaining open to learning from the students during the deliberation process. Fourth, the work of deliberating is real work, not role play. It involves weighing options and making decisions about what to actually do or believe. While the group does not need to end up making the same decisions, everyone is pushed to make *a* decision, which encourages wrestling with the complexities and messiness of the real world. Fifth, multiple perspectives, including marginalized views, are given balanced consideration. This is the best way to ensure that every student has options to choose from that best connect to their own views, to prepare students for encountering different views in other contexts, and to overcome the silence imposed on view-takers who differ from the dominant viewpoint. Finally, students are treated as citizens or decision makers, often engaging in follow-up activities related to these roles. In other words, the decisions that come out of the process do not die in the classroom, but are taken seriously enough to be acted upon in the world.¹²

To aid in keeping the deliberation productive, the National Issues Forum suggests several ground rules. These include: 1) everyone is encouraged to participate; 2) no one or two individuals should dominate the conversation; 3) keep the discussion focused on the options under consideration; 4) consider all the major choices and positions; 5) maintain an atmosphere for discussion and analysis of alternatives; and 6) remember that listening is as important as talking.¹³ Some teachers have created additional ground-rules to help students practice agreeing and disagreeing with each other in productive ways. One teacher, John-Mark Edwards at Phillips Academy, asks students to choose one of three ways to respond to what they hear someone else

¹⁰ Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 17.

¹¹ Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 20.

¹² Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 13.

¹³ These guidelines are featured in a poster created by the National Issues Forum:

<https://www.nifi.org/sites/default/files/product-downloads/FORUM%20GROUND%20RULES%20POSTER.pdf>

The NIF website is filled with resources for hosting deliberative forums, in the community and in the classroom.

<https://www.nifi.org/en> Accessed September 12, 2019.

say. They can: 1) Agree with the person who just spoke and explain why they agree; 2) Respectfully disagree and give a reason for disagreeing; or 3) Add something to the conversation by building on what has been said. Over time, these practices become habits, and students can then find ways to combine them in more complex ways, such as respectfully disagreeing with one part of what someone says while being able to add something constructive to a piece that they do agree with.¹⁴ By establishing these practices intentionally as part of what it means to consider messy topics in a diverse group, teachers are helping students enter a variety of contexts and contribute to decision making positively—even when the stakes are high and people disagree strongly.

Deliberative pedagogy teaches students to consider viewpoints different from their own, to critically engage their own views to consider what their views might leave out or give up, and move beyond either/or thinking to integrate a variety of perspectives and approaches into new approaches that do not accept an “us vs. them” position. This teaches skills in transforming conflict away from division and violence. And because this approach assumes that the students’ opinions and decisions matter, that the teachers can change their minds as a result of deliberation alongside the students, that both student and teacher are working together to consider problems and develop solutions, this pedagogy helps young people to overcome despair and apathy. Can this technique enhance the deliberative tradition of theology and teach Christian youth skills in peacebuilding, while also helping them to mature in their faith?

Creating New Materials for Deliberative Theological Education: One Example

Inspired by the results teachers using deliberative pedagogy have observed, I have begun adapting deliberative pedagogical techniques to theological education, specifically by developing materials for use in deliberative forums focused on theological themes that have implications for violence and peacebuilding. In the booklet, “Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums,” Brad Rourke outlines a process for preparing “issue guides,” hand-outs or booklets that participants in a deliberative discussion use as the basis for their deliberations.¹⁵ These issue guides serve as the primary source of information participants use for considering a wide variety of views and weighing options for decision-making. As such, the materials are most effective when they can provide accessible information that makes the best case for every perspective, and do not push the reader to favor one option over another. They level the playing field, by giving everyone who walks in the room the same information to consider. An issue guide is focused on one issue, generally one piece of one issue, to help deliberators focus on actionable decisions.

The two critical elements of an issue guide is “naming” and “framing.” The issue guide features a heading that names the issues at stake in ways that do not suggest a single answer. It often starts with a broad theme and then develops an open-ended question based on that theme, that, if answered, would require citizen action. Essentially, when we name an issue, we ask, “what should we do?” The issue guide then goes on to provide a framework for thinking

¹⁴ Molnar-Main, *Deliberation in the Classroom*, 45.

¹⁵ Brad Rourke, “Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums” (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2014). The Kettering Foundation, a non-profit organization that supports research that “focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation” and is committed to finding ways to “identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should,” has developed useful materials to help citizens host deliberative forums and teachers use deliberative pedagogy with students. For more information, see their website: <https://www.kettering.org> Rourke’s guidebook can be downloaded here: <https://www.kettering.org/catalog/product/developing-materials-deliberative-forums> Accessed September 12, 2019.

about answering this big question. The framework lists the options or perspectives used to understand an issue or problem, as well as critical information, drawbacks, and trade-offs associated with different approaches. Ideally, the guide should feature three to four broad perspectives to be explored. Providing only two perspectives leads to debate and polarization, so having three or four allows for people to break out of the typical divisions we find in many of our political conversations today. The perspectives should use everyday language people use to talk about the issue. Ideally, the approaches would not align with partisan framings or the views of specific actors or groups, and major as well as marginalized perspectives should be included. The guides should include links to primary and secondary sources that represent different perspectives on the themes and allow participants to check sources and learn more on their own. Most important, the descriptions of the three to four approaches should include key information about each approach, sample actions of what those approaches involve, and some information about the strengths and limitations of each option, as well as the trade-offs that would have to be made if that approach were adopted. Essentially, when we frame an issue, we ask, “if we adopt this approach or action, what consequences should we take into account, and, given our understanding of both the advantages and trade-offs, are we willing to live with the trade-offs because the advantages outweigh them?”

In the example described below, I chose an issue that goes to the core of what Christians must wrestle with if they want to move from embedded theology to deliberative theology: *Who is Jesus?* Rourke notes that “if the materials are to support public deliberation, they must begin where the public does.” Effective materials must “take into account citizens’ various starting points and chief concerns,” and writers of these materials cannot skip the step of actually going out and talking to citizens to find out what really concerns them about a given topic.¹⁶ In order to emulate this process, I created an online group of youth workers, young adults, and youth, from a range of perspectives across denomination, life experience, socio-economic and racial backgrounds, and gender identities—playfully called “The Conclave.” I asked members of The Conclave questions based on Rourke’s template:

- When you think about what you have been taught about who Jesus is, what concerns you? What bothers you most, personally?
- What concerns do you hear friends, family members, or others talking about when it comes to what they've been taught about who Jesus is?

Conclave members gave me a range of responses. Some were concerned that the image of Jesus taught to them was one of an exclusive personal savior, which made it difficult for them to connect Jesus to public action and hard to know what to do about friends and family who were not Christian. Others were concerned that they saw too many people around them using Jesus’ teachings in ways that marginalized others. Several noted that the image of Jesus as a white male made it difficult for them to develop a relationship with him, either because they were themselves men and had barriers to developing intimate relationships with other men, or because they found it difficult to relate to a savior who looked like their oppressor. Still others expressed concerns that Jesus was simply not talked about enough by their friends and family, limiting the impact of Jesus’ salvific power to fewer and fewer people.

Noting some of the underlying concerns Conclave members expressed—fears that images of Jesus created barriers to people developing a personal relationship with him, portrayed him as

¹⁶ Rourke, “Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums,” 11.

so personal and private people could not make connections between their relationship with Jesus and their calling to act in the world as followers of Jesus, had been misused to exclude or harm people, and made him too perfect or too abstract for anyone to follow—I used Rourke’s template to create an issue guide.¹⁷ Rourke notes that an issue guide usually contains five elements. The first is a *title* that reflects the major tension inherent in the issue and conveys that there is a difficult question or problem that must be faced. I titled my issue guide, “Our Images of Jesus,” with a subheading that asks the question, “How do we think of Jesus in ways that transform our lives *and* the world?” My intent was to note the tension I observed between images of Jesus that youth found personally transformative and images that encouraged them to practice a social ethic inspired by Jesus’ earthly ministry.

The second element is an *introduction* that explains what the issue is and why something must be done about it. I begin by noting the multiplicity of images of Jesus in the Bible and Christian tradition, and that these images have been both a help and a hindrance for faith. I then frame the problem as follows:

When we pray to or think about Jesus, we have an image in our minds of who he is, what he looks like, and how he relates to us and to other people. The problem that must be faced is that we all have images of Jesus we have developed through our life experiences and what we’ve learned, and these images impact not only our faith, but our actions in the world. The images most dear to us might actually do harm to other people. The images most dear to others might do harm to us. While we might want to say that Jesus is a universal figure, because Jesus was fully human and came to earth in a specific time and place, images of Jesus are particular and cannot remain vague. Jesus was a *particular human being* in a *particular body*, and that has implications, particularly if we claim that this particular human was also God. This particularity of Jesus on earth is part of why we have such a rich tradition of artistic depictions of Jesus, through paintings, statues, music lyrics, and illustrations in our Vacation Bible School and Sunday School materials. But these images shape our imaginations of who Jesus is, and this has consequences.

I then suggest that a decision of import must be made:

As maturing Christians, we must deliberately choose an image of Jesus Christ as the focus of our faith and model for our spiritual growth. How we image Jesus matters: it influences how we understand what it means to follow Jesus, it influences how we treat others who believe differently from us, it influences whether we really believe Jesus loves us and others...As maturing Christians, it is our challenge to enter into this conversation and make our own thoughtful, prayerful decisions about what to do.

The main body of the issue advisory then features four choices to consider related to how to image Jesus, following Rourke’s recommendation to include descriptions of each *option* for dealing with the issue, and two *subsections* under these options which feature examples of *actions* or *benefits* that follow from choosing that option and examples of *drawbacks* or *trade-offs* inherent in each action. In my adaptation, I changed the subsection language of “benefits” and “drawbacks” to “life-giving” and “challenging,” and tied it to the action of maturing as a Christian (that is, spiritual growth). The four options for deliberation I included were to focus on

¹⁷ This issue guide, as well as others I have developed, will be shared in its full form during the RIG presentation.

Jesus: 1) as our friend; 2) as martyr who died for us; 3) as teacher and healer; or 4) as God's Son, the second person of the Trinity. For each option, I began with a scriptural passage that illustrated the option, placing them all as equally valid, and equally biblical, options.¹⁸ I then included a short paragraph that connects the biblical passage with the overall image of Jesus proposed, and then listed several reasons why each image can be "life-giving for maturing Christians" and several reasons why this image can also be "challenging for maturing Christians." These points of benefits/drawbacks are informed by theological scholarship, as well as by insights gleaned from The Conclave and from conversations with youth at YTI. I end each option description with a set of questions for the group to consider, designed to encourage appreciation of the image and of those fellow Christians who prefer this image, raise critical questions about the image, and push participants to weigh the trade-offs that come with this option, all while encouraging perspective-taking and awareness of the diversity of Christian beliefs and practices:

- What is appealing about this image of Jesus? What do you imagine is appealing about this image for other Christians?
- What concerns you about this image of Jesus? What concerns do you imagine other Christians might have about this image?
- If you made this the primary image of Jesus to focus on for your spiritual growth, what would you be giving up? What concerns would you be ignoring?

In the final section of the issue advisory, I list several questions for group reflection designed to encourage consideration of shared values within the group, deliberation about what is gained and lost with each choice, and moving towards a group decision:

- Can we identify any shared values among some or all of these different images of Jesus Christ?
- Can we identify any shared values among our own group? What do we value most in how we think about Jesus Christ?
- Can we identify any trade-offs or downsides that some or all of us are willing (or not willing) to make when we think about our images of Jesus Christ?
- Is there one image of Jesus Christ we would like to lift up as most important to our faith journey at this moment in the life of our group? Why?

Although a decision to choose only one image of Jesus to focus on is not mandatory, the push to make at least a provisional decision to focus in a particular direction through a group process of weighing the consequences of each choice is what makes this exercise truly deliberative. Within a youth group setting, making a choice might then inform what images of Jesus to use when decorating the youth room, where to focus their next Bible study, how to approach prayer—or how youth will show what image of Jesus they are following by how they treat others or interpret current events.

¹⁸ I also added scripture in order to address some of the Biblical and theological illiteracy that is common among Christian youth, as noted in Christian Smith with Melissa Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 131-137.

Reimagining Confirmation and Sunday School?

In her essay, “Deep Democracy: The Inner Practice of Civic Engagement,” Patricia A. Wilson notes, “at its essence, deep democracy is the inner experience of interconnectedness.” Democracy is “deep” when the individual experiences the “enfranchisement of self at the level of mind, heart, and spirit: the realization that ‘I count.’” One realizes that one “counts” upon discovering that one is a member of a larger whole, and accepts “responsibility for that whole, and the desire to act for the good of the whole: the realization that ‘I care.’” Individuals and community come together in a creative tension “held in place by the transformation of self through greater understanding of, compassion for, and relationship with an expanding circle of others.”¹⁹ In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul describes communion with Jesus Christ and his followers as a body with many diverse parts, inextricably interconnected and necessary to the functioning of the body—Christians, as members of the Body of Christ, both “count” as individual members and “care” about every other member, knowing that “God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor so that there won’t be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it” (1 Cor 12:24-26). Can some of the insights from teaching deliberative democracy help us learn what it means to be parts of Christ’s Body?

As a method of teaching, deliberative pedagogy can be used to teach a wide range of content, and has been used to teach social science, science and humanities courses. Presumably, then, it can also be used to teach theology. In my example above, I have attempted to create one way of using deliberative pedagogy to encourage young people to think critically and compassionately about what is at stake in how we image Jesus, but such materials can be created for considering different understandings of the Atonement, life after death, Jesus’ ethnic and gender identity, our relationship to God’s Creation, how to relate to other religions, and many other “big questions” that young people already wonder about but rarely find the space and permission to explore deliberatively.

What if confirmation classes, Bible Study, or Sunday School meetings were like this? This might be a way of growing in maturity and wisdom the way Jesus did – deliberatively, with adults taking them seriously, in public, and in the center of their religious community.

¹⁹ Patricia A. Wilson, “Deep Democracy: The Inner Practice of Civic Engagement,” in *Fieldnotes: A Newsletter of the Shambala Institute*. Feb 2004, Iss 3.

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Listening for the Sacred: A Method and Pedagogy Toward Hope

Abstract:

Active listening and storytelling are proving to be effective practices toward generating empathy and compassion across different generations, cultures, and beliefs. In this paper I explore the methods of Holy Listening and storytelling as means used by faith communities and public agencies to create spaces where storytellers and listeners can be transformed by the simple acts of sharing and listening. Practitioners of religious education can use methods of Holy Listening and storytelling to promote learning across barriers as well as to learn more about the lives of their own faith communities.

It is said that “being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are indistinguishable.”¹ Listening well is a powerful act of empathy. In this paper I will examine insights from the practice of Holy Listening as it was used in the Young Adult Initiative at Garrett-Evangelical as an interview protocol with guided, open-answer questions; storytelling methods practiced by libraries, churches, and other sacred spaces for the purpose of empathic listening; and give examples of the use of listening and storytelling as bridges in churches, libraries, and other spaces that can be used concurrently in religious education to help bridge divides and build relationships across differences.

In March 2017, the Young Adult Initiative at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, funded by the Lilly Endowment, embarked on an ambitious project to conduct thirty in-depth interviews with young adults in the Chicago area about their spiritual lives, work lives, private lives, and the ways in which the Church has helped to form, and sometimes malform, their faith. Each hour-long interview consisted of questions such as:

¹ David W. Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Hear and Be Heard* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1982).

- What is important for me to know about your growing up years that had an important impact on who you are (such as a-ha! moments/travel/family/health issues)?
- In what ways, if at all, have your ideas about (or your relationship with) your faith evolved over time? Tell me about any ideas or experiences that challenged, destabilized, or called into question your spiritual/religious beliefs (if this has been part of your experience). How did you respond to the experience you described?
- How did you get involved with your church or faith community? How did you hear about it? What initially motivated you to attend? What made you want to return?
- How does this [church/community] compare with your past experiences of church or community?
- From your perspective, what types of people participate in [church/community]? (for example, age; race/ethnicity; gender; sexual orientation).
- How do you feel about the people? Do you know everyone? Lots of new friends? Awkward people? Some you don't like?

These kinds of open-ended questions created space for the interviewer to both learn and experience empathic connection with the persons interviewed. The interview questions not only solicited the telling of experiences, but also functioned as sites for meaning-making in the creation of an often stream-of-consciousness response.² In most cases, the persons interviewed

² Dori Grinenko Baker and Joyce Ann Mercer, *Lives to Offer: Accompanying Youth on Their Vocational Quests* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2007), 75.

were thankful for the opportunity to share their stories and the process of the interview itself led to further self-understanding and self-empathy. They experienced a form of rediscovery, where even though they had experienced something, in the telling of the story they discovered something new.³ In telling or retelling stories, they felt more connected to their experiences. It is rare in casual conversation for someone to be really listened to, and the interviewees were often grateful for the chance to be listened to so deeply without any agenda being sold.

The interview process we engaged in was called Holy Listening, and was created and directed by Dori Baker, senior research fellow with the Forum for Theological Exploration. Holy Listening, as described by Baker and Joyce Ann Mercer, is a pedagogical strategy to build empathy between listener and storyteller; educate about difference; and serve as a mediator by which both listener and storyteller learn together and create knowledge that can help both imagine and even create spaces of hope for engagement and practice across faith differences.

In 2007, Baker and Mercer developed the concept of Holy Listening in relation to their work in religious education with youth. In their book *Lives to Offer*, Baker and Mercer describe Holy Listening as a means of creating space for teens to offer testimony—not just to what God has done, but to “the voicing of memories of an experience, event, or relationship that has been tucked into the seams of everyday living.”⁴ What they are describing is the power of storytelling combined with the power of deep, connected listening.

Baker and Mercer go on to say, “When invited, these stories might pour forth and come into focus as significant testimony to God’s activity in the small moments of life.”⁵ The Young

³ Dori Baker, Tobin Belzer, Bethany Stolle, and Karen E. Mosby, “Holy Yearnings, Holy Listening, Holy Partnerships” March 2018, https://issuu.com/shane206/docs/holy_listening_report_f?f?e=1301864/63074758, 19 (accessed September 13, 2019).

⁴ Baker and Mercer, *Lives to Offer*, 73.

⁵ Baker and Mercer, *Lives to Offer*, 73.

Adult Initiative interviewees experienced this “coming into focus” as they vocalized what they knew internally but had perhaps not attempted to explain coherently as a story. The practice of responding with story to someone invested in deeply listening to that story is a profound way of making meaning from one’s experiences. Many of our interviewees answered short, one-sentence questions with long, connected trains of thought that often started with something simple and ended with something deep and meaningful. As Baker and Mercer so deftly describe,

With only the briefest of prompts from the listener, the speaker sorts out the possibility of a fulfilling future, sometimes one that is radically countercultural. The speaker makes urgent use of this rare audience, basking in the undivided attention of a listening “other” to test significant new meanings.⁶

The interviewees were not the only ones to benefit from their storytelling experience. The young adults who were conducting the interviews also found the *listening* experience to be meaningful in multiple ways. There was a mutuality to the process that the interviewers appreciated. They were positioned to create a space for another person to reflect deeply and as one interviewer noted, giving them “the spotlight and letting them shine in it.”⁷

The interviewers were drawn into the stories they were being told, which creates a shared empathy between the storyteller and listener. Interviewers reflected on their own experiences that connected to what they heard in the interviews. Even though it wasn’t required, some of the interviewers set up further connections with their interviewees around shared interests or a simple desire to know the person more deeply. One interviewer said, “I felt confident in that

⁶ Baker and Mercer, *Lives to Offer*, 74.

⁷ Dori Baker, Tobin Belzer, Bethany Stolle, and Karen E. Mosby, “Holy Yearnings, Holy Listening, Holy Partnerships” March 2018, https://issuu.com/shane206/docs/holy_listening_report_f?f_e=1301864/63074758, 19 (accessed September 13, 2019).

space. They had made themselves vulnerable: I didn't want to leave. I was like 'okay we should probably do this again.' There was this trust built... and I get to keep maintaining that trust.”⁸

In practicing deep listening to someone they were acquaintances with but didn't know very well, the interviewers found that they had made assumptions about their interviewees that were revealed to be incorrect during the space of the interview. One interviewer stated, “One thing that surprised me about the individuals I interviewed was there's a lot about them that I didn't know, that I wouldn't have expected: a lot of passions they have that I was completely unaware of.”⁹

Something akin to this method is being combined with the practice of storytelling and used across both religious and secular spaces to foster communities of empathy. Public libraries across the United States are hosting what they call Human Libraries, where patrons volunteer to be storytellers to “readers” who check them out for conversation and to learn from their experiences. The Human Library movement began in Denmark in 2000 and has since spread to 85 countries, including the United States.¹⁰ Evanston Public Library in Evanston, Illinois hosts a Human Library once or twice a year in a program they have titled “UNJudge Someone.”¹¹ A Human Library event is an opportunity for “Readers” to “check out” a real human person (“Book”) who has experienced prejudice based on race, sexuality, disability, and/or other attributes. A “Book” has volunteered their time to speak about their lives and engage with

⁸ Dori Baker, Tobin Belzer, Bethany Stolle, and Karen E. Mosby, “Holy Yearnings, Holy Listening, Holy Partnerships” March 2018, https://issuu.com/shane206/docs/holy_listening_report_f?f=e=1301864/63074758, 19 (accessed September 13, 2019).

⁹ Dori Baker, Tobin Belzer, Bethany Stolle, and Karen E. Mosby, “Holy Yearnings, Holy Listening, Holy Partnerships” March 2018, https://issuu.com/shane206/docs/holy_listening_report_f?f=e=1301864/63074758, 20 (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹⁰ “Human Library: unjudge someone,” Evanston Public Library, www.epl.org, <https://www.epl.org/events/human-library-unjudge-someone/> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹¹ “UNJudge Someone,” Evanston Public Library, www.epl.org, <https://www.epl.org/unjudge-someone/> (accessed September 13, 2019).

“Readers” in a one-on-one environment suitable for deep listening and respectful questions. The event is held in the library, during a specific timeframe, which creates healthy boundaries around questions and answers, particularly for sensitive topics and themes. In this way, a public space creates an environment where one can listen to and learn from a person who may be radically different from them in a structured environment, free from distractions or unhelpful, unsafe commentaries or stimuli. The library serves as a structured learning environment for developing or furthering empathy, compassion, and bridge-building in a community.

Religious communities are also embracing storytelling as a means of developing empathy and creating space for growth and transformation. Gilead Church in Chicago has become known as the storytelling church, where they “tell true stories that save lives.”¹² At Gilead, storytelling is more than a form of testifying—it is the word of God, for the people of God.¹³ It takes the place of a more traditional liturgy or scripture reading as it is performed before the presentation of a sermon from one of the pastoral staff. Gilead Chicago meets weekly in a variety of places—a Sunday service at a bar; a party to welcome newcomers on one of Chicago’s beloved EL trains; and a rented theater that served as a space to build giant forts to reconnect with a sense of childhood wonder and create new friendships as a Lenten discipline. On Sunday evenings at their regular meeting time, between sips of beer, one of the pastors delivers a sermon and congregants tell stories and build community based on inclusivity, shared experience, and a desire to grow spiritually and make sense of a life of faith.

¹² “Home,” Gilead Chicago, www.gileadchicago.org, <https://www.gileadchicago.org/#home> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹³ Katelyn Ferral, “Life Stories - Not Sermons - Guide Gilead Church in Chicago,” *Religion News Service*, religionnews.com, March 4, 2019, <https://religionnews.com/2019/03/04/life-stories-not-sermons-guide-gilead-church-in-chicago/> (accessed September 14, 2019).

Garrett Seminary has also embraced storytelling as a means of hospitality for staff, faculty, and students. At the beginning of the 2019 school year, the seminary used storytelling in its first all-employee meeting of the year. Two staff members who had received certificates in Community Storytelling led the community in group storytelling as a kick-off to Innovation Week at the school. They began by asking us to think of a toy we played with as a child in a different way than it was intended. One of the leaders told us how she had an oversized coloring book that she would color in, but also set up on its side in order to “step into” the pages like a tent.

Administrator, staff, and faculty broke out into groups of four and shared our stories, each taking a minute or two. The energy in the room heightened as members of the community recalled using their imaginations in unique and playful ways to create new realities with their toys. Our leaders pointed out to us that there is something about telling stories that connects us to our bodies – we are created to tell stories about our lives, and these stories reconnect us with ourselves. They asked us to think about how it felt to remember our childhoods. Some responded with saying it created a feeling of playfulness in them, while others expressed a painful sadness in how they used to play at one point in their lives, but responsibilities for family life took away their opportunities to play at too young of an age. The act of telling stories together bonded us together as a community, as well as touched a necessary part of our own inner stories. Even for those who already know each other quite well, the act of telling and listening to a story strengthens a bond and the teller and the listener come away with new knowledge about their partner, themselves, and the community.

The leaders of the storytelling experience at Garrett received their certificates in Community Storytelling from *The Hearth: Real Stories by Regular Folks*, founded in 2010 by

author and speaker Mark Yaconelli.¹⁴ Yaconelli founded *The Hearth* on the belief that telling stories can “heal, connect, enrich, and mobilize communities for good.”¹⁵ *The Hearth*’s certificate program makes the case for storytelling as having “the potential to bridge divides, cultivate trust, and inspire action by inviting those gathered to better understand what others have lived, suffered, and overcome. All human divisions could be healed if we would only take the time to listen to one another’s stories.”¹⁶ It is this belief that powers movements like The Hearth, churches like Gilead Chicago, and library programs like UNJudge Someone. Combining Holy Listening and Storytelling has proven to be an effective means of connecting people and bridging communities of difference in these spaces.

The interview process employed by the Young Adult Initiative at Garrett was just the beginning of their five-year Innovation Hub project.¹⁷ In keeping with educator Jane Vella’s principles of adult learning, the interviews served as a compelling “Needs Assessment.”¹⁸ The interviews were coded to reveal the goals, desires, needs, and frustrations of the young adult interviewees. The themes that emerged from the interviews were then used by the young adults and other members of their congregations to contemplate ways to further engage young adults in their congregational contexts. This method of listening for themes is vital according to Vella, for “when adult learners are bored or indifferent, it means their themes have been neglected in the design of the course. . . . People are naturally excited to learn anything that helps them understand

¹⁴ “About,” The Hearth Community, www.thehearthcommunity.com, <https://thehearthcommunity.com/about/> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹⁵ “About,” The Hearth Community, www.thehearthcommunity.com, <https://thehearthcommunity.com/about/> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹⁶ “Certificate Training 2020,” The Hearth Community, www.thehearthcommunity.com, <https://thehearthcommunity.com/certificate-training-2020/> (accessed September 13, 2019).

¹⁷ <https://garrett.edu/youngadultinitiative>

¹⁸ Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*, Revised Edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass) 2002.

their own themes, their own lives.”¹⁹ This played out in a group experience of coding for themes by the interviewers themselves. They came alive in the process of sifting through interview transcripts, looking for the common themes among young adults similar to themselves. Holy listening in this context created a deeper understanding and connection to the needs of the young adults involved in Garrett’s initiative and generated renewed interest in the place of young adults in the Church.

Baker and Mercer, through their practice of holy listening with youths, began to see it as a “functional model of the religious educator.”²⁰ In the same way, religious communities like Gilead Chicago have begun to see storytelling as a model for liturgy and community-making in the Church. Holy listening and storytelling combined prove to be an effective method for religious educators, pastors, and other community-minded persons to begin to understand one another across differences; create space via events that bring people together whose lives normally do not intersect; and provide space for individual and community meaning-making toward the hope of a more just and inclusive world.

¹⁹ Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*, 6.

²⁰ Baker and Mercer, *Lives to Offer*, 81.

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A Sacred Pedagogy for Today: Learning from the Sermon on the Mount

Abstract

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount offers a pedagogical framework for Christian belief and identity, yet it also provides a pedagogical framework and strategy for encountering and experiencing “the other” in ways that can bridge the polarizing aspects of religion, nationality, culture, gender and race. The insights of the Matthean Jesus concerning retaliation, love for enemies, and projection can be used to religiously educate towards awareness of the humanity of “the other” and also the awareness of the humanity of one's self. Thus, leading to dialogue, understanding, and the further humanization of all.

Introduction

This study seeks to glean a fresh religiously educative perspective from a familiar sacred pedagogy. That sacred pedagogy is the Sermon on the Mount as found in the Gospel of Matthew. While the Sermon on the Mount can easily be identified as such it is also a pedagogy that seeks to transcend differences while also offering hope to its hearers and practitioners.

Echoing the conference theme, it is evident that there is “a growing chasm that exists in democracies around the world” in which communication across divides has become more challenging. Strangely, though, the very means for combating such challenges and crossing such chasms may be in the primary texts and documents of various religious traditions. The Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew is one of these texts and this study seeks to demonstrate this very point.

Gabriel Moran once wrote that “Christianity is an invitation to human intelligence and freedom to re-create the world.”¹ The hope is that this study would accomplish as much. Moreover, Moran also wrote that in ecumenical discussions, “Christianity also has a place if it is willing to take the humble role of cooperating in the interpretation of human experience.”² Again, this study seeks to offer an interpretation of human experience that seeks to bridge divides in ways that can lead towards humanization and understanding, but not under the assumption that its way is the only way. Using philosophical research methodology³ it will draw upon categories from the fields of education, religious education, and biblical interpretation in order to support the thesis that the Matthean Jesus offers a sacred pedagogy for transcending differences and crossing divides.

¹ Gabriel Moran, *Designs for Religion: Toward Ecumenical Education*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 97.

² *Ibid.*, 48.

³ In *Method in Philosophic Inquiry for Christian Education* Elmer Towns writes, “The aim of philosophic methodology is to describe and analyze thought, throwing light on limitations, and resources, clarifying presumptions and consequences, and relating potentialities to creative areas of Christian religious education.”

The Gift of the Null

In *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs* Eliot Eisner posits that all schools teach three curricula: the explicit, the implicit, and the null.⁴ According to Eisner the explicit curriculum is what is clearly taught in an educational setting like a classroom. Things like learning how to write and read or learning the specific aspects of the history of a country fall under this curriculum category.⁵ Embedded within and without this form of curricula is the implicit curriculum which is what is taught through the kind of place the school or learning environment is and seeks to be.⁶ Those aspects of the implicit curriculum might be the very structure and layout of the classroom, the ways of reward and punishment, the wording and layout of the materials being used. In contrast to these first two is the null aspect of the curriculum which is what is not taught in the given curriculum.

Eisner's distinction of the three aspects of curriculum are particularly helpful in uncovering how the sacred pedagogy of the Matthean Jesus, as found in the Sermon on the Mount, can be used as a guide for bridging the polarizing aspects of religion, nationality, culture, gender, and race. Within the Sermon on the Mount there is a pedagogical framework and strategy for encountering and experiencing the other that maintains the dignity and humanity of all parties. Unfortunately, since the Sermon on the Mount is in the Gospel of Matthew, which is one of the authoritative documents of the church catholic, this text has traditionally fallen under the curriculum ideology of religious orthodoxy. In some respects, this has served to undermine the radical and subversive nature of many of the teachings found therein. As Eliot Eisner notes, one of the aims of religious orthodoxy ideology in curriculum is to pass on the faith of the church, to pass on God's Word and not to question it.⁷ As a result, a null curriculum has developed around the Sermon on the Mount that has resulted in a "simplistic analysis" wherein "there is an absence of a set of considerations perspectives."⁸ In fact, some have argued that this is the result of the increasing influence of the Roman Empire on the church over the first few centuries culminating in Constantine's conversion to Christianity in the fourth century.⁹ What happened during this time is the "oppressive reality" of the Roman Empire slowly absorbed the message of the Matthean Jesus thereby rendering it less radical.¹⁰ Yet, when this curriculum is freed from the confines of religious orthodoxy ideology amazing insights are brought forth. Insights that can help to lead towards dialogue, understanding, and the further humanization of all. Scholar Walter Wink writes concerning the teachings found in the Sermon on the Mount, "These sayings are, in fact, so radical, so unprecedented, and so threatening, that it has taken all these centuries just to begin to grasp their implications."¹¹

If examined closely, one will notice that in certain places in the Sermon on the Mount the Matthean Jesus takes an explicit teaching of his tradition and inserts the null aspect of it into it.

⁴ Elliot Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, (New York: MacMillan, 1994), 87-107.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁹ Wes Howard-Brook, *Empire Baptized: How the Church Embraced What Jesus Rejected 2nd – 5th Centuries*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2016).

¹⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 51.

¹¹ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1992), 184.

By doing so he thereby makes the null aspect an explicit aspect within his new teaching. As a result, he transcends the “us vs. them” mindset of his people by incorporating “the other” in his teaching. This is borne out in Matthew 5:38-39 wherein Jesus states: “You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Here the Matthean Jesus is citing Leviticus 24:20 where it says, “Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury suffered.” Jesus then follows with his own teaching where he makes the null aspect i.e. non-retaliation, transcending revenge, an explicit part of his teaching. He says, “But I say to you, do not resist/retaliate the evildoer” and proceeds to give strategies for doing so that includes retaining the dignity of the enemy or “the other.” He takes the potential null curriculum of his audience and he makes it apart of his new explicit curriculum.

In order to understand just how powerful this new teaching is it is necessary to locate and define the “evildoers” of which Jesus speaks. The Matthean Jesus is quite specific in the following verses of Matthew 5:39-41:

“³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰ and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.”

The evildoers are masters of households or wealthy landowners, creditors, and Roman soldiers, all of whom were great purveyors of injustice in the ancient Roman world. It is important to note that the audience of the Matthean Jesus were peasants, those who had felt the brunt of the unjust actions of these evildoers. Walter Wink writes concerning Jesus’ audience, “There are among his hearers people who were subjected to these very indignities, forced to stifle outrage at their dehumanizing treatment by the hierarchical system of class, race, gender, age, and status, and as a result of imperial occupation.”¹² When they cry out, pray, and yearn for the arrival of the expected Messiah it is these very evildoers that they hope will get their due for the way that they have treated them. It is the master or wealthy landowner that seeks to humiliate the inferior slave or peasant farmer with a slap across the face. It is the wealthy creditor that sues the peasant in order to get as much as possible out of him even though he is already in tremendous debt. It is the Roman soldier that imposes his power on a local peasant by compelling him to carry his bags for a mile. All these things were incredibly dehumanizing and demeaning. Yet, instead of enabling the fires of resentment and anger to be further stoked in such a tumultuous time the Matthean Jesus offers a message that seeks to transcend such hurt and resentment. He offers a third way that enabled the oppressed to regain their human dignity while at the same time maintaining the dignity of the oppressor/evildoer. The Matthean Jesus takes what all too easily could have become the null aspect of his new teaching and makes it an explicit part of his new teaching. The evildoer isn’t to be made null but instead is to be incorporated. Revenge isn’t made explicit, instead it is made null! The Matthean Jesus will not let his audience off the hook, and remember they were certainly justified in wanting revenge.¹³

¹² Ibid., 176.

¹³ Roman oppression had been quite brutal with the squashing of a Jewish rebellion in the city of Sepphoris in 4 B.C. which was just four miles north of Nazareth where Jesus grew up. The Roman legions burned down Sepphoris along with other surrounding towns, destroyed the countryside and enslaved the local population. To make matters, two thousand men crucified from that area as well. This area in northern Galilee was seriously traumatized with mass killing and enslavement of upwards of tens of thousands of people. It is believed that Jesus was born sometime in the vicinity of 4 B.C.E. He grew up in the midst of the residue of this trauma. In one sense, it could be likened to the trauma New Yorkers felt and continue to feel from the terrorist attacks on 9/11, yet far worse. Jesus

Thus, in verse 39 where the Matthean Jesus says, “But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” he is giving his audience a strategic way of recapturing their humanity in the face of “the evildoer” who seeks to demean them with a backhanded slap. By turning the other cheek the evildoer is robbed of their power to humiliate the oppressed because only equals were hit with a right punch.¹⁴ It forces the master or the wealthy landowner to treat the peasant as an equal. The action of turning the other cheek is a way for the oppressed to regain their humanity without dehumanizing the oppressor/evildoer. In fact, it could, but for a moment, cause the evildoer to realize that the person in front of them is a human being just like them.¹⁵ Due note, this teaching moves towards commonality instead of difference. It may not necessarily result in that, but that is one of its goals.

In verse 40 Jesus gives another strategy for dealing with the evildoer/oppressor, “and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well.” Walter Wink notes that only the poorest of the poor would have only a garment to give as collateral for a loan.¹⁶ Through this teaching the Matthean Jesus encourages those in his audience to take off all of their clothes while in court and walk off stark naked so as to protest the system that created the debt in the first place. Moreover, nakedness was a taboo in Judaism and shame fell more on the person causing the indebtedness i.e. the evildoer. Thus, yet again, the oppressed regain their humanity without succumbing to retaliation and revenge in a way that exposes the very injustice of the debt system. In the process, “it offers the creditor a chance to see, perhaps for the first time in his life, what his practices cause, and to repent.”¹⁷

Lastly, is the strategy that the Matthean Jesus gives in dealing with a Roman soldier compelling peasantry to carry their bags. In verse 41 Jesus says, “and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.” Roman soldiers were allowed to levy on subject peoples a single mile of impressed labor but no more. In fact, if they used a person for more than one mile and got caught doing so they could be flogged. Thus, yet again, Jesus offers a strategy for retaining one’s dignity while also respecting the dignity and humanity of the oppressor. The oppressed seize the initiative by offering to go an extra mile throwing the Roman soldier/evildoer off balance and into a situation he has never been before.¹⁸ Similar to the previous teachings, this action also gives the evildoer a chance to see what it is like to beg and to be put in such a position as a peasant. Maybe this could also result in repentance and change on the part of the soldier.

Implicit within this new pedagogy of the Matthean Jesus is its egalitarianism. As noted earlier the Matthean Jesus is giving this teaching to a people who have been oppressed and dehumanized but the strategies therein do not seek to answer the evildoer in kind. Implied in these strategies is the inherent dignity of all people, particularly the poor but not at the expense of the rich. One could say that a goal within these strategies is equalization. Maybe the wealthy landowner will think twice about humiliating his inferior now that the humanness of the latter

probably had extended family members who took part in this rebellion and, in turn, were crucified, enslaved, or killed. Furthermore, Roman oppression did not abate as Jesus grew up in Nazareth. This was in the air that he breathed. It was part of the backdrop of life in Galilee. Thus, Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount must be understood with such things in mind. Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 28-30.

¹⁴ Remember in the ancient world the left hand was not used for striking but only for unclean tasks.

¹⁵ Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 175-176.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

has been communicated in an effective way. Maybe the creditor will be concerned about those who are indebted to him now that he has come to face to face with the actual effects of his loaning practices. Maybe the Roman soldier will have developed empathy for the local populations that he works amongst and not be as coldhearted towards them as he was previously. Strangely, though, the Matthean Jesus does not rely on the evildoer to get it right but instead calls on the oppressed to take the initiative. It is often not perceived in this way but evildoers need the oppressed more than they might realize. For the oppressed, through their subversive strategies that seek to retain the humanity of the evildoer, can bring them back “down to earth.”

In a similar vein, having examined Matthew 5:38-41 with the aide of biblical scholarship and the curriculum lens of Elliot Eisner this study now turns to the words of the Matthean Jesus in verses 43-48 of chapter 5:

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

This passage is an excellent example of the Matthean Jesus taking the null of his community (the enemy) and making it apart of his explicit teaching to love. In fact, he is expanding the definition of neighbor to his audience which would have only considered those who were fellow Jews to be their neighbor. For the Matthean Jesus “neighbor” embraces “diversities of gender, wealth, kin, physical condition, age and ethnicity.”¹⁹ Those formerly deemed “outside” are no longer so deemed. There is a clear inclusiveness in this teaching. The basis for this inclusive love is God who the Matthean Jesus claims loves all people, righteous and unrighteous, completely. There are no exceptions, all are to be loved because God loves all. That is what this sacred pedagogy of the Matthean Jesus explicitly teaches!

The relevancy of this teaching for today becomes ever stronger with each passing day as what Cornel West calls the “neofascist discourse”²⁰ becomes more the norm. According to West, “What happens is, in a neofascist discourse, and it’s true around the world, if you can define a community as pure and characterize those on the outside as a threat, as impure, and then view yourself as the one coming to the rescue to preserve the purity it can be based on race, it can be based on religion, on politics.”²¹ Imagine for a moment if people, in order to combat this neofascist discourse, remembered the explicit words of the Matthean Jesus that they are (1) to love the person across from them and (2) they are to do so because that person is also loved by God just as they are. It might even help in those moments for them to also remember the very evildoers that the Matthean Jesus references before this: the slavemaster/authoritarian boss, the creditor/ruthless Wall St exec, and the Roman soldier/power-abusing police officer. If a point is made to retain the humanity of the enemy/the other great potential arises for communion and understanding. As Thomas Groome notes, “our deepest desire is to transcend sectarianism and

¹⁹ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 154.

²⁰ “Joe Rogan Experience #1325 - Dr. Cornel West,” YouTube video, 1:58:21, “PowerfulJRE,” July 24, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViWvAnvT17c>

²¹ Ibid.

parochialism and live instead with authentic love of self and other and in solidarity with all people.”²²

At the end of his teaching to love enemies the Matthean Jesus concludes with, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.” Without going too much into exegesis it should be noted that a better translation would be, “Be whole/complete, therefore, as your heavenly Father is whole/complete.”²³ After all, God is whole or complete in that God loves all, or more succinctly, his love is all-inclusive. It knows no distinctions in that God does not have “a them” in the equation of “us vs. them.” God is for all people and therefore there is no “us vs. them” for God! This is incredibly important because if one looks closely at various movements like Hitler and the rise of the Nazis,²⁴ American Nationalism,²⁵ White Supremacy,²⁶ religious fundamentalism of various forms,²⁷ there is embedded within the belief that “God” is on their side. God is a means of legitimization for these movements and ideologies. All these groups invoked God and the scriptures in support of their endeavors. Such ideologies must be confronted with this true teaching which has the power to defeat them at their roots because of its inclusivity.

One wonders if such ideologies are but the result of spending too much time “within” a given community, however religious it purports to be.²⁸ The Matthean Jesus’ words push the audience from within to without; something, it could be argued, that religious educators are called to do as well. Here Thomas Groome is helpful when he writes, “God’s universal love lends the mandate to people of God to live likewise – to love without limits or borders. There should never be “us and them” but only “we” – bonded as one human family.”²⁹ For Groome, these words are connected to his emphasis on retrieving a “Catholic Openness” within religious education.³⁰ In articulating this emphasis he writes, “Catholicity means caring deeply about the well-being of all people, the most immediate and furthest away. The only ones more deserving of care are those most in need of it – the “poor” of any kind or circumstance. Catholicity has an open horizon and genuine altruism in its care. It requires concern for the human family as a seamless garment.”³¹

The last aspect of the Sermon on the Mount to be examined in this study comes later in chapter 7. Herein the Matthean Jesus tells his audience not to judge others and not to project their own sins onto them. This study has consistently demonstrated how Jesus takes the potential null curriculum of his audience and makes it explicit within his pedagogy in order to move people towards greater understanding and love. Yet again, the Matthean Jesus does just that. Here’s what the Matthean Jesus says:

²² Thomas Groome, *Educating For Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*, (Allen, TX: Thomas More, 1998), 395.

²³ Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 267-268.

²⁴ Hitler believed that he was called by God and became more firm in this belief after surviving an assassination attempt. Moreover, there developed in Nazi Germany “Positive Christianity” which was a hybrid of Nazism and Christianity.

²⁵ This is evident in the various civil liturgies that take place at sporting events and community events throughout the country.

²⁶ The Ku Klux Klan’s ideology is bound up with Christianity as made evident by their use of crosses on their robes as well as the burning of crosses.

²⁷ Al Qaeda and Westboro Baptist Church are but two examples.

²⁸ Gabriel Moran, “Two Languages of Religious Education,” *The Living Light* 14, (Spring 1977): 44.

²⁹ Thomas Groome, *Educating For Life*, 401.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 393-423.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 401.

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ² For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³ Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.”³²

The null here is the self or individual doing the judging and noticing what is wrong with “the other.” The Matthean Jesus takes the focus on the other and places it back on the self or the individual. The other is not to be the primary focus but instead the secondary focus after the individual has done their own work on her or his self. If this is not sought after one will be lacking in their ability to see comprehend the perspectives of the other and the commonality therein.³³ Thereby, a null aspect remains; the self, which can lead to further division amongst human beings.

Walter Wink notes that this passage is the earliest known teaching on projection.³⁴ What is being done here is the Matthean Jesus is drawing attention to one’s own shadow which is all too often projected onto others. The speck that one sees in another’s eye is but the result of the log in his or her own eye that he or she fails to see. What the Matthean Jesus is teaching is that the very thing that one might find annoying or wrong about the other or their enemy is the very thing that is annoying or wrong about one’s self. The well-known statement, “If you spot it you got it” brings the point home here.

In what can be argued as being an incredibly divisive time in the history of the United States projection is on display in a myriad of places. In fact, all human beings are guilty of projection which is also why from an educational perspective this is such a great teaching. To echo John Dewey, this very teaching of the Matthean Jesus provides an excellent opportunity to use “everyday” experiences for educating towards growth. This growth would be an awareness of commonality that leads to solidarity amongst human beings.³⁵

Strikingly and sadly, the truth of projection is often on display in the two-party political system in the United States government. This is best represented by various media outlets that can easily be divided according to the left/right spectrum. There is no longer the news but conservative news or liberal news and those in between. Depending on one’s political bent they can find a news outlet that will not so much as challenge them but validate and legitimate their currently held beliefs. In many respects, both sides constantly project onto the other claims of corruption, partisanship, not putting the American people first and endless other issues. A simple back and forth between MSNBC and Fox News proves this point. This is no accident. In fact, looking at the extremes found on both the left and right there is a strange mirroring that goes on.³⁶ Eerily, this was on display with the media’s handling recent shootings in El Paso and Dayton coming within a few hours of each other. The Left was quick to latch onto the radical views of the gunman in El Paso for his motivation for killing others. Similarly, the Right was

³² Matthew 7:1-6

³³ Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 97.

³⁴ Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 273.

³⁵ John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, (New York: Free Press, 2015), 40.

³⁶ Marc A. Thiessen, “Yes, antifa is the moral equivalent of neo-Nazis,” *washingtonpost.com*, August 30, 2017, Accessed August 20, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/yes-antifa-is-the-moral-equivalent-of-neo-nazis/2017/08/30/9a13b2f6-8d00-11e7-91d5-ab4e4bb76a3a_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.23ab0ff5005e

quick to latch onto the radical views of the gunman in Dayton.³⁷ This prompted some to claim that we are in the midst of a cold civil war with the El Paso gunman representing the right and the Dayton gunman representing the left.³⁸

With the words of the Matthean Jesus on projection in mind could such tragedies not only be viewed as things to be mourned but also as opportunities for religious education? Again John Dewey is helpful, “It thus becomes the office of the educator to select those things within the range of existing experience that have the promise and potentiality of presenting new problems which by stimulating new ways of observation and judgment will expand the area of further experience.”³⁹ Rather than seeing those across the divide as being unreachable the Matthean Jesus’ teaching on projection suggests otherwise, that areas of disagreement might also be areas of understanding and commonality. Thus, “the other” or “the enemy” is a way in which one can come to know the person across from them better as well as her or himself better. The null aspect of the self becomes more aware through “the other.” Walter Wink is helpful,

“The enemy can be the way of God. We cannot come to terms with our shadow except through our enemies, for we have almost no other access to those unacceptable parts of ourselves that need redeeming except through the mirror that our enemies hold up to us. This then is another, more intimate reason for loving our enemies: we are dependent on our enemies for our own individuation. We may not be able to be whole people without them...As we become aware of our projections on our enemies, we are freed from the fear that we will overreact murderously towards them. We are able to develop an objective rage at the injustices that they are perpetrating while still seeing them as children of God. The energy squandered nursing hatred becomes available to God for confronting the wrong or transforming the relationship.”⁴⁰

Conclusion

This study has sought to demonstrate that the sacred pedagogy of the Sermon on the Mount is also a pedagogy that transcends differences and creates hope. The Matthean Jesus’ inclusion of the evildoer into an explicit aspect of his teaching reminds all people that even the worst among them must not be forgotten. In fact, not only should the dignity of those fighting injustice be retained but also those perpetuating injustice should be retained as well. This does not seek to excuse or enable injustice or unhealthy behavior. Instead it seeks to retain the human dignity of those who would seek to diminish the humanity of those they believe to be less than human. The way to answer evil is not with evil but with goodness and love just as the Matthean Jesus commands. The distinctions of religion, nationality, culture, gender and race are secondary to the very humanity of each and every person. When any of these things are used to diminish one’s humanity and make them null that is a sure sign that something has gone wrong. Moreover, the Matthean Jesus doesn’t move his audience towards difference but instead commonality. This is made evident not only in his call to love enemies but also in his teaching

³⁷ “The Second Civil War Is Coming Into Focus, Reza Aslan Blames ALL Trump Supporters,” YouTube video, 28:15, “Tim Pool,” August 5, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBOoGBmD7EM>

³⁸ Zack Budryk, “Princeton professor: ‘We are in a cold civil war,’” *thehill.com*, August 4, 2019, Accessed August 20, 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/sunday-talk-shows/456111-princeton-professor-we-are-in-a-cold-civil-war>

³⁹ Dewey, *Experience and Education*, 75.

⁴⁰ Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 273.

on projection. Human beings are generally bothered not so much by other human beings but by the things that they don't like about themselves that they see in others. Hence, the null of the individual.

Without a doubt, there is much to be gleaned from this sacred pedagogy that found its beginnings in the back country of the one of the greatest empires the world has ever seen. It is amazing to ponder and learn from the profound words of a seemingly insignificant peasant spoken two thousand years ago. Clearly in solidarity with the oppressed he sought to build a bridge towards the evildoer and the other. From breaking bread with a tax collector to purposely sojourning through unclean Samaria to healing a Roman centurion's servant there was no divide he would not cross. He made his nulls and his people's nulls an explicit part of his teaching and life. More than anything it is hoped that this study of a very familiar sacred pedagogy has sparked the interest and imagination of its readers to teach creatively for the humanization of all and the transcendence of difference.

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In Public Spaces: Hosting Religious Conversation Across Diversity in Secular Quebec

Abstract

In Quebec, attitudes to public religion range from cautious to overtly hostile. This paper documents La Presence-Qi's effort to engage religion in the public sphere by creating a multidisciplinary site for practice, research, and learning in a Montreal neighbourhood. Researchers formed circle conversations to create a space for dialogue across religious, spiritual, and cultural diversity. The results of our analysis reveal the difficulty of creating such space in the context of Quebec, the potential efficacy of our process for creating meaningful dialogue, and the ways narrative and artistic practice helped move the participants into deep encounter, mutual understanding, and meaning making across diversity.

Introduction

The context for this research is a community project of the United Theological College (at McGill) called *La Présence-Qi*. La Présence integrates ministry formation, research, and community engagement around issues of religion and spirituality in the context of neighbourhood redevelopment. The project seeks authentic ways to talk about issues of deeper meaning and values within the wider secular society. It brings together theology students, researchers, and community residents around activities that include spiritual practices, collaborative community programs, and facilitated workshops and discussion about faith, religion, and spirituality.

La Présence is based La Petite-Bourgogne, a Montreal neighbourhood characterized by wide diversity (economic, linguistic, religious, cultural ethnic, racial, etc.). For example,¹

- Forty percent of community residents were born outside Canada (the majority of recent immigrants are Bengali Muslims)
- Although there are roughly equal numbers of Francophones and Anglophones, 27% of the population has a first language other than English or French
- The neighbourhood has historically been home to Montreal's working-class, English-speaking Black community; 43% of residents are members of a visible minority, of which Black Canadians still constitute the largest proportion²
- La Petite-Bourgogne has the highest proportion of social housing of any Montreal neighbourhood³.

It is important to situate the project within the broader Quebec context, as the project was created with the intention of filling a societal gap, that is, the lack of space for conversation and connection across religious and spiritual diversity.

Within Quebec, widespread hostility to religion and suspicion of religious institutions arises from Quebec's own religious past.⁴ The story Quebecers tell themselves about their own history describes the Catholic church as a central oppressive force, that stole children, destroyed families, and dominated all facets of life, including education and access to higher education, careers, and even the intimacy of personal relationships. The concept of a clean break with all their religious past, along with its values and trappings, is central to Quebec self-understanding. The term *Grande noirceur* (literally great darkness/Dark Ages) is used to refer to Quebec's religious past, revealing how strongly Quebecers feel about the pre-Quiet revolution history of

¹ Ville de Montréal, Profils du Quartier, 2011
http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=6897,68149735&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

² Centraide du Grand Montréal, Portrait-Le-Sud-Ouest 2018-19, Analyse Territoriale http://www.centraide-mtl.org/documents/69375/upload/documents/Portrait-Le-Sud-Ouest-2018-19_Ptlf2bc.pdf

³ Centraide du Grand Montréal, Portrait-Le-Sud-Ouest 2018-19.

⁴ Zubrzycki, G. (2016) *Beheading the Saint: Nationalism, Religion, and Secularism in Quebec*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

the province. Five decades after the start of the Quiet Revolution, this sentiment persists in the form of resistance or hostility to any overt expression of faith or religiosity in the public sphere.

The discourse of Quebec secularity re-categorizes Christian culture as religious patrimony or heritage; as such, it has become part of the unrecognized backdrop of Quebec. For example, Catholic religious signs permeate the Montreal landscape (the many streets and buildings named after saints or bishops, a 30-metre high cross atop Mount Royal, religious architecture, wearing crosses or crucifixes), but these are somehow invisible. As Christianity has faded into the background, the discourse of secularity has pushed non-Christian religions to the foreground of public debate. When those of non-Christian religious traditions express their religiosity they are seen as somehow overt in the way that Christian culture is not. Further, secular Quebec discourse assumes that culture and religion can be kept separate, an attitude that is incomprehensible to many for whom culture and religion are experienced as intricately entwined and for whom ethno-cultural identity is also and always religious/spiritual identity.

The research component of La Présence has three goals:

- To discover practices to foster dialogue, connection, and mutual understanding across diversity, especially religious/cultural diversity.
- To understand how people within this diverse fabric of Québec society express and experience spirituality.
- To understand how religion and spirituality can contribute to community vitality and well-being within the context of community redevelopment, entrepreneurial experimentation, and rapid social change.

This research paper addresses the first goal. We share preliminary findings from the first two years of research. We describe how our process has created a space for dialogue and mutual understanding across diversity. We describe the process of shared meaning co-creation of new understanding. And we identify challenges, limitations, and next steps for the research.

Part 1: Creating Dialogical Space Across Diversity

The key focus of our research so far has been developing practices that support dialogue and mutual understanding across diversity of religious and spiritual beliefs, traditions, and practices. Our research design is centred around a participatory (workshop-style) process that we have called “circle conversations.” The process, building on the work of Luce-Kapler⁵ and Baker⁶, uses narrative along with other artistic practices to help participants share and find meaning within their experiences of faith, spirituality, and religion. Participants engage creatively with one another and with the researchers, who are participants are not merely objective observers.

⁵ Luce-Kapler, R. (1999). As If Women Writing. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 31, 267-291.

⁶ Baker, D. G. (2005). *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-talk with Young Women*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press.

Personal narrative: the arts, imagination, empathy and meaning-making

A central feature of the circle conversations is personal narrative. We guide participants to write narratives that are literary creations, by using writing prompts, examples, carefully crafted instructions, and art prompts. Thus, the narratives have qualities similar to literary fiction (thick description, strong characterization, emotive connection, and metaphor).

The decision to use personal narrative as the central feature of the process was based on three interrelated aspects of educational and narrative theory. First, our understanding of the power of art and artistic practice to develop human capacity for imagination, which in turn fosters empathy. Second, our recognition of the power of narrative to invite the listener into the worldview of the storyteller, that is to create hermeneutical bridging across different worldviews, creating a sense of commonality and connection. And third, our experience of the capacity of narrative to generate, shape, and share meaning.

The arts, imagination and empathy

Educational theorists describe a profound connection between imagination, the arts, and empathy. If empathy is understood as with Rogers, as a process by which we “enter the world of the other and [become] thoroughly at home in it,”⁷ then artistic practice can be a powerful medium for empathetic connection.

Greene describes the way in which artistic practices and aesthetic engagement enlarge our imaginative capabilities, allowing us to see the world and the other “as if things could be otherwise.”⁸ That is, that the givens of our own worldview are called into question. She argues that imagination enables us to encounter different points of view, even those with values or perspectives that seem to conflict with our own.⁹ Imagination, Greene says, helps us to envision other possibilities and experiences. It allows us to consider and open ourselves new viewpoints, experiences, and worldviews. As we imaginatively encounter and envision other realities and perspectives we can also imagine, and begin to understand what another person might experience, feel, or value.

Narrative and engagement

All artistic practices have power to open imagination and foster empathy; however, the power of narrative to transport the listener into the world of the other is what Zunshine calls an invitation to the backstage of consciousness¹⁰. Personal narrative, if it is infused with thick description and metaphor, can function in the same way that the way that literary fiction to invites the reader into the consciousness of the characters in a novel.

⁷ Rogers, C. (1975). Empathic: An Unappreciated Way of Being. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 2(4).

⁸ Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 195.

⁹ Greene, M. (1995).

¹⁰ Zunshine, L. (2006). *Why We read fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

According to Luce-Kapler, narrative creates subjunctive spaces within which selves (and hence worldviews) can be revised.¹¹ Luce-Kapler says that those who create narrative and those who read or hear them can be experiencing alternate consciousnesses and different subjectivities as though they were their own. Stories invite participation in the world of the storyteller; they create a kind of engagement that is a fusion of horizons in a hermeneutical sense. Stories have a particular power to transform the listeners, which is to say, to bring them closer to the consciousness of another.

Human beings have a learned capacity to create and sustain relationships with one another through language. The power in storytelling is its relational power, hence its building of empathy, but also a sense of community and commonality.

Meaning-making

Kerby says that life is inherently of a narrative structure. We make that structure overt when we reflect upon our past and imagine possible futures. We come to know ourselves through the stories we tell; it is as a character in our own or other people's narratives that we achieve an identity.¹² A life led is inseparable from a life as told. In other words, life is not how it was but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold.

According to Bruner, narrative is how people explain and cope with life events, which they do not sentence by sentence, but in narrative wholes.¹³ Narrative, Bruner says, "ascends to the particular"¹⁴ in order to form larger patterns of meaning and coherence. Narrative demands the detail. It works out its patterns amid the intricate and intimate particulars, but it is the narrative as a whole that conveys the meaning.

Bruner shows that that narrative is not merely a way of telling; it is a way of thinking, thinking that draws us away from empirical science, with its goals of explanation, reductionism, and prediction into the world of deeper meaning, intention, and value and belief.¹⁵ According to Bruner, people use narrative to make sense of life events. Human beings naturally tend to organize meaning in the form of narrative. As the philosopher Charles Taylor states, the fact that "we grasp our lives in a narrative" is "not an optional extra".¹⁶ Human beings, according to Taylor, are defined as a species by their innate drive to make meaning of their experiences in the world. Narrative is a direct product of this drive; he writes, "we cannot but strive to give our lives meaning or substance, and this means that we understand ourselves inescapably in

¹¹ Luce-Kapler, R. (1999). As If Women Writing. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 31, 267-291.

¹² Kerby, A. P. (1991). *Narrative and the Self*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

¹³ Bruner, J. (2004). Life as Narrative. *Social Research*, 71, 691-710.

¹⁴ Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 64.

¹⁵ Bruner, J. (1990).

¹⁶ Taylor, C. (1989) *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 47.

narrative”¹⁷. Ultimately, it is through narrative that we come to express the deeper truth and meaning of our lives.

Narrative creates bonds between the ordinary and the exceptional; it helps to establish meaning and understanding in the face of extraordinary or incomprehensible experiences. It addresses dissonances between culturally normative worlds and the more idiosyncratic worlds of human belief, desire, and emotion. Self-narrative is not merely a passive recounting of past events but a generative activity – the generation of meaning. Self-narrative articulates what is important to us and it acts as a moralizing force.¹⁸

According to educational theorists such as Luce-Kapler¹⁹ and Sumara,²⁰ when we engage deeply with the narrative of others, we enter into their systems of meaning and value. Meanings emerge out of a complicated negotiation, an ongoing conversation between the creator and the receiver of the texts. However, this conversation is not static. The act of interpretation and engagement between meaning systems generates new meanings, new meaning frames, and new knowledge.

When we used narratives in the circle conversations, we engaged the listeners in a literary response process, based on the work of Luce-Kapler²¹ to listen deeply, including engaging with the imagery and metaphors within the narratives, and to draw out themes and deeper meaning from the narratives.

Part 2: Methodology

2.1 Description of the circle conversation process

Over a period of one year, La Presence-Qi researchers held six circle conversations²² involving 5-10 participants each. The goal of these sessions was to create a space and opportunity for respectful and honest dialogue about spirituality and religion to occur in a quasi-public setting—that is, the conversation circles were in a closed room so that participants could speak freely and in confidence, but those rooms were within a public building or community space.

Role of researchers

For each circle conversation, researchers were present as participant-facilitators. That is, they guided the process and helped moderate conversations, ensuring that the processes were

¹⁷ Taylor 1989, 51.

¹⁸ Kerby, A. P. (1991). *Narrative and the Self*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

¹⁹ Luce-Kapler, R. (2004). *Writing with, Through, and Beyond the Text: An Ecology of Language*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

²⁰ Sumara, D. (2002). *Why Reading Literature in School Still Matters: Imagination, Interpretation, Insight*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

²¹ Luce-Kapler, R. (2004). *Writing with, Through, and Beyond the Text: An Ecology of Language*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

²² The third circle conversation was interrupted due to noise and other environmental issues in the building and the data from this session as not included in our analysis.

introduced consistently, that introductions and group norms followed similar patterns, and that all participants were given opportunities both to listen and to share. Our research acknowledges that the researcher is not a neutral observer but an active participant. Researchers were present and engaged in the process itself, giving activity instructions, inserting guiding questions, and at times even sharing observations or personal experiences. This participatory, workshop-based methodology has been used and developed by the primary researcher over many years²³ to bring people together in a facilitated event to share personal narratives and co-create knowledge.

The location

We deliberately choose to move the conversations outside of private or specifically religious spaces into common or public space. For the first round of conversations, La Présence joined a local co-working space, which, as members, gave us access to meeting rooms which we could use for our Circle conversations. In the second phase, we partnered with a local community association which provided space in their community centre.

Recruitment

For the first phase of our research we chose to work with only female participants, who were recruited from the area by invitation, word of mouth, and social media. Invitations were sent out through La Presence's listserv and flyers were posted on the project's Facebook page and website in both English and French. In the first phase, flyers were posted in the co-working space and in local community organizations. Women of all faith backgrounds (including none) and diverse contexts were expressly invited to participate.

The process for the circle conversations

We used two different workshop processes. Both began with personal introductions and a brief centering activity. Both involved the sharing of personal narrative. The first process was employed four times and the second process was employed twice.

In the first process, participants chose from a collection of artworks an image that reflected their values or deeply held commitments. They spent some time with the art, looking more deeply and noticing/observing (modelled as an aesthetic practice). Then they were asked to share with the group the reason they chose the image and also what they had noticed when they examined it more closely. Participants were encouraged to respond to one another by sharing their thoughts or reactions. Following this introductory exercise, participants were led in a brainstorming activity. The group was asked to say what ideas came to mind when they thought of the words *spirituality* and *religion*, and their responses were written down in two columns on a board in front of the group. Participants were then introduced to writing personal narrative, in which they were given paper and pen and asked to write about a moment or event in their life that had personal or spiritual significance. They were asked to use thick description in their stories and to include sensory details. The introduction included writing prompts and a reminder to choose a

²³ Huntly, A. (2000). *Naomi's Daughters: Bridging the Generations*. Toronto: United Church Publishing House; Huntly (1998). *Daring to Be United*. Toronto: United Church Publishing House.

particular and specific moment that they were able to recall in some detail and that they were willing to share with the group.

Participants were invited to read their stories out loud to the group. After each story was shared, the other participants were asked to respond with affirmations, connections, or things they noticed in the story that stood out (for example, something they enjoyed or found meaningful). This response process was not a discussion of the stories but a chance for narrators to hear how others in the group had experienced their narrative. The final exercise was a collective process in which the group members identified common themes, images, or parallels between the stories and also differences or contrasts. This led into less structured discussion. Finally, participants were asked to share their thoughts and feelings about the circle conversation itself and what, if anything, they had learned or appreciated about the event.

The second process was designed for use with a group of participants who had already attended one circle conversation and were therefore familiar with the process. This process differed from the first in that it followed a less structured format, encouraged more guided conversation and active listening, and did not employ the image or brainstorming activities. Following a meditative centering activity, participants were led in guided conversation with one another. They were asked to share a high (a gratitude, blessing or moment of joy) and a low (a concern, trouble, or low point) from their previous week. This activity was followed by more descriptive storytelling, either in the form of guided conversation or in the form of a writing exercise such as the one used in the first process. Finally, participants were asked to share something they found meaningful about the circle conversation.

All participants who completed the circle conversations were contacted for an individual, follow-up interview. We conducted 15 individual interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a better understanding of the participant's personal background, their spiritual or religious life, and their vision for community change and innovation. Participants were therefore asked a mixture of personalized and general questions.

2.2 Participants

In total, 19 women participated in these sessions, ranging in age from 25 to 60 years old. As is characteristic of the neighbourhood, very few of the participants were born in Montreal or Quebec; most identified as having emigrated to Canada or having moved to Quebec from another province. Also reflective of the neighbourhood, the majority of participants were racialized or ethnic minorities. Most participants either lived or worked in the Petit-Bourgogne, or had a personal connection to someone who did. Many were involved in paid or volunteer community work. A large percentage of participants were multilingual; and many were either fluent or proficient in both English and French. Overall, more participants chose to communicate in English rather than French; a few switched back and forth between the two.

Almost half the participants self-identified as having a Muslim background, while the other half were raised in a Christian culture or had an affiliation with various Christian denominations. Some participants had a history of involvement in multiple denominations. A minority of participants were reticent to discuss certain aspects of their religious affiliation or background in front of the group, though they were forthcoming in personal interviews. Levels of religious observance varied greatly between participants; while some were actively involved in a faith or traditional religious community and had a high degree of religious observance, others described having only minimal involvement with a religious community (they occasionally attending a celebration and worshiped or practiced largely in private), and others still described no involvement at all. Several participants who were not religiously observant were active in New Age spiritual communities and described regularly practicing yoga or meditation.

2.3 Non-narrative methods for creating meaningful dialogue and connection

In addition to the story-telling and narrative exercises employed in the circle, two other strategies were used to create space for meaningful dialogue about spirituality and religion. First, we introduced and maintained behavioural norms for the circle to ensure careful listening and respectful interaction. Second, we engaged participants in a brainstorming activity on religion and spirituality. The impact of these two aspects of the process is discussed below.

Establishing norms of behaviour

A general code of conduct, stressing mutual respect and non-judgment, was presented to all participants at the beginning of each session as part of a non-disclosure agreement. These expectations were reinforced at different points throughout the session when needed. For instance, participants were told that they could share as much or as little personal information with the group as they felt comfortable, thereby establishing that all interactions within the group should be consensual. This meant that participants were not pressured to provide additional details or to participate in activities that made them uncomfortable. It was also explained that participants should use non-judgmental, first-person language such as “I feel..., I wondered..., or I noticed...” when responding to the narratives of others.

Several members of La Presence’s team, who helped to organize and recruit participants, also attended the circle conversations as participants. On occasion, theological students and faculty also participated in the conversations. In addition to facilitating with logistics, they contributed to the creation of respectful and open space by modeling the norms of behaviour for all participants. These norms can be characterized as:

1. **Participating actively in each stage of the circle conversation.** When introductions were made or a new activity was introduced, team members sometimes volunteered to speak first, providing an opportunity for others to become comfortable with the conversation and to enter at their own pace.
2. **Affirming all experiences of religion, both good and bad, as valid and legitimate, and encouraging critical perspectives of religion or spirituality to be voiced without reproach.** Should a participant express hesitancy to share their personal opinion of

religion, team members responded with encouragement and reassurance that all perspectives are welcome, and that there would be no judgement of others.

3. **Listening attentively and compassionately to the testimony of others.** Team members modelled active listening. They did not interrupt and allowed other participants to speak for as long as they needed. They listened to others with body language that indicated their engagement and interest. They responded with comments and questions that highlighted the positive qualities of the—such as, bravery, resilience, strength—and extended sympathy and empathy for other’s personal challenges.
4. **Expressing emotions, both positive and negative, and embracing vulnerability.** Team members were apt to name their emotions and spoke openly of their current challenges and difficulties in their personal life. They did not hold back their own tears, laughter, surprise, or joy. They repeatedly reaffirmed that it was “ok” for others to do the same and were empathic and reactive to the emotions of others.
5. **Creating hospitable space and encouraging the same.** Team members came early to help set up the room for the event. They also stayed late to help clean up. Throughout the event they refilled tea kettles, offered food and drinks to one another, and showed the participants around the building, if needed. They actively welcomed arriving participants and interacted warmly.

Brainstorming

Another strategy we employed for creating space for a meaningful discussion about religion and spirituality was to use a brainstorming activity. This activity served several purposes: (1) it enabled us to see how participants conceived of these two terms—the exercise elicited multiple and often conflicting interpretations of religion and spirituality; (2) it created an opportunity for participants to help one another express their ideas and work together as a group—for instance, if someone struggled to find the right word, another participant might suggest a term; (3) it illustrated that all views and perspectives of religion and spirituality were tolerated and respected within the space of the circle, including negative or critical appraisals—within the diverse space of the circle, participants were able to say things about religion that might be considered taboo in their own communities. (4) it was an enjoyable activity for participants and helped to create a lighthearted atmosphere—participants laughed and affirmed one another’s suggestions, because they were allowed and encouraged to provide as many terms as possible, there was no disagreement between participants and all their ideas were held up as equally valid by the group.

2.4 Data analysis

Data was analyzed using narrative analysis methodology drawn from Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr , and Oliver and Gee’s work in discourse analysis. We began with a close reading of the transcripts and written artefacts. In this initial phase, paid attention to the details— the particularity of words, sensory description, images, and metaphors. Mirroring what we had asked participants to do in their narrative creation (thick description), we employed the aesthetic

practice of narrative inquiry that “requires a particular kind of watchfulness.”²⁴ Close reading served help us “notice what is there to be noticed.”²⁵ Such perceiving, says Greene, demands an energy and commitment on the part of the listener, who must move out to meet the work, rather than passively waiting to receive.

In our initial reading, we were interested in questions such as

- How was diversity manifested?
- How did participants respond to the narratives of others?
- How did participants feel about the experience?
- Did participants feel a sense of connection, commonality or mutual understanding, and if so, how did they describe that?

Following Gee (1999, 93), we used discourse analysis to pose critical questions about the narratives, conversations, and interview transcripts. In particular we were interested in how discourses of secularism in Quebec manifested in or influenced the group conversations. Our main interest in this paper is on how the process facilitated interpersonal connection and understanding across diversity. We will discuss other findings from our discourse analysis in future papers.

Part 3: Findings: The creation of Space for Dialogue

As we noted earlier, there was a high degree of ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious diversity among participants. Nevertheless, they were able to sustain deep and meaningful conversations about topics usually considered taboo or relegated to the private realm. Indeed, some participants noted their surprise that such conversations were able to take place and that they were able to establish deep and meaningful encounters with people who were so different from themselves.

In this section, we will discuss some of what we were able to achieve by applying our methodology, using examples from the transcripts to illustrate: (1) how qualities such as empathy, connection, and diversity manifested through the process; (2) how participants created meaning from their own narratives, their experience of the process, and the narratives of others. Before embarking on this discussion, we will first address some of the challenges and difficulties we encountered and how they relate to the broader social context.

3.1 Challenges due to the Quebec context

This unrecognized cultural Christianity and overt secularity creates a taboo about expression of or conversation about religion and spirituality in the public sphere. While there is freedom in the private sphere to join a faith community and practice one’s religion, faith communities are largely isolated from one another. There is no consistent place of overlap in the public sphere to

²⁴ Clandinin, D. J., Pushor, D., & Orr, A. M. (2007), 21.

²⁵ Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 125.

share across traditions. For those for whom culture and religion is intertwined—as it is for many immigrant women who participated in our research—their *whole* identity is unwelcome in the public sphere, which creates feelings of isolation and, for some, a longing to connect to others across diversity.

The deep suspicion about, and sometimes overt hostility to religion and spirituality created particular challenges for hosting circle conversations. In particular, we experienced challenges building trust with local community organizations, finding physical space for the conversations, and recruitment of participants.

As a community project that depended on the participation of people from the neighbourhood, we needed to form relationships with secular community organizations. We needed to mitigate suggestions or appearance of proselytism; we needed to explain and re-explain our purpose, including what we are and what we are not. Our affiliation with McGill, a secular university, helped because people understood the concept of community-based research. Our identity as a confessional institution, a theological college, was more challenging and sometimes blocked potential partnerships.

Neighborhood demographics—predominantly poor/working class; francophone/anglophone mix; diverse racial/ethnic background; and a variety of religious affiliations—added another layer of challenge because suspicion worked both ways. For example, Muslim women were hesitant to participate because of prior experiences of encountering hostility toward them as visibly religious minorities. We developed a practice of using trusted insiders to help explain who we were and to help us recruit from within particular communities.

We had difficulty securing space to hold our conversations. We did not want to use confessional such as churches, which would have situated us within a particular religious tradition. Most public and community spaces have explicit or implicit policies that prohibit use of space for religious purposes. We were, over time, able to build relationships of sufficient trust with two organizations—a co-working space and a community association—to be able to access space there but this took considerable time and effort. We needed to appeal to those who had a more open/receptive attitude to both religious and cultural diversity and were not always successful in building relationships. Over time, however, we see signs that we are building a deeper relationship. For example, the community association with whom we are currently partnering has recently begun to recognize the value of our work. In a recent conversation the organization observed that we are able to forge deeper connections than they are able to do when they host events to celebrate community diversity. As one person observed, “You have real conversations. We hold events and learn about each other’s food or costumes. We might learn a dance. But in the end, we haven’t learned anything because what do we really know about each other?”

3.2 Making connections - commonality across difference

3.2.1 Empathy

The circle conversation process elicited narrative from participants in both formal - written stories - and informal - guided conversation - ways, both of which had the effect of generating expressions and discussions of empathy in multiple ways. In this section, we highlight three ways in which empathy manifested in the circle conversations: (1) as the understanding and sympathy for the suffering of others; (2) as a form of mutual recognition; (3) as a quality or experience associated with spirituality or religion.

Empathy as understanding the suffering of others

Participants were highly reactive to stories or testimonials about suffering or hardship. For instance, in response to Kajal's story of forced exile, Danielle responded:

I just want to say how sorry I am for what's going on in your country and you have to be here and yet I am I'm glad you are here with us. (LC#2).

Samara, an observant Muslim, gave a tearful confession of marital problems and her reliance on prayer for comfort and hope. Pearl, a devout Christian, reaffirmed Samara's faith and empathized with her situation:

They say praying is healing. Praying is healing. I've been down that road and I can tell you, praying is healing. Keep on praying. It's not when you want it, it's when he's ready to do his work. You'll be ok. (LC #5).

Empathy as mutual recognition

Empathy also manifested within the group as a form of mutual recognition. Participants shared stories of mutual recognition, which they interpreted as meaningful or having spiritual significance. For example, Renata shared a story of having a brief, yet deep and meaningful encounter with a stranger who was often begging for money outside of the metro. She describes looking into his eyes as he addressed her personally one day, as

an endless gift. The time stopped. It was three years ago, but every time I share it, I feel full of the same emotion. It was like, if he told me, I feel that I'm seen. ... it was spiritual because it was something deep. (LC#6)

For Renata, this encounter was spiritually significant because it had an otherworldly quality; it was an instance of deep connection that was unlike all previous interactions she had experienced with this stranger.

This story resonated with Cynthia, who interpreted the spiritual significance of the narrative in another way. She said:

It was deep also because you said good morning to him every day. It wasn't that it was just on a whim, he had recognized that you had seen him day-in day-out, every day, right there, same place, same mantra, and so then, he saw you back on that one day. (LC#6)

It is worth highlighting the differences in their interpretation. For Cynthia, the cumulative effect of Renata's small acts and repeated acts of recognition built up a relationship of empathy between the two strangers. This particular interaction of Renata was significant, in Cynthia's view, not because it differed from those that preceded it but because it was the product of empathy.

During the circle conversations, we also witnessed instances of recognition between participants. For example, Pearl recounted telling a friend about having met Nuria at a previous session: "I said, this one lady in the crowd, I like her spirit. She's like someone who's up, outgoing. [I] could see [her] bouncing all over the place. That's how see her, just free. You understand?" She said, speaking to Nuria, "your spirit, it is so free." Holding her hand to her heart, with tears in her eyes, Nuria responded, "oh that's nice to know. That's really nice! Learning about myself through someone else's lens." (LC#5)

Empathy as spiritual/religious

Participants also discussed the relationship between empathy and spirituality/religion in highly nuanced ways. Nuria, for instance, described an encounter with a person very different from herself, highlighting moment when she recognized herself in their experience.

So, I met this transwoman, because I never understood... you know it wasn't part of my culture, knowing all this. These people, they most probably they... what people would say is that it's all in the head. But then, I remember her talking and the struggle that she has to prove to others that she's a woman and being accepted. And that was my struggle as a Muslim woman, that I exist as I am, and this is my call. So, this is what I felt. That-oh my god, this is a connection that I would never think of having! And I had more deeper connection with her of understanding than anyone else. And that's when I felt that I need to explore. This is connecting. You know? I said to myself, for me, God has given all kind of things in this world, and it cannot be that it's from the devil or something else. No, this person is exactly like me but in another from. You know, she has a struggle and that's what our connection and that's how I think that the more you connect people that have struggled, the more you connect with God. (LC#6)

This experience challenged her faith as it called her to question the beliefs she was raised with, yet also deepened her sense of connection with God and confirmed her decision to embrace her identity as a woman and a Muslim in a context where religious expressions of femininity in public are highly discouraged and, in some cases, illegal.

3.2.2 Connection

The term “connection” was mentioned frequently by participants in each circle conversations. Like empathy, this notion was discussed in different ways and had multiple meanings. In this section, we will explore how participants understood the relationship between connection and spirituality or religion, and provide examples of how the circle conversations themselves created opportunities for connection.

Connection as a theme associated with spirituality and religion

During the brainstorming activities, both religious and secular participants associated this the concept of connection with both religion and spirituality. Multiple meanings of connectivity were given, such as the notion of either spiritual experience or religious practice as a form of connection to one’s inner self, a community, a tradition or a higher power/being/energy.

Connection was also an important theme in many participants’ narratives. Sometimes the term was mentioned only briefly and left unexplored, other times, it occupied a central place within their story. Anya, describing her journey from isolated immigrant to successful entrepreneur and business owner, used the term to describe her central purpose in life:

I feel whatever happened so far in my life. Good and bad. I was the reason I was happy, I was proud, I was energetic, motivated. Made a change, I did all. I did it. I was the reason. I trusted myself, I believe in the process, and I put my effort and then it happened. I think of the dreams of mine came to reality. I think, I learn, I get more connected. I remember I was and I am the reason to connect others. (LC #4)

During the narrative exercise, Nuria shared a story about a religious event in her community. Afterwards she offered an interpretation of her experience, stating:

That’s what spiritually means to me, a connection of people and with all kind of divine connect, togetherness, or non-diviness, if I could use that word. I don’t know, but you know, that’s humanity, just humanity serving humanity. That’s what I fell in that gathering. (LC#4)

Interpersonal connection as a result of the circle conversations

As discussed earlier, one of the principal goals of this project is to create a process through which people of diverse backgrounds could connect with others and exchange their experiences of spirituality, faith, and religion. We therefore designed these circle conversations with the intention of generating connection between participants. Nevertheless, we were struck by how profoundly participants experienced a sense of connection to one another, and how grateful they were for this encounter. For example, Marika said:

I am so grateful to have been here, in this room, this beautiful room with these beautiful [women]. I just want to thank you for listening and sharing without any judgement. I felt so free and so connected. I feel so connected! (LC#2)

Similarly, Danielle stated:

Yeah, I am really grateful and appreciate the kind of willingness to show up for this with a kind of 'I'm not sure what I'm getting into' kind of attitude and all of a sudden we were going so quickly and finding things that are so genuine about each of us, so deep. (LC#2)

Pearl explains how she noticed this sense of connection even before the circle conversation started, a sense of connection she differentiates from the secular marketplace.

When I came in here the first thing I see was a gathering and I'm like see, this is a connection, if you notice, if you go around Montreal, in every community there is gathering. That is a connection, that is where people meet, that's where there's food; that's where everything from the ground, from Mother Earth, everything is just created... because if you just go on St. Catherine [Street] all you see is the stores." (LC#4)

Cynthia goes further in her interpretation, making an explicit connection to a Christian text:

I was definitely thinking that it's pretty amazing that that can be created in any given space. And I know that when two or three are gathered that kind of, here it is, here God is.²⁶ But like I've been here [...] I've been here for the lunch last week. I've been here for passing out flyers for programming I'm trying to get people involved. You know, like, in all sorts of different feelings and sensations, and, um, kind of mood states. But it was kind of neat to be like, Oh, and we can transform this space into another this kind of open and sharing in a different kind of moods space. And that's possible, too. (LC#5)

Here, Cynthia makes explicit connection not just to one another but also to the divine. The group's understanding of spirituality, as described above, includes a strong theme of connection. Cynthia's comment, which is received positively by the group, suggests that the group is also experiencing their connection to one another as, in itself, a spiritual experience.

3.2.3 Valuing diversity

We should note that while diversity was recognized as a potential challenge for creating space, La Presence Qi approached diversity as a common good or value. This was implicit in the process itself, which did not push the group to arrive at singular interpretations or conclusions, but rather encouraged each participant to share multiple interpretations and to use the language and terms of their choosing to express themselves. In this section, we discuss some of the ways

²⁶ Matthew 18:20. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

participants expressed their appreciation for diversity, its relationship to spirituality, and potential for bringing people together.

The desire to meet people of different backgrounds, to be able to have conversations about spirituality and religion with people of different faiths, who would understand their personal experience of religion without imposing or prescribing their own opinions of how they should practice, came up several times in personal interviews and during the circle conversations. This sentiment can be seen in the following quote from Cynthia:

I think the experience of growing up, you know, in a faith community and having those connections with people who are different from me. But we're all part of this community. Gave me a longing to have that kind of experience across lines of difference, whether it's across lines of religion or culture or sexual identity or orientation. And beyond some kind of surface multiculturalism or interfaith dialogue. But to actually have some kind like community and connection with people and for it to be ok that you're different and that you believe different things, that you're coming from a very different direction or perspective. (LC#6)

The ability to recognize, empathize, and value one another in their difference was held in such high esteem by some participants that it was described as a spiritual quality or activity. For instance, talking about her experience of living in the neighbourhood, Pearl said:

I see new people are coming in and people who have been here before me, I see the struggles, I see and I try to understand. Because we have mental illness, we have unemployment, we have single-mothers, alcoholic, everything. So, I see so much and spiritually to me is knowledge with understanding. So, if you have the knowledge of what is going on, you have to have the understanding. If you don't understand, take the time out to understand people, then you judge. I see many times I have passed judgment. Just the outer appearance, but when they start speaking to me, I'm like: 'Oh, I'm looking at you this way but that is not the problem.' So, to me spirituality in the community is knowledge with the understanding. So, here I am. I'm before you for the first time, you walk in here, your appearance is [gestures towards the hijab of another participant] and then it's another story. Same thing with each and every one of us. You know? (LC #4)

At one point, several participants discussed how the sharing of one's challenges and difficulties was itself a spiritual activity that transcended cultural boundaries. "This is spirituality to me, by the way," Emily stated, "it's opening up." To this, Nuria responded:

It's a healing process and it shows that it's beyond culture, and it's the same thing. Because we tend to stay in the same [groups] and think that, okay, it's just a brown thing to be having these kind of issues. And then you meet others, other than brown, and it's like, oh, you too? And you connect on that level, saying it's beyond [culture].

Pearl —It's human, it's a human thing. (LC#5)

She then narrated her personal experience of discovering commonality across socio-economic and cultural differences.

Finally, we see in the following example, an understanding of diversity as having the potential to bring people together. Renata, describing the image she selected to illustrate her deeply held values, stated

I took this picture because, at first, I saw [...] a lot of people together, you know, so my value is gathering people. And after that, I said, oh it's the last supper. Yes, because anyway it's so colourful and so different, the people are so different. And that's why it inspire[d] me. (LC#6)

It is interesting to note that Renata's interpretation of the image occurred in successive moments, such that "togetherness," "religion," and "diversity" were revealed in layers.

3.3 Meaning making within the circle

3.3.1 Finding meanings in one's own experiences

After describing their stories, participants sometimes offered spontaneous interpretations of their narratives, filling in important details. For instance, Anya, speaking of her experience and thoughts while she was writing her story, says:

... and it was like[...] I went deep into myself and it was first my feeling as a new immigrant. Like, I came here alone. no family, no friends. And there are some moments that you feel [...] like I wish there was someone that I can just share this idea with or [...] I could sit right now to share just a cup of coffee. I had those moments much more, of course, in the beginning. (LC #4)

Meaning making was also a dialogical process. Participants used one another's accounts to derive meaning from their own experiences. Sometimes the recognition of commonalities provided new ways for participants to understand their experiences. For example, Danielle, talking about her experience of connecting in a surprising way with a stranger on the street describes her sense of spirituality as being led out of herself.

Danielle —It's like I was guided by something else, something that is like, bigger than you are. Led by something other than you. So now I am there and I have to reach out and make a connection that I have been afraid of.

Alicia —Does spirituality draw us into the places that we wouldn't otherwise go?

Danielle —Yes! It is right there in your own story. You say the wind blew you there, right? You didn't want to go but the wind blew you.

Alicia —Yes. I never saw that before. I never thought of it that way. (LC#2)

Other times, it was the recognition of difference that provoked profound reflections. For example, speaking of her story in comparison with those of other group members, Rubia said, "I think mine was more cultural, restriction, boundaries. I think it's more cultural things. Because I didn't grow up in this kind of free environment, like here. Back home there's more restriction." This interpretation prompts Cynthia to consider her own narrative. "Yeah," she says, acknowledging the deep differences between their lived experiences "mine is definitely more to do with the privilege of choices, but the confusion that can come with that, stumbling on yourself that can come with that." (LC#6)

3.3.2 Finding meaning through dialogue in the circle conversations

Participants also found spiritual meaning in their experience of circle conversations. For instance, four participants discussed their experience of the centering activity that took place earlier in the evening and its significance.

Pearl —That's what I was seeing for the three minutes that we just sat here. And I could actually hear, because the hearing gets clearer and you hear an echo when you speak, and you know, there is... that the spirit is here, and it's listening to us, and it's clean and clear. [...] that is what I was experiencing today. I could hear and I felt.

Emily —I felt [...]well, it was different, but I felt us go *woosh* right in. I was like, oh. It was a strong, strong force.

Cynthia —Yeah, I did that thing where I felt my body going back and down. Where I think I often go up and frazzled a lot. And I was like oh, right. I can land here, and I can move forward from here. But that just kind of settling back into myself. But also kind of solid again your feelings.

Nuria —These are weird feelings, huh? Because for the three minute [...] I could say that I slept in the sense that...you know the deep sleep that you go into? I cannot even have that in my house, in my bed. But here, it's like, I didn't see anything, but I saw this ... just, it's not peace but it's a void. But it's a nice void. (LC#5)

All four participants affirmed that the activity was meaningful for them, however, they each interpreted its significance differently, in ways that reflected their own religious or spiritual

identity. Whereas, Pearl interpreted her experience of the activity through her Christian faith as the presence of the spirit, Emily and Cynthia used descriptors for their experience—such as “force” and “settling”—that reflected their spiritual-but-not-religious outlook. It is interesting to note that Nuria, a committed Muslim, described her experience in opposing terms to those used by Pearl—she spoke of absence rather than presence. This further demonstrates the extent to which participants were able to come together, share the same experience, discuss it, and still remain fully differentiated from one another.

3.3.3 Finding shared patterns of meaning or commonalities

The group listened actively to the stories, what Greene would describe as going out to meet them, not just passively receiving them. There was evidence of deep respect and valuing, as when Alicia commented:

I noticed that between and within the stories we were just breathing, and it felt as though we were continuing to listen in the silence. It was like those little silences show that we have a capacity for deep, deep listening. And I think that was a tribute to the power of our stories and I want to honour that because it felt so profound for me. And I really want to honour our stories too. (LC #2)

There was also a sense of recognition or familiarity, which could be interpreted as encountering a higher level of meaning that transcended the differences between individual participants and the particularities of their experiences. Danielle said,

I really appreciated everybody’s sharing because there were little parts in every story that somehow seemed so familiar, you know. Which is interesting, I think. (LC#2)

A number of participants remarked on the potential of the process to produce or generate a diversity of meanings and produce solidarity, including Nuria who said,

Can we say that the circle could bring [out] a lot of the diverse experiences? You have women, you know? It is so amazing because I didn’t think of it that way. Now I see, I ...what she just said. It’s like, we become sisters without even knowing. So, thank you. (LC#5)

3.4 Developing new ideas of spirituality through the dialogical process

As the group continued to talk about the stories, their own in relation to the stories of others, they continued to refine and develop their ideas about spirituality. This was an emergent process of shared meaning-making through the dialogue. At no point did take the form of a debate or contestation of ideas. Rather, we observed a sense of building up layers of meaning, as participants drew from each other’s sense of meaning and supported one another to articulate their developing understandings. As, for example in the following exchange between Nuria and Cynthia:

Nuria —Yeah, so in the beginning it's still in the process. For me, spirituality and religion had no difference. But more and more, spirituality is understanding a path; and religion is like following to the line. Spirituality is more, you have an understanding of the [direction].

Cynthia —Finding your way.

Nuria —Yes. Yes. I think that this is my understanding. If there are many ways, you know, the expression that all paths lead to Rome, then for me, it's like the same thing.

Cynthia —I like the differentiation between finding your way and following the way. That's a really interesting way to differentiate religion and spirituality. (LC#4)

Nuria, who participated in all six circle conversations, suggested that her interpretations of meaning were changing as a result of participating in these groups. Others descriptions of their own spiritual experiences were leading her to question the worldview she was raised within.

Nuria—I liked what Anya said last Tuesday. You know, it's like you attract what you want. [...but] that's so hard, like, in my case, to come to accept it. Because it's like, it's preordained, pre-done for you. [...] It seems often, in my household that I grew up with, [there is a reason why everything is the way it is], [it's] because you have sinned. (LC#5)

Nuria admitted that “even getting out of it” was difficult even though she understood that “it is true that God belongs to everybody. Not just one person who said that, okay, if your ankles are showing [you're going to hell].” Through this process of changing perspectives, she found encouragement and support in other circle conversation participants:

Nuria—[Emily] often says to me, you're evolving. And, oh, it's so hard.

Emily —She says, ah, it's so painful, but I'm like oh you're evolving. You're going to be fine.

Nuria —It's terrible.*laughing* (LC#5)

Part 4: Conclusions, Limitations and Next Steps

Conclusions

Our analysis of the results of our research so far demonstrates the efficacy of the circle conversations to create a space for connection and deep dialogue across difference, including differences of religion, culture, ethnicity and life experience. Within a context of overt hostility to public expression of faith or religion, and within a community of high diversity, we have

succeeded in creating an experience of commonality and mutual understanding, where shared meaning making was evident. We are doing something that may well be unique within this community—that is, our project may create deeper and more mutual encounters than previous attempts to build cross cultural understanding through broader public events. That we are working in both French and English (and with participants for whom neither English nor French is a first language) is a further demonstration that the methodology effectively transcends a high degree of participant diversity.

We have built a base of trust, including credibility in the larger community, as well as with trusted insiders, that will allow us to continue this work. We are starting to see the beginnings of a snowball effect, where others are hearing about the process and are expressing an interest in participating or in supporting our work.

Limitations of the research

While we have able to build connections with those who are already somewhat open to and interested in connecting across diversity. Most of our participants were already interested in this before their participation even if they had not yet found ways to do so. For obvious reasons we are not reaching those who are less open to such dialogue, for example those who may be deeply religious, but lack trust that they will be valued or respected, or those most opposed to people who are most opposed to religion/spirituality from a secular Quebec frame. In fact, this latter is perhaps the hardest are not easy to include. We know who they are but have not yet overcome the reluctance to join.

For this initial phase we have only with women because it has been easier to build trust and maintain the norms of conduct of the group. We did have one male participant who joined a circle conversation for the first two activities (the image exercise and brainstorming sessions). We found the presence of a man moved the conversation more quickly moved to ideological stances and that there was less openness to personal storytelling. It is also worth noting that the male participant did not fully respect the group norm that all interactions between group members should be consensual—he attempted to persuade one participant to sit closer to him, however she refused and indicated she was comfortable with the distance between them.

In the conversations themselves, we found that there was greater space for sharing when we used language of spirituality to talk of personal experience. The limitation of this is that we avoided explicit conversation about particular religious traditions, and their practices or doctrines. Participants themselves sometimes hesitated to name their specific faith tradition or denomination, especially those who were most currently highly involved within a particular confession. Thus, they shared in private interviews what they did not name in the group.

Next steps

We plan to continue regular circle conversations, expanding to include others from a wider range of diversity including Quebecers who describe themselves as secular/atheist. We will also begin to hold some conversations either with men only or in mixed gender groups, adapting the process

as necessary but continuing to hold narrative, personal sharing, and artistic practices as central. We will also be using data from the research conducted so far to develop more insight into how the participants in our project understand, describe and live their religion and spirituality. Finally, we are planning to use the ongoing research to gain more insight into how connection and encounter across the diversity spirituality, faith, and religious expression contribute meaningfully to the health, wellbeing, and sustainability of the wider community in this part of Southwest Montreal.

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Students Speaking Their Truth: Cultivating Critical Testimony in an Undergraduate Intro to Theology Class

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Introduction

Across the US, many Catholic universities and Protestant colleges offer course work in theology, religious studies, or the humanities designed to introduce students to the practice of serious conversation around faith, values, difference, and critical thought. With titles like “Faith and Critical Reason,” “Exploring Religion” or “Religion, Theology and Culture” these courses are often required as part of the core curriculum. The faculty who teach them are often deeply committed to providing students with important skills in critical thinking and in democratic, open-minded discussion. But the intellectual language and the approach to broaching these topics is foreign to the thought-worlds of most present-day US students.

This is problematic for at least two reasons. First, lots of study, class time, and energy needs to be spent getting used to the thought-worlds of philosophers, cultural studies experts, and theologians. Students spend much of the semester trying to master subject matter that often seems esoteric: acquiring the vocabulary and even the grammar to have rich conversations about serious questions, without much time left to use that language for understanding their real-life world. Second, for those students who are actually interested in the subject matter, mastering its content and grammar can present a troubling temptation: the trap of turning philosophy, cultural studies, or theology into a club for insiders and intellectual elites. There’s nothing wrong with geeking out over a favorite subject, but philosophy, cultural studies, and theology were all founded for a powerful reason: to use the tools of that particular discipline to address pressing problems in real life. Intro courses in theology and religious studies that are framed and organized as projects in practical, existential reflection are more likely to grasp students’ interests and to enhance their ability to use their religious or theological learning to positive effect in the future.

This essay introduces a practical and philosophical framework that can help students think more sharply; act with greater confidence and authenticity; and better cope with the broad range of diversity that they will encounter in classes like “Intro to Faith and Critical Reason.” That framework is “Semiotic Realism,” the branch of Classical American Pragmatism developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), Josiah Royce (1855-1916), and their intellectual heirs. For the sake of brevity, I will refer to this framework as “Pragmatism” for the rest of this essay.

You don’t need to adopt Pragmatism as your worldview to benefit from using the approaches I describe here; but if you do wish to explore it more deeply, you will discover a rich philosophical tradition whose founding contributors included scientists, writers, philosophers, educators, psychologists, and social workers; and whose roots dig deep into Greek, Christian, European, Native American, and Latinx intellectual history. Pragmatism has made important contributions to political and educational theory, philosophy of science, psychology, sociology, critical race theory, and modern-day theology and metaphysics (the list continues to grow).

This essay offers a Pragmatist blueprint for cultivating authenticity, testimony, and critical spiritual reflection in an undergraduate intro theology class. I begin with an introduction to the Pragmatist style of critical thinking and its underlying assumptions. The next section explores how thinking critically about personal authenticity in the context of religious differences can bring students closer together, instead of driving them further apart. The third section ups the ante by exploring how emotionally charged testimonies can build up (not blow up) the sense of classroom community. The final section shows how a Pragmatist understanding of personal moral and spiritual development can help students and teachers engage more thoughtfully in the study of the intersection between faith and critical reason.

I. The Pragmatist Approach to Critical Reason

The basic foundation of Pragmatism is that the *meaning* of an idea, is no different from the *impact* which that idea would produce: the impact that it has, or even might have, on people, actions, and future thoughts. Ideas which work out to have the same impacts, are in essence the same idea; questions, arguments, or distinctions that makes no real difference, are “paper doubts” with no meaning, and should be dismissed.

Pragmatists focus on real life. It can be interesting – sometimes even useful – to come up with questions that no one has ever asked, but Pragmatists find it more urgent to work on questions that arise from pressing crisis, problems, and doubts: a time of confusion; an experience of oppression; addiction, injustice, emotional pain. Pragmatist working on questions of faith and reason will ask, “What should be done? What skills and ideas from religion and critical thinking can help fix this situation, or at least make it better?”

Pragmatists focus on about habits and actions. Thinking, feeling, loving, and hating are mental habits. Working, playing, business, law, sex, war, and religion are habits that combine mind, movement, and materiel. As we go about life, we tend to do things *habit*-ually, based on our settled beliefs and expectations. If we get some unexpected result, an *irritation* develops; if that irritation is strong enough, it turns into a *doubt*; if that doubt is grave enough, it leads us to question, reflect, and *investigate*. Eventually, our inborn creativity produces some hunches; the hunch that tests out to our best satisfaction is incorporated into a new set of *beliefs*, which leads to a new *habit*.

habit → irritation → doubt → investigation → new belief → updated habit

This is how Pragmatists describe the process of thinking.

Charles Sanders Peirce, the founder of American Pragmatism, was a working scientist and a creative philosophical thinker. Pragmatists still need the courage of a scientist: to pursue doubts and follow hunches; to ask the next question; to go where the evidence leads. Pragmatists still need the creativity of an artist: the willingness to brainstorm, to try out new possibilities, to see how different pieces might fit together in order to express something compelling and create something true.

The Pragmatist approach to truth is already familiar to most of us. There is first of all a reliance on other people and on “common knowledge” to guide most of our habits and settled beliefs.

Second is personal experience: on many issues, especially life decisions, the voice of experience often has the last word. When and if these two fail, there is rigorous inquiry. This means “scientific method” and various versions of “evidence based argument”: gathering relevant data, coming up with a possible solution, and testing out how it works.

But Pragmatists argue that some common ways of thinking make rigorous inquiry much more difficult than it needs to be:

- “Everyone is entitled to their opinion, as long as they are not hurting anyone else” (which only begs the questions, “What’s hurtful?” and “Why should I be allowed to hurt myself?”)
- “I have discovered the one true answer (the Bible, the Qur’an, the Free Market): can’t everyone else just agree?”
- “You are not Black / Female / Queer / White “ or “I am the child of a police officer / from a hard-working middle-class family / a survivor of trauma.” You’ll never understand; we’ll never see eye to eye.
- More strictly philosophical, but no less of a stumbling block, are various types of “dualism”: “distinguish[ing] two interrelated realities in such a way that their real relationship to one another becomes subsequently” incomprehensible.¹ For example, dividing the world into “spirit” and “matter” makes it much harder to account for many aspects of human experience. “If love and freedom aren’t a material objects, aren’t they just ideas in our heads? Trying to *study* love or freedom is like arguing over the science of Harry Potter.” Pragmatists argue that dualism undermines our ability to seriously investigate urgent realities. It’s a *failed solution* which critical thinkers should reject.

Pragmatists take all aspects of experience equally seriously:

- Facts and data (objects and forces, texts and testimonies, stories and dreams) have an impact, and we must take them seriously.
- Feelings and qualities (colors and textures; joy and anguish; health or neurosis). Of course they are the result of photons, atoms, and neurons, but they also have an impact, and we must take them seriously.
- Patterns and tendencies (laws of physics, biological processes, trains of thinking, commitments, personalities, persons) have an impact, and we must take them seriously.

Pragmatists are committed to rigorous inquiry into *all* aspects of reality – not only facts, but qualities and tendencies as well.

Of course, taking something seriously does not mean we have gotten it right. We can never be certain that our settled beliefs are correct; we can never predict the next unexpected result! In this way, Pragmatists are consummate scientists. They are willing to question, hypothesize, and re-evaluate *any* belief or behavior when a serious doubt has been raised. They rely on a community of fellow inquirers (scientists, reporters, academics, concerned citizens) to identify sloppy data and inaccurate thinking. As Peirce says, our human tendency is “to compare notes,” and if we never do compare notes, and no third party talks with both and makes the comparison, it is difficult to see what meaning there is in saying we disagree.²

¹ Donald Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*: (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 11.

² *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. by Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Arthur W. Burks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958), 4.26.

For a Pragmatist, truth is not an *idea* which allows us to say, “Now that I’ve found it, my work is done.” Truth is a *relation* which moves us to question: “Am I being true to the data? Am I being true to my own experience? Am I being true to you, and to my own best ideals?”³

II. Authenticity

Being true to oneself, being authentic, is an important value to many present-day young adults. Authenticity fits well with the general tendency of many young adults to want more independence from their families of origin, and with the growing tendency of American youth to move away from strong affiliation with religious institutions, and to adopt a personalized, individual view of spiritual.⁴ Charles Taylor, a Canadian Pragmatist philosopher, argues that this contemporary ideal of “authenticity” can actually help students articulate a robust vision of their responsibilities to each other and to the broader society – what philosophers have traditionally called a vision of “the common good.”⁵ If Taylor is right, cultivating the quest for greater authenticity can be an important element in building a “faith and critical reason” classroom community where students learn to value the challenges of exploring and reflecting on tough moral and spiritual questions *together*.

Taylor builds his argument on an analysis of the history of an important concept within Western society: the idea of the person or – more specifically – the “self.”⁶ Taylor argues that society has experienced several conceptual “turns” that have enriched, but also endangered, the quality of personal life in the West:

- a turn from arm-chair theorizing to the close study of nature,
- a turn from outward behavior toward individual, inward experience,
- and a turn from the lives of set-aside, special people (kings, nobles, heroes, priests, monks, and nuns) toward the value of ordinary people and secular, everyday life.

Each of these turns can be celebrated for the new moral “goods” they have brought to our lives and to our common attention. The rigorous study of nature has given us technical advancement, scientific method, and enhanced public health. The turn toward interiority has given us an appreciation for personal growth and psychological healing, and for the pleasures of expressing our individual identity. The turn toward the common person has given us democratic governance, human rights, social mobility, and a whole infrastructure designed to enhance the lives of people at large.

But each turn also presents a dangerous flipside. Technical success has given us a blind confidence in the technological “fix,” a sense of ecological arrogance, and a “cost-benefit” form of analysis that reduces everyone and everything to an exploitable resource. Increased

³ To learn more about Classical American Pragmatism, check out Richard P. Mullin, *The Soul of Classical American Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), and the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey, William James, George Mead, and Cornell West. To learn more about semiotic realism and how it can help clarify our thinking about religion, faith, and critical reason, check out the late (post 1900) writings of Josiah Royce, and the following: Donald Gelpi, SJ, *The Gracing of Human Experience* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007) and Andrew Robinson, *God and the World of Signs* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010).

⁴ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵ Charles Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1991).

⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

individuality slips easily into self-centered individualism and painful forms of isolation. The massive organizations that facilitate our democracies, economies, media, and cross-cultural flows make us ever more vulnerable to massive exploitation as their tentacles reach into more and parts of our lives.

To address these challenges, Taylor adopts the ideal of “authenticity” as the key good for thinking about our moral and personal lives in contemporary culture. In Taylor’s view, authenticity is the key that can orient and adjust all our other ideals. Without it, our different ideals can clash and derail us; with it, we can organize our priorities and keep on track toward a truly good life.

Authenticity means becoming my best self; identifying and pursuing my deepest hopes and dreams. It means taking care of my friendships and my emotional health; taking charge of my own learning and my own future career; taking up my rightful share of political power; taking full charge of my life. Authenticity cannot be achieved in isolation: it requires human connection, collaboration, and careful consideration of the impacts that my decision will have on the lives of others and on the society and ecosystem I hope to enjoy.

Some scholars insist that students do not have a concept of the common good, and that they must acquire it by studying religions, philosophies, and cultures where the common good was frequently discussed. Taylor would embrace the idea that studying religion, philosophy, and ancient cultures can enrich our lives, but he would insist that students will grasp a concept like “the common good” more firmly, and explore it more deeply, if they have come to construct and understand it through the language and ideals of their own present-day life.

Figuring out what it means to be an authentic self includes a process of sorting out different ideals both within ourselves and within the ever-widening networks of friends, classmates, and fellow humans among whom we will share our lives. This inevitably involves “comparing notes.” If we all shared a common ideal (e.g., “We should all act like Jesus” or “We must all devote ourselves to the success of our Glorious Cause”) comparing notes would be rather simpler: which values fit best with that common ideal? But modern life requires us to *construct* a sense of common purpose and a vision for genuine authenticity. In this case, it makes no sense to try and “prove” your moral point to those who disagree. Only conversations which are *suggestive* can open up the possibility of building a new, shared vision of the common good; only those kinds of conversations can open other people to the possibility that their present settled beliefs may need some adjustment.⁷ Effective moral conversation will begin by helping people to understand their own desires and their own values more deeply. The first goal is to help people *express* their different values, whether through the artistry of words or through some other compelling and communicative form of art. In short, Taylor would celebrate the fact that self-expression and creativity are a natural part of the young adult conversation in modern times.

Once we have expressed these different values, once we have come to know our own minds more clearly, we can engage with each other, and try to seek common ground. Taylor suggests that we engage here in a kind of “practical reasoning” which focuses on the *transition* from one position to another, arguably better position. These transitions, Taylor argues, should be made

⁷ Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, 23.

on the basis of what he calls “epistemic gain.” Conversation partners experience epistemic gain when they come up with a new way of thinking that resolves a contradiction, illuminates a previous confusion, or accounts to everyone’s satisfaction for a detail or piece of data that previously did not fit, or was being ignored.⁸

“This form of argument,” Taylor says, “has its source in biographical narrative,” because honest conversation partners must “live” through the eye-opening transition. Some classes introduce students to new conceptual frameworks and world-rocking “big” ideas; a Pragmatist class on faith and critical reason brings conversations back down to reality – to the nitty-gritty, where communities of inquiry can be built up face to face. In this kind of classroom, our understandings about what is most important get reconstructed piece by piece through particular, specific conversations – through the give and take of trying to articulate our different experiences, and of trying to square our testimonies about those experiences with each other. As Taylor argues, “You will only convince me by changing my reading of my moral experience, and in particular my reading of my life story, of the transitions I have lived through – or perhaps refused to live through.”⁹

As a partner in this conversation, I should be neither too strong-headed, nor too quick to give my own well-thought-out arguments. I cannot judge whether my ideals are more valid than your ideals, whether my goods are more compelling than the goods of your cultural or religious tradition, until we have actually sat down and talked through our histories, our beliefs, and the reasons why we hold them. If such a conversation is successful, it will create a new situation and a new way of thinking that did not previously exist. In this new framework, we may discover that our vision of the common good has converged, or we may discover that our individual visions are indeed incompatible. But we will certainly have learned more about what we both think – and more about how to seek the truth together in thoughtful, illuminating ways.

Practical reasoning means moving from one’s old way of thinking to new way of viewing reality, a way that is more comprehensive, more explanatory, or less confused than before. The new approach may explain problematic or anomalous data better than the old one; it may solve a conceptual impasse that seemed unsolvable in the previous theory; it may point out and overcome blind spots or implicit contradictions in the previous point of view.¹⁰ These types of arguments aim for the best description of reality that is available in a given conversation. A “bad model of practical reasoning” tries to establish universal guidelines for what is “rational,” outside the universe of a particular conversation.¹¹ A good model grounds roots the expressions of moral goods and values in the cultural and personal terms that resonate with the participants in that conversation.

III. How Testimony Works

In this section, I shift the discussion from conversations around differing moral values, to conversations where we give and receive powerful personal testimonies. Working with

⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 72.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 43-55.

¹¹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 73.

testimonies – our own and each other’s – blows past paper doubts and keeps our conversations very real. This kind of work can also be difficult and explosive, which is why many students are very skittish about “getting personal” in context of college classes in general, and the context of college religion classes in particular.

Rebecca Chopp, a Feminist Pragmatist theologian, helps us understand this tension by analyzing the history of another important concept within Western society: the idea of a conflict between faith and reason.¹² Many students have learned from experience that faith is a personal, internal, emotion-based matter. They know that religious arguments can lead to violent situations (from the religious battles fought on cable news and at Thanksgiving dinners, to the “wars of religion” they have read about in history and watch daily on the Web). They have also been taught that critical thinking must remain rational, objective, and disconnected from excessive emotion.

These perspectives are rooted and reinforced in common knowledge and in students’ education. In many descriptions of Western intellectual history, religion is connected with the words of Scripture, official church doctrines, personal spiritual stances, and even popular superstition. The rational rebellion against blind faith freed us from unthinking obedience and outdated ideas. By applying critical thinking and scientific method, the story goes, we can even today achieve objectivity, make up our own minds, and emerge from mental childhood into adult ways of life. In this history, testimony (a Biblical text, a personally held belief) is the mother of confusion; rational thinking “is the clearheaded judge” who sorts out fact from fantasy and truth from illusion.¹³ Chopp and other Pragmatists argue that this conflict between faith and reason is a dualism which should be rejected.

Chopp argues that “rational thinking” really means making judgements based on our prior experience. Consider the idea of “walking on water.” Whenever I see someone in the water, they are either swimming, or floating, or sinking; it’s unlikely that anyone could actually walk on a lake. When I read Gospel stories about Jesus walking on water, as a “rational” person I presume that they could not be factually true. They are perhaps appreciative legends, or ancient metaphors about how faith can achieve anything, even what seems like “the impossible.” In this line of thinking, rational thinking uses common sense and prior experience to sort out which testimonies are reasonable and which ones are not; which testimonies should be considered, and which ones should be thrown out of court (or at least gently set aside and politely ignored).

But this line of thinking cannot be correct. Consider the question of identity. I am a white, middle-class, cisgender gay man. How can I judge the testimony of a transgender person? On the basis of my own prior experience? On the basis of popular “common sense”? I have never been black or poor; I have never been a woman or rich. Is it my job to decide whose testimonies are reasonable, and whose can be thrown out of court?

Chopp argues that when dealing with testimonies, it is not reasonable to declare ahead of time which can and cannot be true. In daily life, we rely on habitual thinking and settled beliefs to

¹² This section on testimony is drawn mainly from Rebecca Chopp, “Theology and the Poetics of Testimony,” in *Converging on Culture*, ed. by Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney and Kathryn Tanner (New York: AAR / Oxford, 2001), 56-70.

¹³ Chopp, “Theology and the Poetics of Testimony,” 61.

determine what does and does not make sense. But testimony stands out and asks us to consider whether our settled habits and beliefs have missed something – something important. If I’m not a Christian, and I’m not likely to meet one, the question of Jesus walking on water is neither here nor there. But if this story represents an important testimony in my religious tradition, or in the tradition of my peers or my classmates, as a pragmatist thinker I need to pay attention. In essence, testimony sets up the courtroom “in reverse,” so that the judge (“rational thinking,” prior experience, common sense) is now put on trial.¹⁴ In a kind of practical reasoning, data which was previously unknown, or hidden, or ignored is now presented and backed up with emotional heft, and the listener/witnesses stretches his previous thinking to see if it should accommodate this new information. Pragmatists do not reject testimony out of hand; they give testimony the opportunity to reshape their sense of possibility, to reshape their sense of what is reasonable.

“Testimony” is not merely something that I heard about or that I happened to say. It’s what I know from my heart and my history; from the life of my friends and the people. Testimonies can come in many forms: the stories of African-Americans, of rape survivors and survivors of genocide, of LGBT people; the arguments of liberation theologians: all of these are testimonies that speak of life and survival.¹⁵ Testimonies can be verbal or written, in the shape of words, actions, music, performance, or visual / plastic art. Sometimes they are polished, sometimes raw, partial, and still undigested. If the pain or the memory is too strong, sometimes fragments and pieces are all we can offer.¹⁶ When we welcome raw and fragmentary expression, or art, or songs, or improvised dramatic performances into the classroom, we make an important step forward in democratizing academic spaces and in taking the language of non-elites and non-academics more seriously.¹⁷

As Chopp argues, testimony calls on us to “remember what [we] have forgotten, denied, [or] ignored. ... One testifies not only so the truth will be told but ... so that the future might be lived differently in light of the history of suffering.”¹⁸ Testimonies seek to “convert” our common imagination so we might start to see, think, and do what we can’t yet imagine. Especially when presented in religious or theological contexts, testimony takes on a prophetic dimension. It says, “This is what happened, this is what I hope for, as God is my witness.”

Testimony frequently generates conflict: “Have you been a hypocrite? Which memories have you chosen to recall, and which ones have you chosen to repress?”¹⁹ We might try to deflect these challenges by questioning the legitimacy of its form of expression: “You have not presented a rational argument. Is that kind of language appropriate? Why so angry? Why so confrontational?” We might become angry at the speaker, or avoid their challenge by obsessing over fact finding, or looking for distractions; we might feel overwhelmed, or go totally numb.²⁰

¹⁴ Chopp, “Theology and the Poetics of Testimony,” 61 - 65

¹⁵ Cf. Chopp, “Theology and the Poetics of Testimony,” 63.

¹⁶ Megan Boler suggests that testimony is the “genre” of trauma. *Feeling Power* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 166.

¹⁷ Rebecca S. Chopp, “Reimagining Public Discourse,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 103 (March 1999): 41.

¹⁸ Chopp, “Reimagining Public Discourse,” 37, 44.

¹⁹ Cf. Chopp, “Reimagining Public Discourse,” 36-7.

²⁰ Boler, *Feeling Power*, 168. Citing Dori Laub in Shoshana Felman, *Testimony* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 72–3.

Minnie Pratt describes how her reaction to the musical testimonies of racially different “others” shifted over time: from sympathy toward the other, to a process of coping with her own feelings through the other, and finally to a commitment of solidarity with the other. A white Southern woman, she was for many years deeply moved by her experience of listening to African American church songs and spirituals. After a while, however she realized:

I was using Black people to weep for me, to express my sorrow at my responsibility, and that of my people, for their oppression: and I was mourning because I felt they had something I didn't, a closeness, a hope, that I and my folks had lost because we tried to shut other people out of our hearts and lives. Finally I understood that I could feel sorrow...yet not confuse their sorrow with mine, or use their resistance for mine.... I could hear their songs like a trumpet to me: a startling...a challenge: but not take them as a replacement for my own work²¹

Faced with a powerful testimony of Black suffering and liberation Pratt moved from feeling vaguely connected, to the insight that she was mainly managing and deflecting her own feelings, to making a conscious commitment about undoing racial oppression. As Megan Boler says, testimony calls on to respond “with [our] own testimony, rather than using the other as a catalyst or a substitute” for ourselves.²²

Samara D. Madrid, like Boler a Feminist educator, explores how to handle testimony without becoming intimidated, numb, or defensive, and without falling into shallow forms of empathy.²³ In classroom settings, they argue, the process must start with the teacher. Before asking students to face uncomfortable testimony, teachers must themselves practice how “to hear and hold the stories of students who have experienced injustice and emotional pain.”²⁴ Teachers must practice the discipline of temporarily putting aside their own thoughts and reactions, in order to pay close attention and imagine themselves in others’ shoes.²⁵ The teacher can then model and “hold” other group members as they struggle to give and receive each other’s testimonies.

VII. Religion and Personal Growth

Religious experience has been a focus of interest in Classical American Pragmatism since the work of its founding contributors.²⁶ For example, the early psychologist William James (1842 – 1910) explored in great depth the more extraordinary forms of “religious experiences” (moments of awe, feelings of connection to the universe, hitting “rock bottom,” sudden conversions). In response to James’s work, his close friend and colleague Josiah Royce reflected on the way in which religious and moral insight unfolds naturally over time in the majority of modern people’s

²¹ Minnie Bruce Pratt, “Identity: Skin/Blood/Heart,” in *Feminist Theory Reader*, ed. by Carole McCann and Seung-kyung Kim, 3rd edition (New York : Routledge, 2013), 285-291 (originally published 1984).

²² Boler, *Feeling Power*, 171.

²³ Sandra D. Madrid, “Care as Racialized, Critical, and Spiritual Emotion,” in *Engaging Culture, Race, and Spirituality*, ed. by Cynthia B. Dillard and Chinwe L. Ezueh Okpalaoka (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 81-88.

²⁴ Madrid, “Care as Racialized, Critical, and Spiritual Emotion,” 87.

²⁵ Diana Tietjens Meyers, *Subjection and Subjectivity* (New York Routledge, 1994), 33, in Chopp, “Reimagining Public Discourse,” 44.

²⁶ The material in this section is drawn from “The Religious Insights of Josiah Royce” in Mullin, *The Soul of Classical American Pragmatism*, 103-115.

spiritual lives.²⁷ Royce spoke of “religious” insight, but I will use the term “spiritual” in this essay since members of many religious traditions, or none, can experience all these changes in their thinking. Royce believed that our spiritual development was driven by a deep human need for “atonement” or oneness: a quest for reconciliation with ourselves, with other people, and with our sense of justice and right in the world. What he called the need for “salvation,” I will call in this essay a hunger for “healing and meaning,” again because these two ideas express the gist of Royce’s meaning for many modern-day teachers and students.

Royce names seven sources of spiritual insight; I name them (1) personal experience, (2) other people, (3) inquiry, (4) commitment, (5) loyalty, (6) tears, and (7) the “Beloved Community.” He describes how these experiences can build on each other if we pay attention to them and their effects on our lives. Personal and group experience awaken inside us a hunger for healing and purpose; serious inquiry and personal commitment move us toward healing and purpose, but cannot take us all of the way; loyalty, tears, and loving community make our commitment, healing, and sense of meaning more complete.²⁸

Royce argues that James’ “religious experiences” are better understood as profound *personal experiences*. These are the most basic sources of spiritual insight: undigested glimpses of our desire for healing and purpose, vague hunches that it can somehow be fulfilled. We can visit the mountaintop or the pit and catch these brief glimpses, but we cannot live there – we have to unpack the insights and cash them out in daily life. We miss someone; we wish we had treated them better. We get excited about a vision or project; how can it fit into our busy lives?

In order to follow up on our spiritual hunches, we need to factor in our relationships with *other people*. This is, of course, a key goal of the college experience. University life (like all social interaction) exposes us to people who are different. It challenges us to learn how to live with them, or to escape back into old, comfortable thoughts and behaviors. Shall we grow, or shall we dig in? We make mistakes: do we try to reconcile, or do we leave the problem / issue / person behind? We make friends: do we stay superficial, or dive deeper and risk sharing our different testimonies?

Choosing reconciliation and depth does not solve the problem – it simply highlights the hard work ahead. *Inquiry* and *personal commitment* are the next steps in working these challenges out. For Royce, inquiry means becoming more “reasonable.” To be reasonable is to think broadly, to understand the important connections. To be unreasonable is to be fixated on my own narrow interests or my own personal point of view. The more reasonable we become, the more we can balance divergent interests and understand how our commitments do (or do not) fit together. Becoming more reasonable, making more insightful connections, helps us get a handle on realities that are more complex and less obvious or concrete: relationships, families, organizations, values, social causes. Practicing inquiry helps us navigate these kinds of entities: when it’s time to play ball, to contribute, to step back, to resist, or to leave. Making commitment turns the results of our inquiries into concrete decisions and actions.

²⁷ See Josiah Royce, *The Sources of Religious Insight* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1912).

²⁸ Cf. Mullin, *The Soul of Classical American Pragmatism*, 105

When we commit ourselves head, hands, and heart to a certain purpose or value, we develop the habit that Royce labels *loyalty*. You need to be loyal if you want to be a good parent, a good spouse or lover, a good soldier, first responder, scientist, or political activists. Being loyal means being willing to sacrifice something lesser (sometimes even your own life) for something greater than your own narrow self-interest. Loyal people do not value their lives or their happiness any less; they perceive how their commitment makes life more worthwhile. With open eyes, they run toward the fire, toward the strife.

While loyalty brings purpose, it does not necessarily bring healing. Healing comes through embracing and digesting the hurt, through owning and crying the *tears*. Christians tell how Jesus' resurrected body still bears the marks of his wounds. Buddhists insist that enlightenment (buddha-nature) leads us to compassion for our own suffering and for that of others. Compassion (*cum passio*, "suffering with") is not pity, but feeling for, with, and in support of another. Healing comes from incorporating our wounds into our life practice in a meaningful and sustainable way. Buried wounds fester and become infected; as Freud observed, the "repressed" always returns in uglier, more insistent, and less manageable ways. Healing brings us to tears and carries us through to the other side.

Loyalty and healing come together in what Royce called "unity of spirit" and what Martin Luther King, Jr. – one of Royce's intellectual heirs – called the "*Beloved Community*." As people work out their individual spiritual journeys, hurting and reconciling, building a shared space in which each one can grow into fullness of life, they must develop a certain unity-in-diversity, without which their common work will fly apart. Royce called this the Spirit of the Community – a spirit he found within the Christian story of Pentecost (one Spirit plus different languages amazingly equals shared understanding, Acts 2). This Beloved Community exhibits "loyalty to loyalty" – its members cultivate relationships and social settings which nurture the personal, social, reflective, committed, healing experiences that lead to others' spiritual growth.

Royce offers a philosophical outline of the human quest for healing and meaning. He shows how one source of spiritual insight can lead naturally into another, as our experience becomes broader and our personalities become more mature.

There are clear echoes here with the insights of scholars who have studied young adulthood from a developmental psychology point of view. For example, William Perry, a researcher and college teacher, describes how moral and interpersonal thinking develops among college students: from "black and white" thinking, through various forms of open-mindedness ("It all depends on where you're at;" "It all depends on your point of view") to a sense of personal commitment towards other people and towards values greater than ourselves.²⁹ Erik Erikson, the famous therapist and developmental theorist, focuses on the human life cycle in its social context. Erikson argues that as our experience becomes broader and richer, we encounter one challenge after another, driving us towards deeper relationships, more responsibility, and greater wisdom. If we do not grow into those challenges, we inevitably find ourselves stuck, less and less able to cope.³⁰

²⁹ William G. Perry, Jr. *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970).

³⁰ Erik Erikson, "Eight Ages of Man," *International Journal of Psychiatry*, 2 no. 3 (1966): 281-300.

As these and other developmental theorists underline, young adulthood is a time of roiling transitions: a period of greater independence mixed with excitement, bravado, and lingering insecurity. Young people know they are supposed to be their own persons, but they don't have much practice doing so in a world where the safety nets and training wheels have begun to come off.³¹ They can use mentors – real people who can model how to be authenticity and how to testify in healthy ways. They can also use roadmaps for the journey, like the one that Royce has provided. Lucky is the student of faith and critical reason whose class gets to visit each key stop on that map: personal experience, interpersonal connection, rigorous inquiry, human commitment, a vision of idealism, participation in healthy a community, and the practice of healing tears.

³¹ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

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Let's Build Our Universal Home Sweet Home

Just as God creates the natural universe, so we are called on to create the social universe--a universe, like that of the planets and stars that is ordered, rule-governed, a space of integrated diversity, a world we can see and say, as God saw and said that it is good.¹

Abstract:

As we live with billions of other people on this earth, we have so much to learn, to understand, and to share with others. Because we are different, we each have something unique to contribute, and every contribution counts. We should embrace and celebrate how special and different we are so that in our interconnected world, we can learn to feel enriched, not threatened, by difference. Since the number of conflicts among races, classes, and religions has been growing in our society, religious educators are called to take an initial step in assisting people to build a world where people can feel truly at home. We need to enable people to recognize the dignity of the differences and to live out the true meaning of religious education. In addition, our role is to assist people to encounter each other in authentic dialogue. Even though conflict between religions, races, and colors is still a reality in our world, it should not be an obstacle to our efforts to foster coexistence in diversity. With the power of imagination, we all are invited to explore ways for community structures and systems to embody justice and equity in diversity.

¹ Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together*, (New York, NY: Cromwell Press, 2007), 138.

Human beings are conditioned by their own environment, cultural background, and beliefs. This sometimes makes people think that their culture and beliefs, race, and social status are the best, and what is different from theirs is wrong or unaccepted. This way of thinking creates division. Sadly, division is not something new in our human history as well as in each nation and religion's history. It even leads people to shed blood in the name of God. For instance, Cain's jealousy twisted his relationship with God and led to the murder of his own brother (Gen 4:1-8). Through the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, we learn that there was discrimination about behavior and the serving of food after the Lord's Supper among church members. People gathered in the house churches of wealthier church members, and guests were served depending on their respective order, class, or status within society. There was also an atmosphere of disunity among church members. They divided into several groups according to various leaders: Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, (1Cor 1:11-12). During World War II, the Holocaust was one of the unforgotten tragedies. Millions of Jewish people were killed because of racism and religious differences. In our time, there is still division among people because of color, race, and religion.

According to the National Convention of the Religious Education Association, our society is divided into conflicting groups--black and white, poor and affluent, different generations, the have and have-not nations, etc. Often, these groups ignore one another; increasingly they become polarized in confrontation and conflict, sometimes violent, their relations distorted by hate and prejudice. The brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind are denied or held to be utopianism.² People use the name of their religion to claim superiority over others. In the name of peace, some attempt to prevent others from seeking a better life. Some even think that they are superior for belonging to a certain group or ethnic background.

Looking at these issues, the question of unity in a nation, religion, and among the world's population is still relevant today. How do we promote co-existence despite differences? How do we bring people together in a fruitful conversation? Why do we need to encounter an authentic dialogue? Should we care about building a world where people can truly feel at home and people can live in peace and harmony despite differences? I believe that religious educators are called to take the initial step in order to create an atmosphere where people can take courageous steps to encounter each other in authentic dialogue. In addition, religious educators are invited to teach "the practice of loving as Jesus did--transforming broken relationships and enacting radical, life-giving ways of being with and for one another."³ In order to do so, religious educators' task is to recognize the value in differences and creatively use them as a main thread in a religious curriculum.

In this paper, I will first talk about the values of the difference that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks presents in his book *The Dignity of Difference*. Second, since I see the need to reshape the meaning of religious curriculum, I argue for this by using Maria Harris's point of view in her book *Fashion Me a People*. In addition, I discuss what we need to do in order to enable our brothers and sisters to have an authentic conversation. Finally, I present the necessary role of prophetic imagination in our process of building a world where people can co-exist despite differences.

² The National Convention of the Religious Education Association, (*Religious Education*, 64: 3, 162-162, July 10, 2006), 162.

³ Courtney T. Goto. "Teaching Love: Embodying Prophetic Imagination through Clowning" (*Religious Education*. Vol. III, No.4, July-September), 1.

The Dignity of Difference

Throughout history, most people for most of their lives were surrounded by others with whom they shared the same beliefs, traditions, way of life, etc. In recent years, “the global age has turned our world into a society of strangers.”⁴ Difference surrounds us. People live with neighbors whose faiths and cultural backgrounds are different from their own. Nonetheless, this need not be a threat to our identity. First, Jonathan Sacks believes that this (diversity) is what constitutes our humanity. “Just as the natural environment depends on biodiversity, so the human environment depends on cultural diversity, because no one civilization encompasses all the spiritual, ethical and artistic expressions of mankind.”⁵ Second, Sacks sees the world not as a single machine; instead, “it is a complex, interactive ecology in which diversity--biological, personal, cultural, and religious--is of the essence.”⁶ As we live with billions of other people on this earth, we have so much to learn, to understand, and to share with others. We do not need everyone to be an exact copy of each other, for “Our very dignity as persons is rooted in the fact that none of us--not even genetically identical twins--is exactly like any other. Therefore none of us is replaceable, substitutable, a mere instance of a type.”⁷ Moreover, because we are different, we each have something unique to contribute, and every contribution counts. We should instead embrace and celebrate how special and different we are so that in our interconnected world, we can learn to feel expanded, not threatened, by difference. I agree with Sacks’ statement that “when difference leads to war, both sides lose. When it leads to mutual enrichment, both sides gain.”⁸

Looking at diversity from a Christian perspective, Sacks points out that, “There are many cultures, civilizations and faiths but God has given us only one world in which we live together--and it is getting smaller all the time.”⁹ The Hebrew Bible tells the story of God who makes a covenant with an individual, then a tribe, then a collection of tribes, and then a nation. Even though it is the narrative of a particular people, it starts by telling a story about humanity as a whole.¹⁰ The Babel event marks a turning point in the Bible narrative. This story ends with the division of humankind into a multiplicity of languages, cultures, nations, and civilizations. However, in Sack’s view, God’s covenant with humanity as a whole has not ceased. From here on, God will focus on one family, and eventually one people to be God’s witness and bearers of God’s covenant. God will ask of them that they be willing to give up home, birthplace and land, all the familiar certainties, and undertake a journey with God as their only protection. They will be a people who are different.¹¹

Christians believe that God created all human beings and all things in the world and declared that they were good. The creation story teaches us that we share the God who created us and all the rest of creation. We are all equal in God’s eyes. In addition, “*the unity of God is to be found in the diversity of creation.*” In Sacks’ view, the test of faith is whether we can make space for difference. Therefore, Christians also should ask whether religion could become a force for

⁴ Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

peace rather than a source of conflict. Can we make space for difference? Can we recognize God's image in someone who is not in our image, whose language, faith, ideals, are different from ours? Can we hear the voice of God in a language, a sensibility, a culture not our own? Can we see the presence of God in the face of a stranger?¹² Do we see the other as a threat to our beliefs and way of life, or as an enrichment of the collective heritage of humankind?¹³ Reflecting on this, I believe that valuing diversity is something that should be the aim of all humans, especially Christians. This is important since, if we cannot love our diverse brothers and sisters within the church, how can we hope to share and show the love of Jesus to the diverse communities and organizations in our secular contexts. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul asked his audience to celebrate their differences and believe that they each bring something important to the community. He challenges them to “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others” (2:3-4).

Now is the time to embrace diversity! “The time for the healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us.”¹⁴ Therefore, living in the world when it is getting smaller and smaller, religious educators’ task is to walk with people and provide opportunities for people to discover the dignity of difference. In addition, we also allow the dignity of difference to become the main thread of the curriculum of religious education. Acknowledging that the phrase “religious education” has been used to refer strictly to the catechism program and religious curriculum, including textbooks used or courses/programs to be run, I argue that it is essential for us to reshape these understandings. So what in fact do religious education and religious curriculum include?

Reshaping the meaning of Religious Curriculum

Over time, religious education has been limited to the formation programs. However, we should not narrow its meaning, for it includes all aspects of our faith and life. It is life-long and life-wide. It begins at birth and ends at death. George Albert Coe defines religious education as “the systematic, critical examination and reconstruction of relations between persons, guided by Jesus’ assumption that persons are of infinite worth, and by the hypothesis of the existence of God, the Great Valuer of Persons.”¹⁵ Mary C. Boys also states, “Whenever men and women have gathered to tell stories and enact rituals in response to the mystery of life, whenever they have searched for the truth and sought to do what is good, religious education has been happening.”¹⁶

In a conversation between Maria Harris and Craig Dykstra, Dykstra was surprised as he learned that Harris was writing a book on curriculum. For him, “the very word ‘curriculum’ conjured up images of boxes piled on top of each other in out-of-the-way places, packed with dull workbooks for children to fill out endlessly in Sunday school. Why would anyone want to write a book on such a topic? How could such a topic deserves a book?”¹⁷ After encountering

¹² Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 5; 17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, viii.

¹⁴ Nelson Mandela, “Let freedom reign,” inaugural address as President of South Africa, 10 May 1994, in Brian MacArthur (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Historic Speeches*, 499.

¹⁵ Mary C. Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Vision*. (Harper & Row, New York: NY, 1989), 53.

¹⁶ Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Vision*, 3.

¹⁷ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 7-8.

Harris' book, *Fashion Me a People*, he acknowledges that "curriculum is about the mobilizing of creative, educative powers in such a way as to 'fashion a people'" and "curriculum is the practice of fashioning a people, in response to and in cooperation with the fashioning of people that God is carrying out."¹⁸

Harris argues that the term "curriculum" in religious education should not be reducible to resource materials. Curriculum is an activity, a practice of a people. The meaning of curriculum is fluid, and it has always been broader than schooling alone. Church curriculum is the *entire course of the church's life*. Even though the term "curriculum" was not used in the early church, we find that its forms are presented in the Acts of the Apostles: *kerygma* (proclaiming the word of Jesus' resurrection), the *didache* (the activity of teaching), *leiturgia* (coming together to pray and to represent Jesus in the breaking of bread), *koinonia*, or community, and *diakonia* (caring for those in need).¹⁹ Fascinated by how *leiturgia*--the curriculum of prayer-- could be used to bring people together and assist people to build a better world, I will explore this curriculum more deeply.

The term "*leiturgia*," or "liturgy" in English, is often translated as "the work of the people," which comes from the Greek word for public service. Harris emphasizes that "because of this meaning, the word 'liturgy' has become associated with the church worshipping as a body, together as a people, and less so with the personal prayer life of church members."²⁰ Harris sees prayer as a component of the curriculum of educational ministry, for it is one of the central patterns and rhythms of Christian communities. She acknowledges, "We are educated *to* prayer, and we are educated *by* prayer."²¹ This education can happen anywhere and at any time. The curriculum of prayer can happen in two forms, corporate and personal prayer. There are several forms of corporate prayers: Mass, prayer group, retreat, rosary, etc. For example, in the form of a retreat, the curriculum is the coming together of a group of people to pray and to be educated *to* prayer, *by* prayer, and *in* prayer. The essential element of corporate prayer is prayer where the agent is not we as individuals but we as a praying community. For Harris, this corporate form of prayer is the form we need in order to create and re-create our identity as a people, for *leiturgia* is at root "the people at prayer."²² Since "the liturgy is the starting point and ending point of all that the church does", therefore "a continuing education for Catholics is needed to appreciate the liturgy."²³

Besides corporate/community prayer, personal prayer is another aspect of the curriculum. The church teaches us that the spiritual life is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. Christians are called to pray with their communities, but they must also pray by themselves, in private, to the Father.²⁴ Moran notes that people think private prayer is completely different from liturgy, even in opposition to it. However, for Moran, the "private" in private prayer is the interiority of every human activity that is at the core of all liturgy and worship. Those who pray in the quiet of their own rooms or when riding the subway can still be linked to the church's liturgical life since private prayer is a centering of all life in relation to God and creation.²⁵

¹⁸ Harris, *Fashion Me A People*, 8, 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

²² *Ibid.*, 95.

²³ Gabriel Moran, *Fashioning a People Today*, (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007), 73.

²⁴ Pope Paul VI. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Chapter I, No.12.

²⁵ Moran, *Fashioning a People Today*, 88.

There are many methods that can be used for personal prayer. Private prayer can be both verbal and nonverbal (meditation, contemplation, etc.). In verbal prayer, we use words to address God while in meditate prayerfully. We place ourselves quietly in the presence of God and think, reflect, or meditate on a particular theme, asking God to open our hearts to accept what He might wish for us in relation to the theme.²⁶ This personal prayer takes place when we spend time alone in the company of the Divine. We can pray at church, at work, at home, on a bus, while walking, visiting friends, or comforting the sick, etc. Moran shows us that “private prayer is a centering of all life in relation to God and creation.”²⁷ I agree with him. I remember an experience of walking around a school campus in the evening. In the silence of the night, I felt related to things around me. I breathed the air, which I did not see, and was aware of the absence of any smell. I felt the wind blowing on my skin, my hair, and my whole body even though I did not know where it came from. I heard different insects' sounds. Through the experience of my senses, I thanked God who brought me into existence. I thanked God for giving me eyes so that I can see things, a nose through which I can smell things, legs that can walk, and hands that can touch things. I felt God's love for me. I realized that this universe is a common home for all, and everything is related. God created me and put me in this universe for a reason. Therefore, as a steward of God's creation, I recognized my duty to take care of God's creation and protect this common home.

In the age of globalization and technology, many people put extreme value on money and power. It is sad to see the economic gap that has created many social justice issues in all aspects of life leading to division among religions, people, and races. Reading the signs of time, I believe that religious educators are especially called to continue God's mission in building a world where justice, peace, and unity are embraced. Religious educators' task is to assist people in deepening their spiritual life, allowing people to reach out to others and to cooperate with others in building a peaceful world. The event on 20 August 2000 at the United Nations shows us an historical moment where many religious leaders from different faiths came together. According to Sacks,

There was the saffron robes of the Tibetan monks, the grey vestments of Japanese Shinto priests, Sufis in their distinctive hats, Sikhs in their turbans, the black robes of the imams, the blue and red sacred clothes of the reindeer people of north Sweden, Native Americans with their eagle bonnets, African priests in purple, Anglicans with their clerical collars and, it seemed, every other conceivable shade and shapes of dress. Being there was like walking into a living lexicon of the religious heritage of mankind...In the great conference chamber normally reserved for politicians debating the issues of the day, here were men and women who devoted their lives not to the noise of now but to the music of eternity, not to the shifting sands of the international arena but to the inner landscape of the human spirit.²⁸

The Art of Encountering into an Authentic Conversation

It is true that working with diversity is not easy; however, it is not impossible. The gathering of more than 2000 religious leaders at the United Nations building was an example. Moreover, there are ways that help us to encounter into an authentic conversation with our brothers and sisters in this diverse world. Ingeborg Gabriel thinks that when we speak about what really matters to us, we create inner personal bonds with others. However, it also has a potential risk

²⁶ Harris, *Fashion Me A People*, 96-7.

²⁷ Moran, *Fashioning a People Today*, 88.

²⁸ Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 5.

since what really matters to us can also create deep division and conflict with others. For Gabriel, such conflicts can only be avoided by strengthening mutual respect based on the fundamental insight that as contingent and limited human beings, we are always searching for the truth but never own and possess it in an essentialist way. Furthermore, it has to be taken into account that dialogue is characterized by an inherent tension.²⁹

In the context of our society today, there are different forms of dialogue that need our attention. The document “The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions,” from the Vatican’s Pontifical Council, presents to us several kinds of dialogue. There is a dialogue of life, which focuses on a greater appreciation for common humanity and seeing one’s faith anew.³⁰ Dialogue of deed and collaboration focuses on humanitarian initiatives. Theological dialogue seeks greater mutual theological and philosophical understanding. The dialogue of religious experience includes sharing one’s spiritual life and opens the possibility for corporate religious experience.³¹ In order to make these dialogues become authentic, Sacks proposes,

We must learn the art of conversation, from which truth emerges not, as in Socratic dialogue, by the refutation of falsehood but from a quite different process of letting our world be enlarged by the presence of others who think, act, interpret reality in ways radically different from our own... We must make ourselves open to their stories, which may profoundly conflict with ours.³²

Bernard Lonergan acknowledges that religious education has an important role in fostering an authentic dialogue through its teaching for cosmopolis.³³

Cosmopolis involves authentic engagement through ongoing dialogue with the other. It is a commitment to be attentive to our own and other’s human experiences, to be intelligent in the questions we ask about the meaning of those experiences, to be reasonable in our judgments concerning those experiences, and ultimately, to be responsible for how we act toward others based on our experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding.³⁴

According to Tom Neal, “the art of dialogue, of *dia logos*, which is literally to “think through” another person, not talking “at” another person, or even “with” them, but thinking *through* them.”³⁵ In this sense, a dialogue partner helps the other to “think through” the truth of the matter they are seeking together. This is an example of an authentic dialogue. As we work toward having an effective and fruitful dialogue, we see that it requires a number of skills and attitudes in order to yield new insights. In Neal’s view, humility is crucial. “Humility is an open, willing disposition to learn from anyone and anything—to be corrected and to correct—as well as the persistent realization that I, on my own, never fully possess the whole truth and nothing but the

²⁹ Ingeborg Gabriel “All Life Is Encounter: Reflections on Interreligious Dialogue and Concrete Initiatives,” (*Religious Education*, 2017; 112:4, 317-322), 318.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 319.

³¹ Peter Feldmeier, *Encounters in Faith: Christianity in Interreligious Dialogue* (Winona, MN: Christian Brothers, 2011), 267-8.

³² Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 23.

³³ Dennis Gunn, “Teaching for Cosmopolis: Bernard Lonergan’s Hopeful Vision for Education in a Globalized World,” (*Religious Education*, 113:1, 26-37, 2018): “Teaching for cosmopolis is an invitation to dialogue which promotes mutual understanding, mutual respect, and mutual interdependence in a globalized world.”

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁵ Tom Neal, “The Arts of Dialogue,” *Word on Fire*, May 22, 2018. Accessed August 10, 2019.

truth. God alone *is* truth, we are stewards of truth, and truth is only held as a *common* stewardship.³⁶

Knowledge and understanding of one's own religion as well as of the others enables people to be involved in a true dialogue. According to Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, "the experience of interreligious learning suggests that the best dialogue partners, those best equipped in building meaningful alliances across religious differences, are those who have a high degree of religious literacy in their own tradition as well as in other traditions."³⁷ Kujawa-Holbrook points out that the effort for interreligious encounter cannot succeed if there is no room for learning. In fact, the first steps of interreligious encounter--altering the calendar, changing food, changing music, changing the prayers--could cause resistance if they never progress to the stage of rich and mutually fulfilling interreligious learning. Therefore, to encounter into an authentic dialogue, "faith communities and religious organizations must confront the challenge of envisioning a new way of relating to the religious "other" where we seek to understand each other more deeply, and are open to learning from each other."³⁸ We have to bear in mind that "The solicitude doesn't demand that one always agree, but it does demand that one recognizes that one is walking on sacred ground."³⁹ It requires us to listen more closely and ask more questions so that we understand what is really meant. We also need to pay better attention to our own assumptions about norms and practices that might be different in other cultures.

One of the factors that prevents us from entering into an authentic conversation is hatred. People do not like others because they do not act the way they are "supposed" to. People do not love others because of a conflict of faith. I believe that religious educators are people who are called to foster love in an educational circle for we have been loved by God and we are called to love one another. Dwayne Huebner also points out what love can do in education. First, when we are faced with the possibility of destruction as we reach beyond ourselves, love provides the assurance that we will not be destroyed, and we will be whole again. Second, the power of love can acknowledge weakness. Love heals the differences within us and reconciles the new tensions and divergences in our life. Moreover, it provides the patience, trust, collective memories and hopes, and conversation to heal the social body.⁴⁰ It takes time to have a truly deep conversation with others so that we can understand who they are and why they act the way do. This is because, "When talking with others often and intensively, a light may appear in the soul that guides us to greater understanding."⁴¹ This light could happen when we allow ourselves to imagine things as if they could be otherwise, but only if we allow the space and time for this to occur.

Prophetic Imagination and Role of Religious Education in a Divided Society

According to Kieran Scott, "the imagination plays a fundamental role in the cultivation of our vision of the world. Its power opens us to new possibilities, other ways of seeing. It enables

³⁶ Neal, "The Arts of Dialogue," 1.

³⁷ Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, "Interreligious Learning," (*Religious Education*, 110:5, 483-486, 2005) 484.

³⁸ Kujawa-Holbrook, "Interreligious Learning," 484.

³⁹ Feldmeier, *Encounters in Faith*, 261.

⁴⁰ Dwayne Huebner, "Religious Metaphors in the Language of Education." Vol. 80, No.3, summer 1985, 467.

⁴¹ Gabriel, "All Life Is Encounter," 318.

us to ‘look at things as if they could be otherwise (Green 2014, 32).’⁴² With the power of imagination, we are able to relate one thing to the other, and we can draw out insights from things that we encounter. Maria Harris also thinks that we are always involved in imagining. Imagination is always accessible to us, and it is as natural and near as breath. “Imagination is not trivialized by its dailiness, for its correlative is that we are always creating, shaping, and constituting our worlds and our lives.”⁴³ Therefore, “today, religious educators should be encouraged to imagine new possibilities for educating in faith that take into account how religious convictions and practices are embodied in specific life contexts within contemporary, postmodern culture.”⁴⁴ Moreover, since teaching is a vocation centered in the religious imagination, religious educators should encourage their students to cultivate the power of imagination. After all, “the heart of teaching is imagination.”⁴⁵

Living in a divided society, “will we endlessly replay the hatred of the past? Or will we choose differently this time, for the sake of the world’s children and their future?”⁴⁶ I believe that the prophetic imagination is very important in religious education today. In Scott’s view, the prophet is a person who sees the world with the eyes of God. Their eyes are directed to the contemporary scene, and they are moved by responsibility for society. Furthermore, “Prophetic practices offer the possibility of revitalizing church life from within and, in turn, offer an outward response to repair our social and public world.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the task of the religious educator is to “nurture individual and communal dispositions of openness, courage, and capacity for loving, even when there are many differences and histories within a single group.”⁴⁸ Sacks believes that “As our capacity for destruction grows, so too must the generosity of our moral and spiritual imagination. I pray that this affirmation will be echoed by many voices from many faiths.”⁴⁹

As Christians, we believe that God [actually Jesus in Mt 25] identifies God-self in our brothers and sisters: whatever we did for one of the least of our brothers and sisters, we did for God and whatever we did not do for one of the least of our brothers and sisters, we did not do for God (Mt 25). Since God’s love is unconditional and has no boundary, Jesus calls us to love and care for our brothers and sisters regardless of their nationality, culture, or faith. This teaching is made clear through the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). The story is about how extraordinary it is that an enemy of the Jews, a Samaritan, would bend down to help the Jewish victim. In striving to enter into an authentic dialogue, I believe the story of the Good Samaritan is a perfect step that demonstrates to us how to act toward brothers and sisters. This story also serves as a bridge to encourage people to come together.

Living in our time, when conflicts between religions are prevalent, what can religious educators do to enable people to perform their prophetic role? According to Maxine Greene, there are people who are born into a culturally defined literacy. Many alienated and marginalized people are made to feel distrustful of their own voices, their own ways of making sense. Yet they

⁴² Kieran Scott, “Alternating Currents: Sacramental and Prophetic Imagining and Church Education” (*Religious Education*, Vol. II, No.4 July-September), 448.

⁴³ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People*, 78.

⁴⁴ Harold Horell, “Fashioning and Transforming: The Power of Imagination in Religious Education.” *Religious Education* (Vol. 110, No. 3 May-June) 246.

⁴⁵ Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 3.

⁴⁶ Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, viii.

⁴⁷ Scott, “Alternating Currents,” 447.

⁴⁸ Goto. “Teaching Love,” 403.

⁴⁹ Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, viii.

are not provided alternatives that allow them to tell their stories or develop new insights into what they already know. Therefore, the task of the religious educator is to teach others to find openings for this growth. In this sense, our teaching should provoke critical questions concerning the modes of literacy, the preferred languages, the diversity of languages, and the relation of all of these to the greater culture.⁵⁰ “Religious educators can help to slowly shift the common habit of seeing race in terms of black and white by understanding the paradigm, by catching themselves in the act, reflecting critically, and exploring what and whose experiences are obscured.”⁵¹ Religious educators can use the arts, such as films, theater, stories, poetry, etc., to release our students’ religious imagination as “artists attempt to portray ‘a touch of eternity’ that communicates potent truths about their subjects, and even to evoke certain feelings and response in the viewer.”⁵² Green notes, “Encounters with arts and activities in the domains of art can nurture the growth of persons who will reach out to one another as they seek clearings in their experience and try to be more ardently in the world.”⁵³

Living in a time when division is not only between people from different faith backgrounds but even between people who share the same faith, reconciliation is an urgent need. I recall one of my experiences when I visited a particular parish here in America. There were two priests who served a multicultural parish. Unfortunately, this parish divided everything into two, including parishioners. Each priest had his own mass set, sound system, altar boys, and choir. Whatever they could divide in two, they would. It was sad to see people in the same parish say nice things about one of their pastors, but not the other. One group tried to do things better than the other. The disunity of this particular parish is just one example of other disunities that exist in our church today and in our relations with other Christian denominations. Therefore, religious educators should become a bridge that brings people together. Religious educators must have a hope and a dream to build a brighter future of living out our Christian faith for our younger generations. Marilyn Llewellyn reminds us that “since we can never completely know another person, there is always the possibility of surprise and hope for the newness present.”⁵⁴

In conclusion, it is obvious that in recent decades, the number of conflicts among races, classes, and religions has been growing. There are people who think that their culture, their way of life, and their religion is the best. This way of thinking blocks people from acknowledging the value of differences. In addition, it prevents people from being open to others, making it impossible to learn and to walk together in love and peace on this earthly journey. This divided society is a challenge to religious education. I believe that religious education must play a significant role in teaching authentic dialogue that allows individuals to acknowledge that they are part of a greater whole. As participants in such a holistic society, each member should, together with others, contribute their best to the whole. Religious educators are people who are especially called to continue the teaching ministry of Jesus. Like Jesus, whose words and deeds show how God has loved all humanity, religious educators are instruments to continue to teach

⁵⁰ Maxine Green, *Releasing the Imagination* (San Francisco: California, 1995), 110-111.)

⁵¹ Courtney T. Goto, “Beyond the Black–White Binary of U.S. Race Relations: A Next Step in Religious Education,” (*Religious Education*, 112:1, 33-45, 2017), 40-1.

⁵² Charles B. Gordon and Karen E. Eifler, “Bringing Eyes of Faith to Film: Using Popular Movies to Cultivate a Sacramental Imagination and Improve Media Literacy in Adolescents.” (*Catholic Education*, Vol. 15, No. 1, September 2011), 31-2.

⁵³ Maxine Green, *Releasing the Imagination*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publisher, 1995), 132.

⁵⁴ Marilyn Llewellyn, “Reclaiming a Spiritual Language and Embracing a Spirituality of Liberation.” *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 71.

this message of inclusion. In addition, the task of religious education is to be active in healing divisions. Conflicting groups may be brought together as part of the religious education process. Even though conflict between religions, races, and colors is still a reality in our world, it should not be a stumbling block to our efforts to foster coexistence in diversity. We all are invited to explore ways for communities' structures and systems to embody justice and equity. Let us encourage one another to create opportunities that allow our prophetic imagination to make a change for the better in our world. Prophetic imagination should be used in order to allow people to conceive and realize a better world where all people can truly feel at home!

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You can talk about your cat, but you can also talk about your God.

Witnessing in hermeneutical-communicative worldview education

Abstract

This paper explores the function of teachers' witnessing of faith in religious education in the context of diversity in the classroom. In hermeneutical-communicative religious education three teaching roles can be discerned: moderator, specialist, and witness. These roles aim to support students in their personal worldview identity development by investigative, creative and dialogical learning. However, witnessing seems to be aimed at the transmittal of a specific tradition. The concepts of witnessing, authenticity, moral agency, role model and self-disclosure are explored to shed light on witnessing in worldview education in the context of diversity. Especially, Ricoeur's philosophical and Biblical explorations of testimony help to clarify witnessing and to position this didactical role in the interreligious educational space of vulnerability and hospitality.

Keywords

Witnessing; hermeneutical-communicative learning; diversity; worldview education; testimony

Introduction

"The tension that I experience is that I see the Bible as the word of God and thus as the truth. I would like to teach from that position. However, I do not do that so often, because I also have to deal with dissenters. Then I present it more like: the Christians believe that... This sometimes clashes with my identity as a Christian. I talk as if Christianity is one of the options "(Praamsma, 2014, p.10).

The teacher in this quote describes a tension between his own worldview position and the plurality of the philosophy of life in the context of the school. There is a struggle visible between the various roles that he as a religious educator can take: the desire to testify of his truth and thus taking on the role of witness on the one hand, and the role of guide in the world of different religions and other worldviews on the other hand. In the background, the question of the objective of the subject of religion/worldview in education is: is it about the transmittal of faith, initiation into a certain tradition or is it about informing about the Christian and other religions? Because of his choice for a more distant role this teacher gets tangled up with the value of authenticity. With his own position in Christianity, how can he take on his role as a supervisor of worldview learning processes?

"As a teacher I see myself mainly as an expert in the field of Christian faith and more as an information provider in the field of other religions (...) When a student asks me about my experiences in the field of Christian faith, I can share some of them. That is fundamentally different from my experience of convincing the student. I want to search for connection rather than for contradictions." (Praamsma, 2011, p.47).

This teacher believes that it is not her task in religious education to be proselyting among the students, but rather to create space for sharing their own experiences of faith. When asked she carefully shares her experiences. She doesn't want to create division, but connection. What then is the purpose of witnessing? Is it a task to fulfil only on demand (as seems to be the case with this teacher). How can teachers testify and keep a dialogue going?

The quotes invite to a reflection on the content and function of the role of 'witness' as Pollefeyt has described for hermeneutical-communicative religious education (2011a) in the context of a growing

religious diversity in schools and school teams. Teaching worldview and religion within a hermeneutical-communicative frame work in the context of this diversity aims at the personal worldview identity development of students. Far from wanting to convince students of their own faith, teachers should support students in their search for meaning, using several didactical roles (Mulder & Van den Berg 2019a). Teaching worldview is a hermeneutical enterprise (Lombaerts & Pollefeyt, 2004) aimed at the attribution of meaning to the self and the world, in the perspective of religious and secular worldviews. Handling plurality in a religiously diverse society is one of the goals of worldview education.

Pollefeyt (2008, 2011a, 2011b) describes worldview education in terms of a multiple correlation didactics. Multiple refers to embracing a plurality of world interpretations as meaningful sources for students. Of course teachers in confessional education, like the Roman-Catholic context to which Pollefeyt refers most, can or must have a firm rooting in their own tradition, but their main goal must not be to convince students of its truth but to support them in a collective and private search for meaning in life. The dominant tradition in society (in Europe and America the Christian tradition) taken as a starting point for dialogue on meaning in life is exchanged for another point of departure: the hermeneutical intersection.

Hermeneutical intersections are moments in conversations about life in which a plurality of interpretations comes to light. Students come to understand that life situations can be experienced and interpreted differently in the light of a plurality of religious and non-religious worldview traditions.

For the conversation at these intersections, a teacher must, according to Pollefeyt, take on three hermeneutical roles: the specialist, the moderator and the witness. The *specialist* provides information on religions and philosophical worldviews. The *moderator* teaches students to talk about the significance of religion and philosophy of life in a dialogical and respectful way.

The role of *witness* indicates that the teacher is connected in a committed way to a worldview and this engagement is brought into the classroom conversation. The teacher is a witness to the tradition or traditions that he or she lives by and acts upon. By witnessing teachers act vulnerable: they show something of what touches them and puts them in motion. In this way they function as role models demonstrating how inhabiting a worldview is done.

2

Current discussion in worldview education: witnessing?

In the current rethinking of the profession of religious educator in areas where secularization and increasing worldview diversity is visible most of the times there is no controversy about the relevance and necessity of the roles of moderator and specialist. As it comes to the role of specialist it is obvious that students need to become familiar with the range of worldview traditions (in their forms of appearance in holy books, organizations, rituals, sacred objects and places and so on) that is present in their society, to be able to recognize them and to be able connect them to scientific concepts concerning religious and non-religious worldviews. The teacher in the role of specialist is a guide who critically introduces students in the world of religion and philosophy of life in traditional and contemporary forms. Important goals for this role are the achievement of worldview sensibility and worldview literacy.

The role of moderator is equally and generally appreciated. Students should learn to be respectful of each other in a dialogue about religion and other belief systems which they see in the society around them and to which they are committed or by which they are influenced themselves. As a moderator, the teacher teaches the students how to do that and sets an example in inviting students to find multiple perspectives and discuss them critically. Goals associated with this role are the competence to perform a dialogue respectfully and the handling of diversity as an engaged and responsible

citizen.

It is the third role that Pollefeit named the witness, that raises questions. Het states *“In other words, the religious educator is someone who can and must witness to the traditions to which s/he has derived her/his own religious/ideological identity and from which such identity speaks, breathes and interacts.”* (Pollefeit, 2011a, p. 14). What functions does this witnessing fulfil in relation to the goals of hermeneutical-communicative worldview education? How can witnessing play its part in worldview teaching when this teaching is not aimed at convincing, but at guiding, moderating dialogue and challenging to respond to religious or non-religious worldview content (Mulder & Van den Berg, 2019a)? And wat purposes are intended in witnessing? For example, is the testimony aimed at the transmittal of worldview? Or is the testimony intended to contribute to the motivation of students for the contents of the subject at hand? Is it really desirable and necessary to adopt the role of a witness or can it be sufficient that a teacher provides information (concepts) and teaches the skills to dialogize? Must the worldview educator, working in the context of diversity, not be ‘neutral’ and let students search their own answers on life issues, not interfering in their processes of meaning making with an authoritative opinion connected to a position of power? Shouldn’t we skip this role because of its risk of dismissing the autonomy and freedom of choice of students?

To find some provisional answers to these questions regarding the legitimacy and functions of witnessing we will explore some concepts that help clarify the act of witnessing and situate it in the context of education. We acknowledge that addressing a clarification of the role of witnessing and its legitimacy is connected to normative choices with respect to learning about, into, from or for religion (De Kock, 2015). The answers we seek are embedded in our perspective on learning worldview or religion. We discuss witnessing within our normative framework of hermeneutical-communicative learning (Mulder & Van den Berg 2019a; Mulder & Van den Berg, 2019b).

We start with exploring some general concepts that seem to be present in the semantic realm of witnessing: self-disclosure, authenticity, modelling and moral agency. Then we take a look at the concept of witnessing borrowing some philosophical and Biblical notions from Paul Ricoeur, who uses the concepts ‘attestation’ and ‘témoignage’ (Jansen, 2002).

To probe the context of hermeneutical-communicative learning we describe some pedagogical theological choices of Pollefeit. We close with some thoughts on power, vulnerability and hospitality.

3

Self-disclosure

In witnessing people share something about themselves, something of importance, something connected to who they are. Research shows that self-disclosure – described as “any message about the self that a person communicates to an other” can fulfil important communicative and motivational functions (Cyanus, Martin & Goodboy, 2009). It plays a significant role in affective learning. Self-disclosure enhances student engagement and intensifies the communication in the classroom. It improves motivation and enforces affective learning (Cyanus, Martin & Goodboy, 2009). Is giving a testimony to be considered as a constructive form of self-disclosure? Is this self-disclosure only a bridge to the learning substance or does it serve more goals?

Research indicates that teachers proceed to self-disclosure to maintain and to promote credibility in their relationship with the students (Myers, Brann & Members of Comm 600, 2009).

Also, some older research shows that the teacher's personal convictions are the most important influencing factors in the classroom, more importantly than the teacher's training, educational philosophy or the learning tools (Brown, 2000, p. 60). Jeunen underlines this conclusion and holds a plea for a powerful usage of the testimony (Jeunen, 2010). At least witnessing shares some features of self-disclosure.

Authenticity

We would like to point out that that witnessing fits in an educational climate in which authenticity is valued (Kreber et al., 2007). Not only should schools foster authenticity of the students as a contribution to formation, but also teachers would be empowered when becoming authentic teachers who are more defined by themselves than by others. Living in an 'age of authenticity' religion and worldview have become a matter of choice and subject to "'expressive" individualism' (Taylor, 2007). In the quote of the teacher above we can discern a willingness to disclose herself as a Christian. When she is asked by a student about her experiences in faith she wants to share them. Teaching is a profession of personal involvement, and a teachers identity is a personal fusion of aspects 'coming from within' that are uniquely belonging to the self and aspects that lie 'beyond the self' (Kreber, 2010). Social norms, standards and convictions of the professional teaching community interact with who I am as a person, with my psychological and worldview make-up.

Although authenticity can be seen as a slippery concept literature and teachers personal convictions concur that sincerity, candidness and honesty are building blocks of authenticity (Kreber, 2010). Teachers do not want to hide anything or be a 'fake'. Authenticity can be seen as the expression of a genuine self (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). The content of the self-expression has to be negotiated with regard to the personal and professional goals which are pursued and to the societal and professional constraints that limit self-expression. Teachers want to be authentic in expressing their identity. This also counts for aspects of their personal identity like their sexual and religious identity. You can talk about your cat, but you can also talk about your God. The longing for authenticity can lead to a religious testimony.

Authenticity, however, is not pure self-expression only for the reason to be disclosing yourself as a teacher, but authenticity surmounts self-interest because it aims at a horizon of significance, a greater good (Kreber et al. 2007, p. 35). In worldview education this could mean that authentic teachers not only show their involvement in religious or non-religious worldviews but also share and discuss that this subject matters in the real world and in the lives of teachers and students (Kreber et al., 2007, p.37). Authentic candidness and honesty about personal drives and inspiration connected to worldview sources must be aimed at clarifying the meaning and relevance of worldviews in a world of diversity.

4

Role model

In educational practices modelling is discussed as a new and successful teaching strategy. Instead of solely conveying information teachers show what they teach; they model the content for learning in their behavior and accompany that sometimes with reflections from theory. In the context of teacher educators, one of the goals for modelling is the 'contribution to the professional development of students' (Lunenberg, Korthagen & Swennen, 2007). Transferring this to witnessing in the classroom modelling would serve the goal of contributing to the development of a worldview identity of the students. The way a teacher lives his worldview sets an example that could be followed by the students. Theory considers modelling a powerful tool, especially when this modelling is done explicitly – thinking aloud-, is applied to the lives of the student, and is connected to theory. Research also finds that this kind of modelling is hardly practiced, due to lack of skills and knowledge (Lunenberg, Korthagen & Swennen, 2007). The concept of role model invites worldview educators to rethink witnessing as a kind of modelling, and to explore the skills and knowledge needed to model fruitfully.

Moral agency

Generally speaking teaching is intrinsically a moral practice (Hanson, 1998). When we are speaking in the context of witnessing we want to point to the role of the teacher as a moral agent. In a

sometimes divided society, with young people chasing extreme ideals, uttering polarizing or discriminating opinions in the classroom, an appeal goes out to teachers to create learning environments in which all students experience space for acceptance and learning. Moral agency does not stop by what teachers teach, but comprises how teachers act (Campbell, 2004). A moral agent as a witness refers to the moments in which the teacher has to show his moral convictions in situations where disrespect, discrimination, humiliation, bullying and other varieties of harmful behavior occur. Creating pedagogical safety in a kind of permissiveness to malignant behavior because 'everybody has the right and room to say what he or she thinks right' is not enough. We need brave teachers creating brave spaces (Verduzco-Baker, 2018). We need prophetic witnesses who speak up, right from their heart, sharing their moral emotions and convictions rooted in their worldview. This does not mean that students may not share their convictions, but it means that harmful convictions have to be critically deconstructed at the hermeneutical intersections where all students must feel safe and free to be at that intersection as equals, traveling towards wisdom. In moral agency an aspect of witnessing comes to the fore: the disclosure of moral boundaries rooted in a religious or non-religious worldview.

Witnessing according to Ricoeurⁱ

In general usage the word witnessing means to report on what is seen, felt or heard according to the person. This report, which can be called a testimony, is always, of course, an interpretation in words of the experience spoken about. These words are addressed to an audience of one or more persons and so the act of reporting has to be seen in a communicative context. It functions as a means to convince the listener(s) of the truthfulness of the testimony. The witness wants to be believed.

Testimonies refer to a legal context where there is a debate about the truth. Testimonies have influence on the decisions of judges as they are used as evidence (Jansen, 2002, p. 65). A testimony can be true or false- and therefore it has to be critically evaluated. Testimony also involves the witness as a person ('I have seen', 'I heard', 'I believe'). A witness attests him or herself. Sometimes it can be dangerous to function as a witness, and a testimony can be seen as an engagement with the truth. In witnessing a person stands for the truth as experienced and interpreted.

Ricoeur rejects the concept of absolute truth, and in witnessing people use speech acts that produce less than empirical certainty but more than subjective opinions. A condition is that witnesses have to have credibility to be believed, and also they have to be reliable. Their involvement demonstrates truthfulness when they themselves believe in their testimony and act accordingly (Jansen, 2002, p. 78).

Referring to the Bible, Ricoeur points out that witnesses are sent to witness by God. Their testimony is about experiences of the witness in his or her time and context and it reports about the involvement of God in the events. God attests himself in the narrative of the testimony. Prophets witness to the one true God in the Old or First Testament. In the gospels and in Acts the testimony is attached to the work of Jesus. Although the testimony can be read as a confession it never loses the connection to the reports of eye and ear witnesses. The content of the testimony always refers to the acts of Jesus. Jesus is depicted as the Son of God. God is involved in the act of witnessing in the New or Second Testament.

Jansen (2002, p. 86/87) points at two kinds of interpretation when we hear the testimony about Christ: first we are invited to interpret the content, f.e. "Jesus is lord"; and second we have to decide whether this is a true or false testimony. Believers will never have absolute certainty about truth about God, and are at the same time again and again depending on truthful testimonies.

What do we learn from these Ricoeurian philosophical and Biblical remarks? First, witnessing is not preaching confessions or dogma's from an authoritative position but sharing lived experience. It

speaks to the heart and the imagination even more than to reason. Second, it is not sharing the truth but sharing experience in words of own interpretation that are open for debate and discussion. Third, witnessing is connected to the wish to be believed as a witness, so it is about authenticity and truthfulness. Fourth, witnessing is always about *my* experience, it is sharing the self. And fifth, witnessing is a vulnerable act: you may or may not be believed. You can be rejected, especially when your testimony has prophetic content with moral judgements. With the words of the New Testament: a prophet has no honor or acceptance in his home town (John 4,44; Luke 4,24).

Backgrounds of Pollefeyt's role of the witness

In religious education Pollefeyt does not search for a neutral or non-committed transfer of knowledge about religion nor does he want to promote to convince the absolute truth stemming from one religion. Learning about worldview is according to his hermeneutical-communicative perspective a dialogical search for truth in which several options are to be reviewed, deconstructed and tested. Nevertheless, this collaborative search for meaning, taking wisdom from several worldview sources, is always an engaged activity. Students are invited to take position and the teacher is expected to be living, speaking and teaching as a person with a clear worldview identity. So the dialogue Pollefeyt fosters at the hermeneutical junctions in the classroom is a dialogue of engaged people. In this dialogue there is room for a critical examination of several perspectives. Teaching a certain religion is best done by an adherent of that tradition. In the context of Roman-Catholic education this means that Pollefeyt prefers that the subject of Roman-Catholic religion should be taught by devout Catholics (Pollefeyt, 2011a). This does not imply relativism, but for the sake of the dialogue it means some and temporary distance of one's own truth claims (Pollefeyt, De Vlioger & Smit, 2011c). A hermeneutical position means that truth is not fixed but always interpreted in the context of life situations and that a religious identity is also not fixed or finished but always changing. From this flexible identity a teacher testifies: "A teacher bears witness of his or her own constructed, particular, Christian synthesis of faith, and its being under construction". (Pollefeyt, 2011b, p. 6).

This witnessing takes part in the context of diversity and pluralization of visible traditions in our society. Pollefeyt's concept of religious-education is therefore a proposal of interreligious education that uses multi-correlation instead of mono-correlation. The experiences of students are connected to more than one worldview tradition, because the plausibility for mono-correlation has vanished in a plural society. When plurality is mirrored in the student body the ingredients are there to create a dialogue in which mutual witnessing takes place and multi-correlation can be given form. But what about equality and the power that comes with the position of the teacher? How can religious educators honor the autonomy and freedom of the students to make choices that do not concur with their testimonies?

The attitude in which witnessing takes place has to be shaped by some important convictions to enable the creation of a safe space for a genuine process of searching for meaning.

The first conviction is that teachers realize that their own truth is just that. Pollefeyt states that truth is an eschatological concept that lies in the future (Pollefeyt, 2011a, p. 15). Truth owns the middle ground between ontology and relativism. It is never to be reached definitely and the human being as a hermeneutical creature looking for meaning and able to deliberate reasons of existence (Pollefeyt, 2011b, p. 13) is searching for meaning until he dies. Realizing that truth is a good that no one possesses fully teachers might see their testimony as a contribution to a collaborative search for meaning. They should hold an open and curious concept of truth. Impartiality is a condition and a skill that can be learned, even by teachers holding strong beliefs (Jackson & Everington, 2017).

The second conviction that can shape an attitude that fosters an open dialogue of mutual witnessing

is that of abductive learning. According to Pollefeyt an approach that seeks the middle position between inductive learning (starting correlation from experience) and deductive learning (starting correlation from tradition). Abductive learning awards a great responsibility to students who search in their biography and experience what they already know of traditional wisdom. This knowledge is challenged in new experiences, interpretations and thought experiments. The correlations between experiences and traditions are not imposed by the teacher, but discovered and explored (Pollefeyt, 2011b, p. 10). The testimony of the teacher must be seen as a modest contribution of discovery and exploration, being an example of correlation that the teacher found in his or her own biography. A third conviction is a didactical one: the teachers see learning religious or non-religious worldview as an open process in which purposive correlating is sustained. Although pedagogically religious learning is seen within the perspective of multi-correlation lessons are non-correlatively structured. This protects teachers from all too easily and quickly correlation experiences to wisdom of a certain tradition. Correlating too facile may close the students for new interpretations, questions and thought experiences as it may look as if the answer to a certain question is already there. Continuous questioning keeps the learning process going and within this process of questioning the testimony of the teacher may take place.

Keeping these three convictions in mind the role of the witness in hermeneutical-communicative education can be described as follows (Pollefeyt, 2011b, p. 18): *“a readiness to dare to lead religious and Christian conversations as well as preceding in games, expressions, emotions and spirituality. In doing so, the teacher does not see him or herself as the one path, truth, and life, but as a guide, or rather as the person that shows students cliffs and beacons, traps and points of reference in their search for meaning. It is therefore important that the teacher is in touch with the deeper (or higher) layers of him or herself and of the students.”*

7

Testimony, power and hospitality

We close with the theological perspective of hospitality: inviting students to discover and develop their own identity in an open space of mutual witnessing is an act of hospitality. This act does not exclude but does indeed include the act of witnessing. Witnessing is not an act of power or coercion. It does not limit or close the possibilities of the other, but as a fragile testimony it opens up new ways of understanding faith (Moyaert, 2011). In education sometimes witnessing is seen as opposed to respect for persons to make their own choices. Respecting persons is respecting differences (Baurain, 2007). Speaking from a Christian perspective all people deserve to be respected equally, regardless their differences. Of course there are example of Christianity and other religions in which there is little room for diversity because of their contention of the existence of an absolute truth (which they possess). Even if one might define witnessing as ‘living out one’s beliefs in purposeful ways so as to persuade others also to accept them as true’ (Baurain, 2007, p.210) this does not necessarily has to lead to a praxis of disrespecting other views and narrowing down the space for differences.

Witnessing can only be fruitful when performed in an attitude of humility and hospitality.

Respecting the hermeneutical condition in worldview education we do not believe an absolute or object truth about human existence is available. In the context of institutionalized or personal religious or non-religious worldviews people pursue a good life in their own ways. We consider this diversity as positive and as an invitation to hermeneutical openness for the otherness of the other, which is a difficult virtue (Moyaert, 2011, p. 277). In a situation of diversity witnessing is a vulnerable act because the certainty of the witness can be disputed, and the testimony can be rejected.

Nevertheless, certainty cannot be imposed but can only be shared in a humble and hospitable way in an open dialogue, because we recognize and acknowledge the fragility of our wisdom, listening to the wisdom of others. Teachers should consider their structural position of power and always invite

students to critically discuss their fragile testimony. In that way they act out hospitality in an attitude of humility.

Conclusion

Let us wrap up what we found. Witnessing as a concept relates to some general educational concepts. We can say it is embedded in a conceptual network (authenticity, role model, self-disclosure, moral agency) and shares some features of these concepts that describe aspects of education. It fulfils functions related to these general concepts: f.i. witnessing motivates in the way self-disclosure motivates, it makes a learning situation genuine like authenticity does.

Furthermore we stressed that witnessing can help student develop their personal identity, because by default a testimony is open for discussion. Whether or not a testimony is believed depends on truthfulness. Whether or not a testimony leads to adopting the same worldview depends on the subsequent critical discussion and personal views and choices of the students.

Witnessing can have prophetic qualities (moral agency), and a teacher can be obliged to speak up against all kinds of unwanted behavior.

Witnessing, however, has to be performed under certain conditions, based on some convictions that fit a hermeneutical approach. It has to be performed as an act of hospitality. Then it can serve as a productive didactical role in hermeneutical-communicative worldview education.

So, witnessing by teachers of their experiences and personal knowledge related to their own worldview can be a meaningful resource in the classroom when performed within the boundaries of the hermeneutical-communicative framework.

8

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ⁱ In this section we follow the interpretation of Ricoeur from Jansen (2002, pp. 64-88).

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Toward ‘faith-adjacent’ pedagogies: Reconfiguring the roles, spaces, and practices of religious education

Social and religious change are posing significant challenges for religious institutions and giving rise to novel forms of religious and spiritual community. How learning happens in such communities, and how religious educators can help shape it, is sometimes difficult to understand and describe via traditional framings of the work of religious education. In this conceptual analysis, I draw on religious, social, and anthropological literature and ethnographic field data from several recent studies to theorize “faith-adjacent” spaces, and to illustrate the analytic benefits and pedagogical possibilities raised by this reframing.

Social and religious change in the U.S. are challenging our long-held understandings of *who* are the teachers and learners engaged in religious education, *where* these changing constituencies convene for such learning and formation, *how* they are growing together through shared practices, and *why* they choose to do so.

Consider the case of Tapestry¹, a foster youth mentoring organization run by two Protestant ministers in a Western U.S. metropolitan area. The founders of Tapestry originally set out to found a new, denominationally affiliated congregation. Tapestry, the church, would engage the primary mission work of growing healing and developmentally supportive community around young people in the foster care system. Over the course of several foundational years spent connecting a network of (1) adult mentor teams, (2) the individual youth those teams support, and (3) facilitators who coordinate and troubleshoot weekly mentor team outings, Tapestry’s co-directors decided this network *was* the community they had set out to build—albeit one with a very different group identity from what they expected or were familiar with.

Tapestry is not a church, but it is an explicitly spiritual community convened by ordained religious leaders. It’s not a religious educational endeavor per se, but it does engage practices of learning, healing, caring, growth, and inclusion that have much in common with at least some of the formational objectives and trajectories found in congregations and certain schools, camps, and other explicitly religious settings and programs. As such, it has stimulated my thinking about

¹ People, place, and organization names from the ethnographic studies discussed in this paper are pseudonyms.

the limits of our traditional theorizing about the broad purposes of religious education in the U.S. and beyond.

Without finding new ways to complement more familiar framings of religious educational purposes, tasks, and challenges, I believe it will be increasingly difficult to communicate about our sites and modes of teaching and research—with each other as practitioners and scholars, and with publics much less likely to organize their understandings and practices of religion and spirituality with respect to traditional categories (Drescher 2016; McGuire 2008; Smith and Snell 2009; Wuthnow 2007). Moreover, exposure and/or commitment to spiritual and religious diversity must continue to register not just in how religious educators talk about our work, *but also how we conduct it*. As we shall see, the challenge for educators who are in various ways representatives of particular faiths is especially ambiguous and especially acute in these times of rapid change and high institutional anxiety.

This paper will draw on religious, social, and anthropological literature and on ethnographic field data from my research partnership with Tapestry and from other projects. Following colleagues in literacy studies and other fields, I draw on spatial theory to conceptually analyze how we position the roles and practices of religious education in a complex religious landscape like the U.S.—where religious belief is quite widespread but traditional religious affiliation is rapidly declining (Gallup 2019; Pew Research Center 2015; Putnam 2000), and where interest in spiritual practices is high but so is ambivalence about the roles of authority figures and institution-based community (Drescher 2016; Gallup 2018; Pew Research Center 2016). I develop and illustrate an empirically responsive framing that theorizes what I call *faith-adjacent spaces* and that discusses some of the benefits of taking a faith-adjacent stance in our religious education.

Literature review: Framing the orientation(s) of religious education

In this first section, I review several authors' high-level understandings of the purposes and priorities of religious education. While obviously not comprehensive, this summary of approaches provides a foundation and trajectory for further theorizing religious education in light of the shifting landscape described above.

Working in the UK primarily during the final third of the twentieth century, **Michael Grimmitt** carves out a role between “confessional” religious nurture on one hand and purely a phenomenological religious studies orientation on the other. His advocacy for going beyond *learning about* religion to *learning from* religion provides an important precedent for thinking about how educators can not only inform but also stimulate a religiously diverse community of students: “[Religious education]’s prime responsibility [is] to help pupils to come to terms with questions about their own identity, their own values and life-styles, their own priorities and commitments, and their own frame of reference for viewing life and giving it meaning” (Grimmitt 1981, 49). His pedagogy uses religion “as a tool” for “reflection, judgement, thought

processes, [and the] search for meaning and identity of the students” (Engebretson 2006, 677). I believe Grimmitt’s hybrid approach (see table 1) and those like it—previously relevant mostly to settings where religious education takes place in committedly pluralistic settings—is becoming increasingly important for representatives of *particular* traditions providing even confessional formation or nurture.

Philosophers of education **Hanan Alexander** and **Terence McLaughlin** (2003) draw on a number of categories and metaphors to organize their civically minded philosophical discussion. They delineate education in religion and spirituality² “*from the outside* ... in which no one religious or spiritual tradition is given normative status” against education “*from the inside* ... in separate religious schools” and “other educative contexts” that “attempt to form and nourish a commitment to the particular beliefs, values, and practices of a specific religious and spiritual tradition” (361, italics mine). The authors associate the ability of the former approach to form *openness*, both to knowledge of and acceptance of diverse religious communities and to the spiritual dimensions³ of all human life. The latter they associate with an ability to form *rootedness* in particular traditions.

Nevertheless, the pair conversely nod to the fact that true openness “from the outside” requires an empathetic appreciation for the ways particular communities are rooted, and that education “from the inside” demands careful preservation of the autonomy of especially those who find themselves in such an educational setting despite outsider status with respect to the majority identity. Thus, while I do not detect in their account a desire to construct a distinctly hybrid approach, as Grimmitt does, it is clear the pair wishes for both approaches to take account of the central insights of the other and to apply those insights when appropriate.

A teacher, teacher educator, and researcher in Singapore, **Charlene Tan** (2009) engages with Alexander, McLaughlin, Grimmitt and others and organizes her treatment around the question of commitment. She critiques *teaching about commitment* in part for reasons similar to Grimmitt’s advocacy for moving beyond the purely phenomenological approach. However, she also finds the liberal ideology at the heart of a supposedly neutral stance to, in practice, bias educational systems against religion entirely. On the other hand, Tan views *teaching for commitment* to be inappropriate even in religiously monolithic contexts⁴ because of its close

² The pair treat religion and spirituality separately and include a helpful distinction between spiritualities that are tethered to and untethered from various religious traditions. Nevertheless, in the question of whether to treat the two separately, I concur with Drescher (2016) “that the ongoing debate about what counts as ‘spiritual’ and what is more properly ‘religious’ reveals more about who is using these words than about the terms themselves or, perhaps more significantly, than it does about the spiritual and/or religious experiences and commitments of ordinary Americans in the midst of everyday lives” (7).

³ The pair define spirituality through a discussion of five distinct strands: searching for meaning, “cultivat[ing] ‘inner space,’” manifesting virtues in everyday life, responding to the human and natural worlds (“awe, wonder, and reverence”), and sharing in community (359–360).

⁴ Tan intentionally does not differentiate between religious education, i.e., in schools, and other forms of religious nurture or upbringing, i.e., at home or in faith communities (210).

association with indoctrination and its inconsistency with the desire to preserve learners' rational autonomy.

Consequently, Tan also advocates for a hybrid approach, one that she calls *teaching from commitment*. This two-step process involves first introducing a single religious framework and then, over time and in age-appropriate ways, subjecting it to critical reflection. From Tan I take the importance of even religiously affiliated instructors learning to bracket their own wishes about their students' religious formation. Her implied strategy of doing so by stressing perspective-sharing (*from* commitment) rather than case-making (*for* commitment) seems to me a realistic compromise⁵ between teachers' desire to pass on faith to a new generation (Foster 2012; Westerhoff 2012) and students' awareness of the many "fully-formed alternatives ... before us" (Taylor 2007, 28).

A Catholic religious educator teaching in a U.S. Lutheran seminary, **Mary Hess** calls religious educators who represent particular faiths to locate and emphasize the parts of their traditions that look *beyond* those traditions (a "from the inside" approach that focuses its attention "to the outside"). She calls this approach "respect[ing] a community of communities" (2017, 38), and she notes that it often receives only lip service: "a curriculum that explicitly names religious pluralism as a contemporary issue, but then marginalizes it to study in only a few courses, or only in electives, implicitly teaches that religious pluralism is actually not all that relevant or important to practices of faith" (2017, 38). Rather, she asks elsewhere,

Can we embody religious education that educates *within* and *for* specific religious communities, but also and concurrently *with* and *for* people who are not part of religious communities? Can we reach people who might have very little interest in, or perhaps even hostility towards, religious institutions? I fear that until and unless religious communities can communicate ... our integral and inextricable commitments to relationship across, among, within, between and amidst various kinds of difference, we will lose even more ground with a generation of people growing to consciousness within the rich and varied landscapes of the US. (2016, 1, italics hers)

Thus, Hess remixes multiple approaches defined above, nodding to Alexander and McLaughlin's inside/outside framing, trusting with Grimmitt that it is possible simultaneously to nurture the belief and practice of religiously *diverse* learners, and seeking like Tan to uphold the autonomy

⁵ Of course, she is far from alone in making this point. See, for example, Westerhoff (2012) writing from his tradition: "To be Christian is to ask: What can I bring to another? Not: What do I want that person to know or be?" (Kindle location 424). Even Alexander and McLaughlin (2003) hold up such a standard, calling it "a kind of 'openness with roots'": "Students are exposed to, and involved in, a form of education articulated by a particular conception of the good, but they are encouraged to put their formation into critical perspective and to make any acceptance of it on their part authentic" (369). In fact, I debated whether to put "openness with roots" in the hybrid column of table 1, but doing so seemed to confuse a discussion that despite acknowledging some mild and partial hybridity, nevertheless is intentionally organized around the inside/outside dichotomy.

of students exploring or committed to identities that may go against the grain in a particular setting.

Table 1 Summary of various authors’ framings of religious education

Author(s)	Purely secular approach	<i>notes on relationships⁶</i>	Hybrid approach	<i>notes on relationships</i>	Purely religious approach
Grimmit (1981), see also Engebretson (2006)	<u>Learning about religion</u> via phenomenological process for the purposes of descriptive, comparative knowledge	← <i>provides foundation for</i> →	<u>Learning from religion</u> via educational process for the purposes of personal development	← <i>must avoid engaging in</i> →	<u>Learning through⁷ religion</u> via nurturing process for the purposes of strengthened religious commitment
Alexander & McLaughlin (2003)	Education in religion and spirituality <u>from the outside</u> to form openness (understanding, tolerance, civic virtue)	← <i>must still be grounded in empathy that is particular to</i> →		→ <i>must still avoid uncritical indoctrination against</i> ←	Education in religion and spirituality <u>from the inside</u> to form rootedness (beliefs, practices of distinct traditions)
Tan (2009)	<u>Teaching about commitment</u> to expound “a wide range of religious views in a neutral and objective fashion ” (210)	→ <i>protects against the reductionist and secularist impulses of</i> ←	<u>Teaching from commitment</u> by introducing primary framework then nurturing autonomy	← <i>protects against the indoctrinatory impulses of</i> →	<u>Teaching for commitment</u> to “ catechize believers into the faith ” (210)
Hess (2016; 2017)	“[E]mbrac[ing] relationality across difference ... without perceiving such practices as being in any way connected to religion ” (2016, 1)	→ <i>authorizes and challenges participants to examine own and others’ beliefs and practices in context, in contrast to</i> ←	Educating for <u>community of communities</u> “within and for” particular traditions, and “with and for” traditions’ non-members	← <i>ensures alignment between explicit and implicit curriculum’s claims to value difference, in contrast to</i> →	“[R]equir[ing] identity to be constructed through only one community ” (2017, 38)

⁶ The arrows should be interpreted as follows: ← = “the approach to the left”; → = “the approach to the right.” E.g., “Learning about religion provides foundation for learning from religion.”

⁷An extrapolation representing my best guess at how Grimmitt would extend the “learning ____” formula.

Conceptual analysis: A spatial turn for religious education

There are a number of appeals to spatial reasoning in the understandings of religious education surveyed in the previous section and summarized in table 1. The most explicit is Alexander and McLaughlin's (2003) discussion of religious and spiritual education *from the outside* versus *from the inside*. In this case, and in others that replicate its logic, what determines the boundaries of "inside" and "outside"? While it may be true that there are characteristic "inside" and "outside" pedagogies and learning activities, it seems to me unavoidable in this way of framing things that participants and observers will be led to ask, by extension, who are the "insiders" and who are the "outsiders"?

I see such a framing as significantly problematic. First, even if we view insider/outsider labels themselves as somehow neutral⁸, this framing fails to account for the tension that Tan registers in her proposal of a two-step process of first learning the tradition and then questioning it (but see also footnote 5). For example, if I'm a youth or adult seeker or inquirer in a Christian baptism or confirmation class, am I likely to experience my positionality as "on the inside"? Likely not, I'd venture, and certainly not fully. Indeed, many of the traditions of the catechumenate seem especially and appropriately designed to mark a hybrid or liminal status: periodic public liturgies of intention setting, particular ways of conducting oneself inside and outside the worship space, etc.

Moreover, empirical research suggests that an inside/outside framing is overly simplistic even for a significant number of—to use a Christian term with a certain spatial sensibility—"people in the pews." Drescher (2016) provocatively emphasizes this point in her choice to compare and contrast religious Nones with those she calls "Somes"—who, despite their positive affiliation, turn out to have much in common spiritually and sometimes even religiously with Nones⁹. As I mentioned in the introduction, Drescher and others (McGuire 2008; Smith and Snell 2009; Wuthnow 2007) are helping us come to a clearer understanding of a phenomenon that was probably always true and is certainly becoming more numerically significant: the people "inside" our traditions and our individual faith communities aren't as religiously or spiritually similar as we might be tempted to believe, nor are the people "outside" as dissimilar. If our categories for understanding are getting messier, so should the ways that we teach and learn with them. For example, my pedagogy *from the inside* as an Episcopal priest serving on Sunday mornings is likely at best to fall flat with and at worst to erase the experiences of many

⁸ Or even as fraught but inevitable—no group identity without a group boundary, etc.

⁹ Perhaps most strikingly, *both the religiously affiliated (78%) and unaffiliated (22%)* in her Spiritual Practices Survey (N=1,166) ranked what she calls "'The Four Fs of Contemporary American Spirituality': Fido, Family, Friends, and Food" as the most meaningful spiritual practices (e.g., "enjoying time with family," "preparing or sharing food"); even the Somes ranked "attending worship" and "studying sacred scriptures" near the bottom of the list, with prayer coming in below the Four Fs but above other practices for both groups.

participants who are not *insiders* with respect to all¹⁰ or even many of the various dimensions of Christian belief and practice.

Most importantly, though, I argue *any* framing that accepts religious education settings as empty or neutral space—or even as straightforwardly delineated, enfused¹¹, filled¹², or set aside, e.g., a house of worship as “sacred space,” a classroom as “learning space,” etc.—fails to adequately account for the insights of postmodern geographers and other social thinkers who attend to the perceived, imagined, and lived¹³ complexities of space. Writing in the introduction to an important volume in literacy studies, Sheehy and Leander (2004) call for a spatial turn in their field of educational research and beyond:

Whereas space was once thought of as empty, available, and waiting to be filled up, recent theorizing about space has brought to light that space is a product and process of socially dynamic relations. Space is not static—as in metaphorical images of borders, centers, and margins—it is dynamically relational. Space, as a noun, must be reconceived as an active, relational verb, which is our intent in invoking “spatializing.” (1)

To spatialize our understandings of religious education, we have to see and imagine our spaces more complexly—as simultaneously serving many purposes for diverse constituencies, groups and subgroups whose members are connected to and beyond each other in ways that need to be traced out rather than taken as a sociological given (Latour 2005). According to Knott (2005), the value of understanding religious spaces in these theorists’ terms is

realised through an awareness of the *interconnectedness* of events and *relational nature* of the persons, objects, and places that constitute space. The spaces of religion ... are overlapping, co-existent, in parallel with other spaces, and because they are internally in tension, being made up of multiple, contested, real, and imagined sites and relations. (23, italics hers)

In the remainder of this section, I will discuss three characteristics of social space described by these theorists¹⁴ and ask what difference these characteristics might make to our understanding of our spaces of religious education. As we will see, a spatial framing according to these rich

¹⁰ Beaudoin (2008) points out that “[t]he very opposition between ‘picking and choosing’ and ‘accepting the whole’ is itself a recent way of imagining, often for the sake of intended control, what the ‘options’ for belief are today” (Kindle location 1955).

¹¹ As with an ethos, spirit, or pedagogical approach.

¹² As with religious insiders, and possibly also outsiders.

¹³ See Oliver (2018) for a brief discussion of these three principal categories from Henri Lefebvre and their relevance to one of the ethnographic studies discussed later in this paper.

¹⁴ Leander and Vasudevan (2009), following Massey (2005).

characteristics will inevitably call us to ask the big questions of people, purpose, and process with which I began this essay.

The first thing we need to know about social space is that it is **relational**: “constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global¹⁵ to the intimately tiny” (Massey 2005, 9). You instantiate (or re-instantiate) the space around us when you shout at or whisper to me from across the street, or the Twitterverse, or the classroom, and the choice to shout or whisper is as formative of the space as your choice of venue, as is how or even whether I choose to respond. *If space is relational, then the cohesion of our spaces of religious education is constituted not only by each teacher’s and student’s relationship to the content, but by their relationships with each other.* Intentional pedagogical design can attempt to influence the latter as well as the former, but the latter is even more resistant to any attempts at control.

Next, and consequently, we note that social space is **hybrid**, “the sphere ... of coexisting heterogeneity” (Massey 2005, 9). The central column of table 1 explores one way in which religious educational spaces can take on a hybrid character, i.e., approaches shaped by two different broad orientations to particular religious experience. But spatial theory helps us recognize hybridity of quite another order of magnitude: “Wherever two or three are gathered”¹⁶—how much more so eight or ten or thirty or hundreds—we will find “the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality” (Massey 2005, 9). Here again, a certain wild unpredictability comes to the fore, especially as we take stock of the (potentially) growing presence and impact of learners committed to a religious and spiritual identity characterized by the mantra “No Labels Except No Labels” (Drescher 2016, 21). *If space is complexly hybrid, then the composition of our spaces of religious education will always make them stubbornly resistant to generalized, homogenous characterization.* Here I particularly appreciate the way Hess’s “community of communities” framing for religious education foregrounds acknowledgement of, wrestling with, and rejoicing in forms of difference—religious difference, and also ways other kinds of relationships and life commitments complexly intersect with our religious identities.¹⁷

Finally, social space is **dynamic**, “always under construction,” borne forth in each moment by “material practices which have to be *carried out*” (Massey 2005, 9, italics mine). Such a way of understanding the practices in progress in our spaces of religious education seems especially important during a time when “traditional modes of *believing, belonging, and behaving*” mean less to most Nones and Somes than “narratives ... of *being and becoming*”

¹⁵ This explicit mention of global interactions reminds us, for example, of the role *digital* interactions may play in convening social and religious space. I have discussed these dynamics in depth elsewhere (Oliver 2019; following Campbell 2012; Vasudevan 2010).

¹⁶ Matthew 18:20a.

¹⁷ See also Beaudoin (2008): “the particular beliefs that are ‘sanctioned’ by religious leadership at any particular time and place are *deeply implicated in ‘nontheological’ or ‘nonreligious’ political, social, cultural, and economic factors*” (Kindle location 1953, italics mine).

(Drescher 2016, 13, italics hers). In other words, we have the opportunity to align, on the one hand, the lived reality that learning (and/as relating) is always unfinished business with, on the other hand, the lived reality that religious identities are no less a work in progress. I have chosen to align my own research with those seeking to shape religious educational spaces by convening diverse communities of identity-rich narrativity—in which story “tellers” (Hess 2012; 2014), story “linkers” (Wimberly 2005), or story “sharers” (Mallette Stephens 2018) join their voices in what Massey (2005) might call the resonant and/or dissonant “simultaneity of stories-so-far” (9). *If space is dynamic, then the (inevitably multifaceted) learning objectives operating in our spaces of religious education mock our attempts to prescribe¹⁸ or proscribe particular outcomes of identity and disposition.*

We are now in a position, I hope, to appreciate the full utility of framing the spaces (and hence diverse participants and purposes) of religious education as increasingly *faith-adjacent*. I began using this term merely to distinguish my work at my first research site from what I take to be the popular understanding of *most* religious education activities in the U.S. context, where Grimmitt-esque religious education isn’t prominent¹⁹. “Faith-adjacent” seemed to capture my orientation as an Episcopal priest conducting participatory storytelling research in a church-run but decidedly non-religious summer camp, a camp that nevertheless met in a church and that included both members and nonmembers²⁰ of the congregation as counselors and staff (see Oliver 2018). When I later met the leaders of Tapestry and started attending the organization’s events, the label began to feel durable for a kind of space and kind of learning taking place in novel not-quite-religious communities.

But as I hope the foregoing spatialized analysis has suggested, an appropriately nuanced understanding of “adjacency” to faith may be quite appropriate for understanding a growing

¹⁸ While I appreciate certain religious leader colleagues’ adoption of the term “faith formation” to distinguish their work from descriptive/phenomenological *learning about religion*, I am nevertheless increasingly of the opinion that seeking to broaden the sense of “education” beyond mere schooling or “book learning” in the narrow sense is a more advisable rhetorical move than telling participants in *any* of our religious education spaces that the forming of faith is a learning community’s ultimate and shared objective.

¹⁹ In other words, I hoped to maximize the potential of my mentors and classmates in a secular doctoral program to nevertheless be engaged with and supportive of my research beyond what might have been possible were I working in the mode(s) of table 1’s right-hand column approaches.

²⁰ And notice that these nonmembers might be quite comfortable describing their relationship to this church and its faith as “adjacent” in any number of senses: “I live in the neighborhood,” “I hang out there sometimes,” “I volunteer in their outreach programs but don’t go to services,” or “I go to services there but don’t really believe all the dogma.” I’m thinking especially of the complex relationship one “Lutheran-None” among Drescher’s (2016) research subjects has with the church where she sings in the choir: “I’ve been *around* church for long enough to know that most of it is a lot of crap. I don’t believe very much of it. But I like to sing, and I couldn’t do that if I told everyone I’m probably a None” (13, italics mine).

number of religious education spaces in a religiously pluralistic world—including many we wouldn't have thought to label as such, and some we might have been overeager to:

- Since learning spaces are convened through all kinds of interaction and relationship, then a conversation doesn't have to take place in a teaching space adjoining a house of worship or at a formally organized interreligious dialog to “count” as religious education. Any interaction in which one or more participants' faith is named, noticed²¹, called upon, or otherwise implicated is faith-adjacent²², i.e., *connected to or bound up with* faith, when considered through the lens of spatial theory. If disaffiliation trends continue in the U.S. context, such interactions (“pop-up spaces”?) may come to be the most influential sites of religious education.
- Since learning spaces are inevitably marked by the multiplicity of their diverse participants, understanding them as “inside” or “outside” a religious tradition through appeals to a singular identity categories of those present, or to an abstract set of practices and beliefs appropriate (or not) to a particular faith, may not be especially useful. This is not to say that a religiously diverse community holding space to together at a particular moment convenes religious education in some momentary “composite faith”; rather, their learning space is in that moment complexly adjacent to any number of faiths implicated by the participants' various networks of commitments and relations.²³
- Since learning spaces are dynamically open-ended, and growing numbers of Americans and others feel comfortable following these learning trajectories in diverse, “contradictory,” or non-normative²⁴ directions, educators with a faith-adjacent framing for their work prepare for, and support as they are able, the journeys their students choose to undertake. In my view, wishing that the nature of learning spaces were different or that None-style orientations to faith were less popular is not an excuse for choosing pedagogies that work against rather than with these realities, even if we work in contexts still better described as straightforwardly religious rather than faith-adjacent.

²¹ See especially Knott's (2005) discussion of de Certeau's “walking rhetorics” in the special case of religious people's spatial practices, such as wearing religious clothing in public or making (even unconscious) routine religious gestures (39–42).

²² Or “religion- and/or spirituality-adjacent” if you prefer. As for me and my household, losing a little precision seems a small price to pay for dropping so many syllables. See footnote 2.

²³ Such a view makes me sympathetic to, or has perhaps been partially formed by, Latour's (2005) methodological skepticism about the sociological givenness of various groups or categories—his mantra is “No Group, Only Group Formation” (27). I am intrigued by the connections (pun intended) between these spatial theorists' work and Latour's actor-network theory and working to articulate this fusion in my dissertation work on faith-adjacent communities.

²⁴ To religious leaders or to the wider social practices of the surrounding cultural milieu.

Illustrations & discussion: Two moments of faith-adjacent religious education

Having sketched this orientation to religious education and discussed some of the ways it both differs from and builds on well-known understandings from the literature, I now seek to illustrate some of the characteristics of a spatialized understanding in action. I will describe two significant ethnographic turning points or narrative moments (see Oliver 2018²⁵; following Bruner 1994; Lambert 2012; Ricœur 1991; Taylor 2016) in learning spaces that I believe are appropriately, and productively, understood as faith-adjacent.

Moment: Embodying faith-adjacency through flexible, pluralistic pedagogy at Tapestry

On my second formal ethnographic field visit with Tapestry, I observed explicit faith-adjacent pedagogies in action amid the multifaith learning space convened by co-director Hannah. The event was a monthly mentor training, what turned out to be their largest to date. I saw when I arrived that Hannah was wearing her clerical collar, as she often does. Her collar was just one of the symbols of her role as a religious leader, but one she would complexify over the course of the morning. Our introductory activity involved a form of sharing and listening seeded by a reflective step in which we wrote our names in the center of a circle and words that “describe [our] world” in the space outside the circle. After each participant spoke about significant parts of their world and what those elements had to do with their decision to explore becoming a Tapestry mentor, Hannah then introduced a presentation about the “core principles” of Tapestry. She said this presentation would help everyone get clearer about how they would care for their youth “both biologically and spiritually.”

²⁵ I have since significantly expanded this paper’s discussion of the analytic character of narrative turning points in ethnography. I will gladly share as work in progress with interested scholars as I revise this theoretical and methodological essay for publication.



Figure 1 A photograph of the January 12 mentor training, taken by Hannah. Instagram post de-identified via procedure similar to that of Kligler-Vilenchik and Literat (2018).

The core principles presentation²⁶ began with Hannah unloading a blue backpack full of objects that she used to tell a Montessori-style story about Tapestry’s four guiding principles: hope, presence, recreation, and communion. The first object was a 6–8 inch circular yin-yang disc (lower right in figure 2) with a labyrinth pattern printed on it. She said that this training, and each meeting with our youth, would “start at a threshold,” and it would be good for us to “walk slowly with deliberation.” She said this work is about holding space, sacred space, safe space—and that as with walking a labyrinth, we’d need to ask at the end how do we walk back into everyday life. When she later placed the articulated wooden figure near the PRESENCE placard (upper left), she said, “You have what you need to be a mentor. Bring your full self. You don’t need to do or be anything special.” When placing the interlocking gears toy (lower left), she referenced her ministerial and denominational identity and said “[In] our tradition communion is about togetherness. We want you to never feel alone in this work. There are many layers of support.”

This moment was a turning point in my understanding of Tapestry. I later confirmed with Hannah that the core principles presentation reflects her training in Godly Play (Berryman 2009), a popular and well-respected story-based curriculum used for experiential religious education with elementary-aged children in traditional congregations. I had seen a few Godly Play stories told to adults before, but certainly never any that began with a well-known symbol from Chinese

²⁶ Tapestry has since shared a standalone video version of this presentation, which I have deidentified and made available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWxOLJyNNE4>

philosophy and cosmology. Her willingness to adopt, for a multifaith learning community, a common educational practice that would be at home in the right-hand column of table 1 shows an obvious way in which her Christian faith is connected to the space she co-convened with the community of trainees, but in a hybridized way. Indeed, she simultaneously and consistently invited the others present to bring connections from their own religious and spiritual practice to bear²⁷, pointing out that the guiding principles are connected in particular ways to Christianity but can and should take on different meanings for different participants. I don't know if she had Drescher's work in mind, but it seems especially fitting that Hannah began the presentation by discussing the very practice (labyrinth walking) with which Drescher opens *Choosing Our Religion*²⁸. In sum, many faiths were woven into the Tapestry on that January morning, for the primary purpose of helping trainees learn to support their youth and each other in the spiritual art of healing—flexibly and pluralistically understood.



Figure 2 Artifacts Hannah used to tell the “guiding principles” story.

The potency of relationality at St. Sebastian’s Camp (and Church)

If the Tapestry example highlights the kind of hybridity we might expect to be at play in a faith-adjacent learning space, a moment from my research at St. Sebastian’s can show us the

²⁷ A precedent she set in beginning with the “world sharing” activity, notice.

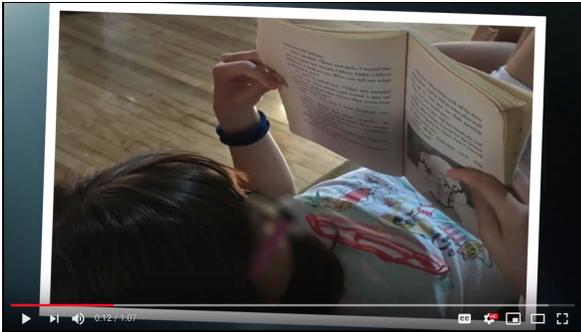
²⁸ “Labyrinths are in many ways the perfect symbol for the spiritual lives of many Americans today, appearing as they do in traditional religious settings as well as in the ad hoc spiritualities of people affiliated with institutional religions as well as those whose spiritual lives unfold largely outside the doors of churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples” (Drescher 2016, 2)

significance of relationality and what faith-adjacency has to do with it. St. Sebastian's Camp is a summer-long, whole-day camp run by a Protestant congregation in Woodfield, a primarily Latinx immigrant community in a northeastern U.S. metropolitan area. The purpose of the camp is outreach and social support in a community where most parents work more than full-time and options for affordable summer child care are scarce. The camp includes no explicitly religious activities or content. Approximately 25 percent of the campers' and counselors' families attend services or other events at St. Sebastian's.

Lauren, Dylan, and Veronica, the participants in the weeklong digital storytelling experience I convened there as a reflection activity for first-year counselors, are part of that 25 percent. My hope for the digital storytelling experience was that each of the participants would create a 2–3 minute autobiographical video (see Lambert, 2012) to explore a personally meaningful experience in their lives. I was eager to attend to if and how the context of the church and/or the camp might inform the stories they chose to tell in that setting. Upholding the trio's autonomy, and zeroing in on their primary locus of excitement and meaning-making, I ended up guiding the group through the creation of a single, shared digital story, which they called "The Summer Camp"²⁹. Table 2 contains a partial reverse storyboard I have constructed, juxtaposing the text of the authors' script with three representative screenshots.

²⁹ I produced a deidentified version from the group's final files and have made it available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oOURnkJHXc>

Table 2 Final script for “The Summer Camp” by Lauren, Veronica, and Dylan

<i>Speaker: Lauren (0:10–0:25)</i>	
<p>we grew up at this camp, we’ve been attending it for 6-7 years. Now that we are counselors it’s a whole different experience we now have more responsibilities. But we still find a way to have fun while doing our job. From being playful campers, to c.i.t’s assisting this camp, to full-grown counselors helping our head counselors the responsibilities have grown along with us.</p>	 <p><i>Juliet reading on Lauren’s lap (see discussion in Oliver [2018])</i></p>
<i>Speaker: Dylan (0:26–0:35)</i>	
<p>At this camp there is something for everyone. You are cared for, respected and you won’t be forgotten. There’s always a way to express yourself.</p>	 <p><i>Counselors watching over sprinkler time (see discussion in Oliver [2018])</i></p>
<i>Speaker: Veronica (0:57–1:05)</i>	
<p>Our experience from campers to c.i.t’s to counselors has been an amazing opportunity, we look forward to assisting this camp more years to come.</p>	 <p><i>Lauren, Dylan, and Veronica</i></p>

At the exact center of the script lies what I take to be the group's collective summary of what makes camp so meaningful to them: "You are cared for, respected and you won't be forgotten." Throughout the week, the group reflected on the joys and occasional frustrations of relationality at camp, including

- the well known experience of nervous campers getting "stuck to" particular counselors who show them kindness (e.g., Juliet in table 2 reading in Lauren's lap);
- their new responsibilities as "full-grown counselors" (script) to both "look after the kids" and "play around with them" (Veronica), to be "a fun type of person" but also "serious" (Lauren);
- the giving and receiving of *respect* (Dylan's quietly insistent contribution to the scripting process); and
- the opportunity to spend time and keep in touch with their "second family," including many friends from other towns who they only see at the camp (see below).

Notice that these reflections hit on but also move beyond familiar themes of camp being "all about fun" or of teenagers just wanting to spend time with their friends. The group was aware of a range of ways their connections to each other helped to constitute the camp community.

These relationally observant members of St. Sebastian's *Church* were also quite clear about the differences between camp modes of interaction and what they experience on Sunday morning. I was quite struck by the ways they characterized the latter:

Kyle: What would you think about doing a project like this in Sunday school?

Dylan: I feel like it would be different. I don't think we'd be talking about camp we'd be talking about like church and how if we like it.

Kyle: Like if you like church? Okay. You think it would make a good video?

Dylan: Depends on the people who make it. If it was kids it'd probably be like "Oh I have to sit in the church listening to people at the altar and just sit there. But if it would be like the parents it would be like "Oh, we're talking about God, that's helping me."

Kyle: What would you think about doing something like this as part of the Sunday school?

Veronica: I feel like it would be different because for Sunday school it's basically all about bible things, church things. Kids come yeah but it's usually because ... the parents don't want their children to be in church crying, bothering them ... [I]nstead of like having fun and learning ... and doing their [summer] homework, they learn about the bible and it's during like school time.

Both Dylan and Veronica can easily see past (through?) the physical place of the St. Sebastian's campus and differentiate between the socially constructed spaces of church and camp. Notice that the difference doesn't just have to do with the individual people with whom they relate. In addition, Veronica and Dylan make explicit appeals to the different character of the social practices at work in these distinct spaces. For Dylan, the experience of Sunday morning is characterized by "listening" and "talking about God." It's a sedentary mode of engagement, and it's centered on "people at the altar." Veronica contrasts camp's fun forms of learning (even working on summer homework!) with church's more school-like modes of learning (but about "bible things"³⁰) with kids attending only reluctantly and mostly because they are deemed disruptive to the worship service's practices of attention.

These characterizations will not surprise religious leaders familiar with movements to more meaningfully include children in worship and to reform religious education pedagogies away from rote instructionism. And in an explicit sense, the young people's fairly hard distinction between church and camp calls into question the notion that the latter is meaningfully "adjacent" to the group's religious faith.

However, what's so analytically interesting about this contrast is how consistently and poignantly the group's description of their camp-based social practices of care and inclusion *conform to the very kinds of faith values I know the leaders of St. Sebastian's Church want to instill in their members*. Indeed, I wrote about their roving screening of the final digital story to each counselor's group at the end of the week as the itinerant preaching of "a contextually appropriate gospel of love and inclusion" (Oliver 2018, 23). In this sense the camp space and its practices were faith-adjacent indeed. And in my view, the failure of the Sunday morning experience to appropriately implicate faith—for these "kids," at least—in a way that encompassed not just religious content *but meaningful relational practices* should make us pause before dismissing the non-religious camp as an important and meaningful space of religious education..

Conclusion: The blessing of faith-adjacent teaching amid disaffiliation

Earlier this year I presented about this work at St. Sebastian's to a group of religious educators from my denomination, advocating that we be more open to participating in educational spaces that might be made "faith-adjacent" perhaps only by our presence as transparently religious people participating in non-religious endeavors. Partway through the presentation, someone finally asked the blunt question I'd been expecting, something like, "I can understand this as a mission project, but not a faith formation project. Why should we do this, as *Christians who are educators*?" I'm sure this is a question many REA members associated with

³⁰ Later: "During the Sunday school they usually just like probably get bored because it's about the Bible, like not to offend churches or anything like that."

particular faith traditions have fielded from co-religionist colleagues over the years, especially in contexts where non-confessional education—and hence this quandary—is more widespread. I appreciated that several participants chimed in with answers, including the lesson/witness that (again paraphrasing) “Your local faith leader cares about you for reasons beyond your potential contribution to their community’s organizational and financial viability.” In light of Drescher’s and others’ data about the high levels of cynicism toward religious institutionalism, this strikes me as a pretty good answer. My less patient (and perhaps equally cynical) answer was that we better get good at doing this kind of work because it may soon be the only kind of work we can get.

However, a better reason for taking a more faith-adjacent stance in our convening (or simply participating) in spaces of religious education combines a sociological realism with probably the single greatest concern all of table 1’s authors are wrestling with: preserving autonomy. My colleague James Nagle has recently published a piece calling Thomas Groome’s shared praxis pedagogy “to the courage of its [open-ended] convictions” regarding how to respond to the process that Nagle, following Tom Beaudoin and Patrick Hornbeck, calls deconversion (Nagle 2019, 536; see also Nagle 2017). He emphasizes in North American and European contexts the need for educators to be open to deconversion and disaffiliation as legitimate outcomes of religious education experiences in Catholic schools and elsewhere:

Despite the narrative of loss implied by descriptors like “lapsed,” “former,” and “fallen away” to describe this growing group, consistent research suggests the religious lives of disaffiliating persons are more complex than pessimistic assessments suggest ... “[L]apsed” Catholics often leave the church for moral and religious reasons—and these “non-practicing” Catholics still practice something. (Nagle 2019, 528)

I agree with Nagle that treating deconversion always as an example of loss or failure is both intellectually dubious—in light of our commitment to student autonomy and critical thinking—and also unlikely to benefit the very institutions whose self-protective instincts give rise to such characterizations. If it’s an accepted sociological reality that there are more choices than ever about how to practice, how much more likely are we to alienate learners if they perceive us to be convincing or coercing rather than sharing or witnessing. Indeed, before I entirely understood Tan’s *teaching from commitment* position, I thought it effectively captured what I especially recognize in my colleagues at Tapestry: a transparency about what brings them to the faith-adjacent table, combined with a curious—rather than controlling—interest in what does (or doesn’t) bring others there.

I did not have room in this article to discuss a third example from my research, one that might illustrate spatial theory’s understanding of social practice as dynamic, as “always under construction,” and what this might mean for faith-adjacent approaches to religious education. But it is the dynamic character of social space that I think of when I read this brief excerpt from Nagle’s (2019) research, which puts Catholic school religion teachers in conversation with their disaffiliating former students:

The thirty-year-old disaffiliating Catholic confidently shared with his teacher that his courses helped guide him through the diverse religious world he encountered after leaving high school. He explained thoughtfully the comfort and capacity he learned to “go outside of religion to find religious answers” or “go outside of being Catholic to find spiritual answers” because his courses included an exchange between religious and non-religious sources, including personal experience ... This disaffiliating young man, who was in the process of planning a wedding that would not be a Mass, shared with this teacher: “I believe my religious education was successful. Absolutely. I don’t think church leaders would say that same thing, but I would. Absolutely.” What made this dialog powerful was that, after their conversation, his teacher agreed. (538–539)

Of course, we don’t need to be committed spatial theorists, fixated on the ongoing becoming implied in all social practice, to admire a Catholic religious educator’s commitment to the integrity of his former student’s journey. And we don’t (necessarily) need to recast this teacher’s classroom as a faith-adjacent space, however fully we might wish to divest ourselves of institutionally centered understandings of religious education.

No, what made me smile when I read this anecdote—in another (2018) of Nagle’s writings that had space for more ethnographic detail—was that the pair repositioned their chairs and continued talking when the researcher concluded the interview and excused himself. In the interview, and I bet especially in what came after, these two learners coconvened/reconvened a dynamic and deeply relational space of religious education. I was tempted to call it a “long-dormant” space, but it’s clear that remembered and imagined connections between the two have continued to shape the younger man’s life and faith. Perhaps it’s been much more influential than other more traditional education spaces in which he has participated since. It may have shaped his once and future teacher’s faith as well.

If we look at this rekindled relationship and see among these two men a faith-adjacent space of religious education, the question of “success” and “failure” falls away. What remains is a beautiful mode of engaging faith, and the world, that is almost surely more ancient and arguably more traditional than what we (think we) see when we visit a classroom like the place where the pair first began their journey together.

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Paper for Research Interest Group Presentation.**Religious Education Association Annual Meeting– 2019 – Toronto**

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Title - The Teacher: Specialist in a Pedagogy of Difference.***Abstract.***

Western societies and schools are characterized by an increasing plurality. We consider the hermeneutical-communicative perspective on worldview education as meaningful when dealing with this diversity: students are encouraged to explore their personal clarification of existence, to encounter differences and to develop their worldview literacy. Former research has pointed out that hermeneutical-communicative learning demands several roles of the teacher. In this paper we focus on the role of Specialist concerning the interpretation of this role in the context of diversity and what teachers need for implementing the role. The Specialist is the role in which the teacher has knowledge about ideas, practices and sources of worldview traditions, he is able to evaluate these in a critical way, and he possesses skills to translate this knowledge into a meaningful dialogue in class. We will add former views on this role by theoretical insights related to the use of worldview sources on an equal bases and to schools that educate students in a particular faith tradition or worldviews.

1. Societal developments

Western societies are more and more religiously plural “in the spheres of religions, values and culture” (Jackson 2006, 21). Even within the same religious tradition, there is a diversity of views (Milot 2006; Bakker 2001). Every school is characterized by a plurality of worldviews and religious convictions: there is no such thing as a religiously homogenous group of students (Milot 2006). Plurality is interpreted as a challenge for schools and teachers (Ipgrave 2004).

We recognize pluralization in Western societies not only in the existence of multiple religious traditions, but also in the presence of non-religious or non-affiliated people in society and classrooms (Vermeer 2004; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017).

In a plural society and a school that is characterized by its religious diversity, education in general and worldview education in particular should stimulate “a reflective and sensitive encounter” (Schreiner 2006, 32). Differences in ideas and beliefs are to be explored in order to create mutual understanding on the one hand and to provide enrichment for the development of personal identity on the other (Ipgrave 2004). This encounter serves the ultimate goal of educating young people in order to prepare them to live in a plural society (Miedema and Ter Avest 2011). People with diverse values and convictions are challenged to live together and contribute to their shared goal of a peaceful society based on equality. This diversity contains religious as well as non-affiliated and secular views on life and on the world we live in.

Encounter in plural settings can foster identity formation among students. Confronted by and in dialogue with views and experiences that are unfamiliar or different than their own views, students can reflect on their personal position and can add something new to their identity and view of life (Elias 2010; Vermeer 2004; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017). Encounters in the context of diversity have a positive effect on the development of the student’s personal identity. We underline the importance of the exploration of students’ personal life experiences and views in worldview education in encounter, which contributes to students’ identity formation (Schreiner 2006; Ghiloni 2011). The encounters between students from different backgrounds are particularly enhanced when this exploration is encouraged (Miedema 2000; Wright 2004): “Pedagogically, the more aware teachers are of beliefs and values embedded in the experience of students, the more they can take account of pupils’ concerns and can provide teaching and learning situations which are designed to foster communication between students from different backgrounds” (Jackson 2004, 108).

Encountering differences in education and worldview education in particular also stimulates students’ attitude of tolerance and openness (Elias 2010). Encounter promotes peaceful ways of living together and building bridges between people that have diverse worldview perspectives (Miedema and Ter Avest 2011; Rautionmaa and Kallioniemi 2017; Gabriel 2017).

So, in a western society like the Netherlands worldview education is challenged to focus on encounter about personal experiences in order to foster the identity formation of students living in a plural society. It is of great importance to take the context of students’ existence into account and to address his or her existence in classroom dialogue.

2. A hermeneutical-communicative perspective

The context of students’ life experience in dialogical and plural settings is underlined in a new perspective on worldview education: the hermeneutical-communicative approach. We interpret this as an innovation in worldview education that fosters the identity formation of students and the encounter between a variety of religious and other worldviews within and outside the classroom, especially in the context of the aforementioned societal development of the pluralization of the Dutch society. The teacher contributes to this formation and encounter by putting forward content of a variety of traditions and challenging the students to contemplate and to discuss the human life experiences in the sources. Traditions of belief and worldview are introduced to stimulate students to reflect on their life in an intersubjective and hermeneutical process (Miedema 2014).

This perspective is hermeneutical in the sense that the teacher stimulates the exploration of the relation between worldview sources and personal experiences and views of the students: *“The teacher is always focused on what presents itself as meaningful in the stories of students, in the perceived experiences of the students, and in the traditions or sources they*

know and live by.” (Mulder and Van den Berg 2019, p. 3). This is an hermeneutical process in which the teacher and the students search for possible ‘hermeneutical junctions’ in the interaction between sources and student’s views and experiences. Theoretical sources about the hermeneutical communicative perspective underline the variety of the worldview sources (Pollefeyt 2011a; 2011b; Mulder and Van den Berg 2019), especially in the context of pluralization in society.

Our perspective is communicative because of the concentration on dialogue and encounter between students and the teacher. This asks for an open and reflective attitude of both the students and the teacher: “*the teacher aims at dialogical exchange of views and experiences in the encounter with students about what is meaningful to them.*” (Mulder and Van den Berg 2019, p. 3).

In the current investigations of the research group of Theology and Worldview of Windesheim University, hermeneutical communicative learning is central. We regard this model as a powerful perspective on worldview education, precisely in the context of diversity (Van den Berg en Mulder 2017; Mulder and Van den Berg 2019). We investigate how this model of worldview education can take place, and what this requires from the teacher. It is therefore follow-up research to further develop the model of hermeneutical communicative learning.

In this model, this perspective, we assume three key points.

- a. In the first place the teacher sees diversity as an opportunity and not as a threat to his or her own philosophy of life and identity. Diversity is a resource. It is an enormous chance for education in general and worldview education in particular to stimulate “a reflective and sensitive encounter” (Schreiner 2006). Teachers work with diversity by introducing space for different visions. It is about the school as a small society. Where living together is practiced. It is both a great possibility and a challenge for schools in western societies to deal with diversity in society and in the classroom (Ipgrave 2004). Religious and intercultural education play an especially important role in this plural setting (Schreiner 2006).
- b. Secondly, in the practice of living together, and in the hermeneutic-communicative perspective, worldview education is about experiences and visions. It is about the experiences and visions of students, peers and adults within and outside the classroom. These visions are connected to personal experiences. The questions and experiences of students are the center of worldview education and the development of their identity. We believe that dialogue benefits from the focus on life experiences in worldview education. In our perspective it is important that worldview education is “*brought down to earth, to what is ‘common’ between human beings*” (Sutinen, Kallioniemi and Pihlström 2015, 335). When life experiences are shared in education, the dialogue is stimulated (Jackson 2004). This also means that the views of the students and the teacher can change their perceptions on the good life and religious points of views (Van den Berg en Mulder 2017; Mulder and Van den Berg 2019).
- c. The third key point of hermeneutical communicative learning is that religion and worldview matter in education (Schreiner 2006; Van den Berg en Mulder 2017; Mulder and Van den Berg 2019). Not to emphasize a preferred position, and certainly not to initiate students into an exclusive tradition. But as an essential part of children's education: “*All kinds of sources from worldviews are examined to find provisional, temporary answers to minor and major questions of life.*” (Mulder and Van den Berg 2019, p. 5-6). Education of children is impossible without the development of a critical, independent and personal position in the life of the student. Also, precisely in relation to religion and worldview.

We describe three aims of the hermeneutical communicative perspective:

1. **Personal clarification of existence.**
Worldview education is aimed at learning to understand and articulate the personal life questions and experiences by students. These questions and experiences are introduced into a dialogical process with others and with sources.
2. **Dialogical responding to plurality.**
In dialogical practices, students explore their own questions and experiences, those of others and the meanings of traditions and sources of meaning. This means that the diversity of different insights is seen as a force for identity development. Students learn to deal with dialogue in a diverse context. These dialogical practices are organized in education on the basis of equality. We recognize this characteristic in several sources (Leganger-Krogstad 2003; Keaten and Soukup 2009; Miedema and Ter Avest 2011).
3. **Worldview literacy.**
Students learn to give meaning to a diversity of traditions and sources of meaning: stories, rites, ideas, laws, architecture, symbols and images: *“They acquire basic knowledge about religious traditions and know how to relate to this information in a critical way and to formulate their own reaction to solutions to life issues offered in that information.”* (Mulder and Van den Berg 2019, p. 5).

3. *Teacher roles in worldview education*

In current research of the research group of Theology and Worldview of Windesheim University we focus on the roles of teachers in hermeneutical communicative learning. We investigate what competences and skills are required when implementing this perspective. These roles of the teacher build on earlier views. In the first place we are inspired by Pollefeyt (Pollefeyt 2011a; 2011b). He spoke about three teacher roles in his GSM model. The teacher is Getuige (Witness), Specialist and Moderator (Van den Berg en Mulder 2017; Van den Berg en Mulder 2019).

By conducting the Witness role, the teacher expresses personal values, ideals and motivations in the search of students to a personal vision of life. He does so without wanting to convince, he shows what he finds important and how his personal views and experiences play a role in his life.

As a Moderator, the teacher guides students to conduct conversations about life themes and learn to dialogue in open and respectful way and to perform educational activities from and with differences. She challenges students to express personal thoughts and views and to reflect on them in dialogue with others.

The teacher as Specialist *“makes students familiar with the colorful world of cultural-philosophical and religious stories, rituals, values, questions, ideas and practices. The teacher knows how to find his way in the colorful world and corrects wrong insights or images based on current scientific information”* (Van den Berg en Mulder 2017). She is a specialist in the field of worldview traditions and sources. She has knowledge about ideas, practices and sources of worldview tradition, she is able to evaluate these in a critical way, and she possesses skills to translate these knowledge into a meaningful dialogue in class.

4. *The role of Specialist in worldview education*

We interpret the role of Specialist in worldview education as a key role in the context of diversity. The teacher knows his way in a variety of sources and traditions and is able to translate key thoughts to the personal experiences and world views of students. He knows and he values religious and cultural diversity in society as meaningful for the personal development of students. The Specialist is able to use multiple sources and traditions in an open, critical and hermeneutical way, *“because the pluralistic society implies that the worldview educator cannot depend on only one meaningful source to correlate with the questions and life stories of students.”* (Mulder and Van den Berg 2019, p. 3).

However, little research has been done about this role concerning the following questions:

- a. we know from a theoretical point of view that the Specialist can play an important role in a pedagogy of difference. There has been some empirical research at Dutch primary schools about the hermeneutical communicative perspective on worldview education (Parlevliet, Van den Berg en Zondervan 2013). But there are hardly any empirical findings concerning the specific role of Specialist. Especially because of the important role the Specialist, according to theoretical insights, plays in fostering the students’ attitude towards difference and diversity, we need to know how teachers value this role. We need to find out what teachers in primary and in secondary education think of their competences and attitudes concerning this role. This way we find out what teachers need for schooling possibilities and what content and skills they value for implementing this role in education and in teacher training.
- b. in the Netherlands we detect a decrease of religious and cultural literacy. There is a decline of affiliation with religious institutes and knowledge of religious and cultural stories and content. Also teachers and students at teacher training institutes deal with this decline. There seems to be a gap between this limited literacy and the role of Specialist, a specialized teacher that knows her way in worldview sources. So, empirical research and further theoretical study need to find out what possibilities teachers and scholars see as necessary for dealing with this gap. Further research and discussion focuses on the question what we can expect from teachers in worldview education when we observe teachers and students from teacher training institutes to be less and less literate in worldview traditions and sources?
- c. The dual educational system is a unique feature of Dutch society. Article 23 of the Constitution provides that a school is either public or nongovernmental. A school for nongovernmental education is based on a specific and recognized religion or philosophy of life (Glenn and Zoontjens 2012; Noorlander and Zoontjens 2011; Zoontjens 2003). A public school exists thanks to a government initiative and cannot define or motivate its education from any religious point of view (Bakker 2012; Zoontjens 2003; Ter Avest et al. 2007). In addition to this principle, public education is characterized by its so-called ‘active multiformity’ (Veugelers and De Kat 2005). In almost all schools for nongovernment and public education, the diversity in society is also recognizable in both the student and teacher population. The Dutch constitution confers the right for every nongovernment school to receive governmental subsidy, to the same extent as public education (Zoontjens 2003). However, when we consider the teacher to be a Specialist in a pedagogy of difference in educating worldview education from a variety of religious and non-religious sources we wonder: how does a teacher motivate a diversity of worldview traditions and sources based on equality, especially in a specific context of a school that educated students in a particular faith tradition or worldview? How can the teacher at such a school implement this diversity in order to foster dialogue between these sources and students’ personal experiences and visions? The central hermeneutic-communicative concept of equality and dialogue between a variety of worldviews needs to deepen by investigating how and why teachers deal with this

concept in the context of their faith-based school identity.

Based on these three questions we conduct further research concerning the interpretation of the teacher role of Specialist in the context of diversity and what teachers and teacher training institutes need for implementing this role.

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Educating for Ecological Conversion:

An Ecstatic Pedagogy for Christian Higher Education amid Climate Crisis

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I. Introduction: Reading Wendell Berry in Costco

In an arresting anecdote, Protestant theologian James K.A. Smith writes,

[a] funny thing happened on the way to the grocery store. I discovered a significant gap between my thought and my action. This hit home to me one day while I was immersed in reading Wendell Berry's delightful anthology, *Bringing it to the Table*. As I paused to reflect on a key point and thus briefly took my nose out of the book, I was suddenly struck by an ugly irony. Here I was reading Wendell Berry in the food court at Costco. There are so many things wrong with that sentence that I don't even know where to begin (Smith 2013, 8).

Smith concludes that while he gave "passionate intellectual assent" to Berry's environmentalist ideas, his actions and habits had not yet been "converted." Underlying his actions and habits, he argues, are deeper orientations to the world and dispositions that must also be converted. Such a conversion process, Smith later suggests, will require "sanctifying perception" (Smith 2013, 8).¹

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis has called for the *ecological conversion* of the church and of all humanity. This term, used also by Pope John Paul II (Pope John Paul II 2001), has a predecessor in the work of Catholic eco-feminist Rosemary Radford Ruether (Ruether 1993, 91), as well as echoes in the contemporary work of Elizabeth Johnson (Johnson 2014, 259), all of

¹ Admittedly, Smith works with a different set of philosophical and methodological tools than we will use in this essay, but his point about dispositional conversion stands.

whom call upon the biblical idea of *metanoia* to signal the deep change that must occur for the sake of the planet and our fellow creatures. *Metanoia*, variously translated repentance, as well as “transformation, conversion, renewal, and change” is “a process that affects one’s entire existence...and that requires far more than just a single or even a repeated act of thinking, feeling or willing” (Ratzinger 1987, 55). Conversion that is ecological thus means, in Elizabeth Johnson’s definition, “falling in love with the earth as an inherently valuable, living community in which we participate, and bending every effort to be creatively faithful to its well-being, in tune with the living God who brought it into being and cherishes it with unconditional love” (Johnson 2014, 259). Her definition echoes Francis’s description of St. Francis of Assisi:

Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever [St. Francis] would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into this praise. He communed with all creation... His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists (Pope Francis 2015, 11).

St. Francis showcases the alternative to Smith’s predicament of intellectual appreciation apart from dispositional reorientation. In this view, ecological conversion moves toward *ecstasis*, a way of being both mystically connected to the world and self-transcendent. Arriving at such an ecstatic orientation to the world requires a fundamental change of our basic dispositions, affect, and imagination.

In *Laudato Si’*, Francis imagines that individuals and communities might support ecological conversion in others as they undergo it themselves. He calls on “all Christian communities” as well as schools and other institutions to join in the effort of environmental education (Pope Francis 2015, 213–14). In particular, he underscores the role of theological pedagogy in educating for ecological conversion: “Environmental education should facilitate making the leap

towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care” (Pope Francis 2015, 210). Following this call, this essay suggests ways that Christian higher education might appropriate *Laudato Si*’s call for an ecstatic pedagogy of ecological conversion.

Our proposal for an ecstatic pedagogy of ecological conversion unfolds in three parts: First, we discuss challenges a pedagogy of ecological conversion faces in Christian higher education. Second, with appreciation for prior work by Neil Ormerod and Cristina Vanin on ecological conversion, we introduce Bernard Lonergan’s description of conversion in its intellectual, moral, and religious dimensions. Robert Doran augments Lonergan’s typology with psychic conversion. We emphasize ecological conversion as psychic, because it deals with the dispositions and orientations that must be transformed for the sake of an ecstatic relationship with the earth. Third, we propose pedagogical strategies that respond to the cultural challenges and instigate or support ecological conversion on the psychic level.

II. Cultural Diagnostics

The effort to support ecological conversion faces challenges in the university setting. Three such features include 1) the place and practice of environmental education in the university, 2) worries about the appropriateness of “conversion” efforts in a university, and 3) consumerism as the dominant cultural-economic system in students’ lives (and our own).

1. *The Place and Practice of Environmental Education in the University*

The discipline of environmental studies has been the primary way in which universities and colleges have sought to respond to the ecological crisis. Every discipline, including those in the liberal arts, can respond substantively to climate change, but instead, study of the environment and the human relationship to it is often quarantined in the hard sciences. As Charles Saylan and Daniel Blumenstein have argued, environmental studies as a hard science is appropriate, but when the hard sciences is the only home of inquiry about ecology, the result is a dominant empirical epistemology and siloed approach, with neglect of other ways of knowing the world or responding to it, as well as a lack of integration across the curriculum (Saylan and Blumenstein 2011). Lamenting what he calls “fast education” that ignores ecologically connected knowledge, David Orr describes “a crisis of mind and perception” in which students cannot see the interconnectedness of their learning, their lives, and planetary crisis (Orr 1994, 95).

For such reasons, environmental educator Richard Kahn calls for eco-pedagogies that more fully integrate ethics, critical politics, literature, and spirituality and religion (Kahn 2010), while C.A. Bowers invites the critical recovery of ancient stories, traditions, and social structures that that escape the modern myths of progress and individualism (Bowers 2001). In addition, nature writers Michael McCarthy (McCarthy 2015) and Robin Kimmerer (Kimmerer 2013) argue for environmental education that awakens the imagination and the heart, and that, in the words of David Orr, helps us “to join intellect with affection and loyalty to the ecologies of particular places” (Orr 1994, 95). This essay aims at such an integrating approach.

2. The Question of Conversion

A second challenge to ecological conversion is concern about the appropriateness of doing anything related to “conversion” at a university. There are three forces at work here. One is the role of commodified education, which reduces education to a transaction in which students trade their efforts for the promise of a lucrative career, rather than pondering difficult questions or being equipped for the work of world-transformation. A second force is a rationalistic approach to education, which worries about the presence of emotion in the classroom and judges all knowledge according to empirical or rationalistic standards. A third force is an understandable concern about the deeply troubling history of conversion efforts. After all, the Christian church’s record includes tragic stories of coercion, manipulation, and cultural destruction. As Katherine Turpin has shown, Christian education was historically used not only to educate, but also to maintain racism (Turpin 2017). In light of such a troubling history, is it not arrogance to seek anyone’s “conversion” to anything, especially in a university setting, where freedom of thought should be most prized? Such questions demand a longer response, but here we offer two points.

First, transformation of the self and the world is central to the mission of Catholic and Christian higher education. Bernard Prusak, summarizing a host of other thinkers in Catholic higher education, has defended the transformative aims of Catholic education, noting that all education is ultimately formative, a fact we can admit and deal with responsibly (Prusak 2018). Catholic religious educator Thomas Groome has argued that ongoing conversion, which Groome understands with Bernard Lonergan as “a radical turning toward authenticity and self-transcendence” (Groome 1981, 488) is the goal of Christian religious education. Groome expresses the role of the teacher as a “sponsor” of others’ conversions: we do not cause

conversion, but with humility, and while undergoing conversion ourselves, we may support others' journey toward a more conscious, loving, and responsible life (Groome 1981, 492).

Second, some who argue most eloquently today for pedagogies that convert people to new ways of seeing and acting have felt the harm of past conversion campaigns. Robin Kimmerer is a Native American botanist whose *Braiding Sweetgrass* beautifully weaves together indigenous wisdom and scientific knowledge. Kimmerer laments the annihilating role of Christian missionaries who eradicated her people's culture, language, and identity. Yet she also argues for education that transforms. She envisions education that cultivates dispositions of gratitude and reverence toward the natural world (Kimmerer 2013, 35), coaches us to hear the "songs" of plants (Ibid 43) teaches the "grammar of animacy" (Ibid 48), trains schoolchildren in grateful reciprocity with the natural world (Ibid 116), replaces the paralysis of despair with the work of restoration (Ibid 328) and invigorates the imagination with "the vision of the economy of the commons" (Ibid 376). She advocates education that alters our affective dispositions, dominant images, and habitual ways of perceiving. Her work suggests that while humility is in order, Christian teachers can justifiably join in the educational efforts she outlines.

3. Consumer Culture

As Smith's example of sitting in Costco suggests, a third challenge to ecological conversion is consumer culture. University students, especially at expensive institutions like the one where we serve, are embedded in consumer culture, where status is linked to acquisition and display of the right consumer goods. Consumer culture militates against the efforts to be more environmentally aware and responsible, for it constantly forms us into habits of overconsumption and waste. This

leads to unacknowledged gaps between personal aspirations and actual practices, so that it is in fact no surprise to find oneself “reading Wendell Berry in Costco.”

But the problem goes beyond our personal hypocrisies. We are, in fact, constantly formed not to know or notice realities, not to perceive connections between ourselves and the world of production and waste. Ensnared in a world created by advertising, relative wealth, and the vast distances of the global economy, consumers are protected from the discomfort of knowing too much about the origins of our stuff—often exploited peoples and places—or about its destinations—landfills, waterways, oceans, and incinerators. We are, as William Cavanaugh says, formed in the dominant mood of consumerism: detachment (Cavanaugh 2008, 33ff).

Moreover, if we decide to be attentive to questions about the true costs of consumer goods, the information we desire to know is often hidden. As Tom Beaudoin has described, a phone call to a multinational clothing corporation asking about the manufacture of one’s clothes leads to endless evasions and platitudes, even to indignation (Beaudoin 2003, xiii–xiv). The system of late-consumer capitalism is intentionally opaque, confounding attempts to acquire, understand, and evaluate pertinent knowledge, and thus to act responsibly.

III. Psychic Conversion

1. Lonergan and Ecological Conversion

The call to ecological conversion raises questions about how we understand conversion itself, including its dimensions and processes. Here, we argue that Bernard Lonergan’s proposal for

conversion, especially as amplified by Robert Doran, equips theological educators with the foundations to support ecological conversion.

Loneragan describes conversion in its intellectual, moral, and religious or affective dimensions (Loneragan 2003, 238–43). The three forms of conversion are integrally related in one process towards self-transcendence. Robert Doran augments Lonergan’s description with the addition of psychic conversion, the central concern of this essay. Lonergan provides a rich description of conversion:

By conversion is understood a transformation of the subject and his world. Normally it is a prolonged process though its explicit acknowledgement may be concentrated in a few momentous judgements and decisions. Still it is not just a development or even a series of developments. Rather it is a resultant change of course and direction. It is as if one’s eyes were opened and one’s former world faded away and fell away. There emerges something new that fructifies in inter-locking, cumulative sequences of developments on all levels and in all departments of human living (Loneragan 2003, 130).

Conversion, in general, relates a problem of desire to a problem of horizon (Wilkins 2018, 66).

Loneragan employs the metaphor of horizon to indicate the limit of one’s field of vision. Objects that lie beyond the horizon are not visible, at least currently. The horizon bounds one’s knowledge and interests. Within it lie objects of interest and knowledge, while beyond it one knows and cares not. Jeremy Wilkins remarks: “The old self not only does not love the right things; the old self cannot even properly conceive them; they fall outside the horizon, the effective range of openness, interest, and concern” (Wilkins 2018, 66) We think of a student who once wrote that she had never considered environmental concern “her thing,” treating it as though it were one among many possible personal interests. As she could not conceive of planetary crisis as a situation in which she was intimately involved, it fell outside her horizon of openness, interest, and concern. Caring about it was someone else’s hobby.

As this example demonstrates, we need more than a change of interest. We need an entirely new way of conceiving of the problem and ourselves in relation to it. Following Joseph de Finance, Lonergan thus calls conversion a “vertical exercise of freedom,” because it dismantles the previous horizon and establishes a new one, giving life to new desires, new interests and concerns (Lonergan 2003, 237). As our desires and horizon inform each other, conversion entails the gift of a new heart and a new world. Conversion remains an ongoing and precarious process. It almost always occurs incrementally, possibly with dramatic moments, and for most of us it requires continual renewal. Conversion entails deliberately making oneself within the dialectic of “human solidarity in sin” and “divine solidarity in grace which is the mystical body of Christ” (Lonergan 1993, 27). Thus conversion, in addition to being ongoing and precarious, is both personal and communal.

Drawing on Lonergan’s categories and *Laudato Si’*, Neil Ormerod and Cristina Vanin have approached ecological conversion as intellectual, moral, religious, and, borrowing Robert’s Doran’s term, psychic (Ormerod and Vanin 2016). Their account enriches *Laudato Si’*’s description of ecological conversion, which is dominated by conversion’s religious dimension (Ormerod and Vanin 329). As *intellectual*, ecological conversion confronts the modern crisis of normativity that obscures the affirmation of objectivity in truth and values apart from arbitrary personal preference and the politicization of knowledge. By facilitating the shift from descriptive or ‘common-sense’ to explanatory knowing, ecological conversion as intellectual demands a more differentiated understanding of the interconnectedness of all things (Ormerod and Vanin

2016, 344). It therefore counters distortions of reality present in our hyper-anthropological culture.

As *moral*, ecological conversion overcomes the paralyzing resistance to the choice of genuine values over self-referential satisfaction (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 336–334). Deeply ingrained patterns of routine and comfort disregard the ecological impact of human decisions despite overwhelming evidence documenting the resulting destruction of human and non-human life. Ecological conversion as moral considers the delicate ecological balance at stake as humans make themselves socially, culturally, and personally.

As *religious*, ecological conversion expands the scope of our loving to closer approximate the universe. Ormerod and Vanin remark: “Being in love with God opens up the possibility not only of loving God, but of loving *all* that God loves, and loving *as* God loves. Our human knowing has the potential to become unconditional. Religious conversion pushes the boundaries of that unconditionality to include the whole universe” (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 334). Religious conversion supports the self-sacrificing love required as humans change their ways of living based on uncritical production and consumption to a fundamental gratitude for all that exists. St. Francis of Assisi epitomized ecological conversion as religious in “the inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (Pope Francis 2015, 10). As religious, ecological conversion beckons us to universal communion and intimacy, because “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement” (Pope Francis 2015, 89).

2. *Psychic Conversion*

While recognizing the interrelatedness of the four dimensions of conversion, in this essay we wish to highlight ecological conversion as psychic, the least developed of the dimensions in Ormerod and Vanin's work (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 346–49). "Psychic conversion" is Robert Doran's addition to Lonergan's schema. With this term, he builds upon Lonergan's understanding of the pre-conscious psyche that selects which sensations, memories, and images will emerge into consciousness as empirical data for the intentional conscious operations exercised in the process of knowing (Lonergan 2008, 3 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*:192). The conscious operations include: inquiring into the data of our experience in order to understand it, weighing the evidence to determine if the understanding checks out, making judgments, raising questions for deliberation, and executing decisions for action. We would argue that the tacit, unconscious criterion for the psyche's selection of certain sense data is *pertinence*: does this matter? Is it pertinent?²

The performance of the intentional operations and the sensitive stream of consciousness, or what Doran calls "the neural undertow" (Doran 2011b), mutually influence one another and can do so constructively. We cannot, after all, pay attention to all sense data; attention thus functions as an important filter, allowing us to think and act upon the world. But our thinking and acting in turn influence what captures our attention, as anyone who has explored a new hobby can attest: the world is suddenly full of butterflies or postage stamps, depending on one's practiced hobby. The constructive role of the psyche, Doran suggests, is evidenced when one habitually performs the

² This is distinct from the question of value that emerges later in the conscious operation of judgment.

operations of *intelligent* inquiry and insight, *critical* reflection and judgment, *responsible* deliberation and decision, and love (Doran 2016, 54).

However, the relationship of the conscious operations and the neural undertow can, Doran explains, become pathological, and the psyche can come to function repressively, so that we fail to notice certain sense data. For example, urban dwellers who never experience the brightness of stars against the backdrop of a truly dark sky may cease to wonder about their connection to the cosmos. They may remain blissfully unaware of the effect of light pollution on the vast number of nocturnal species in our environment. Repression can also be a matter of denial, so that when we are presented with information about the planetary crisis, we dismiss it as “just one opinion” or a hoax.

Psychic conversion, according to Doran, reestablishes the constructive connection between the psyche’s primordial flow and the existential and intellectual acts that emerge from it. Doran arrives at a definition of psychic conversion “as the transformation of the psychic component of the censorship exercised in our orientation as dramatic subjects – a censorship over images for insight and over concomitant feelings – from a repressive to a constructive role, thus enabling simultaneously the participation of the psyche in the operations of intentionality, and the embodiment of intentionality through the mass and momentum of feeling” (Doran 2016, 63).

Doran explains that “the reason for establishing or re-establishing that connection, in terms of authenticity, is that affective self-transcendence is frequently required if we are going to be self-transcendent in the intellectual, moral, and religious dimensions of our living” (Doran 2011a, 6)

Psychic conversion thus leverages the psyche’s sensitive stream as an ally in the quest for self-

transcendence. It is observable as a shift in one's "dispositional immediacy," that is, in the "disposition or mood or self-taste that accompanies all our intentional operations" (Doran 2011b, 15).

3. Ecological Conversion as Psychic in Ormerod and Vanin

The "neural undertow" includes the images that guide us, often outside our conscious awareness. Psychic conversion involves, among other things, unearthing such images, becoming aware of their power, and developing new images that open possibilities for different ways of life.

Ormerod and Vanin argue that ecological conversion as psychic, in the first instance, deals with the influence of our own psyches on "the mechanistic image which profoundly affects how we relate to the natural world, and especially the extent to which we regard the natural world as a machine made up of a diversity of parts, each of which we treat instrumentally" (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 347). This mechanistic image is the result of our alienation from "the rhythms and flows of the natural world" (Ibid). Ecological conversion as psychic signals the shift from entrenched alienation to growing communion with the rhythms of the natural world and with other creatures of the planet, "not to mention with the beauty, awe, and immensity of the story of an unfolding 13.4 billion-year-old universe" (Ibid).

Ecological conversion as psychic, Ormerod and Vanin also explain, entails heightening attentiveness to what we have chronically neglected due to our "alienation from the natural world," an alienation "so extensive that we are not even aware that we are alienated" (Ibid). For example, Ormerod and Vanin cite Thomas Berry, who writes about the alienation of children: "For children to live only in contact with concrete and steel and wires and wheels and machines

and computers and plastics, to seldom experience any primordial reality or even to see the stars at night, is a soul deprivation that diminishes the deepest of their human experiences” (Berry 1999 cited in Ormerod and Vanin, 347). Without such experiences, children do not learn to pay attention to the stars at night in the first place. Psychic conversion is the change in horizon that allows such attentiveness to that which we “habitually disregard” (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 347), and attentiveness in turn illuminates the new horizon.

Ormerod and Vanin also note that attending to the “rhythms and flows of the natural world” (Ibid) is not reducible to intense solitary excursions into the wild. Rather, urban contexts daily present opportunities to connect with the natural world in the mundanity of our lives. They cite Lyanda Lynn Haupt, who reminds us that “it is in our everyday lives, in our everyday homes, that we eat, consume energy, run the faucet, compost, flush, learn and *live*. It is here, *in our lives*, that we must come to know our essential connection to the wilder earth...” (Haupt 2009, 13 cited in Ormerod and Vanin, 348). Attending to the natural world in our midst quickens psychic conversion by “overcom[ing] alienation and reestablish[ing] connections between our psyches and our intellectual and moral operations” (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 348). Ormerod and Vanin conclude their description of ecological conversion as psychic by citing *Laudato Si'*: ““We can come to feel the close bonds of universal communion and know, intellectually *and* affectively, that ‘nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves...we are part of nature, included in nature, in constant interaction with it’” (Pope Francis 2015, 139 cited in Ormerod and Vanin, 349). In this essay we use the term ‘ecstatic’ to highlight this relational quality as a fruit of ecological conversion, particularly in its psychic dimension.

4. *Theological Perspectives on Psychic Conversion: Incarnation and Trinity*

Working from a Christian perspective informed by the historic Christian tradition and by contemporary eco-feminism, we wish to frame theologically the experience of ecological conversion in the psychic dimension. As Ormerod and Vanin hint in their observation that we “habitually disregard” the natural world (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 347), we argue that psychic conversion of whatever sort poses the question: “What am I attending to?” Underlying our attending is a criterion of *pertinence*: we do not pay attention to that which we assume has no bearing.³ In its ecological form, psychic conversion reveals the pertinence of our relationship with the biotic family and calls us to attend to it. When psychic conversion is *Christian* and *ecological*, the attention we give to the natural world is a divine gift enlivened by the Holy Spirit that unfolds in relation to the *incarnation* of God in Christ and the *Trinity*.

Christian tradition celebrates the incarnation of God in Christ. In light of the incarnation, attention to the natural world becomes a form of attention to God. Elizabeth Johnson (Johnson 2015; 2014), Celia Deane Drummond (Drummond 2009), and Denis Edwards (Edwards 2014) have developed the notion of “deep incarnation,” as coined by Niels Henrik Gregersen (Gregersen 2010). Deep incarnation takes its cues from the gospel writer John’s claim that the Word became *flesh* (Jn 1:14), not simply human, and thus, extends “into the very tissue of biological existence, and system of nature” (Gregersen 2001). Their vision of deep incarnation echoes St. John Paul II: “The incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is ‘flesh’: the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world” (Pope John Paul II 1986, 50).

³ Again, pertinence is distinct from value, which Lonergan says we evaluate at the level of judgment. Pertinence is simply the criterion by which something emerges into our consciousness.

Inspired by Gregory of Nazianzus' axiom that "what is not assumed is not redeemed," deep incarnation encompasses Jesus' solidarity with the material conditions of all biological life forms and the sense experience of creatures. Johnson writes, "The flesh assumed in Jesus Christ connects with all humanity, all biological life, all soil, the whole matrix of the material universe down to its very roots" (Johnson 2014, 196). Psychic conversion redirects our attention to the pertinent reality of this interconnected matrix.

Lest "deep incarnation" separate the mystical work of the Trinity from the economy of salvation in history, we also look to the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. In *Laudato Si'*, Francis points to Jesus' way of attending to the natural world: "The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder" (Pope Francis 2015, 197). Taking Jesus as model, the psychic dimension of Christian ecological conversion consists in attending to the world as Christ attended, which, as Francis notes, means practicing the preferential option for the poor *and* the earth.

Likewise, Elizabeth Johnson forwards the "christic paradigm," as developed by Sallie McFague. The christic paradigm attends to the life and ministry of Jesus in history as divine revelation, concluding that "liberating, healing, and inclusive love is the meaning of it all" (McFague 1993 cited in Johnson 2014, 201). Such love, Johnson, argues, must extend to the earth. She thus proposes "deep ministry" as the pastoral manifestation of deep incarnation (Johnson 2015, 143–45). Deep ministry begins in Jesus' particular concern for the poor and marginalized and extends that concern to the exploited earth. This extension finds a reflection in *Laudato Si'*, in which

Francis urges an integral ecology that links love of neighbor and care for the earth as mutual expressions of love for God (Pope Francis 2015, 10).

Ecological conversion as psychic is also *Trinitarian*. Noting that the world is “created according to the divine model” of Trinitarian relations, and calling on Bonaventure’s claim that the whole world and each creature bear the imprint of the Trinity, Francis writes, “[T]hroughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships” (Pope Francis 2015, 240). He adds, “Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (Ibid). To perceive such interconnectedness is not necessarily easy, a fact that Bonaventure attributed to sin. Yet, Francis notes, we are still challenged to “read reality in a Trinitarian key” (Ibid 239).

A change in the way we “read reality” is a change at the level of the psyche; it is a call for psychic conversion. Ecological conversion on the psychic level demands that we repudiate ways of reading reality that allow us to damage creation without considering the consequences. Instead, pondering our own attention, we begin to ask about every action and item, “To what else is this connected, and how, and what does such connection have to do with the way I now live?” This new way of living becomes *ectastic* insofar as it invites us into self-transcendence, recognition of the interconnectedness of reality, and joy in the beauty of God’s creation.

IV. Pedagogical Suggestions

We wager that a majority of theological educators in higher education today, including the authors of this essay, share the predicament of James Smith. We unequivocally affirm the truth

articulated in *Laudato Si'*, but we continue to use the McDonald's drive-thru. This is likewise the quandary of our students at large. The foregoing account of ecological conversion outlined the philosophical and theological foundations for a pedagogy that invites healing into our fractured relationship with the biotic family. Above we noted two major elements involved in the psychic dimension of ecological conversion: 1) the establishment of a reflective discourse between the psychic flow and the conscious operations so that we can attend more responsibly to our sense data and 2) the shift in desire and horizon so that we come to see what we previously did not, so that we recognize what has been actively hidden from us by forces such as consumer culture, or what we simply could not see due to our social location or historical, cultural context. We now present "ectastic" pedagogical suggestions that may promote ecological conversion as psychic and contribute to St. Francis' self-transcendent union with the cosmic world.

1. Reestablishing Connections

If ecological conversion on the psychic level involves establishing the inner connection between the psychic flow and the intentional conscious operations, what pedagogical approaches might support this connection? In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Mary Field Belenky urge what they call "connected teaching." In connected teaching, the teacher confirms the student as "independent, a subject" (Belenky et al. 1997, 224). We would add that it is also important to acknowledge students as "feelers." They do not merely *know*. Acknowledging and dealing with feeling is important to healing the pathological rifts or imbalances between our psychic flow (our images, emotions, sensations, memories, desires) and our intentional conscious operations (our understanding, inquiring, evaluating, and acting).

In a rationalistic classroom, we fear emotion and seek to dampen it. But in a connected classroom, feelings can be a source of knowledge, a motivator to know more, and an object of reflection. Strong feelings are in fact a healthy response to overwhelming stories of environmental and species destruction. Yet in college classrooms, students are often asked to move on quickly from their feelings about the situation to analysis of the problems. We contend that education for ecological conversion on the psychic level must encourage students to notice their feelings and reflect upon them.

One of us has developed an exercise for a freshman class to facilitate this process of inner reconnection. In this course, students read the devastating stories of oppressed workers around the world and also see news stories and documentaries about the environmental destruction in which consumer culture is complicit. These stories increase emotional engagement, but they can also lead to paralysis. Often strong emotions are accompanied by strong statements, such as, “What can we do?!” or “It’s hopeless.” Hearing such statements, the educator announces that a thought has flown through the room and writes two columns on the board labeled “Thoughts” and “Feelings.” Writing down the words a student has just said (“What can we do?”), the educator then asks the students to consider what feelings accompany this question. Students respond: Guilt. Fear. Anger. Impatience. Discouragement. The class further talks about the relationship between emotions and thoughts and the relation of both to our action in the world. The goal is to help students bind up the rift between their feelings and conscious operations, as well as to equip them to take responsibility for the unfolding relationship between psyche and conscious operations.

As we noted above, psychic conversion also involves unearthing the images that guide us and developing new images that open possibilities for different ways of life. A second exercise used in the above-mentioned class is aimed at unearthing such dominant images. Near the beginning of the course, students are asked to draw a picture of themselves “living a good life.” The students, mostly freshmen, often draw pictures of a large house, a small family, sometimes a lucrative job, and frequently the symbols of expensive leisure activities. Together, the class analyzes these pictures: Who is in them? What activities are represented? What resources are being used? Students note that our pictures of a good life tend to be centered on personal gratification. Through such an exercise, we unearth the subterranean images that establish us as unreflecting consumers. Such excavation makes way for replacement images that might guide us.

Laudato Si' offers the “replacement image” of interconnectedness. Pedagogies of ecological conversion as psychic can help students see the interconnectedness of the world. One of us asks students in an introductory theology course to trace the origin of one mass-produced item they own. In the process, students discover a vast web of economic, labor, and resource relationships that intersect in them as a consumer, a web on which we then reflect ethically and theologically. Fiction can also help students perceive connections that might not otherwise be apparent, as well as affect them emotionally. Barbara Kingsolver’s novel *Flight Behavior* is a good choice, offering a story of one woman’s journey into ecological consciousness (Kingsolver 2012). The novel makes visible the strands that connect human behavior to species survival, as well as the connections of family, community, nation, and culture in a specific place. Reading such works allows students to reflect on the connections of their own world.

2. *Changing Horizons*

Psychic conversion, as an aspect of ecological conversion, is also a change in horizon so that we can see what we did not see before. To support this shift, Omerod and Vanin recommend increasing our attentiveness to the natural world—an attentiveness the educator can support. But the choice to pay attention at all is based on a prior noticing. If something seems immaterial or unimportant to us, we are unlikely to attend to it, and if, as in the case in consumer culture, many of the world's realities are actively hidden from us, we will never consider certain facts or questions at all. Thus a second pedagogy for changing horizons is *encounter*, in which the educator invites learners to discover what they had previously failed to notice. Encounter challenges living at its very roots. Lonergan adds, “Encounter is the one way in which self-understanding and horizon can be put to the test” (Lonergan 2003, 247).

Above we noted that the preferential option for the poor and the earth instantiates Christ's “deep ministry.” In a world structured towards severe economic inequality that inevitably distorts the disinterested desire to know and limits our horizon, the preferential option for the poor and earth creates the conditions for the possibility of ecological conversion (Gutiérrez 1988). The option, as expressed through our attentiveness, invites us to encounter those who do their knowing, deciding and loving within distinct horizons marked by the experience of poverty or oppression.

Encounters with the poor and the exploited earth can reveal our tacit anthropological, cosmological, and moral assumptions, inevitably informed by biases, which order our horizon. Rohan Curnow highlights Robert Doran's innovation of psychic conversion as an expression of the option for the poor: “In psychic conversion, the images for needed insights, subsequent

judgments, and decisions, are admitted to consciousness, along with the appropriate concomitant feelings that function to reinforce intentional operations” (Curnow 2012, 146). James Marsh adds the category of political conversion as a “more consistent expression of the option for the poor. The true God is not a God that protects and legitimizes the bourgeoisie status quo, but a God that liberates us from such a status quo – Jesus Christ the Liberator” (Marsh 2014, 126). If a middle-class or wealthy student enters into the world of the poor with honesty, he or she is more likely to radically question the habits of the heart that inform the identity of North American upwardly mobile subjects informed by a culture of bourgeois individualism. Speaking from the perspective of the privileged, Dean Brackley explains:

Letting the poor crash through our defenses usually provokes a wholesome crisis that leaves us shaken and disoriented. If we stay with the poor – listening, observing, interacting – our horizon opens. Our worldview gets reconfigured. What is really important (life itself and love) moves from the margins toward the center of the canvas, displacing what is less important (Brackley 2008, 6).

It follows that education for ecological conversion should include such encounters with others and the earth—especially encounters that clarify the devastation and vulnerability of the earth—as integral to its curriculum.

Encounter can happen face-to-face, through interviews, field trips, and travel. But encounters can also be virtual and include documentaries, news stories, and fiction. For example, one of us asks students to watch the documentary *The True Cost*, which is about the effects of the fashion industry on workers and the environment (Morgan 2015). Through the film, students “meet” garment workers in Bangladesh, a Texas organic cotton farmer, and activists for ethical fashion. Having watched this moving film, students often remark that they suddenly recognize the *reality* of workers on the other side of the world—these are real people, with real lives and desires.

Students also note a change in their own desires: suddenly, the cute, cheap consumer item seems so much less appealing. Here, we discern the beginnings of psychic conversion: students begin to see the situation of poor and oppressed people, as well as the plight of the earth, as bearing on their own lives. From there, they begin to pay attention, to ask questions, to evaluate situations, and to make decisions to act.

V. Conclusion: An Ecstatic Pedagogy

The climate crisis is the greatest existential threat and most pressing moral issue of our time, and responding adequately to it will require fundamental change. The mission of Christian universities obligates them to respond to this crisis with an education that transfigures our relationship with the biotic family. Ecological conversion entails an existential shift from a relationship with the earth marked by possessive, wasteful consumption to one marked by delight in creation, concern for its suffering, and preservation of this divine gift. We must understand, feel, and behave as though *everything is connected*. Such a conversion toward *ecstasis*, which is always a mystery beyond any educator's power to produce, finds support in teaching strategies that heal inner connections and enable encounter. Through such means, the Spirit may transform our fundamental orientations and dispositions towards self-transcendent union with the earth.

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Healing our Divide with the Non-Human World: Ecclesiological Trends Within the Wild Church Network

Abstract:

A growing number of new faith communities in North America are emerging as part of the Wild Church Network. These outdoor church expressions seek to re-acquaint, re-cover, and re-member their faith communities as loving participants of the larger community of Creation. This paper explores theological foundations and spiritual practices grounding the ecclesologies of these communities. This study is based on data gathered from site visits, surveys, and interviews with Wild Church leaders and participants. Implications for faith formation in this era of climate change will be explored.

Faith Formation in the Anthropocene

Climate change is a key, if not the key, issue shaping the quality of life on our planet. In May, our planet reached a record level of over 415 parts per billion (ppb) of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.¹ 350 ppb, which was reached in 1990, is believed to be the threshold for a stable climate. This reality contributes to species extinction, sea level rise that displaces human and non-human creatures, poor air quality which most adversely impacts people of color in urban settings, and a myriad of other ecological disturbances and social justice issues. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby describe action on climate change as a moral responsibility.² In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis cited the need for “ecological conversion” to reclaim our responsibility of caring for God’s Creation³ and all of its inhabitants.⁴ In these times, Christian discipleship calls for a sustained and integrated response to climate change. Yet, as a whole, Christian communities have remained largely silent or indifferent, continuing to engage in practices that exacerbate these realities rather than address them.

What faith-based teachings need to be emphasized or recovered to engage in the work of addressing this crisis? What pedagogies and practices can nurture a love of the earth that heals our divide with our planet and moves people toward action to care for it? How do we equip people of faith with the resilience necessary to engage in ecological justice for the long haul,

¹ “Daily CO2,” CO2-earth, accessed September 15, 2019. <https://www.co2.earth/daily-co2>. The level, as of this writing, is a bit lower (just over 408 ppm), but annual record highs have been steadily increasing.

² Bartholomew and Justin Welby, “Climate Change and Moral Responsibility,” *The New York Times*, accessed September 15, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/20/opinion/climate-change-and-moral-responsibility.html>

³ I have intentionally chosen the term Creation rather than Nature in my own narrative throughout this paper. In my experience, most people are culturally conditioned to think of Nature as wilderness or dedicated green space. This can perpetuate a notion of Nature as “other,” perhaps especially in persons raised in urban settings. Creation, while still conjuring images of the natural world, I believe has greater potential for inviting a broader perspective which would include the grass emerging through a sidewalk crack as well as human beings. I have also intentionally capitalized Creation to communicate its reality as a sentient being and help shift our cultural tendency to refer to Creation as an “it”.

⁴ Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’ of the Holy Father Francis: On Care for our Common Home*. 18 June 2015.

even when the fruits of our labor are uncertain? What spaces do we create for the acknowledgement and processing of grief which is inevitable as we lose habitats, species, and human communities?

Erin Lothes Biviano interviewed faith-based environmentalists and uncovered seven patterns that moved people from being “ideally green” to “really green.”⁵ Biviano states that “promoting experiences in nature is a key strategy for several faith-based environmental groups.”⁶ Concurrent with reading Biviano’s research, I discovered the Wild Church Network (www.wildchurchnetwork.org), a network of churches that worship outside. These communities seek to help people “re-acquaint, re-cover, and re-member”⁷ themselves as participants in the natural world. Through an online survey, interviews with leaders and participants, and site visits to several of these churches in the United States, I sought to discern how, if at all, worshipping outdoors impacted the spiritual lives of participants as well as their sustainability practices. Did regular communal worship outdoors help people move from being “ideally green” to living “really green”? Were there distinctive elements of their spiritual experience that appeared not to be as readily available or nurtured in traditional indoor congregations?

This paper explores some of the explicit and implicit theological foundations and community practices of Wild Churches. In what ways are these practices helping heal participants’ divide with the non-human world? This exploration will conclude with a discussion of possible implications for faith formation in this time of climate change, with attention to practices that may be applicable for predominantly indoor faith communities as well. While most of the communities I studied identify to varying degrees with the Christian tradition, some findings may be applicable and/or translatable to other traditions.

Described below are very broad strokes of themes that emerged during my research. Further reflection and exploration will be needed to fully surface deeper learnings and identify challenges in the practices of Wild Churches.

What Makes a Wild Church a Wild Church?

I had the privilege of visiting seven Wild Churches in the United States for this project.⁸ Several Wild Churches in Canada also exist in Canada, and the number in both countries has been increasing steadily. These churches represent a wide range of denominational affiliations (including none), meet in a variety of settings – some with their own property, some in parks, some at times in parking lots – with great diversity in liturgical practice, and varying degrees of connection to the Christian tradition. So what defines a Wild Church? Leaders of these churches have been exploring this question as the network grows. Although the criteria are still being refined, the following four characteristics have general consensus. The first two criteria describe what make a Wild Church “wild”; the second two identify what make a Wild Church “a church”:

⁵ The seven patterns Biviano identified are: scientific literacy; awareness of global interdependence; commitment to social justice; reverence for creation; interfaith connections; expanding religious visions of God, neighbor, and self; and being independent thinkers. Erin Lothes Biviano, *Inspired Sustainability: Planting Seeds for Action* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 1-37.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷ Home Page, Wild Church Network, accessed August 23, 2019, <https://www.wildchurchnetwork.com>.

⁸ I am deeply grateful to the BTS Center (<https://www.thebtscenter.org>) for the Innovation Incubator grant which funded this project. The stipulations of this grant limited travel to within the United States.

1. **Wild Churches Meet Outside.** Wild Churches regularly meet outdoors, rain or shine, except in extreme weather conditions. They connect directly with the natural world, whether in the woods or a parking lot, as part of their practice.
2. **Nature is Preacher and Co-Congregant.** Wild Churches intentionally develop spiritual practices that deepen understanding of the Beloved Community to include all people and all of Creation.
3. **Wild Churches Meet in Community.** The website states: “Wild Church is about going to your own local version of wilderness, into your own watershed, on purpose, *together*, to practice the presence of God.”⁹ Part of this foundational experience includes acknowledging the indigenous human communities who were the original inhabitants of the land.
4. **Wild Churches are Grounded in the Christ Tradition.**¹⁰ While most Wild Church communities either very explicitly and intentionally identify as Christian or implicitly connect to that tradition through the person of the leader, a few communities identify as interspiritual rather than Christian. There is general consensus, however, with the statement that their purpose “is not to recruit new members into any dogma, creed, or even some new ‘wild church’ religion, but to invite people into a direct, sacred relationship with an untamed God, the land, each other, and creatures who share their home, and into a deeper relationship with their own wild untamed soul.”¹¹

Theological Foundations of Wild Churches

Wild Churches do not share a common denominational tradition. They do, however, share a number of theological perspectives that ground their practices. The following themes are all present to some degree in each of the communities I visited. I believe that these foundations can also help a broader range of faith communities heal their divide with the non-human world.

Creation as a Manifestation of God

Pantheism was a predominant theme in conversations with both leaders and participants in Wild Churches. Many communicated a conviction that God is in all things, including the natural world, and speaks through it. As one leader put it, “Creation is God’s sermon.” Another described the theological foundation for her ministry as “my absolute certainty that the Divine Mystery is present, inherent, and speaking to us in and through the natural world. And moves within the natural world. And can be experienced if we are open to it.” A third named “the reality that God, the Divine, is deeply embedded in all things. Within Creation itself. Within human beings. And in the relationships between us. In the space between us. That all things are sacred. All beings.”

Some leaders who ground this connection in Christian terms described Creation as part of the body of Christ, as part of the incarnation. This connection is seen as integral to helping people connect with Creation. One leader described the theological foundation for her ministry as follows: “I’ve had a growing sense of the importance of the concept of incarnation. And I really think that’s the most central and key theological basis for faith, is the fact that God is

⁹ “What Makes a Wild Church a Church? What Makes a Wild Church Wild?,” Wild Church Network, accessed August 23, 2019. <https://www.wildchurchnetwork.com/about>.

¹⁰ This criterion is currently fostering significant discussion amongst leaders in the Wild Church Network.

¹¹ “What Makes a Wild Church a Church? What Makes a Wild Church Wild?”

incarnate, not just in Jesus, but in us and in all of creation.” Another leader asserted that “Once one understands the natural world as part of the body of Christ, then how—why would we not behave with the same intention to that part of the body of Christ as we do to all the rest of the body of Christ that we’re used to talking about?” A number of participants also echoed this expanded understanding of Christ’s incarnation to include the non-human world.

Creation as Part of the Beloved Community

Wild Churches explicitly include the land on which they worship and all of its creatures as part of the Beloved Community. Many leaders intentionally challenge anthropocentric understandings of Christian theology and practice. This is consistent with one of the patterns that Lothes Biviano found as well – an expanded religious vision of God, self, and neighbor. One of her focus groups named an understanding of human “identity linked with the cosmos, with God and creation, being not ‘*apart from* creation, but a part *of* creation.’”¹² She noted that “within such expanding religious visions, people, plants, and even rocks are kin.... These are elements of an ecological identity: an embodied identity that goes beyond a scientific description of relationship between humanity and creation to focus on people’s self-perception.”¹³ Wild Churches often invite their participants to “re-member” their place in creation. As one leader described it,

...loving our neighbor, knowing our neighbor, and welcoming the, the stranger and anyone who arrives, those are all central to our theology and practice. And, I think, being outdoors, how that has allowed us to deepen our, our theology and practice, seeing our non-human neighbors as neighbors.... Knowing where the, you know, where the different terrains are, even within these twelve acres... that those are part of, part of neighbors, part of our neighborhood, part of what we care for as well as our human neighbors.

Lothes Biviano points out that this understanding can lead to a broader understanding of social justice. In such an understanding, love of neighbor “remained absolutely central, but its compass widened. Now the earth community belonged to a larger definition of the neighbor, and social justice serves the entire earth community, seeing the ‘earth as the new poor.’”¹⁴ She notes further that participants came to understand that “[N]eighbors in need include plants, animals, and even nonsentient parts of planetary systems.”¹⁵

To foster this re-membering, a number of leaders invite participants to converse with one or more of their non-human neighbors as part of their worship service. Several communities have a time of “wandering” as part of their practice. During this time, participants are given between 10-45 minutes to go for a solo walk in the surrounding area. Typically, participants are sent out with a question or holy text to ponder, to carry with them in search of a conversation partner on the land. They seek a companion amongst the trees, flowers, grasses, and/or animal beings that they encounter. One part of this practice is asking the non-human neighbor for permission to sit with them. This simple instruction communicates the recognition of the agency and value of the potential conversation partner.

Thus, the relationship to the natural world is not unidirectional. In their practices of wandering or reflection, Wild Church participants are invited to listen for the wisdom that a being (or beings) has to teach them. As a couple of leaders described, their intention is to guide

¹² Lothes Biviano, 20.

¹³ Lothes Biviano, 21.

¹⁴ Lothes Biviano, 23.

¹⁵ Lothes Biviano, 33.

people from a place where Creation is something they love to Creation being something people have a relationship with – in other words, to move from Creation being an “other” or object to being a subject. This expanded understanding of neighbor was articulated by a number of participants. One person described their community as a place that “reconnects people with the earth and adapts spiritual traditions to engage land and wildlife as steward, co-creator, and friend.” Another participant stated that being part of the community had “increased my sense of sacredness and connectedness of everything.”

Liturgy is key in nurturing these understandings of connection to nature. The two liturgical churches I visited have adapted their liturgies to include imagery of the surrounding land, thanksgiving for the surrounding watershed, and/or recognition of their non-human neighbors. One offers a time for persons to name the creatures that are praying with them and/or to listen for the hymns that Creation is already singing with them. Several Wild Church communities also include recognition of the indigenous peoples who were the first human inhabitants on the land, recognizing the community’s presence on unceded indigenous territory. Sermons or a “Note from Nature” include recognition of what we can learn from Creation and what God is revealing to us in Creation.

Communities which practice some form of the eucharist include participation of non-human neighbors in the ritual. In one community, the celebrant offers the first piece of bread to the earth as well as the last bit of wine. Dogs are among the attendees in some communities and are offered the communion elements. One participant described the significance of being able to bring his dog, Sadie¹⁶, to worship:

...every service I was able to come and enjoy the service, but then also bring Sadie and then walk for 20-25 minutes with her, but in a way that I felt like, you know, ... “I think Sadie was having a spiritual experience too.” I have no idea. She couldn’t tell me... Blake was also kind enough to give her a piece of communion bread every time... [E]very time we would come to church she would sit very quietly and mostly patiently, because she knew something good was coming.

The first funeral in one of these new communities was for a canine attendee. Both leaders and participants view the inclusion of these four-legged community members as one manifestation of how all Creation is part of the worshiping community.

Even churches that do not have a formal liturgy include prayers, readings, or songs that encourage people to develop a relationship with their non-human kin. Several communities began with some variation of a four-directions prayer, intentionally greeting their surroundings and celebrating the gifts and wisdom that their non-human neighbors provide.

Reimagining Salvation and Discipleship

Traditional Christian terms like “salvation” or “discipleship” were largely absent from participants’ descriptions of their church’s identity. Although these words were not used, themes of transformation and service or mission were present.

Several participants described their congregation as a place of healing – healing for themselves, for the human community, and for the Earth. The theme of healing the land emerged predominantly in congregations with settled spaces. Leaders and participants talked about the healing work of letting native plant life return to land that had been over-forested or used for other human-induced purposes. Healing emerged as a theme in non-settled communities as well. One service I attended in a public space focused on repairing harm. Participants were asked to

¹⁶ The names of all humans and creatures in this paper are pseudonyms.

consider how they might repair harm to the land, and were invited to consider this as a practice that would also help them heal from their own wounds. Lothes Biviano noted a similar pattern in her study participants. She noted that they came to see “life on the planet is part of the self—and so the distinction of caring for ‘nature’ outside of us disappears.”¹⁷ Doctrines were seen as not just concerned with the individual soul, but belief systems that impacted the entire planet. They “came to recognize a ‘bigger God’ whose concerns included the earth.”¹⁸

Providing sanctuary arose as a form of mission in communities with their own land. One participant described the church’s mission as providing “relatively undeveloped land as a refuge for animals, plants, and humans.” The leader of another community echoed this sentiment, describing the mission of her church as one of “holding sanctuary, holding sacred space” in an area undergoing rapid development.

These images of healing and sanctuary demonstrate an understanding of salvation that goes beyond Western Christian individualistic constructions that limit salvation to the relationship between an individual and Christ. Salvation is a communal experience which includes all of Creation.

Priesthood of All Believers

One leader explicitly identified this as a theological grounding for their Wild Church. The pastor embodied this grounding in a “Blessing of the Animals” service I attended. After giving the human participants the opportunity to share life lessons their animals had taught them, this leader invited them to bless their own animals, stating “not just persons with stoles can bless.” While other leaders did not explicitly name the priesthood of all believers as a commitment, practices in each community implicitly communicated this theological foundation to some degree. For example, the chosen worship arrangement for almost all of the Wild Churches was a circle. The few that did not worship in a circle (likely due to size) had participants in a semi-circle. This implicitly communicates the importance of all participants in the worship experience.

Several explicit practices in Wild Churches also decentralized the role of the identified leader and engaged all congregants. One of the more liturgical churches had all participants join in the communion blessing. During the wandering that some congregations practice, people are often invited to bring back a piece of nature that spoke to them (if appropriate) and place it on the altar to share in the building of the altar. The leader of one community described this as having all participants become members of the altar guild. Folks are then invited to share about what spoke to them during their wandering. One faith community intentionally describes this as the “community sermon.”

Worship Without Walls

As illustrated in the examples above, participants consistently talked about the experience of worshipping outside as a means of helping them connect or re-connect with God and Creation. However, people spoke distinctively of the experience of worship without walls or physical boundaries. Participants expressed sentiments such as “walls disconnect from what is real.” One leader stated that “the box of buildings doesn’t help us listen to God.” Participants described the lack of walls as leading to authenticity, to being “a truly safe place [for participants] to be their vulnerable messy selves.” A number of participants described how worship outdoors had helped them move from an intellectual faith to a more embodied experience that involves all of their

¹⁷ Lothes Biviano, 27.

¹⁸ Lothes Biviano, 33.

senses. Worship outdoors in Wild Churches called for incarnational participation of congregants. Wandering is a significant way that this occurs, though members of communities without this practice also described more holistic bodily engagement in worship.

Some participants experienced the lack of walls as a means of facilitating connections with people, especially people with diverse opinions and theologies. Two pastors also named the diversity of theological and political opinions present in their congregations, the challenges of discussing climate change issues explicitly, and simultaneous appreciation for the way their congregation members were still largely able to be in meaningful relationship with one another.

In her research, Lothes Biviano noted the importance of worship in helping transcend differences in people's willingness to engage in conversations about climate change. In her study, Lothes Biviano had noted that "[b]ecause group experiences of worship and celebration inscribed care for creation within ancient traditions, worship smoothed the way to accepting new ideas.... Worship has a unifying and communal authority that transcends the divisive taint of politics or wary mistrust of that global-warming science."¹⁹ One of her participants noted that "people strongly resisted being urged to consider the environment if it seemed to be motivated by political leanings.... But the shared commitments of faith created a bridge. These shared commitments were highlighted and celebrated in worship."²⁰ In the two communities I referenced above, both of which have permanent property, the shared commitment to caring for the land and its non-human inhabitants constitutes the bridge. The communal experience of worship without walls on that land appears to help build and strengthen that bridge.

From "Ideally Green" to "Really Green"?

One key purpose of my research was to discern the impact that participation in a Wild Church had both on one's spiritual life and on participants' daily practices in relationship to creation and its care.²¹ How do people describe the influence that worshipping in a Wild Church has had on their spiritual life and daily practices? Some themes are named in the previous section. Other noteworthy patterns emerged in the survey data and interviews.

Many participants described themselves as having already been committed to caring for Creation and/or being environmental activists. The largest shift for them was merging these commitments with their spiritual practices. Following are some of their reflections:

- "Wild Church has made my environmentalism less secular, and more sacred."
- "I'm now practicing ecospirituality, not just ecoconservationism."
- "This community has helped me connect my spirituality to my environmentally-conscious lifestyle choices."

Some respondents further stated that community participation has also provided strength for their work on environmental issues. One participant described how her experience in a Wild Church "enhances and reinforces" her sustainability efforts. Another stated: "My new social practice ... is that I now meet with other people in nature with a sacred intent. For others, this may lead them to creation care. For me, it deepens my already existing practices and gives me the spiritual energy to continue."

Several survey questions sought to uncover how participation in a Wild Church increased participants' practice of creation care. A significant majority of participants' responses to these

¹⁹ Lothes Biviano, 128-29.

²⁰ Lothes Biviano, 133.

²¹ The second key purpose of my research was to discern particular leadership approaches and skills that were present in Wild Church pastors. Discussion of those findings is beyond the scope of this paper.

questions indicated a positive correlation between their creation care practices and participation in a Wild Church. For example, one person stated that their church involvement has “caused me to kind of completely rethink how I think about church and how I think about spirituality and how I think about care for the Earth, and what it means to be comfortable blending all of those things.” Survey participants listed changes in eating habits (becoming vegetarian or vegan, or at least eating less meat), driving and/or flying less, composting, reducing use of plastics, etc. since becoming part of their Wild Church. One person stated, “I consider the earth when I spend and when I vote.” Several others stated that their advocacy for the earth had increased, either in conversations with friends, family, and colleagues or in deeper political engagement. Some participants attributed these practices directly to their church affiliation; others saw these changes as part of a wider fabric of influences of which the Wild Church was one.

Despite this uncertainty regarding causality in some persons’ individual responses and interviews, overall trends in the survey responses demonstrated a more direct relationship. For example, one question asked persons to respond to a quote from Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si*: “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an option or secondary aspect of our Christian experience.” Survey participants were asked to rate their agreement with this statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was not at all and 5 was very much so. Of the 50 survey participants, 48 rated their agreement either as 4 (10 respondents) or 5 (38 respondents). They were then asked to rate the extent to which participation in their faith community had influenced their rating using the same scale. Of the 48 persons noted above, twelve rated the Wild Church’s influence on their response with a 3; thirteen rated this with a 4; and seventeen responded by rating the influence with a 5.

More definitive relationships emerged as participants described changes in their spiritual practices and relationship to the earth as the result of participation in a Wild Church. This was communicated unintentionally in response to one survey question. Respondents were asked to rate changes in their level of participation in ten personal lifestyle practices since becoming part of their Wild Church, such as changing eating habits, transportation patterns, and reducing use of plastics. After participants rated each of these items, a follow-up question asked people to list any additional practices they had undertaken since becoming part of their Wild Church. Twenty-seven persons listed additional practices. Of these practices, only nine listed lifestyle practices such as the ones they had just rated. Eighteen listed practices that would traditionally be described as spiritual (although there was a question specifically related to spiritual practices earlier in the survey). All eighteen responses described some form of what one participant described as “increasing time spent in nature; engaging rituals set in nature” through prayer, poetry, personal wandering, and/or learning the names of non-human inhabitants of their ecosystem. One participant stated that they “practice daily to radically engage the natural world, give thanks, [and] walk the earth with care for all beings.” Another stated that they were “more aware of [the] Holy Spirit in everyday encounters with the natural world.”

Pedagogical Implications for Christian Communities in the Anthropocene

“All who worship on Sunday mornings would do well to ponder how our weekly indoor gatherings can help correct our anthropocentric focus, and whether worship services should be held more frequently outdoors.”²²

Jim Antal, *Climate Church Climate World*

²² Jim Antal, *Climate Church Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 108-9.

“Of course!” Wild Church leaders and participants would respond to Jim Antal’s somewhat off-the-cuff comment in *Climate Church Climate World*. In this book, Antal makes a compelling case for addressing climate change as the key focus for Christian discipleship in this cultural moment. He offers practical suggestions for re-imagining practices, such as preaching, for this discipleship. The section below brings some of Antal’s insights into conversation with the theological foundations of Wild Churches described above. Possible implications for pedagogy and practice in indoor and outdoor congregations will be suggested.

Cultivating Wonder and Imagination

In his chapter on Prophetic Preaching, Antal identifies two approaches as central to the work preachers must do in preparing people’s hearts for the ongoing work of addressing climate change: cultivating wonder and nurturing imagination. He advocates for a commitment to cultivating wonder by appreciating and contemplating the beautiful gift of God’s creation. Antal suggests that the reading of Mary Oliver’s poetry or Wendell Berry’s essays can be a way to nurture imagination.²³ In this short section of his book, Antal seems to be speaking more to preachers about their own formation than offering strategies for the fostering of wonder and imagination in one’s preaching. He also does not explore the possibility of moving a congregation outside to cultivate wonder and nurture imagination. Wild Churches, however, offer such practices.

Wandering is one practice that both cultivates wonder and nurtures imagination. While this practice may not be practical for weekly worship in many indoor congregations, it could be incorporated into other settings such as Bible studies, retreats, and other community practices. Wandering also need not be limited to settings one traditionally considers “wild.” Even urban settings have trees, birds, insects, and flowers that one can observe and engage in conversation with, and learn from.

Faith communities seeking to learn more about their neighborhoods often participate in a “neighborhood walk” to understand its demographics, explore local businesses, and identify public resources that are present there. Faith communities could do a neighborhood walk seeking to identify their non-human neighbors. What flora and fauna are present? What birds and animals do you see? What evidence do you see of their stress or thriving?

Nurturing Love and Gratitude

Antal noticed two key motivations fueling persons’ activism on behalf of Creation. The first, and most powerful, motivator is love: “love of God; love of nature; love of beauty; love of their children; love of creatures and plants in all their diversity; love of the impossible way in which this planet provides all living things with everything we need to flourish.”²⁴ Antal found that such love, combined with honest reckoning of the ways humanity has threatened the well-being of these loves, provides the courage for people to bear witness.²⁵

Some Wild Churches explicitly live out a call to activism on behalf of creation. Most of the communities that I visited did not, though most, if not all, have participants who would describe themselves as environmental activists. Love of creation, however, is consistently cultivated through prayer, liturgy, and other practices. As one participant stated: “Our aim ... is

²³ Antal, 127.

²⁴ Antal, 144.

²⁵ Antal, 145.

to reconnect with the divine through creation, to feel and understand our connection to the living world, to grieve for our destructive actions and learn to be in deeper conversation with and connection to the wild world we are part of. We can't save what we don't know and love." Wandering practice again emerged as a source of nurturing love, but participants in churches without wandering also communicated a deepening of love of Creation through their worship practices.

Gratitude was the second motivating factor Antal noted in activists. They expressed gratitude for creation and all of the ways in which it nurtures and sustains life, as well as gratitude for many other gifts God has given. Interestingly, gratitude did not emerge as a notable theme in my respondents. As noted above, Wild Church participants more consistently described how church participation helped them re-member their identity as part of Creation. For them, this connection seems to motivate action and care, though further data analysis would be needed to solidly determine this correlation.

Antal asserts that faith communities need to transform familiar liturgies and create new ones to nurture the love and gratitude that will motivate action on behalf of Creation. The theological foundations of Wild Churches earlier can provide guidance for such liturgical renewal. Consider, for example, shifting focus from salvation as an individual event between a human being and Christ to salvation as a communal experience that includes both the human and non-human community. What prayers do we need to stop reciting? Which hymns do we need to stop singing, or at least revise? If shifting from an anthropocentric understanding of Christianity is necessary for the flourishing of our planet, some of our beloved rituals may need to be revised or set aside.

The more liturgical Wild Churches have reworked their traditions' established liturgies to include more creation-based imagery and recognition of the natural world as part of the worshiping community. Below is the blessing of the eucharistic elements from one community, which is recited collectively:

Now gathered at your table, remembering that we are one with you and with all creation, we offer to you from your own Earth these gifts of the land, this bread and wine, and our own bodies – our own living sacrifice.

Pour out your Spirit upon these gifts that they may be the Body and Blood of Christ.

Fill us with your Breath, O God, opening our eyes and renewing us in your love.

Send your Spirit over this land and over the whole Earth, making everything a new creation.

In the fullness of time bring us, with this good Earth and with all your creatures from every people and tribe and faith and language and nation and species, to feast at the banquet prepared from the foundation of the world.²⁶

This revised liturgy names the oneness of the human community with all of Creation, and includes the whole Earth as recipients of the Spirit's blessing and participants in the Divine feast. Such re-imagining is also needed in the rituals of indoor congregations to nurture love of, gratitude for, and connection to God and Creation.

Creation as Teacher

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;

The birds of the air, and they will tell you;

²⁶ From <http://kairosearth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CotW-liturgy-Dec-2016.pdf>, accessed September 12, 2019.

*Ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
And the fish of the sea will declare to you.*

Job 12:7-8

Reshaping language and liturgy in indoor congregations is an important movement in shifting people's consciousness to a more inclusive understanding of salvation and discipleship to encompass all of Creation. However, nothing can substitute for experiencing the above-referenced liturgy outside surrounded by the trees, birds, rocks, and woodland creatures. I still can feel the autumn breeze and hear its rustling through the leaves as I shared in that liturgy with the human and non-human community in the New Hampshire woods. The community of creation was visibly present as we shared in the bread and wine together. As much as traditional indoor congregations can seek to foster transformation through their liturgical practice, such transformation is limited if all such practice is conducted inside or with only human congregants. The stories of Wild Church leaders and participants shared during this study testify to the significant role that Creation plays as teacher, facilitator, and guide in participants' lives, in connecting them to the Divine, and in strengthening their relationship to Creation. As one participant stated, "It's a lot harder to ignore what's happening to the environment when you're not separated from it."

Time in nature for all participants of indoor churches is an important vision. However, the reality of implementing it could be complicated for some communities and their parishioners. In urban settings, for example, connecting with Creation, as typically envisioned, could be challenging on a regular basis and would require ingenuity on the part of leaders to facilitate this connection. Some churches may not be in areas where green space is easily accessible. However, parishioners can be invited to notice and begin to appreciate trees or shrubs, even patches of bare ground that house communities of insects and microorganisms that we typically overlook.

Accessibility is another concern. Some persons with physical disabilities may have challenges in accessing and navigating green spaces. Others may be fearful of more wilderness settings, due to lack of experience with it or past trauma. How can communities help people with these challenges develop a meaningful connection to Creation? Indoor spaces can be transformed in ways that incorporate natural elements and include pictures of natural spaces. Worship experiences can include visual elements from Creation. Guided experiences with stones, a plant, or other natural beings can be conducted indoors as well as outside.

Next Steps

This preliminary summary and distillation of insights from my Wild Church research points to the need for experiences which help people deepen understanding of themselves as part of Creation, and rather than beings separate from or above it. This connection is crucial for motivating action toward addressing climate change personally and communally. Faith community practices that foster this connection to the natural world are critical for helping people of faith engage all of Creation as part of the Beloved Community in need of healing and salvation; healing and salvation work in which we are God's partners.

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Cooperative Coexistence for Co-creation

Abstract: The word cooperation is so commonly used that it has lost its meaning and is less practiced. The author in this research paper explores the theological, social, and historical ways of cooperation for coexistence. The research also highlights the basic realities that bring in cooperation and helps human beings to coexist. The paper also focuses on the challenges that arise from coexistence and how they impact the co-creation. Using this intensive research, the author proposes ways in which the societies can not only coexist; but this cooperation leads to co-creation bringing about new life and vitality. This paper provides insights from interviews and classical findings from everyday life which add richness and reality. It argues with the real facts that cooperative coexistence eventually leads to co-creation which is germane. The paper also augments the scope for Religious Educators to develop new pedagogical practices. It concludes by identifying areas which provide the vast scope for future research.

Introduction:

In the *busy-ness* of life it is important to pause and look into our neighbor's eyes, as we listen deeply instead of just a "how are you?" This phrase has become more of a greeting rather than its real meaning of genuine inquisitiveness of a neighbor's well-being. People seldom pause to listen after this question is asked. The busyness of life has created a false ego. There is a need for the movement from the individualistic consumer ego to the communal ecosystem. The need for the community is derived from the basic human drive to live in communion with each other.

Coexistence means the fact of living together at the same time or in the same place. The broader definition of coexistence itself means that there are two separate entities and yet they live together either in the same place or at the same time. There is an intrinsic sense of belonging which keeps them together in the same place. This coexistence opens up possible avenues to cooperation.

Cooperation as it simply means operating together towards a common objective. The Greek word for cooperation means synergy, collaboration, etc... The word *cooperation* goes beyond the group dynamics involved in groups or teams. In the everyday lives cooperation is silent like an unspoken word and yet is evident in the day to day operations. There is a belief in each other which is developed in the process as there is a need for operating towards a common objective. This synergy leads to becoming a new cohort as it co-creates a new space, or a product.

Co-creation is an act of creating something new by working together as a team. This is evident result of coexisting together as a community and synergistically operating together. The community which coexists eventually ends up *co-creating* as they cooperate in their activities. Co-creation is not an end result of an activity. It is an ongoing process in the life of the individual and the community. This activity is evident through the fruits that it yields for the common good. There are several ways that we can see life through the acts of co-creation.

On the one hand, The Wall Street Journal reported about the suicide bomber on Easter attacks as recent as April 21, 2019 at St. Sebastian's Church in Sri Lanka. The bomber was trained in Syria with Islamic State. This recent killing with a human suicide bomber is an example of hatred, and rationalization of values, and many other factors. This is preceded by a massacre at Christchurch, New Zealand on March 18, 2019. In this incident 50 adults and children were killed at two mosques. There are also similar shootings at two synagogues in the US. The New York Times reported on October 27, 2018 about the deadliest anti-Semitic shooting at the Tree Of Life Congregation Synagogue in the United States in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This was followed by the most recent Passover attack at a Synagogue in Poway, California on April 27, 2019. These classical examples depict that the whole race of human beings was attacked irrespective of religion, gender, age, culture, etc... These suggest one thing in common, no matter whether it is an organized attack or a random expression of hate, this is an irreversible act leading to death, trauma, hatred, fear, divisions in society, and the list goes on. What next?

On the other hand, following these deadly events, we were having interfaith discussions at the Islamic Center of Richmond about the recent happenings worldwide. The leaders of various religious groups and denominations (Catholics, Muslims, Jews, Baptists and other faiths from the community) met to grapple with real life issues and wrestle to understand how we all can coexist in these *divided societies*. The discussions that occurred at the Inter faith dialogue was an excellent example of how a Rabbi, Bishop, Pastor, Imam, and the community were able to talk openly of how they feel about the recent happenings. There was a safe space created to talk and express the feelings of the larger community. These places are referred to as safe because each individual opinion was valued and they could be their real self. Hence these spaces can also be referred to as *brave spaces*. The recent interfaith meeting at the Islamic center of Richmond gave us an open and honest conversational approach to the divisions in our societies. The meeting ended with what would be the next most faithful steps amidst these differences. How do we build a *social capital*?¹

In today's divided society, it is considered that these people who kill others (militants/terrorists) are from the poorest of the poor and do not have any means to survive. They were recruited to perform these tasks as their families were paid and supported. On the other hand, the very educated, elite, and middle class to upper middle class, youth/younger generation are taking up these tasks of carrying out the horrific slaughter of humankind. They are blinded to the fact that they are killing their own neighbors – the innocent human race. Intolerance to our own neighborhood, which is a diverse society today, is adding complexity to the coexistence. There is increase in knowledge and improved communication in the 21st century. Can we refer to those performing these cruel acts of merciless killing as *Educated Illiterates*?

What is the real problem of our society? How can we address the needs of our neighbors? What are the sacrifices that we need to make as a community? When do we realize the value of this precious life? Where can we find hope for these lives? What can we do to live in peace and unity?

¹ Sacks, Jonathan *The Dignity of Difference: How to avoid the clash of civilization* (New York, NY: CONTINNUM, 2005) pg. 148

Methodology: The methodology for this paper includes but is not limited to - Historical research, Insights from different faith traditions, Personal interviews from heterogeneous individuals, Bibliographical resources, Faith journals, Published articles, etc... These terms cooperative, coexistence, and co-creation do not have to occur in linear fashion for them to be evident. They are independent of each other and can occur randomly at any stage of life. Some of the interviews and case studies used for this research will reveal more about how the terms *cooperative*, *coexistence*, and *co-creation* are germane.

Historically human beings existed as a part of their communities and as groups of people. They lived together as they encountered the outside forces of nature and protected their own community. Communal living was a way of life and a means of survival. They also depended on each other for their living. Certain communities specialized in specific trades and they helped each other with their specialization, apart from all the differences and struggles.

What does it cost to appreciate the differences and yet live in harmony as being *Imago Dei*- valuable lives created in the Image of God? Does it cost more than the lives killed in all such incidences throughout history to just let go of our own *ego*.

It is interesting to see that we are created in the same physical bodies and species as our *homo-sapien* neighbors and yet ironically we often ignore our neighbors. Moreover the neighborly love is not evident in our society at this time. Especially in southern context in the United States, there is a deeper sense of *slavery* still persisting in the hearts of people. Though we “coexist” in the same society, there is seldom a sense of cooperation. Hence when the things of the past keep coming up, it suggests that there is no co-creation or healing and the society is still struggling with the same problems that existed decades ago.

In fact the Pew Research Center’s report as recent as April 2019 says that “most black adults have negative views about America’s racial progress.”² The moments of cooperation need to be a part of our everyday lives rather than isolated events. They are not acts of performance which are done occasionally. How can we as religious educators, educate the *educated illiterates*? Where do we see the value in our society as we educate? What are the pedagogical practices that we are willing to adopt in our teaching methodologies that would impact the present and the future generations?

Case Studies: We will try to understand the role of the terms cooperation, coexistence, and co-creation, by examining several interviews and case studies. This case study is to critically understand the relativity between coexistence and cooperation, and in the process whether there is a co-creation.

One of the interviews is with NS who is a professor. He is a dynamic personality and a great scholar. He is one of the earliest African Americans to have received his Doctor of Philosophy from Harvard University. He is very well respected in the academic circles. One thing is evident that more than half of the professors who teach at this seminary have been his students at some point in time. NS is an eminent personality and has taught at a seminary since many decades. As I witnessed the story of NS, he says it has been a hard journey. He says with classic examples of how he has been treated by the people because of his “*Black-ness*.” Moreover it is not stories from the past; he cites evidences from the present day context.

² Pew Research Center: Social and Demographic Trends (April 9, 2019)

NS is an African-American, refers to himself as a *black* man. He resides in the student residence dormitory of a *white* seminary. Both he and others (his neighbors) are under the impression that he is a tough man to deal with. NS goes on morning walk to the nearby track. One day NS was on his routine morning walk, and was intercepted by security personnel of a neighboring school and was asked not to tread that path. To his amazement, he was told that it was a private road and it's a "no trespassing" area. However there were no signs stating that it was a private property. Later there was confrontation and it was a bitter experience for NS. He felt threatened and had many sleepless nights because of the way he was treated. Hence NS decided to meet with the authorities' of that neighboring school to discuss about this issue. However he was disregarded and was unable to get an appointment with any of them. Meanwhile this was brought to the notice of the authorities of the *white* seminary by some other *white* folks who intercepted him. The leadership of the *white* seminary called NS to discuss the matter. Looking at the way the issue was dealt, NS relates this incident to the days of slavery when a black man was not spoken to directly. He felt that he was treated the same way. Moreover he was called by another person not related to the one who intercepted. NS says this was the way the slaves were treated. On the one hand the neighboring school authorities were not willing to talk to NS and on the other hand they were conveying a message to him through other sources. (According to NS it is like the slave master conveying the message to his slaves.) Though it seems that there is coexistence, there is no cooperation, integration, and reconciliation.

Recently there was a change in the management of the neighboring school. Hence the new management wanted to reconcile with NS. There was a desire to cooperate and co-create the relationship. To his amazement, NS was invited to meet with the neighboring school authorities and they were also *white* folks but had a different approach. NS felt that this was a radical approach to the previous encounter that he had. NS also explained that the new management of the neighboring school had apologized about the previous hostile experiences and were willing to work with NS and create a holistic renewed relationship. The desire for cooperation had led to co-creation.

The new management of the neighboring school took a courageous step towards reconciliation after analyzing the facts. On the one hand they were willing to risk the consequences of the *white-black* encounter. On the other hand there was openness and acceptance to the reality and the hurt caused by their institution. They were willing to cooperate in the given situation and this led to the co-creation of a completely new and renewed relationship with NS. This also changed the perspective of both the parties involved in this encounter. The *white*-ness did not bother the *black* personality of NS any longer. There was acceptance from both of them. There is a creation of a brave space where they could meet and talk about things both from the past and of the present. There was a creation of a new life, new way of living, living at peace with each other, and recovery of the broken relationships.

This experience ties back to the Pew Research results which states that most black adults have negative views about Americas' racial progress. When I analyze this from the eyes of a researcher, on the one hand this research is based on a larger research sample. Hence it may vary when there are personal interviews done with individuals. And on the other hand these views of the black adults are impacted with each individual encounter of racial reconciliation as we have seen in this case study.

We will look at another case study to understand the relativity of the *cooperative coexistence for co-creation*. MEA is an international *refugee* who has been living in the US from April 2014. HM has had varied and hard experiences in these past couple of years. MEA says that these experiences have shaped his views and ideas of how he views his neighborhood. There had been a huge culture shock for this family since they are from the Middle Eastern country. They have been coexisting in these divided societies trying to make meaning of life. The family is learning the language, culture, and neighborhood. They expressed that they had mixed experiences about the incidences in the past few years. The government has isolated them when it came to the judicial systems and the injustice toward them is evident.

On the one hand they were treated as those who do not belong because of their nationality. On the other hand a different department from the same government has offered them the Social Security benefits as persons of low/no income. Since they are supported by these programs of the government, they are grateful for these benefits of food and basic needs. It is a different approach by two different entities of the same government.

On the one hand, they faced challenges and persecution by the people of their own community (The people who speak their language and those who are from their own country) on multiple occasions. There is a mistrust created by the people whom they had thought their own. On the other hand the MEA family has encountered the *philoxenia* (love of/toward a stranger) from their neighbors though they don't speak the same language and are from different cultures. In the process they say that the neighborhood has been very kind and helpful to them. The family has seen many neighbors looking into their eyes when they needed help.

Post 9/11 it is evident how people from certain religious community and immigrants are treated in the US. The MEA family says that it does not hold true in their context, because though they are refugees, they are taken care of well and are shown abundant love from their neighbors. There is a unique *environment* and a support system created around them.

A Vietnam veteran commented about the real life experiences when they were deployed. The veteran says, "When we look into one's eyes and when we are face to face with another human it is hard to kill or harm the other person. On the other hand when we know where the target is, we cannot see the humans there, and we war against the *enemy*. Hence it is comparatively easier to shoot the target." The veteran also mentioned that age also matters. Young blood is easily motivated against the so-called *enemy*, in his opinion. The veteran goes on to say that, it is hard to realize that it takes a war to make friends. These wars resulted in friendship with those nations; he questions, "can we not make friends without war?"

We can expect miracles from dialogue because, dialogue brings us face to face with truth in a relationship of love. As each person speaks and responds honestly to the other, each moves to the other and includes them. To really see another is to see the *other*, and to really love another is to love the *other*. The purpose of dialogue is to restore relationships and to bring about transformation. This restoration brings about encounters that add meaning to life. In the process of the dialogue the humanity is restored, and there is reunification.³

³ Howe, Reuel L. *The Miracle of Dialogue* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1964) pp. 64-106

When we begin to see things, there is a *change*. Change in our attitude, change in perception, change on our surroundings, because we see things clearly and are intentional. Before all this there is already an inner change which allows the individual to see things differently. There is a new learning about the facts, which uncovers the previous perceptions. There is an unlearning of earlier ways giving way to new learning methodologies. The individual and in turn the community is more open to the radical transformation. There is a evident change in the whole ecosystem.

It is evident from these case studies, that when we face reality things look different. Each encounter and every situation is unique. We encounter real life, and real people that exist in our midst, our outlook towards life changes. Our perceptions about certain preconceived ideas take a new shape. There is reality unearthed when research is done to understand each individual's context. It helps the researcher to get a better grasp of the study.

Humans are surrounded by nature which encompasses everything around us. I would like to delve deeper into three classical examples of the ecosystems right around us: the *flora and fauna*, the *environment*, and the *human beings*. These ecosystems exist right within and around us, and they have a vast a varied ways of cooperation in which they coexist. What are some of the things that we see in this *neighborhood* right around us? We live in this environmental ecosystem with the need for each other. Hence there is cooperation as each individual unit supports the other as they coexist in this vast ecosystem. There is a vast number of species that we are yet to discover. Research suggests that more than 85 % of the species are yet to be discovered. This means that there is a majority of life that exists right around us. Some are seen because of their visible structures, and most of them remain unseen. Whether we see them with our naked eyes or not, they still exist in our ecosystem. It takes effort and understanding to realize and recognize their presence which is very important for the ecosystem to function.

The flora and fauna and all the earth's creatures live in a dynamic relationship with each other. The recent scientific discoveries have revealed the mutual relationship and cooperation between these species.⁴ By virtue of being in the same habitat, they begin to leverage the relationships. There is a symbiotic activity which is beneficial as they coexist. They create conditions that are suitable for their living and for their coexistence. The Amazon rainforest is home to over 400 billion trees from 16,000 different species. These different species exist only in dependence to each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.

During my recent visit to Kenya, I had an opportunity to study about the *meru oak* tree found in eastern Africa, which is unique to this part of the world. It is known for its longevity. This kind of oak is a unique species which is found only in Kenya. The meru oak tree harbors more than 35,000 species of microorganisms. They naturally grow on this oak tree and are often ignored. These species are not taken into consideration when the tree is cut for many reasons and its multiple uses. As the *meru oak* tree is a threatened species and is growing extinct, and does not grow in any other part of the world, even these 35,000+ species which dwell on this tree are growing extinct.

⁴ Delio, Warner, Wood *Care for Creation: a Franciscan spirituality of the earth* (Cincinnati, OH: At. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008) Pg. 67

What are some of the ways that these can be preserved to maintain the richness in the ecosystem? How many such unseen species are ignored by human beings? Does this awareness help to understand the ecosystem in a much larger perspective?

While we work to conserve the natural habitat, it is important to understand how we function together in this natural environment. We are dependent on trees like *meru oak* and many other flora surrounding us. They help us by inhaling the carbon dioxide that we exhale. They also give us the oxygen that we need to exist. There is a symbiotic relationship which is often ignored and taken for granted. A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion, and concern for our fellow human beings.⁵

Every human being is unique too. Humans inhabit the earth and there is a need to respond to the nature by reconnecting to it. These humans are named as *Homo Sapiens*, which means that they are wise relational beings. Humans participate actively in this nature and the environment that surrounds them. Nature is interconnected with human life. Every species has a multiple role to play to keep the ecosystem functioning.

A human being stands to the *polis* (referred to as community) as a part of a whole, in a way analogous ...to that in which a hand or a foot stands to the body of which it is a part ...detach a hand from its body; it then lacks both the specific function and the separate capacity of hand; it is no longer in the same sense a hand...What is it that a human being is deprived of, if radically separated from the life of a *polis*?...law and justice which only the *polis* affords...Separated from the *polis*, what could have been a human being becomes a wild animal.⁶

The author intends to derive the fact that there is no sense of moral ideas without the community. Rather, moral vision is the product of the communal experience itself. Human body consists of many cells and organs and yet operates as one body. One of the facts from scientific research is that there are trillions of cells in human body. And yet they function together as one body. How do these many members function on their own and yet are a part of a whole? The many individual organs within the body, function within themselves, and yet coordinate together for the whole body to operate. There is a communal experience within itself which helps in coordinating its operations. This is not a onetime work, and rather it is an ongoing process as long as the body exists. It also shows a sense of belongingness. The body parts are strategically placed to co-operate. They cannot exist one without the other. They also operate within their boundaries; which means there are both permeable and semi-permeable membranes to regulate their movement from one area to the other. One organ cannot encroach into another area of the body. Each has to operate within its own limitations. Yet there is a common thread (referred to as blood) which connects all these organs to function simultaneously. This is a classical example of many members dwelling in unity, recognizing and honoring their differences, and agreeing with one another as they operate.

⁵ Francis, Pope *LAUDATO SI': On Care For Our Common Home* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2015) pg. 63

⁶ MacIntyre, Alasdair *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) pp. 98-99

Indeed the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as God chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and out less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.⁷ *I Corinthians 12:14-26* –NRSV

The quoted reference is used to describe the image of the Church in its original context. However, this explains how the human body in itself is a complex creation. There is a trust within these members as they operate. They operate in unity and synchronize their activities. While each has its own function and purpose, they cooperate together to create life in the body. The unity brings them together, and helps to dwell together in the same body. This also helps each member to recover something of their true selves. We can understand God as the creator of all people made in God’s image, even though in all their diversity. He is still one of the foremost proponents of a dialogical theology.- Wesley Ariarajah (WCC).

As I grapple to understand how the different organs exist within the same body, at the same time I wonder how each of these cells that neither resemble each other, nor function the same way and yet coexist within the same body. These are specialized organs that perform a specific function and yet augment the functioning of the body. If there is no cooperation between the vital organs, it leads to end organ damage – multiple organ failure – leading to death. It is difficult to dwell in unity and realize the human dignity in those whose language is not mine, those who look different, whose skin tone is of another color, who believe in other than what I believe in, whose truth is not my truth.⁸

The flora and fauna are unique and diverse. The human body is also gives a fair glimpse of the unity that dwells right within us. The environment too expresses itself as we understand how they coexist in divided surroundings. What can we learn implicitly and explicitly from all this nature that surrounds us? On the one hand we see that there is coexistence of the different entities within the same body/ecosystem. On the other hand we see the struggle that exists within due to division within the same ecosystem.

⁷ Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter’s Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002) pp 946-948

⁸ Sacks, Jonathan *The Dignity of Difference: How to avoid the clash of civilization* (New York, NY: CONTINUUM, 2005) pp. 64-65

Religious Educators play a vital role in bridging the gap between these divided societies. There is a vast knowledge that is transmitted to the learner. These are eye-openers and help the learner to visualize things differently. The learners would be empowered organically as leaders to carry on what they have learnt into their communities. Some of the methods which can be adapted include and are not limited to these: *CREATE*

Celebrate Diversity: Religion/Religious Education should foster sisterhood and brotherhood, which should encourage tolerance, respect, compassion, peace, reconciliation, caring, and sharing. This diversity is to be celebrated and cherished for its richness. Our concern must be to embrace everybody and invite them into the community.⁹ It needs an eye for detail to appreciate the diversity even when we look into the everyday activities. This opens up the opportunity to celebrate the diversity that exists right among us and not out there somewhere.

Reconciliation: Reconciliation is real, radical, and revolutionary. Radical reconciliation during the first century looked like – “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28 NRSV This can be contextualized to address the roots of injustice. Theologian Gusatavo Gutierrez states reconciliation is revolutionary and it means “to abolish the present status quo and attempt to replace it with a qualitatively different one.”¹⁰

Empower: Empowering the community by imparting religious education and equipping the community with relevant tools to encourage cooperation. These tools might include, living out by faith in the community, to be an inclusive community, coming together, intentional focal point for intercultural engagement.¹¹ Empowerment lets the individual see things from a different perspective. They would not just remain as the *connoisseur*; rather they empower others in the community to take up the leadership roles as they *taste* the realness of life.

Acknowledge: Acknowledge the witness that we all bear in common as being created in the image of God. As religious educators we also need to acknowledge the chasm that exists in our society, and offer the avenues which open up possibilities to bridge the gap. By acknowledging that there is a divide, we let people see and appreciate the community amidst these divisions.

Thoughtful: Thoughtfulness and timely approach are very vital to bridge the gap. As an educator it is important to be thoughtful of the learner’s physical, spiritual, state. This helps to provide a customized approach to each individual as the lesson plan unfolds. There are also timely steps to be taken to maximize the creativity within the individual and in the community as a whole.

Embodiment: Personally embodying the values that we teach as religious educators. Imparting these pedagogical content of knowledge. The embodiment of what we teach carries a deeper impact in the lives of the learners. The learners will not be able to comprehend unless they see these teachings being enacted in the lives of their educators. Moreover they will be able to visualize their own lives transformed by embodying what they learn.

⁹ Tutu, Desmond *God Is Not a Christian: And Other Provocations* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2011) pp. 49-56

¹⁰ Boesak & DeYoung *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012) pp. 14-23

¹¹ Keum, Jooseop *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Switzerland, Geneva: World Council of Churches Publication, 2013) pp. 22-26

Conclusion: As religious educators we have a unique responsibility to bridge the gap in our communities. As we continue to educate and impart wisdom of coexistence in these divided societies, we need to embody the values that are consistent with the teaching. There are a wide variety of approaches that we can consider as educators. “Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life.”¹²

“The idea of conviviality, with its three aspects of sharing with each other, learning from each other, and celebrating together, appears helpful in an interreligious and secular context. It is one way that dialogue can take place such that the two parties do not lose their identity.”¹³

Dialogical method of teaching involves both the teacher and the student to participate in the learning process. Design a curriculum with multiple intelligences with the Scope that brings the community together; and a sequence that would open up the forum for conversations. We need to work toward the deconstruction of the locus: from *I* to *WE*; and from *WE* to *US*. As we teach to transgress there is *liberation* from these divisions. We need to make it a vibrant thriving community which includes all the living species and brings them together as a community.

We need to pick the common threads that run in our societies and in our religion. The divided societies create a ground for more separation. Education needs to be imparted in ways that bring unity and one that breeds love. The coming together is the beginning of a new creation. When we come together we need not agree on what we discuss. We as educators need to encourage the differences and talk about what enriches the symbiosis. Our ecosystem is an example of coexistence. Whether it is a teachable moment or a happy accident let us as great teachers, *CARE* for our creation as we *co-create* life!

C – Celebrate Mistakes
A – Appreciate Differences
R – Relay Feedback
E – Evaluate Ourselves

I am looking at the rising sun as a wonderful promise the creation has to give each one of us. Nature is a living example for coexistence in today’s divided societies. The sun shines on all humans alike, does not discriminate, and does not hold grudge or hatred. What can we learn by *seeing* things around us, right in our own neighborhood?

Dialogue, as we have been thinking of it, is more than communication. It is communion in which we are mutually informed, purified, illumined, and reunited to ourselves, to one another, and God.¹⁴ We need to work so much for coexistence, for tolerance, and be willing to disagree on matters of conflict and defend our opinion. At the same time there is a need to respect our adversaries and our willingness to dialogue and negotiate. “There is room for everyone; there is room for every culture, race, language, and point of view.”¹⁵

¹² Francis, Pope *LAUDATO SI’: On Care For Our Common Home* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2015) pg. 139

¹³ Simon, Benjamin *Mission and Its Three Pillars: Translation, Transmission, and Transformation* (Bognor Regis, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2018) pg. 409

¹⁴ Howe, Reuel L. *The Miracle of Dialogue* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1964) pp. 105-121

¹⁵ Tutu, Desmond *God Is Not a Christian: And Other Provocations* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2011) pp. 49-52

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By What Authority: Reading Research on Disaffiliation through the Lens of Constructivist-Developmental Psychology

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Crisis in the Churches! Young Adults are leaving and are not coming back! They are losing their religion! The Rise of the Nones! These are just some of the shocking headlines being discussed in the world of religious education when it comes to the current status of young adults leaving organized religion. There is clearly something going on that is part of a wider phenomenon of younger generations dis-affiliating from institutions and communal organizations. The numbers behind these headlines reflect the growing body of research on religious belief and belonging. However, the numbers alone are not necessarily helpful as religious communities and leadership try to figure out how to respond. This paper is an attempt to offer a potentially valuable lens through which to read some of the research data. The lens is based on constructivist-developmental theory, an epistemological framework for the development of meaning-making. This does not negate the research findings, but asks different questions regarding the data in order to inform strategies for supporting young adults. As religious educators are reading more work in sociology of religion, it becomes important to find a lens through which to read and analyze the findings. This essay is an attempt to put these disciplines in conversation so as to constructively view the current trends and data not as a crisis but as an opportunity to creatively support young adults in their development and well being.

The essay has three sections. The first looks at the current research from the United States with regard to young adults disaffiliating from organized religion with special attention to the Catholic context. The second section is an introduction of pertinent constructivist-developmental

theories and how they apply to reading the research findings. The third section illustrates use of constructivist-developmental theory as a lens for interpreting and analyzing qualitative research data through a series of examples. The conclusion points toward implications for religious education practice in light of the suggested interpretive lens.

I. The Rise of the Nones: Contemporary US Context and Research Trends

Trends of Disaffiliation

Disaffiliation is a phenomenon at the center of many studies. We identify the disaffiliated as those who were raised within the church (i.e., baptized), but who are no longer connected with the institutional church nor are actively engaged in church as community. Researchers Robert McCarty and John Vitek argue that “Disaffiliation from the Church is largely a thoughtful, conscious, intentional choice made by young people in a secularized society where faith and religious practice are seen as one option among many. It is a dynamic process that unfolds over time and after a series of experiences or considerable thought.”¹ There is no question that membership in organized religion is declining among young adults in the United States. There appear to be many significant factors that are contributing to this decline and not a single one is dominant. For example, many point to the contemporary pluralistic society we live in that makes religious involvement more voluntary, such that religious belief and practice is less of a given, tied up with family, local community, or culture. In much of the country, religious worship is no longer what everyone does on Saturday or Sunday mornings. Another factor, relevant especially to the Catholic context, is that many young adults disagree with the Church on social and moral

¹ Robert McCarty and John Vitek *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholic* (Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press, 2018), 11.

issues such as birth control, women's roles in leadership, and treatment of LGBTQ people.²

Furthermore, the sex abuse crisis in the Catholic Church is no small issue. The full effect of actual abuse and failure of church leadership on the lives of Catholics of all ages, has yet to be fully realized. It is important to point out that this trend of declining membership is not unique to religious organizations as there has been a significant trend of decline in all voluntary types of organizations post-World War II.³

There appear to be many reasons for the decline in participation within religious organizations and there is a growing body of sociological research that is attempting to capture this phenomenon. In order for religious organizations to respond effectively and appropriately it is important to grasp as accurately as possible what is driving the decline. However, it is equally important that the research be interpreted well by religious leadership, and not simply taken at "face value." To that end, it is valuable to understand something of the methodology (i.e., what is being measured and how), as well as to read the sociological results through other analytical lenses (e.g., theological, psychological). Therefore, in this section we look at a few sociological studies on religious belonging. We focus, when possible, on those whose subjects are between the ages of 18-30 and identified somehow with Roman Catholicism. We discuss the studies' methodologies and findings so as to discover how we might learn from the studies as well as identify their limits. In the following section we interpret the findings through a

² Christian Smith, Kyle Longest, Jonathan Hill, and Kari Christoffersen, *Young Catholic America: Emerging Adults In, Out of, and Gone from the Church* (New York: Oxford University, 2013). Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Atria Books, 2017).

³Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985). Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

constructivist-developmental lens to further illuminate the findings for the purpose or religious education efforts.

According to Pew Research, one-fifth of the US public, and a third of adults under thirty, are religiously unaffiliated. The 2012 Pew Research study “*Nones*” on the Rise: *One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation* was designed “to delve more deeply into the theological, social and political views of the large and growing number of Americans who have no religious affiliation.”⁴ It was conducted via phone interviews (landline and mobile) with an intentional over-sampling (approximately one-third) of those who identified as religiously unaffiliated. The intention for the over-sampling was to gain a better picture of the religiously unaffiliated and compare them with findings drawn from Pew’s rich data sets of those who *are* religiously affiliated. Overall religious affiliation has dropped dramatically over the prior five years of study, with the greatest decline attributed to “generational replacement” whereby younger generations are not as religiously affiliated as those they are replacing. The research shows that the trend is mainly a Euro-American phenomenon in the U.S. In fact, Roman Catholic affiliation overall has remained stable over time, which Pew attributes to the influx of Hispanic immigrants to the U.S.⁵ However, within the Catholic Church, White non-Hispanic membership has dropped, as well, significant numbers of Hispanic immigrants have switched affiliation to other Christian denominations upon arrival in the U.S.⁶

⁴ Cary Funk and Greg Smith. “*Nones*” on the Rise: *One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation*. (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2012), 7. Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012 Accessed at: <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>. The authors qualify the use of “nones” by using quotation marks, but within the study this refers explicitly to those identified as “religiously unaffiliated,” including atheists and agnostics.

⁵ Funk and Smith, 14.

⁶ “The Shifting Religious Identity of Latinos in the United States,” *Pew Forum*, May 7, 2014, Pew Research Center. Accessed September 13, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2014/05/07/the-shifting-religious-identity-of-latinos-in-the-united-states/>

According to the Pew report, a majority of those identifying as “unaffiliated” never doubt the existence of God (68%) and at least one-third (33%) say religion is “at least somewhat important in my life.”⁷ So what is the reason for disaffiliation? Within the study report, the authors offer “capsule summaries” by leading theorists as to why they have seen a dramatic increase in the number of people claiming no affiliation even though three quarters (74%) were raised with some affiliation.⁸ Those reasons include: political backlash; delays in marriage; and broad social disengagement. If one digs deeper into the report, one finds that when those who consider themselves religious, but do not attend services regularly, are asked why not, only 40% offer what the researchers considered a “religiously-related reason,” somewhat less than the 45% who offer either practical or personal reasons for not going.⁹ Even this finding raises for us the question, is this true “disaffiliation” or lack of affiliation?¹⁰ In other words, even for those who still claim to be religious, is their reason for not going less a deliberate choice to leave, or lack of a compelling reason to stay? We believe the distinction becomes important in a cultural world which in general is trending away from religious practice and membership.

Pew’s large quantitative surveys are very valuable for noting major trends and the correlation among factors. But they are not able to determine causation. Is the loss of religious

⁷ Funk and Smith, 18.

⁸ Funk and Smith, 16.

⁹ Funk and Smith, 78.

¹⁰ It is worth noting an additional body of research in this section is on the process of *deconversion*. While not coined specifically for Catholic experiences, Catholic theologians such as Tom Beaudoin and Pat Hornbeck are taking up the term and using it to define the process by which baptized Catholics change their ways of affiliating with the Church and faith. Tom Beaudoin, et al. “Round Table on Deconversion and Disaffiliation in Contemporary US Roman Catholicism,” *Horizons* 40 (2013), 256. Hornbeck argues that “deconversion” reflects an “emerging consensus among scholars that terms like lapsed and defectors fail to capture the complex reality of the process by which a person chooses to leave a religious group more completely.” Hornbeck argues that deconversion also names a more complete process of detachment than the concept of disaffiliation. Pat Hornbeck, “What is Deconversion” in “Round Table on Deconversion and Disaffiliation in Contemporary US Roman Catholicism,” *Horizons* 40 (2013): 255-92., 266.

affiliation attributable to a larger social decline, the influence of conservative religious communities on politics, failures of religious leadership, or doctrinal and/or ethical teachings of the religious body? While the study can provide trends, even access and more fine grained analysis of the data (e.g., intersecting the axis of age along that of reason for non-attendance) can only hint at a clearer sense of causation, simply because that is the nature (and limit) of this form of research.

Another interesting contribution to the conversation on religious belief and belonging is a report by Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar drawn from the *ARIS 2013 National College Student Survey*. This is helpful for our purposes because of its limit to college students. The researchers write, “This report also provides a unique opportunity for an investigation into the phenomenon of the growing number of Americans who say they are ‘secular’ as well as those who say they are ‘spiritual but not religious.’”¹¹ In particular, the researchers wanted to investigate whether those who are identified as “religiously unaffiliated” in other studies are largely traditional theists in search of a religious home or not. The researchers emailed the link to an online questionnaire to students at 38 colleges and universities within the United States, resulting in over 1,700 surveys that were at least halfway completed. The study sets itself apart from Pew by asking respondents to self-identify by responding to the question: “In general would you describe yourself more as a religious, spiritual or secular person? Select one.”¹² The responses were distributed almost equally: 31.8% Religious, 28.2% Secular, and 32.4% Spiritual.¹³ It is noteworthy that no descriptor is offered of any of these three. Throughout the survey, the

¹¹ Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, “Religious, Spiritual, and Secular: The emergence of three distinct worldviews among American college students.” *A Report based on the ARIS 2013 National College Student Survey*, (Hartford: Trinity College, 2013), 4.

¹² Kosmin and Keysar, 8.

¹³ Kosmin and Keysar, 8.

researchers test for various theological, scientific, philosophical, and political stances. These responses are then analyzed for how they correlate with the three worldviews. For the most part, their findings were not surprising. For example, most Secular respondents either don't believe in God (41.7%) or don't believe there is any way to find out (35.2%),¹⁴ and believe in "Evolution/Darwinism" (93%).¹⁵ When asked which religious tradition each identified, the researchers found that "Over 99% of the students who self-identified as Nones rejected a Religious worldview and a clear majority opted for the Secular worldview."¹⁶ This data, they claim, complicates the narrative that all "Nones" are still searching for a spiritual home, or are just religiously unaffiliated.

The researchers admit that their questions are chosen to reflect current political and social debates found in the public square. While the majority of the questions are not written in a binary fashion (e.g., Do you believe A or B?) but as separate questions (e.g., Do you believe A? Do you believe B?) they largely reflect binary choices and use language about religious belief that would be found in the public square in debates over public policies, for example: "*Do you believe in Creationism/Intelligent Design? Do you believe in Evolution/Darwinism?*"¹⁷ The questions do not reflect the nuance that might be discovered as differences within and among religious communities. In other words, the survey is not testing for adherence to religious, political, philosophical beliefs *as held by* many religious people, but *public perceptions* about those beliefs. In that regard, this survey might be difficult to answer for those who hold religious worldviews that allow for greater nuance than these questions do. The study overall is best

¹⁴ Kosmin and Keysar, 13.

¹⁵ Kosmin and Keysar, 21

¹⁶ Kosmin and Keysar, 11

¹⁷ Kosmin and Keysar, 21.

understood as validating “Secular” as a distinct worldview among college students than offering anything revelatory about Religious or even Spiritual worldviews.

We learn from the study that of those who self-report as Secular, close to half (49%) attended religious services frequently in childhood, are concerned about global warming (96%), hold more progressive or liberal political views (women’s and LGBTQ rights), and believe in assisted suicide (71%). These findings may be helpful as religious leadership wishing to reach out to college students who so identify, may have a sense of the topics on which they might connect. These researchers claim that “over 99% of the students who self-identified as Nones *rejected* a Religious worldviews and a clear majority opted for the Secular worldview.”¹⁸ This may be an instance of overclaiming. To choose something for oneself is not necessarily a rejection of other worldviews. However, the authors do make a strong and valid claim for creating space in religious research for the Secular worldview.

A very different study published online by Harvard Divinity School students in 2012 entitled *How We Gather*, investigated the premise that unaffiliated young adults *are* looking for meaningful communities and finding it in spaces other than organized religion. In their report, the researchers present ten case studies of organizations that are attracting considerable attention and commitment from millenials. In their reading of these organizations - some for profit, some not-for-profit, the authors concluded that while young adults were engaging in a cultural shift away from traditional religious organizations they were looking for and engaging in meaningful communities. The report does not indicate their methodology except to note that within each case study the authors “map six recurring themes...found in mission statements, blog posts, and

¹⁸ Kosmin and Keysar, 11. Emphasis added.

manifestos, and on the lips of leaders and participants.” The six themes by which each organization is assessed are: Community, Personal Transformation, Social Transformation, Purpose Finding, Creativity, Accountability.¹⁹ According to the report, no single organization held all six values, but two or three were clearly associated with each case. Some examples of cases were: CrossFit, SoulCycle, and The Dinner Party. While it is clear that the authors applaud each case as a value-driven organization, they caution leadership about being unprepared for the pastoral role many are taking on. Furthermore, while the authors are not necessarily looking for God-talk or religious language, they do claim that “community would ultimately be unsatisfying for both [authors] if it did not encompass the spiritual dimensions of existence.”²⁰

We believe two points are worth mentioning. First, the report, as written can tell us nothing about the ability of these organizations to sustain individual members, even if they may be attractive to significant numbers of members at any time. Second, while the authors describe several of the organizations as value-driven, there is no indication of a larger worldview, ideology, or agenda that drives or directs those values. In fact, in the cases of the for-profit organizations (e.g., Soul Cycle and CrossFit), we might assume that if they are not financially viable as commercial projects they might be closed down. This raises the question for us, what is the larger vision that supports or prioritizes the values therein?²¹

¹⁹ Angie Thurston and Casper ter Kuile, *How We Gather* (Cambridge, MA, 2012) Accessed at: <https://www.howwegather.org/reports>.

²⁰ Thurston and ter Kuile, 19.

²¹ The study authors address just this question in a follow up study called *Something More* wherein they note that the organizations listed in the first study “These fledgling organizations are cultivating and experience for which they largely lack language. In fact, they are often startled by the gravity and attraction of what they find.” Angie Thurston and Casper ter Kuile, *Something More*, (Cambridge, MA,), 7

Catholic Trends and Research Results

Christians make up over 70% of the U.S. population and Roman Catholics make up the single largest denominational group of Christians at 20%.²² This fact alone explains why Catholicism has experienced the greatest net losses of any major U.S. religious tradition in this current trend of disaffiliation. However, St. Mary's Press - long-time publishers of religious education materials for adolescents and young adults - wanted to understand "more fully why young people leave the Catholic Church in particular."²³ In 2015 the publisher commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate out of Georgetown University (CARA) to conduct a survey of adolescents and young adults (ages 15-25) who have left the Catholic Church. Casting a wide net, CARA eventually was able to conduct the full 8-minute telephone survey with 204 respondents who identified as having disaffiliated from the Catholic Church. The survey data was analyzed for themes and demographics. From that number, fifteen subjects were later interviewed more fully on their history and reasons for disaffiliation. The interview material has been subject to a qualitative analysis. They found that for those interviewed, disaffiliation had been a largely thoughtful and conscious choice.²⁴ There was no single reason for disaffiliation but researchers generally saw three categories that young adults interviewed could be places within: the *Injured*, the *Drifters*, and the *Dissenters*.²⁵ Those identified as *Injured* often had "negative experiences associated with faith and religious practice, both familial and ecclesial."²⁶ Those identified as *Drifters* do not see the value of religious faith and practice

²² Evangelical Christians make up the largest group at 25.4%, but are spread across many churches. *Pew Religious Landscape Study*, Pew Research, 2019. (Accessed August 6, 2019)

<https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

²³ McCarty and Vitek, 5.

²⁴ McCarty and Vitek, 11.

²⁵ McCarty and Vitek, 3.

²⁶ McCarty and Vitek, 14.

for their lives or the lives of others. Additionally, they felt they lacked companions on their spiritual journey: “[At] some point these young people question why they are affiliated with the Church in the first place.”²⁷ Those identified as *Dissenters* “exhibit a more active resistance to or rejection of the Church” mostly for the Church’s stance on social issues or “perceived Church teachings about the Bible, salvation, heaven and life after death.”²⁸ The researchers who have done an initial coding of the data has named six “common dynamics for disaffiliation.” These findings are helpful, but we will not identify them here. For now we simply wish to express the value of this research data is that it allows us to hear in the young persons’ own words why they have left. As we demonstrate below, access to a young person’s own words allows us to analyze those words for how the young person makes sense of the Church, its beliefs, the value of membership, and the like.

The issue of disaffiliation causes much anxiety in many religious leaders across traditions. Our goal is not to jump to solutions nor to join in the anxiety. Instead we suggest taking a step back so as to look at the data through the lens of cognitive and spiritual development. This lens may help us read the data in a more useful way, helping us learn what is going on internally for youth and young adults who choose to disaffiliate.

II. Cognitive and Spiritual Development of Young Adults

In this second part we suggest constructivist-developmental theory as a basis for developing a lens through which to read the research. The theorists attached to this theory use a qualitative methodology, using interviews, in which they pay attention to how people express themselves and in doing so, make meaning. Robert Kegan writes, “I use the word ‘meaning’ to

²⁷ McCarty and Vitek, 18.

²⁸ McCarty and Vitek, 21.

refer to this simultaneously epistemological and ontological activity; it is about knowing *and* being, about theory-making *and* investments and commitments of the will.”²⁹ We believe a meaning-making theory is highly applicable to research on religious belief and belonging. For in proclaiming belief in life’s ultimate source, meaning, and purpose, religious communities hope to call for commitment and investment from its members. Reading research on belief and belonging through this lens may help us recognize to what extent religious belief and belonging impacts a young person’s investments and commitments in life.

Our focus will be on the leap a young person makes when moving from childhood, through adolescence to adulthood. To assist us, we look to the work of Robert Kegan, Sharon Daloz Parks, and James Fowler. Though each theorist is paying attention to different aspects of the cognitive, emotional, and affiliative movements of this development, they hold some things in common. First, each comes out of the cognitive developmental school pioneered by Jean Piaget, noting diverse aspects implicated by the growth from *concrete-operational* thought to *formal operations*. Piaget studied the development from infancy through adolescence, thus ending with formal-operational thought. Kegan, Fowler, and Parks all study development into adulthood, thus recognizing cognitive development beyond formal-operations. Kegan identifies the next development as *systemic-complex*.³⁰ Similarly, Parks names the further step *probing commitment* and *tested commitment*.³¹ Fowler next is *individuated-reflective*.³² Each calls for the

²⁹ Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 44-45.

³⁰ Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: the Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994)..

³¹ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

³² James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981).

capacity to move beyond simple ideation, to think ideologically, which is possible in young adulthood, given the appropriate support and challenge.

Second, their research methodology is qualitative. Through an interview process researchers analyze not only what research subjects say, but how they compose meaning in what they are saying. Finally, each perceive developmental “stage” as reorienting. What was understood previously is not forgotten, but reorganized or re-centered in light of what is newly perceived. Kegan describes “the subject-object relationship” as the “principle of mental organization.”

“Object” refers to those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate upon. All these expressions suggest that the element of knowing is not the whole of us; it is distinct enough from us that we can do something with it. “Subject” refers to those elements of our knowing or organizing that we are identified with, tied to, fused with, or embedded in. We have object; we are subject. We cannot be responsible for, in control of, or reflect upon that which is subject.³³

In the process of assessing the meaning-making capacity of the interviewee, these theorists pay attention to what the interview subject holds as object (e.g, what they believe they can manipulate or determine) and to what they are subject (e.g., the unnamed or given and beyond their control). According to constructivist-developmental theory, development occurs through the knower disembedding from that to which they were *subject*, such that it becomes *object*, thus making it possible (and necessary) to make new sense of their world and of themselves.

Kegan explains further, “One does not simply replace the other, nor is the relation merely additive or cumulative, an accretion of skills. Rather, the relation is transformative, qualitative, and incorporative. Each successive principle subsumes or encompasses the prior principle.”³⁴

³³ Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 32.

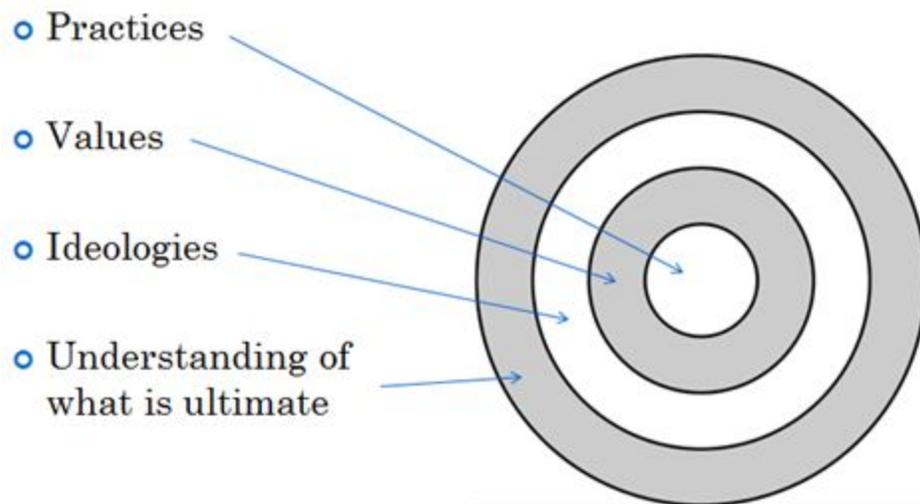
³⁴ Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 33.

What is *subject* becomes the organizing principle of what is *object*. Kegan makes a geometric analogy of a point being subsumed in a line, which is further subsumed in a plane. Each, more complex frame, organizes, but does not negate the earlier element; rather the earlier is included and organized within a larger frame of reference. The research analysis determines what the research subject is able to recognize, decide about, or manipulate: the point, the line or the plane?

The cognitive development that is most likely (but not necessarily) to occur as a person moves from childhood, through adolescence to adulthood, is from the concrete to the thematic, and possibly, the ideological. For example, the concrete-operational child is able to follow instructions and prohibitions, but is not able to communicate or understand the motives or values behind those instructions or prohibitions. The child, limited to the concrete and immediate, will attribute a meaning that makes most immediate sense to them (e.g., if they don't do it they will be punished). Appropriately supported and challenged, the growing adolescent develops the capacity for formal-operations; they are able to ideate and think thematically, and is no longer simply bound by the concrete and immediate. They begin to learn the meaning behind concrete actions (e.g., intentions or values); and can learn to organize more concrete realities into thematic groups, like values. However, if questioned, why those values? They likely would be unable to articulate the theological vision in which they are grounded. More likely than not, they would attribute the why to some authoritative source (e.g., the church, or parents), thus indicating their inability to see and discuss the ideological.

How might we recognize constructivist-development in terms of religious belief and belonging? Similar to the analogy of point-line-plane offered by Kegan, and following the kind of development that can happen through adolescence to adulthood (from concrete-operational to

formal-operations, then complex ideation), we offer the schema of practice-value-ideology. This schema reflects the kind of elements found within religious traditions (practices, values, and ideologies) and organizes them from the concrete, to thematic, to complex/systemic. Each becomes the organizing principle for the previous, and finally, ultimate claims about life's source and purpose become the highest organizing principle.



Practices may include the concrete realities of worship and prayer, community membership and activities, reading from scripture, but also injunctions and prohibitions for behavior. *Values* would include commitments to beliefs that inform and determine the practices, but also the commitments to the community that holds those beliefs. *Ideologies* would include the theological perspectives that shape and prioritize the values and the community. Finally, the ideologies express, but fit within claims/beliefs about what is ultimate; what is ultimate organizes and prioritizes the ideologies. Thought of as concentric circles, each circle is the organizing principle for the circle interior to it. For example, our values shape what practices we think are important.

Imagined in this way, the constructivist-developmental framework can be a helpful lens through which we interpret research on religious belief and belonging among adolescents and younger adults because it gives us a means of paying attention to what research subjects say about religious faith and belonging. Is the subject able to ideate and discuss issues from a thematic level, or are they limited to talking about concrete practices? For example, they may talk about bible stories in a literal or concrete way, but are unable to recognize any deeper meaning communicated by those stories. Similarly, they may speak of the moral injunctions of religious community - do this; don't do that - without being able to name the values intended in those injunctions. In both instances, we would say that practices are object, but the values remain subject. Such is not a value judgement about the person's life of faith, but it gives us a sense of their cognitive capacity for making meaning of religious belief and belonging. Such can be a helpful guide for religious educators to develop new initiatives for what is appropriate to the way adolescents and young adults are coming to see and make sense of religion.

III. Reading Accounts through the Constructivist-Developmental Lens

In this section we use a few personal statements from research subjects whose interviews are found in *Going, Going, Gone*. As first-person accounts they can serve as examples for analysis, analyzed for how the speaker is making sense of their belief and belonging. Through these examples we offer brief illustrations of how to read first person accounts through the constructivist-developmental lens. The complete transcripts would be more helpful to give a fuller picture of any individual study subject, but for the time being, the short statements offer an opportunity to initially illustrate our thesis. We interpret and analyze the statements of three subjects - Diane, Amy, and Edward - drawing new insights from their words.

1. *Seeing beyond the concrete, but...*

In our first example, Diane, we notice her basic growth beyond concrete-operational towards what Kegan calls cross-categorical. But we wonder why her capacity to ideate does not translate into an ability to recognize and discuss religious values. Diane's statements offer examples of someone who is quite able to ideate and think in terms of values. This is best demonstrated in her repeatedly naming the of the value of choice. In the following statements she bemoans her lack of choice in childhood and lauds her right to choose that comes later:

- But in reality, kids go to church because they think that is what kids do, they don't realize they have a choice.³⁵
- It was not until I went to college that I was officially out of the Catholic Church. I was no longer forced to be Catholic. When this finally happened I was relieved and happy, really now I was able to make my own decisions. I have never went back to church.³⁶
- I went to Catholic schools from kindergarten through high school. That was something that I did not have a choice in either.³⁷

In each of these we notice that she not only names choice, she can apply it to multiple situations, reflecting a capacity to work with choice as a value.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that she names an extensive list of religious practices in which she was involved as a child and adolescent (receiving sacraments, serving at liturgy as an altar server and a Eucharistic minister, attending annual school retreats, and completing service hours).³⁸ Yet never once does she speak of them in terms of any value they represented - except for their inhibiting her choice. Likewise, she identifies several moral injunctions or prohibitions: "I believe in birth control...I am a complete supporter of gay marriage and being

³⁵ *Going, Going, Gone*, 22.

³⁶ *Going, Going, Gone*, 27.

³⁷ *Going, Going, Gone*, 27.

³⁸ *Going, Going, Gone*, 27-28.

able to choose who you want to be with. I am fine with priests being able to get married.”³⁹ Yet only speaks of them as a restriction to freedom, with no articulation of the values intended in the prohibitions.

Her discussion of the value of choice and extending it to a variety of situations indicates a good capacity to ideate and think thematically, extending the application of an idea from one setting to others. Diane is able to speak extensively of the value of choice, which is widely and diversely communicated in the culture at large. On the other hand, she does not speak of the values inherent in the many religious practices. She seems to be unaware of them; as if they do not exist for her. The irony is that these practices are deeply value laden, and Diane is capable of thinking and judging in terms of values. As religious educators it draws us to ask, did Diane never hear someone speak of the religious values that inform the practices? Or was it presumed that the values were obvious and explanation unnecessary? Either way, it points to the need to regularly and consistently articulate the values of practices, along with instruction on the practices.

2. *Struggling with Conflict and Ambiguity*

One of the challenges of the necessarily uncomplicated religious belief taken on in childhood is that it usually does not stand up well to the more complicated reality of life first discovered in adolescence and continuing into adulthood. Even for the child able to “tell right from wrong” the framework in which they are able to do that is pretty limited to simple conceptions of good and evil, and a simple reciprocity between actors: If I do this, you will do that. Things are either good or bad. Fowler describes this kind of faith as *mythic-literal*, wherein

³⁹ *Going, Going, Gone*, 21.

the concrete-operational child interprets stories and actions in a literal and limited way and God is bound to the limits of the stories.⁴⁰ When a child moves beyond childhood and begins to recognize the world in a more complicated way, religious faith needs to grow deeper and wider to take account of newly recognized conflicts and complexity. Unfortunately, it frequently does not.

For example, in the face of suffering, God, who the child learned is good and loving, is determined by the adolescent to be either absent or weak. According to Fowler, recognition of this kind of conflict is common for someone who has moved beyond the early credulity of *mythic-literal faith*, but does not yet have any other way of conceiving of God. Fowler writes of the ““eleven-year-old atheists’...[who] begin to experience the breakdown of the moral principle of reciprocity they have used to compose their images of God. By observation and experience they have found that either God is powerless...[or] ‘asleep.’”⁴¹ Such incredulity is commonly found in the stories in *Going, Going, Gone*.

We see evidence of such a struggle particularly in the stories of the *Injured*. For example, Amy, who says,

When I reflect back, I think my initial doubts began with my childhood diabetes. I would always ask, “Why me? Why would God do that to somebody? Why would he let that happen to somebody who has been going to church religiously and doing everything they were supposed to be doing?”⁴²

⁴⁰ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981).

⁴¹ James Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 45-46.

⁴² *Going, Going, Gone*, 17.

In this instance we see Amy's expectation of a tit-for-tat reciprocity between herself and God. Her concept of God remains limited to a mythic-literal conception, but she is able to conceive of greater themes, such as suffering, pain, loyalty, and fairness.

The Christian tradition is centered around a belief in a God who suffers *with* us. However, most children (and many adults) find it difficult to hold such contradictory realities (e.g., suffering and love) simultaneously. Granted, asking where is God in the face of suffering is an enduring question within religious traditions, never fully answered for all time. However, as religious educators we suggest that engaging in the question with worthy and thoughtful interlocutors would be most pastorally helpful direction for Amy, rather than assuming that her questions put her beyond the pale.

3. *Authority and the Possibility of Choice*

The third example shows someone who clearly has moved beyond the limits of concrete-operations to formal-operations, demonstrated by their ability to recognize values and claim allegiance or affiliation. However attaining the simple capacity for formal-operations is not always sufficient in a world of apparently conflicting ideologies. It becomes necessary to understand the values more clearly and make determinations or prioritize among them. To recognize if a person is able to do that, it is helpful to notice where they are placing authority and how. In *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, Sharon Daloz Parks offers a multifaceted schema of development, one facet of particular value attends to where and how people place authority. She writes, "When people compose their sense of truth in this form...eventually they reveal their assumed, unexamined trust in sources of authority located outside the self."⁴³ Parks adds that

⁴³ Parks, 55

“this form of knowing also tends to be dualistic.... They tend to make clear divisions between what is true and untrue, right and wrong, us and them. There is little or no tolerance for ambiguity.”⁴⁴ Their trust is in the authority to know what is right, and they affiliate with that authority as a source of truth. Their own agency is found in choosing among authorities, not in closely understanding and examining what they assume the authority has done reliably.

In Edward we see agency around his choice of allegiance to an authority, but we also see that his authority remains largely unexamined by him. Edward says:

I always have been very smart and I was always studious. But as I started to enjoy math and science more I just realized the discrepancy between science and religion. I guess that was another shaking point. Obviously the two can coexist fairly easily, people do it all the time, but for me I was one of those more toward the science end of things. Catholicism, especially, did seem to clash fairly well.... That pushed me away from the Church a bit more because of the belief in science that really didn't stack up with religion as far as agreeing with each other.⁴⁵

By his own description, Edward says that “the two can coexist fairly easily” because he sees it in the example of people who “do it all the time,” but seems unaware as to how they do it. In no instance does he indicate how it is that science and religion do not “stack up.” What is apparent is that he sees a duality between science and “Catholicism, especially,” but that presumed duality remains largely unexamined. Were Edward indicating membership in a Christian denomination that was more tied to biblical literalism, or denied or undermined scientific inquiry and discovery, the charge might make some sense, but such is not largely the case within Catholicism. The church does not set up the dualism, he assumes there are differences requiring a judgement in favor of one over the other.

⁴⁴ Parks, 55.

⁴⁵ *Going, Going, Gone*, 24.

As a religious educators we might be drawn into deeper conversation with Edward about the points of distinction he sees between scientific inquiry and religious belief. Were those distinctions about biblical texts, we might investigate what it means for scripture to make theological claims, rather than scientific. Were the distinctions about moral injunctions, we might have a conversation around the values intended behind the moral injunctions and those intended behind scientific inquiry. Broadly, we could invite him to learn more about why and where these two “authorities” converge and diverge. We could invite him into a more nuanced understanding of both.

In this section we have offered three brief examples, working from very limited interview statements. Were we to test this interpretive lens more thoroughly we would need access to the fuller interviews for the purpose of greater validity. However, even in these brief examples we demonstrate that by analyzing the material through a subject-object lens, as offered through constructivist-developmental theory, we notice how the young person is making meaning. A better understanding on our part helps us move to more constructive responses as religious educators.

IV. Conclusion

In this paper we have suggested that sociological research on disaffiliation among young people might be interpreted through the lens of constructivist-developmental theory. This lens helps us nuance and read between the lines of what may be going on cognitively and spiritually. Reading the data at its face value does not allow for the complexities of individual experiences nor does it take into account the diverse locations interviewees and survey respondents may be at within stages of growth. Furthermore, reading current data trends on religious belief and

belonging of young adults through a constructivist-developmental lens can lead to practical responses for religious educators as they work with young adults.

We must take seriously the voiced concerns of young adults who are dis-affiliating while also being aware of where they are developmentally so that we can support their spiritual and cognitive growth. While many religious professionals remain validly concerned about the statistics of young adults falling away from organized religion, we remain hopeful that there can be opportunities to engage with disaffiliated young adults so as to support their exploration of life's ultimate source, meaning, and purpose. Familiarity with the work of Parks, Fowler, and Kegan can help educators provide young adults with the support *and* challenge that they need. Interpreting current and future data on trends of religious belonging among young adults through a constructivist-developmental lens can ultimately aid religious educators practically in working with young adults.



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Against All Odds: Formational Education as Bridge across Deep Division

Abstract

Formational college education can promote dialogue across deep divisions. Regardless of university affiliation, students regularly declare themselves, "spiritual, but not religious." Deeper than a trend in contemporary language, transformational learning offers the possibility for a more complex relationship with the self, others, and the world. Whether or not a university claims to be forming its students, developmental theory would say students are, most certainly, in a stage of profound formation. This paper will overview the landscape, and suggest a holistic, transformational way forward.

Against All Odds

Distracted by semantics and operating under false dichotomies, faculty and administrators on university campuses are missing an opportunity. This missed opportunity could play a pivotal role in the growth, development, and success of college students and societies. For centuries the debate has lingered—What is the purpose of a college education?—leaving behind a wide spectrum of opinions. Developmental theorists point out two distinct ends of the spectrum. Geared toward the acquisition of skills and knowledge is *informational* learning. *Transformational* learning, on the other end, aims to lead people toward more complex relationships with the self, others, and the world. More important than this distinction itself is whether or not a college or university recognizes its role in forming its students. Developmental theory states: students, at this point in their lives, are being formed. Transformational learning, then, is an important opportunity afforded by college education. Following the identification of false dichotomies and a brief exploration of contemporary research data, a holistic, nuanced, transformational way forward is possible.

"It's funny: I always imagined when I was a kid that adults had some kind of inner toolbox full of shiny tools: the saw of discernment, the hammer of wisdom, the sandpaper of patience. But then when I grew up I found that life handed you these rusty bent old tools - friendships, prayer, conscience, honesty - and said 'do the best you can with these, they will have to do'. And mostly, against all odds, they do."

False Dichotomy 1: Spiritual, but not Religious—Interior/Exterior

“I’m spiritual, but not religious,” college students across North America report, to the great dismay of many professionals within higher education, and the great disinterest of countless more. This proclamation suggests a gap—perhaps more accurately, a fault line, between “religion” and “spirituality.” The perception of this gap, and the subsequent need to repair it is, of course, well intentioned. College studentsⁱⁱ for the past fifteen years have increasingly referred to themselves in this way.ⁱⁱⁱ Over the course of this same time period, the bafflement has grown in direct proportion. University professors and student affairs professionals in both secular and religious institutions wonder: What, exactly, do they mean? What is it that college students seek? And what is the point of a college education?

In 2003, as an attempt to better understand this question, Helen and Alexander Astin began their work as Co-Principal Investigators for a multi-year project out of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA. They entitled their project, *The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose*. The work was funded by the John Templeton Foundation. Astin and Astin wrote,

The project is based in part on the realization that the relative amount of attention that colleges and universities devote to the ‘exterior’ and ‘interior’ aspects of students’ development has gotten out of balance...we have increasingly come to neglect the students’ inner development—the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, spirituality, and self-understanding.^{iv}

While this comprehensive study is certainly of value to professors, administrators, and other professionals within the world of higher education, it is helpful to highlight its underlying assumption, betrayed by the use of *inner* development. Namely, that the “interior” and “exterior” lives of persons are fundamentally different, existing on some sort of physical, locational, binary. By definition, that which happens outside is not that which occurs within. This can be expanded to say, that which happens in an *informational* type of learning environment is separate from that which occurs as a result of *transformational* learning experiences. Those pieces constitutive of transformational learning fall under the interior life of the student: sense of self, role in relationships, sense of wonder, meaning and purpose. These aspects are excluded from the exterior life of the student: academic success, mastery of skills, acquisition and execution of leadership roles.

False Dichotomy 2: Secular/Sacred

Charles Taylor defines the notion of *secular* in its original context, Latin Christendom, wherein it was understood as one term of a dyad. That which was secular had to do with profane time, or “century.” It was contrasted with the second term in the dyad, that which was eternal or related to *sacred* time, kairos. The secular/sacred, profane/kairos, temporal/spiritual distinction was one in which each half of the equation functioned simultaneously. In other words, the secular fundamentally depended upon the sacred and vice versa. Neither acted alone.

Across history a major shift occurred, in which responsibilities formerly falling under the jurisdiction of church slowly became the responsibility of each individual citizen, or non-church organization. The meaning of “secularization” with respect to this general shift, beginning post-Reformation, is rather obvious. “This configuration of the “secular,” where it still holds, can make secularization a relatively undramatic affair...basic features remain unchanged.”^v Society

grows increasingly secularized as individuals and organizations not associated with organized religious communities (churches) take ownership for needs traditionally left under the umbrella of church. By definition, this development is not problematic.

However, the gradual progress of a new and different configuration has arisen. The secular, according to this arrangement, acts alone, and is “opposed to any claim made in the name of something transcendent of this world and its interests.”^{vi} This shift has left the secular/sacred dyad fundamentally disconnected and in conflict. In terms of the interior/exterior dichotomy outlined above, the exterior—that which is observable and concrete—is that which matters. To put this in the context of the university setting, students’ exterior lives, comprised of academic performance, demonstration of skills, and leadership roles are the only aspect worthy of investment. This conception of the secular drives informational learning. Transformational learning, geared toward illuminating and enriching the messy interior lives of students, where self-understanding, relationship skills, and wonder for one’s place in the world, is left to the ethereal realm of the sacred.

To complicate things further, the distinct domains are ordered hierarchically, the lower being the secular. According to this ordering, the secular is that which can be understood immediately and clearly. It creates a new formulation, in which good social and political order is disconnected from the traditional ethics of the good life. Goodness no longer has room for that which is interior, relational, or potentially religious. Good, according to this formulation, is that which contributes to the smooth and ordered functioning of the exterior lives of persons. Secular Goodness consists of measurable skills, acceptable academic prowess, appropriate public performance.

It is interesting to consider what religious communities, as well as institutions of higher learning, have done to fabricate this dichotomy, and effectively perpetuate a false sense of conflict between the secular and sacred. For centuries the notion of the spiritual/transcendent/intellectual had been ordered over and above the secular/temporal/immediate/bodily. Within the Catholic theological tradition, Thomas Aquinas physically sketched out a pyramid to demonstrate this idea. Sacred Goodness could be understood as the way of religious piety, humility, and following the rules of God, which were only ever interpreted by a small governing body. As human persons and human culture have developed and changed, the suggestion that a body of selected, consecrated individuals should hold power to interpret the transcendent and hand down rules and regulations for the lives of others has (understandably) lost its luster. For these historical reasons, and a variety of others, sacred goodness has been colloquially linked to the religious. Left shadowed and obscure, having something to do with rules, maybe transformation, and interior “stuff”—religious is a label rejected by contemporary young people.

“We Are Not Responsible for Forming You”

Taken to the extreme, a secularized approach to informational learning falls on one of the far ends of the “Opinions on the Purpose of College Education Spectrum.” One might find someone like John J. Mearsheimer, professor of political science, offering a welcome address to the University of Chicago Class of 2001 as part of the “Aim of Education”^{vii} lecture series at this end. His compatriots would conceptualize the separation of sacred and secular with a firm, impermeable boundary. Mearsheimer would argue the university is a place for critical analysis of the exterior—facts, figures, and skills that matter. *If* there is something to be said about that

which is sacred or interior, there is no place for it within the precious intellectual fortress that is university.

Proudly tracing what he calls “the effort to develop a scientific morality” across the course of the twentieth century, Mearsheimer lands on the judgment that it has failed “almost completely.” He extrapolates that contemporary *elite universities* operate under a distinctive and delineated separation between intellectual and moral purpose, “and they pursue the former while largely ignoring the latter”—the underlying suggesting being that this delineation is precisely that which constitutes the elite. He seems glad to pronounce the University of Chicago a “fundamentally amoral institution,” affirming that it “makes hardly any effort to provide moral guidance.”^{viii} He understands the purpose and value of the University of Chicago, alongside other elite colleges, as providing an education centered on teaching its students to think critically, not ethically.^{ix}

Careful to indicate his sense that there is no “good life,” per se, the professor promises, “a Chicago degree will go a long way towards helping each of you to lead the **good life**, however you define it.” This promise echoes Taylor’s false dichotomy: the “good life” passed on through centuries of religious and philosophical tradition no longer exists, but one can have a good life insofar as it is made of external, objectively beneficial things. Over the course of the rest of his speech, he outlines what one can only surmise is a list of qualities of The Good Life According to John Mearsheimer: a jumpstarted career, lots of money, an “upper-class lifestyle.”^x The importance of getting a “good” job is included, although the goodness of the job is not related to: utilization of one’s talents, contribution in some meaningful way to a fulfilling endeavor, or service the greater society in any capacity—those would be interior goods.

When he does mention responsibility, it is to one’s spouse, children, and house. “Be prepared, which is another way of saying, make sure you have a lot of money in the bank, and the more of it you have the better.”^{xi} He notes the possibility of crisis, but assures the students their “intellect will help you deal with it.”^{xii} Because, he explains, “The sort of critical thinking we encourage is especially necessary when you are facing a personal crisis, and having a broad array of intellectual resources can be a source of real comfort.”^{xiii} Again, external skills and resources, he promises, will be enough to assuage the interior tribulations associated with crisis.

Following the line of theory constituting the “secular/sacred,” and the “exterior/interior” dichotomies, Mearsheimer proclaims, “We are not responsible for forming you.” One could argue, whether or not a university is making a concerted effort to effectively form the young adults enrolled there, the students are at a developmental stage that is fundamentally formational. To put this parochially, if you say you’re not doing it, it means you’re not paying attention to it, which probably means you’re doing it poorly. It’s hard to accidentally form people well.

This particular presentation of the far end of the spectrum is incredibly narrow. While others, when asked this same question, might not necessarily disagree entirely with his claims about the value of critical thinking or preparation for economic stability--informational learning, to declare an institution “amoral” or entirely disinterested in the formation of its students is severely limiting. This view dismisses the possibility of a “something in the middle,” a third way, that would provide both critical skills and personal development. It also dismisses the empirical research surrounding students’ desires, and fails to take advantage of the season of life during which human persons are most deeply becoming themselves—in both exterior and interior ways.

Spiritual-Secular /Religious-Sacred

It is important to note that, within sociological research, the dichotomies compound; the term religious has become associated with the sacred while spiritual has been tied to the secular. “The trend toward dichotomizing or polarizing spirituality and religion is accompanied by a tendency to characterize spirituality as ‘good, individualistic, liberating, and mature, while portraying religious as institutionalized, constraining, and childish.’”^{xiv} If, in contemporary college student lingo, the spiritual is tied to the secular, and the secular is that which is real, practical, and (according to this line of thought) can be trusted, it makes sense that a young person making any claim on an interior life would claim ties to that which is tangible. It would be counterintuitive to make claims toward an “imaginary,” communal, transcendent, ethereal, *religious* identity. Perhaps this shift in the vernacular is partly the cause of the self-reported refrain, “I’m spiritual but not religious” ringing out on so many college campuses.

To summarize, following paradigmatic shifts, the sacred is that which is ethereal and governed by an outside authority. The sacred is understood as being tied to the religious. The sacred is confusing, intangible, and undeserving of trust. In a convoluted way, the interior life is tied to this faulty notion of the sacred; it is left to the wayside. The secular is that which is immediately available and trustworthy. The secular is that which drives the perceived need for institutions of higher learning to graduate adults with skills and knowledge. The secular is close at hand, clear, and readily available. In some ways, it is miraculous that students today claim the spiritual at all—they understand it to be close at hand, available to them, and worthy of investigation!

This contemporary web is of course in stark contrast to the understanding of spiritual as that which has been carried quietly through the lived reality of persons belonging to communities of faith. It is important to remember that, within the world of religion and religious traditions, the spiritual is often tied to the myriad ways in which individuals and groups demonstrate their beliefs and commitments. Across the span of centuries, the spirituality of persons and communities has contributed in deep and meaningful ways to the lives of whole societies, regardless of whether or not those societies claim the same God as the spiritual persons and communities.

Empirical Research

Nancy Ammerman, professor of sociology of religion at Boston University, has conducted in-depth research on ‘spiritual practices’ in the secular age. She uncovered numerous respondents hinting at real and important experiences, but having no shared language to articulate easily what the experience is about; nor the ways in which the participant knows the experience to be significant for themselves and their life.^{xv} In other words, Ammerman’s research has found people willing to give voice to their interior lives, but unable to accurately language their experience exteriorly. This, it seems, is an outcome of the process of secularization in which individuals and groups have moved away from the shared lexicon provided by belonging to faith-based communities or formalized religions. It is a symptom of informational learning, focusing on skills and knowledge, but not interior development and language to articulate one’s inner life.

In 1999, Love and Talbot worked to define five interrelated processes in spiritual development. They found that it involves:

- An internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development.
- The process of continually transcending one's current locus of centrality.
- Developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and union with community.
- Deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in one's life.
- Increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing.^{xvi}

All five of these processes could be described as developing internally. They would not necessarily be observable on the exterior, and would not likely be included in the evaluation of an informational learning process. A college student exploring spirituality in an intentional way, quite possibly finding *success* in developing connectedness, deriving purpose and meaning, or increasing openness, would not necessarily present any differently on the exterior. It might appear as though nothing was happening.

Nancy Ammerman has found in self-reported studies of spirituality that, “experiencing a sense of awe is not unrelated to what some people described when they talked about unexplained and mysterious happenings...a spirituality of awe is about affect, what one feels.”^{xvii} As was outlined in the previous section, common wisdom in contemporary culture holds that religion is about institutions that assert external authority, and spirituality is about authentic and internal individual pursuits.^{xviii} Based on the work of Ammerman, it seems students are talking about an affective experience of awe when they utilize the word spiritual.

The work of Astin and Astin suggests the “interior” lives of the students are those things tied to spirituality, meaning, and purpose. At this point in human history, a stark separation of interiority from exteriority in daily life is widely accepted. The 2003 study directed by Astin and Astin resulted in the 2005 HERI report, which summarizes findings from the survey of 112,232 entering first year students, attending 236 diverse colleges and universities across the country. Astin and Astin understood the role of higher education in the US context as one representing “a critical focal point for responding to the question of... ‘exterior’ and ‘interior’ [balance].”^{xix} One of the most salient findings of the study is the fact that students consistently agreed with survey statements about the expectation that their time as an undergraduate student would encourage and support their spiritual exploration and development.

Dawn Overstreet, in her doctoral dissertation, studied students’ use of the terms spiritual and religious, to better understand this trend of self-identification. Looking to the 2008 study entitled the Boston College Questionnaire,^{xx} she found that 81% of students in the study sample identified themselves as spiritual, while only 60% self-identified as religious. This 21% gap, she summarized, “reinforces the idea that students understand these two concepts to be different from each other and that more investigation in this area is necessary.”^{xxi} Students in the HERI study regularly and consistently indicated spiritual growth as an expected central aspect of college. Of the students polled in the study, 80% indicated, “having an interest in spirituality;” three-fourths of the students said they were “searching for meaning/purpose in life.”^{xxii} It is interesting to consider where these students went on their search, and whether or not they were met with enthusiasm or dismissal.

Other studies, with less carefully selected terms, found “religious development” to be positively correlated with both moral development and developing a sense of meaning or

purpose in life.^{xxiii} This, of course, is no surprise considering the tangled lines of development and connection behind the interior/exterior, secular/sacred, and spiritual/religious dichotomies. Religious development was also found positively associated with efforts to enhance multiculturalism on campus.^{xxiv} These outcomes are not associated with *success* according to an informational learning model. They are, however, associated with success when it comes to reaching across channels of deep division and making strides toward peaceful coexistence. These are measures of success according to a transformational understanding of learning.

What's the Point?

At this complex juncture, Sharon Parks would call attention to the particular fabric of the contemporary context- creating a sort of threshold, or hinge time in human history. She says, “We have unprecedented access to knowledge of our cosmos, our planet, our selves, and each other...creating a context in which social-cultural covenants are being reordered.”^{xxv} Throughout this season of unprecedented change, and problematic separation of vague dichotomies like interior/exterior, secular/sacred, spiritual/religious, one thing remains: young people are growing up, and they are seeking ways to make meaning of their lives. Colleges and universities are uniquely poised to aid in the formation of emerging adults. Contemporary college students demand a more nuanced explanation, better-informed educators and mentors, and a better toolbox with which to equip themselves for the “cusp time,”^{xxvi} in which they live and learn, and ultimately, will be tasked with creating meaning. Providing opportunities for inner growth and development is not simply a nice thing to do—it is an important and readily available avenue toward bridging deep societal divides.

Transformational Learning

Unfortunately for those hoping they can simply refuse responsibility for forming their constituents, college students are at intense stage of human development. Sharon Parks points out that the traditional college years occur during a period when one's critical thought includes an examination of the “tacit assumptions that comes with one's family and culture, and the construction of an intellectual framework more adequate to the diverse, complex, and morally ambiguous world of contemporary adulthood.”^{xxvii} She goes on to explain that as one's perception of authority shifts from external and implicit to internal and self-constructed, individuals begin to move toward questions that allow for a more spacious way of knowing.^{xxviii}

Moreover, if recent research findings are correct, contemporary students are more interested in “things spiritual” and “exhibit more diverse religious affiliations and expressions of those affiliations.”^{xxix} If colleges and universities are willing to invest time and resources into the spiritual growth and development of their students—that is, the interior lives of their students—their communities will benefit from “a broadly-inclusive, pluralistic climate on their campuses.”^{xxx} Common sense suggests this broadly-inclusive, pluralistic disposition will follow students after graduation as well. Given the increasingly globalized world into which college graduates move, to equip students with the skills and sensitivities to better navigate difference is not only a desirable educational outcome, but a necessary one.

As was seen above, one might articulately argue that the purpose of a college education is to produce educated adults with appropriate skills and motivation to join the workforce, find pleasurable jobs and monetary success, and critically reason their way through any crises that

might arise. This is one valid end of a wide spectrum of opinion. Another option might be to help form adults with an increased capacity to deal with the complexity of life in an increasingly secularized, complex context.

Sharon Parks notes, in her works from 1986 and 2000, that this time of development, young adulthood, is a time during which individuals are significantly invested in questions regarding purpose, vocation, and belonging.^{xxxii} She highlights the need of individuals for “familiar and dependable networks of people, places, and communities to explore themselves and their values.”^{xxxii}

Parks’ theory outlines forms of knowing corresponding to four periods of development. These periods include distinct levels of dependency and emotion. Within various theories of cognitive development, it is understood that over time, human persons move away from an external locus of authority, experiencing the gradual and uncomfortable realization that truth they have been taught is imperfect, and desiring a state of independent exploration. It is natural and *good* for students to endure a period of discomfort, seeking, and wonder. Simultaneously, Parks explains, it is imperative that students have conversation partners with whom they might discuss shifting perspectives and worldviews.

...It grows daily more urgent that those elders who would be intellectually, ethically, and spiritually alive heed the call of responsible mentorship, seeking not simply to pass on our disciplinary learning, but to embody our wisdom on behalf of the next generations as we pass the torch in this cusp time of both peril and promise.^{xxxiii}

Through her research, Parks highlights the value of mentors, healthy relationships with those mentors, and peers for the formation of college students. While the University of Chicago might disagree with Professor Mearsheimer’s presentation, in which he suggests *not* forming students, he nonetheless suggests a list of values: careerism, affluence, intellectualism.

Parks and the empirical studies noted above demonstrate that college students are at a place of actively seeking opportunities to explore, study, and discuss spiritual development—that is to say, development of a vocabulary for notions of meaning and purpose. This is a key to successful human development. Some argue spiritual development could be a critical factor in the increasing number of college students struggling with issues of anxiety and depression in a contemporary context, where major shifts are occurring and traditional models of success and pathways to adulthood are dissolving altogether. As society becomes increasingly complex, people struggle with daily salience of questions like, “Am I going to make it?” and “What is the point of all this?” In this way, deep existential questions of adolescence and young adulthood intensify.

Given the dissolution of these pathways and the struggle endured by many as a result, it would be fair to say a well-rounded education is a public health concern. Meg Jay, author of *The Defining Decade*, and TED presentation entitled, “Why 20 is Not the New 30,” contends that a major challenge facing the current cohort of emerging adults is a decreased ability to deal with increased complexity. Cognitive development theory would suggest that a key to healthy development is moving toward a capacity to hold conflict and tension without immediately moving to resolution. Like Parks, Jay suggests ours is a sociocultural location that increases uncertainty, partially because of ever-changing networks, technologies, and possibilities.

How Do We Do This?

Within an entirely secular framework, the college years provide an opportunity for young people to develop skills, dispositions, and relationships to better face uncertainty. They have the networks to help them become more inclusive, honest, and discriminating persons. Parker Palmer says that as they develop, humans move toward a more inclusive, honest, discriminating disposition.^{xxxiv} Developmental theorists use the language of crisis to speak of occurrences that disrupt equilibrium and force a person to face a developmental task that might be outside of their reach at a given time. Crisis, in this context, is a helpful motivating force to push persons into deeper exploration and development. In this way, college is a great time for a crisis.

A holistic approach to college student formation, one that blends secular and spiritual frameworks, would suggest the work of the college years is to learn to better handle these moments academically, spiritually, emotionally, and socially. This is quite a different toolbox than looking to one's very sharp intellect at a time of crisis. The traditional undergraduate educational years provide an excellent developmental window for students to explore new information, practices, and resources, while surrounded by helpful and invested peers and mentors.

Within a religious or spiritual framework, young people at a point of wonder and discovery might come to a point on their developmental journeys where they begin to ask questions specifically of spirituality and religion. At this time, they likely begin to look for a community of persons or collection of practices to help enrich their life's journey, and support them as they grapple with the possibility of a larger context and purpose. This is the point at which the rich spiritual resources of a given religious tradition or faith community can be of great help. They can be accompanied as they explore the possibility of the transcendent, wonder about the meaning and purpose of life, and develop into young adults with vibrant spiritual lives, nuanced belief systems, and rich communities of support.

Development in College—Theological Contributions

Students consistently report a clear interest in searching for meaning and purpose. This requires more than simply developing the intellect. *Aesthetics* is born from the Greek—*aesthesis*. Aesthetic experiences are those of art and beauty, "...distinctive for the powerfully gratifying ways they absorb our attention, unify our consciousness, and engage our emotions..."^{xxxv} The ancients considered philosophy the study of an embodied way of life.^{xxxvi}

Oftentimes, the subjects in Ammerman's studies talked about particular activities that might cultivate, evoke, or encourage the growth of the spirit.^{xxxvii} When prompted to talk about spirit, many respondents referenced inexplicable instances in their everyday lives. The type of events they described pointed to the limits of human understanding, and hinted toward the sense that despite the progress of scientific understanding of the natural world, there would always be some part 'beyond us.'^{xxxviii} Gleaning wisdom from the work of Nancy Ammerman, and the shared knowledge of those who proudly self-identify as spiritual, religious, or anything in-between, it is known widely that the everyday lives of human persons are sacred, and provide opportunities for recognition as such. This, of course, includes the lives of college students.

Richard Shusterman overviews, and in some ways introduces the idea of *somaesthetics*, an interdisciplinary approach, comprised of theory and practice. He defines it broadly as both a critical study and supportive tilling of the body (*soma*) as the site of both sensory appreciation

and creation of the self. Aesthetic experiences are those of art and beauty, "...distinctive for the powerfully gratifying ways they absorb our attention, unify our consciousness, and engage our emotions..."^{xxxix} Somaesthetics looks particularly to the body as the place where aesthetic experiences occur, that is, within the senses. As a discipline growing out of, and committed to an attempt to *make better* the understanding of both theory and practice, somaesthetics explores epistemological questions in the fields of science, theology, psychology, and sociology, to name a few.

The interdisciplinary field of somaesthetics contributes rich material to theological questions raised by Luke Timothy Johnson^{xl} as he explores a God who is ever new. Belief in a creative God welcomes the possibility of the lived experiences of human persons revealing never-before-known truths about that God. For Johnson, the human body is shorthand for human experience, inasmuch as it is in and through the body that human persons experience life.

Johnson claims that the Living God is made known in the world through the same processes in which bodies participate. He challenges misconceptions of faith, defining *authentic faith* as that embodied by those who trust and obey the one whom Scripture designates as the Living God. This Living God is one who is revealed through the accounts of Scripture as one who, at every moment, creates. Insofar as the human person can apprehend its experiences in the body, Johnson says, the human body is the *essential arena of a never-ceasing process of divine revelation*.

An article in *TIME Magazine* from 2014 highlighted the "spiritual" experience of high-powered women with stressful lives who schedule near-impossible workouts with the explicit goal of a good cry in mind.^{xli} The article talks of women craving the space for physical self-expression and release. People gather regularly inside studios in major cities for exhausting group fitness classes and workshops. They seek someone who can lead them through their embodied experience. Physical activity functions as a spiritual practice for many because it is an invitation and daily reminder of the present. It offers structure, rhythm, repetition, and ritual. "If spirituality is sometimes signaled by the beauty of the natural world, it is also sometimes experienced in the transcendence of the social world. Finding (or losing) oneself in the ocean of a common human spirit is another of the things people mean when they say something is spiritual."^{xlii} If university professors and student affairs professionals could find a way to bring ritual and rhythm into the busy, embodied, real lives of young people the way Instagram fitness influencers and yoga instructors have, they would be on their way to a vibrant educational revolution. To embrace one's physical reality as *creature*, as *beloved*, and as *good* is to open the door to questions of meaning and purpose.

In the secularized world, bodies are affirmed and included in spiritual practices because lives are lived through bodies. If spirituality is an inner drive for self-transcendence—a moving beyond the self to reach out in love to seek truth and goodness^{xliii}—then it is always tied to the richness of an individual's living. In her research, Ammerman found that people reported objects of beauty as spiritual "...when they evoked awe, when they asked a person to stop, step out of the ordinary business of life, stretching the mind and imagination toward what might be."^{xliiv} This is the task of educating in a contemporary context: to ask a person to step out of the ordinary business of life, or the traditional rhythm of the school day, to reclaim the ordinary as sacred, and help students to reimagine *and re-embod*y the significance of their own lives.

Countless possibilities like movement, art, mentorship, and meditation contribute to a holistic approach to college student formation. Incorporation of these aspects might lead a student to recognize inherent value in the self and others. Stemming from this recognition,

students often desire to situate themselves in the presence of a community exploring similar questions and sensibilities. This contributes in a dynamic way to students' spiritual maturity—a valuable theological goal. Providing students with rich intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual groundwork during the college years prepares them to build and live a good life.

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End Notes

ⁱ Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*. Pantheon Books: New York, 1999.

ⁱⁱ College students, for the sake of the data included in this paper, will refer to students in the United State context, falling into the "traditional" college age of 18-24 years.

ⁱⁱⁱ Astin, A., W., Astin, H.S., Lindholm, J.A., Bryant, A.N., Calderon, S., & Szelenyi, K. (2005). *The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose* (Full Report) http://spirituality.ucla.edu/docs/reports/Spiritual_Life_College_Students_Full_Report.pdf.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Charles Taylor, *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere* "Western Secularity" 2011, p. 2

^{vi} Taylor, 2.

^{vii} John J. Mearsheimer is the R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Political Science and the College at the University of Chicago. *Philosophy and Literature* 22.1 (1998) 137-155; Symposium, "The Aims of Education," John J. Mearsheimer.

^{viii} Mearsheimer, 9.

^{ix} Ibid., 9.

^x Ibid., 11.

^{xi} Ibid., 12.

^{xii} Ibid., 11.

^{xiii} Ibid., 12.

^{xiv} Johnson, Kristeller, & Sheets, 2005, 3 cited in Overstreet, D. V. (2010). "Spiritual vs. Religious: Perspectives from Today's Undergraduate Catholics." *Journal of Catholic Education*, 14 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1402062013>, 11.

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^{xvi} Hartley, Harold. "How College Affects Students' Religious Faith and Practice: A Review of Research." *College Student Affairs Journal* 23, no. 2 (2004): 111-29.

^{xvii} Ammerman, 35.

^{xviii} Ammerman, 24.

^{xix} Astin & Astin, et. al, 2005.

^{xx} "The BCQ is a quantitative study that analyzes the impact of the undergraduate experience on students attending Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. The study provides detailed information on the activities, practices, and attitudes that could be linked to student outcomes aligned with the mission of a Catholic university (Fleming, Overstreet, & Chappe, 2006). The BCQ has been administered every other year since 2004 to a total of 11,200 seniors at six Jesuit Catholic institutions." Cited in Overstreet, 244.

^{xxi} Overstreet, 244.

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- xxxii Patton et. al., 205.
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- xxxvi Shusterman, 3.
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Silence as the "Mother of Speech": Cultivating a Contemplative Orientation for Dialogue and Communion Across Difference

Abstract:

This essay explores the role of silence and a contemplative orientation for religious education that can foster deep dialogue across difference. First, aspects of a Christian mystical tradition of contemplation and the practice of silence are explored through the work of Thomas Merton and others. A review of related contemplative pedagogical theory is then offered. Finally, these considerations are applied towards deepening the commitment within religious education to both honoring the unique agency and subjectivity of self and other and seeking communion within a diversity of perspectives.

The person must be rescued from the individual ... The creative and mysterious inner self must be delivered from the wasteful, hedonistic and destructive ego that seeks only to cover itself with disguises.¹

Introduction

How can we ever hope for *coexistence in divided societies* and *dialogue across our deep and sometimes incommensurable divisions* if we are each as divided within our own interior being as Merton insists in the above quotation?² How can our inner self be delivered from the destructive and conformist ego that undermines true freedom, dialogue and coexistence? Religious educators are uniquely positioned to prompt and uncover this freedom, particularly as they attend to the ontological level, the very being, of their students, educating in ways that are “humanizing”³ and that engage “all the dimensions and dynamics of human being”.⁴ This ontological concern provides a singularly powerful telos for religious educators that can guide our endeavors towards spiritual and practical bridge building across our differences.

Bridge building out of this ontological orientation can be abetted by pedagogical considerations that cultivate the depth of being-rescuing the person from the individual-that Merton calls for. Contemplative pedagogies hold promising potential to engage this depth of being, simply through their most basic attempts to “place the student in the center of his or her learning so that the student can connect his or her inner world to the outer world”.⁵ At the same time, studies have suggested that training in contemplative practices can also lead to increased prosocial behavior, such as reciprocity and helping behavior,⁶ increased altruistic behavior,⁷ and

¹ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 38.

² Call for Proposals, Religious Education Association Annual Meeting 2019,

² Call for Proposals, Religious Education Association Annual Meeting 2019, <https://religioeducation.net/rea2019/call/>

³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 43-44.

⁴ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Christian Praxis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 85.

⁵ Daniel P Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 6.

⁶ Susanne Leiberg, Olga Klimecki, and Tania Singer, “Short-Term Compassion Training Increases Prosocial Behavior in a Newly Developed Prosocial Game,” *PLoS ONE* 6(3): e17798. (March, 2011), doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0017798

⁷ Helen Y. Weng, Andrew S. Fox, Alexander J. Shackman, Diane E. Stodola, Jessica Z.K. Caldwell, Matthew C. Olson, Gregory M. Rogers, and Richard J. Davidson, “Compassion Training Alters Altruism and Neural Responses to Suffering,” *Psychological Science* 24(7).

a more compassionate response to the suffering of another.⁸ The promises and pitfalls of this introspective subjective/first person approach will be expanded upon below, but if carefully and critically utilized, contemplative pedagogical approaches can provide a powerful tool particularly well suited to the religious education classroom that hopes to be a place of dialogue across difference.

For Christian religious educators, a mystical thread runs through the tradition that provides a lineage upon which to build a contemporary contemplative pedagogical approach.⁹ In her classic text on mysticism, Evelyn Underhill places silence as an essential stage along the path to spiritual union with God. The stage of quiet, she writes, is the stage in which the self “can only surrender itself to the stream of an inflowing life, and to the direction of a larger will”.¹⁰ The surrender to God’s will and the deeper level of consciousness and sources of wisdom accessed in silence help turn us toward both God and others. In this manner, silence becomes a crucial aspect of a spirituality that can foster dialogue, for, as Merton puts it, “if we experience God in contemplation, we experience Him¹¹ not for ourselves alone, but also for others.”¹²

(2013), doi: 10.1177/0956797612469537

⁸ Paul Condon, Gaelle Desbordes, Willa B. Miller, and David DeSteno, “Meditation Increases Compassionate Responses to Suffering,” *Psychological Science* 24(10). (2013), doi: 10.1177/0956797613485603.

⁹ My focus in this essay is on the Christian mystical tradition, particularly in its Roman Catholic iteration, and as it appears in the work of Thomas Merton. As such, I am unfortunately constrained by time and space from enumerating the wonderfully robust mystical traditions that appear in other faiths. Despite my omission here, and despite a pluralism of beliefs and practices, a strong mutual contemplative affinity exists across faiths. On this important note, Wendy Farley writes about how contemplation “moves through beliefs and practices of particular religious traditions to the source of wisdom and healing that animates every religious tradition.” As such, it is my sincerest hope that my omission of other faith traditions does not diminish in any way the potential for dialogue and unity across the diversity of contemplative orientations, and, in fact, I heartily welcome comment towards this point. (*The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, 121).

¹⁰ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Preeminent Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 317.

¹¹ Merton utilizes male-gendered language throughout his work to describe both humans and God. While the use of such exclusive language is highly problematic, and I would much prefer more equitable, inclusive and gender-neutral language, I have left quotations of Merton in the original language in which he wrote simply for the sake of accurate reproduction of those quotations. It is by no means my intention to exclude anyone from the conversation proposed in this essay and it is my hope that Merton’s work of another age can still resonate today, despite his reliance on the misguided gender conventions of his day. If Merton’s gendered language renders him exclusive and irrelevant today, that is an important point of dialogue and debate for scholars, and one that I welcome in any discussion on Merton’s value to religious educators.

Merton On Silence and Contemplation

Thomas Merton, the Catholic contemplative monk and author writes, “silence is the mother of speech,” it exists in our lives as an orienting stimulus on our speech, it is “ordered to an ultimate declaration, which can be put into words, a declaration of all we have lived for.”¹³ In order that dialogue across divisions of any sort might occur, a careful consideration of the speech we use and what sorts “ultimate declarations” we hope to make with our lives seems urgently due. While turning to silence to find our words might seem counterintuitive at first, there can be no point without its corresponding counterpoint. Utilizing haiku as a metaphor for life more generally, Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast adds further color to Merton’s depiction of silence as giving birth to speech. Steindl-Rast writes that “the center of a haiku is always silence,” and “the words are only a kind of scaffolding around that silence.”¹⁴ For Steindl-Rast, this silent center is the *now*, the “moment we feel particularly in touch with the Source of that great design of life ... in those moments, everything makes sense”¹⁵

Merton and Steindl-Rast are drawing upon their shared Benedictine tradition of structuring silence into the daily rhythm of life in order to better attune oneself to God’s word with “the ear of the heart.”¹⁶ Silence, in this Benedictine tradition, can be traced back to St. Anthony and his fellow Desert Fathers and Mothers of fourth and fifth century Egypt and Syria, who turned away from what they deemed corrupting power and status afforded Christians in the wake of Constantine’s baptism. For these monastic precursors in the desert, “silence and contemplation were constructed in the midst of ordinary society as much as in solitude,” and distinctive solitary and communal forms of monasticism began to flourish within Christianity.¹⁷ One long-developed branch of this monastic tree is that of the Cistercians, also known as Trappists, founded in 1098 in Cîteaux France as a strict reformation of Benedictine life. It is this tradition that was passed down the years to Merton, who lived and wrote in his vocation as a Cistercian monk at the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky.

Silence is a defining aspect of Cistercian life to this day, and monasteries of the order typically observe a “Great Silence” from the end of night prayer until after morning Mass the following day, nearly twelve hours.¹⁸ This aspect of Cistercian life would have been a major

¹² Merton, *New Seeds*, 269.

¹³ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1955), 258.

¹⁴ David Steindl-Rast, *Essential Writings: Selected with an Introduction by Clare Hallward* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 127.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 124.

¹⁶ Benedict of Nursia. *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*. Edited by Timothy Fry. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982), Prologue, 1.

¹⁷ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: A Christian History* (New York: Viking, 2013), 74-75.

¹⁸ A contemporary daily schedule, including the “Great Silence,” of a Cistercian monastery can be found at: <https://www.spencerabbey.org/our-day/>. For the very similar daily schedule that

influence on Merton's understanding of the importance of silence to the spiritual life. From within the Great Silence of the cloister of his monastery in Kentucky, Merton shared the fruits of a life of silent contemplative prayer with a wide readership, beginning with his best-selling autobiography of 1948, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Merton had entered the solitude and silence of the contemplative life, turning his back on the world as the early Desert Fathers and Mothers, only to realize that this was the route back into the cares and concerns of his fellow humans. It was this gradual awakening that prompted Merton to keep writing about the inner life of silence and contemplation for others, to "learn in my writing a monastic lesson I could probably not have learned otherwise: to let go of my idea of myself."¹⁹ This is silence as *the mother of all speech*; and charting a course for the rest of us into this storehouse of wisdom is one of Merton's lasting gifts to people of all faiths.

Merton linked silence to contemplative prayer and the Christian spiritual life in multiple ways throughout his work. He did not necessarily leave a systematic treatment of silence that can be drawn upon as a final summative statement, but there are several (at least) recurrent themes that can be detected in Merton's writing on the topic. First and foremost for Merton, silence is the place of encounter with God. He writes, "we go forth to find [God] in solitude ... there we communicate with Him alone, without words, without discursive thoughts, in the silence of our whole being."²⁰ Second, Merton insists that in meeting God in silence, we also work together, with God, to find our very deepest and most true sense of self there. For Merton, "to be a saint means to be myself ... the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self."²¹ And, finally, it is not only a meeting of God or our true self in silence and contemplative prayer that is important to Merton. The discovery of our true self is "also a discovery of one's responsibility to other such selves, one's brothers in Christ, one's fellow men."²² Let us give some attention to each of these themes, for they are helpful additions from Merton to contemplative pedagogy for religious education that we will discuss below.

Meeting God in Silence

As noted above, Underhill cites silence as a crucial practice in a contemplative orientation to God. In Underhill's comprehensive survey of the Christian mystic tradition, she situates quiet as a "stage" along the way to contemplative union with God, as the "surrender to

Merton would have followed in the 1940s at The Abbey of Gethsemani, consult: Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk & Writer: The Journals of Thomas Merton Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 489.

¹⁹ Thomas Merton, "First and Last Thoughts: An Author's Preface," in *A Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas P. McDonnell (New York: Image Books, 1989), 16-17.

²⁰ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*, 254.

²¹ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 31.

²² Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 52.

the stream of an inflowing life,” wherein “the self slides into a certain dim yet vivid consciousness of the Infinite.”²³ The sort of quiet Underhill is writing about is not simply refraining from speech or noise, but rather a far more nuanced state that one must take up as a routinized ascetical practice in order to arrive at. Underhill further calls the silent world a “more real world,” a place wherein our conscious discursive and analytical way of being is laid aside for something deeper.²⁴ The stage of quiet, according to Underhill, is a stage from which “the self emerges to the new life, the new knowledge which is mediated to it under the innumerable forms of Contemplation.”²⁵ Silence prepares the soul-makes it more receptive-to God’s initiative towards union with us in contemplation.

Merton’s monastic life afforded him daily practice in just such a form of deep and abiding silence, a silence wherein he could surrender himself and enter *the more real world*. For Merton, “only when we are able to ‘let go’ of everything within us, all desire to see, to know, to taste and to experience the presence of God, do we truly become able to experience that presence with the overwhelming conviction and reality that revolutionize our entire inner life.”²⁶ Merton’s contemplatively revolutionized inner life is the subject of much of his corpus, and he is abundantly clear that silence and solitude are the catalyst for this inner revolution. Encountering God in silence is for the purpose of obeying God’s will and worshipping God, “here now, today, in silence and alone, and that is the whole reason for one’s existence.”²⁷ To encounter God in silence is to find God’s Truth, for “silence, then, is the adoration of His truth.”²⁸ Virtue and hope also flow from our encounter with God in silence, as Merton writes, “if we fill our lives with silence, then we live in hope,” and Christ lives in us and “gives us our virtues.”²⁹ The hope we receive from God in silence appears in our lives as profound enlightenment, it is the reassurance that if we “dare to penetrate [our] own silence and risk the sharing of that solitude with the lonely other ... then [we] will truly recover the light and the capacity to understand what is beyond all words and beyond explanations.”³⁰ And, perhaps at its most elemental, silence is the place where

²³ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, 317.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 317.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 327.

²⁶ Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Image Books, 1996), 89.

²⁷ Thomas Merton, *The Intimate Merton: His Life from His Journals*, ed. Patrick Hart and Jonathan Montaldo (New York: Harper One, 1999), 249.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 106.

²⁹ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is An Island*, 259.

³⁰ Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1985), 158. From a letter to Dom Francis Decroix of the Cistercian monastery of Frattocchie near Rome, August 1967.

we encounter God's love, God's "own simplicity," and contemplation is "the union of the simple light of God with the simple light of man's spirit, in love."³¹

Meeting Our True Self in Silence

Merton was also convinced that we find our true self in silence, this his contention named above that to be a saint is to be one's self. For Merton, finding ourselves in silence is inseparably linked with our encounter with God's love in silence, for it is God's creative love to which we consent in silence and through which we become that which we have been created to be. Merton writes, "each particular being, in its individuality, its concrete nature and entity ... its own inviolable identity, gives glory to God by being precisely what He wants it to be here and now."³² Merton is quick to add that we have freedom to choose our true or false identity, but that we cannot do so with impunity, for "if we have chosen the way of falsity we must not be surprised that truth eludes us when we finally come to need it!"³³ Our task as humans is the co-creation of our true self with God, and silence is the medium in which we can most readily attend to this work. Even in a life of action oriented by and towards God's kingdom of justice, and as important as this work surely is, we need times of solitude and quiet to attend to the inner transformation that God is enacting within us. Recalling the wisdom of a twelfth century Benedictine predecessor, Merton reminds us that "Martha and Mary are sisters [and] neither can approach the throne of God without the other."³⁴

Merton is also acutely aware of the paradoxical nature of *finding* one's true self by *losing* one's true self in God. In fact, for Merton, this paradox is at the heart of salvation. We are "saved," he writes, by being "true to the concept that God utters in me ... the thought of Him I was meant to embody," for in so doing "I shall be lost in Him: that is, I shall find myself."³⁵ Merton's pairing of silence, salvation and finding one's true self is a hallmark of Merton's contemporary relevance, a potent mix of ancient monastic wisdom with the modern turn to the subject. In an increasingly fracturing and disenchanting postmodernism³⁶, Merton provides something of a bulwark against the emphasis on the subject simply descending into subjectivism. Merton helps us to find ourselves only in losing ourselves in God; our subjectivity is contingent upon this ultimate reality. Our truest sense of self, then, is "to have a will that is always ready to fold back within itself and draw all the powers of the soul down from its deepest center to rest in silent expectancy for the coming of God, poised in tranquil and effortless concentration upon the

³¹ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 291-292.

³² Ibid, 30.

³³ Ibid, 32.

³⁴ Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 66.

³⁵ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 37.

³⁶ On the phenomenon of disenchantment, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

point of my dependence on Him.”³⁷ Merton’s true self is no subjectivism; we don’t become saints of our own individualized accord.

Meeting Others in Silence

The third ‘meeting’ that must occur in silence if it is to truly be the catalyst for a contemplative orientation to life, is with our fellow humans. As noted above, discovery of our true self in contemplative silence “is also a discovery of one’s responsibility to other such selves.”³⁸ Merton insists, “I will never be able to find myself if I isolate myself from the rest of mankind as if I were a different kind of being.”³⁹ Our true self is found not only in our silent encounter with God, but within community. This implies at least a somewhat worldly and active orientation, which is the way the great majority of humans go about their day-to-day lives. Part of Merton’s genius is in how he was able to so readily link silence and solitude to this communal human need.

Merton shared a communal monastic lifestyle with other men who were seeking the same silent contemplative life as he was. He also withdrew (somewhat) from this community to live as a hermit gradually for some time, then permanently for the final three years of his life (1965-1968). Merton’s decision to live as a hermit came about only after a long and arduous discernment process with his abbot.⁴⁰ Akin to the paradox of finding our true selves only to the extent that we lose ourselves in God, we are better able to attend to the other when we take the time to withdraw into contemplative silence and solitude. In his journal, Merton touches on this paradox in his life as a hermit, writing, “I come into solitude to hear the word of God, to wait in expectation of a Christian fulfillment, to understand myself in relation to a community that doubts and questions itself, and of which I am very much a part.”⁴¹ Merton’s silence and solitude were always in support of his monastic community, and the ever-widening circles of correspondents and social concerns outside the monastic enclosure. Again, there is no naval-gazing subjectivism in the silence that Merton espouses, but rather a wholehearted entry into humanity, very broadly writ. How else could Merton exclaim, “I am the world just as you are! Where am I going to look for the world first of all if not in myself.”⁴²

We will carry Merton’s insights on silence and contemplation forward as we engage contemporary contemplative pedagogical theory and finally explore some links to religious education. Before we move on, however, it is important to note that Merton’s contention that we encounter others from within a silent contemplative orientation is a powerful guide for dialogue across our differences. When the gulf of polarization seems to widen as our cross-chatter gets louder, it becomes imperative that we find a way to quiet the din; a release valve for the tensions.

³⁷ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 46.

³⁸ Thomas Merton, *Contemplation In a World of Action*, 52.

³⁹ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 51.

⁴⁰ Monica Furlong, *Merton: A Biography* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1995), 271.

⁴¹ Thomas Merton, *The Intimate Merton*, 261.

⁴² Quoted in Monica Furlong, *Merton: A Biography*, 239.

Merton's three-fold contemplative meeting (God, self, other) provides just such a means to seek a deep unity with God and within our human diversity. This deep human unity is perhaps best exemplified in one of Merton's most cited and most beautifully literary passages describing a flash of mystical insight on a street corner in Louisville Kentucky. It is an invitation to a contemplative orientation for all of us and it is worth reproducing in large part here:

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness ... I have the immense joy of being *man*, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.⁴³

Contemplative Pedagogy

For Merton in his Cistercian monastery, the contemplative life was simply *life*. The whole of the daily round and the entire ethos of this sort of community fosters a quiet contemplative encounter with God. This is the spirit within which all the relationships of the community are set (to greater or lesser degrees, of course, according to the relative health of such a community). What are those of us living in the non-cloistered world outside of such a community to do to foster a contemplative orientation in our own lives and relationships? Can it be done well enough in the busy to-and-fro of life? Can contemplation be taught? Merton seems to think so, but he adds an important caveat that "we should not look for a method or a system, but cultivate an attitude, an outlook," and "we should not expect to find magical methods, systems which make all difficulties and obstacles dissolve into thin air."⁴⁴ It can be taught, it seems, but not necessarily in an overly straightforward or didactic manner. Underhill, too, points to the "art" of contemplation and indicates that growth in "the mystic's effective genius" is intimately connected with growth in the art of contemplation, "and that growth is largely conditioned by education."⁴⁵ Further, Underhill contends that this is open to each and every one of us. She writes, "the germ of that same transcendent life, the spring of the amazing energy which enables the great mystic to rise to freedom and dominate his world, is latent in all of us; an integral part of our humanity."⁴⁶

⁴³ Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 140-141.

⁴⁴ Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 34.

⁴⁵ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, 299.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 445.

In order to access the latent *germ* within that Underhill writes of, or to cultivate the *attitude* and *outlook* that Merton points towards, we each need some guidance, some help along the way. Potential troves of good help in this endeavor-particularly for those of us concerned with religious education-can be found in the burgeoning fields of contemplative studies and contemplative pedagogy. According to Daniel Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, “contemplative pedagogy uses forms of introspection and reflection that allow students to focus internally and find more of themselves in their courses [with] a focus on personal awareness, leading to insight.”⁴⁷ The emphasis here is the process of learning within any discipline for the sake of learning the subject matter of that discipline in more focused and internally aware ways, and not explicitly about the learning of contemplative practices. However, it is patently evident that introducing students to such practices will also be part of the curriculum unless, of course, students have had the unlikely background of a Cistercian monastery or some similar training.

A wide range of practices-both religious in tone and secular-make up the toolbox of contemplative pedagogy. While the emphasis in this essay is less on the practices themselves and more on the theoretical discussion that surrounds some of the promises and pitfalls of those practices, it may prove helpful to briefly note the range of such practices to provide a sense of context around the terminology. The practices of a contemplative classroom can be the most basic, such as taking a brief moment of silence in the midst of a busy day, simple mindfulness exercises of attention to breath and the present moment, or a free-writing, journaling or art-based assignment within a class session. Practices can also be more complex, with more instruction required to enter into them, such as yoga, meditation, or Centering Prayer. Much will depend on the teacher’s own knowledge, creativity and use of practices. Though the practices can be quite varied, they all have in common the attempt to “cultivate greater focus [and] some lead to insight, wisdom, and compassion.”⁴⁸

Promises of Contemplative Pedagogy

Introducing contemplative practices in a classroom has the potential to “increase students’ discernment and attentive capacity, deepen their understanding of the material of the course, and enrich their relationships with themselves, each other, and the world.”⁴⁹ The promise of contemplative pedagogy is dual in nature, holding both intellectual and relational potential. Intellectually speaking, contemplative pedagogy can foster a first-person subjective approach to course material, mining the rich vein of personal experience. Arthur Zajonc, one of the foremost proponents of contemplative pedagogy writes, “contemplative exercises are a crucial form of experiential learning where time is taken to pause and the individual or entire class drops into silence in order to release their attention from conventional preoccupations, redirect it, and then live fully into the content at hand.”⁵⁰ The broad interdisciplinary appeal of contemplative

⁴⁷ Daniel P Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning*, 9.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 89.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 39.

⁵⁰ Arthur Zajonc, “Afterword,” in Daniel P Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education*, 205

pedagogies evinces a desire to take up Zajonc's enthusiasm and to link the discursive rational approach to academic learning with the cultivation of interiority and a contemplative awareness. A marked difference exists between a conventional teaching approach that helps students "think about" a subject matter and a contemplative approach that brings students to "know from within."⁵¹ Contemplative pedagogy can re-center this *knowing from within*, which has been too often dismissed within the rational and objective emphases of much teaching and learning.

Regarding the relational potential of contemplative pedagogy, we can discern echoes of the three studies cited above regarding increased helping behavior,⁵² increased altruistic behavior,⁵³ and a more compassionate response to the suffering of another;⁵⁴ all associated with contemplative practices. The building of capacities of attention and awareness that can arise with contemplative practices can also help students to emotionally regulate, thus building "students' sense of agency and resiliency," which can "encourage their flourishing as individuals who can in turn build humane communities."⁵⁵ The working definition of contemplation that has been developed through practice by the faculty and students in Brown University's undergraduate concentration in contemplative studies also captures the potential for contemplative pedagogy to foster relational acumen. Harold Roth, the founding directors of that program, states their definition of contemplation, in its more relational part, as "the basis of other-regarding virtues such as empathy, compassion and love which provide a crucial foundation for social engagement."⁵⁶ Such goals align contemplative pedagogy well with the humanizing and transformative potential that lies within religious education. These relational goals also echo Merton's call to turn deeply within in order to turn back out to our fellow humans.

While this very brief survey of the promises of contemplative pedagogy is far from exhaustive, it provides a small glimpse into its potential to be a useful aid to religious educators who hope to inculcate in their students the intellectual and relational dispositions to be builders of bridges across difference. For, as with Merton's insight that *silence is the mother of speech*, contemplative pedagogy can help students to more readily make their own declaration of what it is they hope to learn and live for. In this manner, it can be a transformative experience for

⁵¹ Judith Simmer-Brown and Fran Grace, *Meditation in the Classroom: Contemplative Pedagogy for Religious Studies* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011), xvi.

⁵² Susanne Leiberger, Olga Klimecki, and Tania Singer, "Short-Term Compassion Training Increases Prosocial Behavior in a Newly Developed Prosocial Game."

⁵³ Helen Y. Weng, Andrew S. Fox, Alexander J. Shackman, Diane E. Stodola, Jessica Z.K. Caldwell, Matthew C. Olson, Gregory M. Rogers, and Richard J. Davidson, "Compassion Training Alters Altruism and Neural Responses to Suffering."

⁵⁴ Paul Condon, Gaelle Desbordes, Willa B. Miller, and David DeSteno, "Meditation Increases Compassionate Responses to Suffering."

⁵⁵ Karolyn Kinane, "Critical, Creative, Contemplative," in *Religious Studies News* (June, 2019): 21, <http://rsn.aarweb.org/spotlight-on/teaching/contemplative-pedagogy/editors-introduction>.

⁵⁶ Harold D. Roth, "Contemplative Pedagogy," in *Religious Studies News* (June, 2019): 31, <http://rsn.aarweb.org/spotlight-on/teaching/contemplative-pedagogy/editors-introduction>.

students. Contemplative practices can aid our endeavors in religious education to foster what Parker Palmer calls an “authentic spirituality,” a spirituality of depth and interiority, which “encourages us to welcome diversity and conflict, to tolerate ambiguity, and to embrace paradox.”⁵⁷

Pitfalls of Contemplative Pedagogy

Despite the rich promises that contemplative pedagogy holds, it is not without its potential pitfalls, and these can be discerned, in part, as the inverse of the promises. To begin with, the promise of a first-person subjective way of knowing and learning can devolve into subjectivism and relativism. How tempting to misconstrue insights and awareness that arise for me in the midst of my own contemplative practice as having more universal application than they truly do? Additionally, this first-person emphasis within contemplative pedagogy can too easily be placed over-against critical-technical-rational approaches to education. Such critiques, writes Kathleen M. Fisher “seem to overlook the depth and complexity of critical thinking ... Analysis does not reject the personal viewpoint of the knower, but guides him or her to a greater awareness of it so as not to be constrained or misled by it.”⁵⁸ Contemplative pedagogy can be an aid to good critical reasoning, but we must be careful not to dismiss too easily the good wisdom that also rises in that mode of learning.

Regarding the relational promises of contemplative pedagogy, the more mindful and thoughtful encounters with self and others that can arise, caution is also due. To begin with, many students will have no formal experience with contemplative practices and may approach such practices with fear or skepticism that rightly demands a respectful response. Relatedly, “students have often been led to avoid and deny their personal responses to class material, adopting instead an abstract and more objective attitude” which may also make them tentative about contemplative pedagogy.⁵⁹ Students may also find the religious traditions that are behind many contemplative practices to be an impediment if the tradition is not their own. Candy Gunther Brown names the fact that socio-cultural perspectives and particular worldviews are in the background and continue to inform any contemplative practice-even when they are secularized-and students should be provided with a chance to “opt-out” of performing such practices as a way to “respect cultural and religious diversity.”⁶⁰ If such concerns are not adequately addressed, the deep encounters with self and others that can arise in contemplative practices will inadvertently become null and, in fact, an opposite effect may result with students experiencing a sense of alienation at the prospect of such practices.

⁵⁷ Parker Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education As A Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), xi.

⁵⁸ Kathleen M. Fisher, “Look Before You Leap: Reconsidering Contemplative Pedagogy,” *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 20, no. 1 (January 2017): 11.

⁵⁹ Daniel P Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning*, 68.

⁶⁰ Candy Gunther Brown, “Why I Do Not Use Contemplative Pedagogy in the Public University Classroom,” in *Religious Studies News* (June, 2019): 9, <http://rsn.aarweb.org/spotlight-on/teaching/contemplative-pedagogy/editors-introduction>.

Conclusion: Contemplating and Educating Our Deepest Being

Merton and contemplative pedagogy can come together helpfully for religious educators who hope to honor the unique agency and subjectivity of self and other, while seeking dialogue and unity within a diversity of perspectives. How is this possible if we are each as divided within our own interior being as Merton insists when he claims that *the person must be rescued from the individual*? True freedom, dialogue, coexistence, and certainly unity, seem impossible when we are operating from a false and interiorly divided sense of self. Contemplative pedagogy can be helpful in the religious education classroom precisely for the manner in which it can center the agency and subjectivity of the student. This is not a pedagogical innovation that is unique to the contemplative orientation by any means, and contemporary religious educators have embraced experiential learning and the ‘turn to the subject’ in good measure. Education that takes up the contemplative emphasis on uncovering and cultivating the true self is even more likely to engage students on the level of their very being. Additionally, and crucially, as Merton insisted above, this discovery of our true self is “also a discovery of one’s responsibility to other such selves.”⁶¹ A powerful starting place for dialogue across division is revealed in this dynamic of turning inward in order to better turn outward.

What business do we have as religious educators in asking our students to engage their deepest interiority or relate to one another on this level? Of course we leave the decision to our students to freely go there or not. And yet, this is when education becomes most transformative, when it takes as its purpose “to show a person how to define himself authentically and spontaneously in relation to his world-not to impose a prefabricated definition of the world, still less an arbitrary definition of the individual himself.”⁶² This gets us closer to Freire’s *humanizing* education. This is also education that reflects an “ontological turn,” a pedagogy that can “engage all the dimensions and dynamics of human being.”⁶³ Surfacing such a complete and authentic engagement with one’s being may be the pedagogical goal most needed for our fractured and polarized times. If we hope for dialogue, we must know intimately the affirmations of our own *being* that we will bring to the table and have our powers of reception well tuned to the *being* of all the others at the table. And, if we hope to build bridges, we must know the person who will cross that bridge to meet the other and be ready to be transformed in the encounter.

To give Merton the last word here, we’ll draw on John Laughlin’s paraphrasing of the way Merton summarized our greatest spiritual needs in his 1968 book *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. Those needs revolve around “genuine community; ultimate meaning in understanding ordinary life and human problems; a whole, integral experience of body, mind and spirit; [and] freedom from the extremes of self-consciousness and self-awareness.”⁶⁴ Such spiritual needs are met, to a good degree, in the adoption of contemplative practices and a contemplative orientation

⁶¹ Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, 52.

⁶² Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, Eds. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 3.

⁶³ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 85.

⁶⁴ John Laughlin, *Reading Thomas Merton: A Guide to His Life and Work* (self-published, 2000), 51.

to life. Education that can shape the very deepest identity of people, contribute to an authentic dialogue across human diversity, and ultimately find a sense of unity within that diversity, could find no better charter than Merton's list.

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Roots and Branches: Mystagogy for Religious Education

Abstract

This paper argues that incorporating a praxis of mystagogy within religious education is crucial for the church and our world today. It enables us to “sniff out grace” and be all the more likely to discern the mystery that inheres to daily life. A praxis of mystagogy incorporated into religious education helps to fashion people into mystics—a life-long process of becoming alert to God’s hidden presence by honoring the fundamental mode by which we know anything about God: intentional reflection on the encounter with God’s self-revelation and effective love through human experience.

*And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.¹*
— Gerard Manley Hopkins

What is always in front of us tends to disappear. Like fish unaware of the water around them, human beings swim in an infinite ocean of grace and mystery. Indeed, “the signs and fruits of grace are not always (or usually!) extraordinary mystical events. Often they are not even explicitly religious.”² Gerard Manley Hopkins voices this mystery above: “There lives the dearest freshness deep down things...” The abundant, inexhaustible ever-fresh giving of God’s self holds all creation— all of us— *in being*. The human person, in the world, is the recipient of God’s deepest communication within creation, that is God’s very self.

The fundamental insight here is the recognition that grace is not a remainder— outside, over, and extra— to creation and nature. God’s self-disclosure and effective love is not an irruption into a world where God is absent. Rather, God’s presence pervades and surrounds and is the very ground of all existence. This is what Catholics refer to as the ‘sacramental principle’—the belief that all things in the cosmos are capable of mediating God’s presence. How might religious education enable Christians to “sniff out grace” and become more likely to discern the mystery that inheres to daily life?³

¹ Excerpted from *God’s Grandeur*, Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems*. London: Humphrey Milford, 1918.

² Sachs, John R. *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 73.

³ Fuellenbach, John. “The Church in the Context of the Kingdom of God,” Daniel Kendall, Gerald O’Collins, and Stephen T. Davis. *The Convergence of Theology: A Festschrift Honoring Gerald O’Collins, S.J.* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 237.

I propose that incorporating a praxis of *mystagogy* within religious education is a crucial recovery for the church and our world today. Arising from the ancient church, mystagogy is an essential interpretive frame of reference for discerning mystery. The word mystagogy means “interpretation of, or initiation in, the mysteries.” Emphasizing a mystagogical approach nurtures a sacramental imagination. It enables us to discern the mystery of grace that inheres to daily life. It honors the fundamental mode by which we know anything about God: encounter with God’s self-revelation and love through human experience.

Education, at its roots, is a critical exchange of ideas and beliefs, truths and values in a community of practice⁴ that is oriented toward participants understanding and self-reflection of their position in the world. The best education engages active learners to apprehend, appropriate, and amend the community and the world (inform, form, and transform).⁵ Groome writes, “Consider the worthiest purpose of education as that learners might become fully alive human beings who help to create a society that serves the common good.”⁶ Contemporary religious education must be capacious enough to allow for the experience of the mystery of a God who seeks us out and draws us close, then, reflects critically on its implications for our lives and our world, and how best to respond.

Despite this positive affirmation of religious education’s role, current trends in teaching theology in the United States are inherited from earlier classical approaches that have for a century been influenced by an increasingly secularized academy. Farley writes, “the churches hid from themselves the uncomfortable fact that they promote an education that does not educate.”⁷ This methodology trains and perpetuates an academic proficiency that seems more at home in universities rather than engendering a faith that unites what is taught, grappled with, integrated, and lived. Harris in her evocative work, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* writes, “I am convinced our society desperately needs a philosophy of teaching that explores the dimension of depth in teaching, a philosophy that begins not with technique but with the majesty and mystery involved in teaching.”⁸

Mystagogy was foundational to the formation of those initiated into the faith of a burgeoning ancient church, and remains an important ingredient to shaping a meaningful and honest search for the credibility of faith in our milieu. This essay will explore the *roots* of mystagogy within our tradition and how a model of Recollect, Recognize, and Relate emerges as a constitutive pattern of mystagogy. What *branches* arise from mystagogy’s reinterpretation in today’s context?

The Etymological Roots of Mystagogy

Mystagogy has been long known as a catechesis from the ancient church to help *neophytes* (newly baptized) come to a deeper understanding of their sacramental experiences throughout the Easter season. Over centuries, mystagogy fell away from broad use until it was

⁴ See Lave, Jean., and Wenger, Etienne. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Learning in Doing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁵ See Groome, Thomas H. *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (1st ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

⁶ Groome, Thomas H. *Educating for Life : A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*. (Allen, TX.: T. More, 1998), 36.

⁷ Farley, Edward. “The Tragic Dilemma of Church Education,” as quoted in Kieran Scott (2016) *Alternating Currents: Sacramental and Prophetic Imagining and Church Education*, *Religious Education*, 111:4, 447

⁸ Harris, Maria. *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 24.

reclaimed as part of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults with Vatican II. Many today consider mystagogy largely a homiletic tool with an emphasis on biblical typology and narrative method that takes priority over doctrinal or systematic methods. But what are the origins of mystagogy in the formation of Christians?

The term mystagogy originates in the secret cultic and “mystery religions” of the ancient Greco-Roman world.⁹ Mystagogy was employed to signify the deeper meaning of participating in the life and “rites” of the community.¹⁰ Plato coopted the term to express “the asceticism of philosophical knowledge, leading to contemplation of the real, of beauty, the way to the divine.”¹¹ Mystagogy’s appropriation into Christian formation along with its rise to prominence in the patristic period is most closely associated with Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.

As noted, mystagogy comes from the Greek *mystes*, “one who has been initiated”, and *agogos*, “to lead”. Vincie suggests, “Although controverted, it is possible to trace the word “mystagogy” to the Greek verb *mueō*, which means to close the lips or to keep silent.”¹² This leads to the realization that the root of the Greek word for “mystery” (*mysterion*), and “mystic” (*mystikos*) is what gives rise to the Latin word, *mutus*- to be speechless. Thus “mystery” comes from a place of speechlessness.

David Regan theorizes that the etymology “of the word ‘mystery’ implies those present ought to close their mouths about what they had heard or experience; this is one of the factors making for scarcity of information about the cults.”¹³ Because of this, mystagogy has been a mystery of its own within the tradition which lead Regan to claim that “No comprehensive work exists on the topic of mystagogy as a whole... Nowhere have I come across any attempt to treat of all brands of mystagogy as a coherent whole and to apply the results to contemporary pastoral needs.”¹⁴

Scholarship in the area of mystagogy seems to be on the rise, and Pope Francis has included the term in homilies. However, Enrico Mazza, stands singly as the comprehensive work on mystagogy. He defines mystagogy as closely united to our contemporary understanding. For Mazza, mystagogy is an authentic liturgical theology by virtue of its liturgical and patristic origins, and refers especially to the ritual sacraments of initiation and “the deeper spiritual meaning of the liturgical rites.”¹⁵ However, this is only one aspect of mystagogy’s importance and relevance. From its roots in ancient human history, mystagogy was the way elders, or *mystagogues*, led candidates into the hidden mysteries, practices, and culture of a community.

⁹ See Regan, David. *Experience the Mystery: Pastoral Possibilities for Christian Mystagogy* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), Chapter 1.

¹⁰ Regan suggests that mystagogue and mystagogy were used in a much more “extended sense” than we are accustomed to, such as, to introduce friends to the “sacred precincts of the Greek family” or initiation “into the business of tax-farming”. *Experience the Mystery*, 11.

¹¹ Regan, David. *Experience the Mystery*, 13.

¹² Vincie, Catherine. “Mystagogical Preaching” in *A Handbook for Catholic Preaching: Developed under the Auspices of the Catholic Academy of Liturgy*. Edward Foley, General Editor, and ProQuest. (Pueblo Book, Liturgical Press, 2016). Accessed February 14, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central. Created from bostoncollege-ebooks on 2019-02-12 18:07:46.

¹³ Regan, David. *Experience the Mystery*, 12.

¹⁴ Regan, *Experience the Mystery*, 3.

¹⁵ Mazza, Enrico. *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age* (New York: Pueblo Pub., 1989), 1.

Religious education can be thought of in the same way. I propose that mystagogy, in this way, is the process of intentionally *recollecting* the experience of the sacramental moments of everyday, mediated through sacred symbols and the sacramentality of life in the world; coming thus to *recognize* the deep echo (types, analogies) of those experiences with the salvation story of Christian faith; and then *relating* this growth in our daily living as disciples of Jesus to others. Mystagogues, then, are people who themselves engage, and invite others to engage this praxis, empowering people to see the deep resonance between their own story and God's saving story in Jesus.

Mystagogy's Roots in Christianity

In the years following the first century, mystagogy was slowly appropriated from the pagan mystery religions and cults by a flourishing Christianity. These religions were opposed and critiqued by the Christian writers of antiquity to show how “debauched” and “inferior” they were, as well as being “diabolic counterfeits of Christian liturgy.”¹⁶ Eventually, the nascent Christian empire was to ban them entirely.

In the Patristic Era (primarily in the 4th century), and with the “official toleration”¹⁷ of Christianity by Emperor Constantine and its subsequent establishment as the “official imperial religion (by edict of Theodosius in 380),”¹⁸ the burgeoning of the Catechumenate, and by extension, mystagogy rose to prominence. The early Church Fathers—Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), Ambrose of Milan (d. 397), John Chrysostom (d. 407), Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), Maximus the Confessor (d. 662), and others, employed mystagogy as a homiletic and catechetical aspect of the catechumenate for new candidates. While Theodore and John Chrysostom preferred their mystagogical preaching before the rites of initiation as a preparation, more often mystagogy developed as a reflection on what had been *experienced*. For the majority of mystagogues, these were mysteries best understood from *inside* and having undergone the initiation.

The primary thrust of mystagogy—following the rites of initiation—was to uncover meaning by relating the experience of mysteries within the ritual and sacraments with types (*tipos*) found in the Hebrew scriptures—the figures, the occasions, and even statements that anticipated the Christian experience. For example, the passage of the Israelites through the waters of the Red Sea toward freedom became a “type” for passing through the waters of baptism to a new freedom from sin and death in Christ.

This typological interpretation and reflection on the scriptures was paired with the symbols and rituals of the sacramental experience undergone in initiation. Vincie explains that in typological reflection,

Christian Scriptures could be read backward, giving further insight into the events of salvation history witnessed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Typology was an effort to keep the various phases of salvation history in relationship to one another. It could be either commemorative or prophetic. The movement could be from past salvific events to present realities or from present realities to future eschatological fullness.¹⁹

However, not all reflection was typological. Mystagogues also employed allegory—a way of interpreting the hidden potential meaning and symbolism in narrative text to illustrate an

¹⁶ Regan, David. *Experience the Mystery*, 13.

¹⁷ Harmless, William. *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1995), 51.

¹⁸ Regan, David. *Experience the Mystery*, 14.

¹⁹ Vincie, “Mystagogical Preaching”, 2.

abstract idea. For example, in *De Paradiso*, Ambrose provides a commentary comparing Paradise (Gen. 2:8-3:18) to the soul.²⁰

Along with braiding the facets of ritual and scriptural interpretation, there was a moral feature as well. The newly initiated were not just to become new members of a society or cult. The Christian understanding of baptism implied a fundamental reorientation of their lives—an elemental shift of self in the world. They were become “a new creation,” and this new identity was to be reflected in how they lived their lives as faithful disciples of Jesus.

From the work of Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) in *Mystagogia*²¹ (circa 658), we have a model of mystagogy articulated in a register that seems most appropriate for religious education recovery today. Maximus was writing at a time when Christianity was firmly established as a state religion and lacked the vigor and urgency of the persecuted church of the earlier age. “Many were leaving in disillusionment and his purpose in writing seems to have been to recall them to their earlier faith.”²² Maximus’ primary insight was to propose mystagogy as a way to “gain knowledge (*gnosis*) of the Mystery through contemplating it with the spiritual senses... This spiritual sensing can only be accomplished through seeking the Mystery where it is to be found: in creation; in Scripture; in the liturgy, as mediated by symbols.”²³

With the rise of infant baptism as a nearly universal practice by the mid-3rd century, the adult catechumenate grew fallow. The mystagogical approach of reflecting on the experienced mysteries of Christian initiation began to disappear in wider church practice, and was kept alive only in monastic communities.²⁴ The early Scholastic period with its emphasis on rigorous dialectical reasoning and resolution of contradictions, assured the passing of mystagogy into historical artefact.

Rooted in a Pattern

The mystagogues of the early church had to fashion a theology and pattern of formation for *neophytes* as a pastoral and catechetical response.²⁵ Moreover, the ancient church recognized that lived experience is replete with meaning—experience does not always lead to more questions. It may also provide answers, and disclose the sacral and mysterious dimension of our existence. Precisely because it affirmed people toward a lived and living faith, mystagogy in the Patristic Age honored experience by being affective, based in the sensible, and made use of evocative and lyrical language.

Thus, a pattern to the mystagogical approach emerges that I describe as *recollect*, *recognize*, and *relate*. The first aspect of the pattern, *recollect*, has to do with two features of memory in the Christian life: the corporate memory of the church (typological) and the individual affective memory of each member (experiential). William Harmless suggests the mystagogy of the fourth-century “typically wove together three common elements: (1) gestures

²⁰ Savage, John J. *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 42)* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1961).

²¹ See *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. Berthold, George C. (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1985), 183-214.

²² Regan, David. *Experience the Mystery*, 20.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Regan, David. *Experience the Mystery*, 20.

²⁵ Mazza claims, “In the patristic age, there was no standard way of doing theology, if for no other reason that theology sprang not so much from a felt need of developing a treatise as from the Church’s vital needs, which called for a homily or more thorough instruction (catechesis)... It seems then that it was pastoral need that forced bishops to become theologians and thus Fathers of the Church.” *Mystagogy*, 7.

and words drawn from the liturgies of the vigil, (2) scriptural themes and images, (3) analogies drawn from nature or the local culture.”²⁶ The memory of the *neophytes* and gathered community were activated by drawing upon the archetypal moments of salvation history, human experience, and what each member had encountered in the rites of initiation.

Experientially, recollection helped the community identify and renew itself in connection with those who had gone before them as friends of God. Recollection gave access to salvation history, that in turn became personal history. Moreover, for Theodore of Mopsuestia, the act of recollection provided a means of encounter with Christ and the soteriological blessings that come from his resurrection. As Theodore claims,

Because of this [the death of Christ] they [the faithful] must gaze with *recollection* and awe on what is occurring, and also because at this movement, by reason of the awesome “liturgy” that is being accomplished... it is fitting that our Lord the Christ should arise, proclaiming to all a participation in the ineffable blessings. This is why in the oblation we *recall* the death of our Lord: because it proclaims the resurrection and the ineffable blessings.²⁷

Typologically, the way to make meaning of present experience of the mystery of initiation was to draw the experience into the light of God’s self-revelation in human history. Augustine of Hippo was a master of utilizing typological referents to animate the imagination of the *competentes* even prior to their baptism, preparing them for what was to come. Harmless writes, “[Augustine] encouraged them: ‘Be joyful going to baptism; enter without fear on the road to the Red Sea.’ He tried to allay fears about certain future ‘enemies,’ those minor sins one committed daily. These would be destroyed the same way Israel destroyed the Amalekites: by standing, as Moses had stood, with arms raised in prayer.”²⁸

Similarly, Patristic Era mystagogues recalled biblical typology for the rich imagery and disclosive power of God acting in the history of God’s people before and after baptism. Jesus as the “new Adam” stood contrapuntally to the Adam of the Fall. Moses led the Israelites out of slavery, through the waters of the Red Sea into a new covenantal life with God and so on. “Like Cyril, Ambrose read the baptismal washing typologically, as a harkening back to and a recapitulation of a long sequence of Old Testament events: the Spirit hovering over the waters at creation; the flood at the time of Noah... Moses sweetening the desert spring; the cure of Naaman the Syrian.”²⁹ *Recollect* locates the petitioners, or *neophytes*, within the arc of God’s self-disclosure in history, helps them assume it as their own, brings it forward to orient them toward their new life. From the entirety of this experience they can come now to *recognize* new meaning.

The Church Fathers’ approach enabled newly initiated Christians to *recognize* and understand the implications of their commitment and new status within the community and as adopted daughters and sons of God in Christ. We turn again to Augustine. In his famous Sermon 272, Augustine draws on and elucidates the meaning of Church described in the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians:

“You, though are the body of Christ and its members.” (1 Cor. 12:27)
So if it’s you that are the body of Christ and its members, it’s the
mystery, meaning you, that has been placed on the Lord’s table; what

²⁶ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 71.

²⁷ Mazza, *Mystagogy*, 67. Emphasis mine.

²⁸ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 308.

²⁹ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 122.

you receive is the mystery that means you. It is to what you are, that you reply “Amen,” and by so replying, you express your assent.³⁰

“In other words,” writes Kubicki, “Augustine reasons that if his listeners want to understand the Eucharist as sacrament, they must begin by understanding themselves as the Body of Christ. The mystery that they receive is the mystery that sums up their own identity as Christ.”³¹

Another example of helping the newly baptized to *recognize* the hidden meaning within experience of the mystery is found in John Chrysostom’s *Baptismal Instructions*. Chrysostom painstakingly elucidates the meaning of baptism drawing on Galatians 3:27 for the *neophytes* new status in the world and their relationship to God:

In Chrysostom’s description of the rite following the water bath, it becomes clear that the spiritual garment the *neophyte* dons is Christ. “For straightway after they come up from the waters, they are led to the awesome table heavy laden with countless favors, where they taste of the Master’s body and blood, and become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. Since they have put on [ἐνδεδυμένοι³²] Christ Himself, wherever they go they are like angels on earth, rivaling the brilliance of the rays of the sun.”³³

By drawing upon all features of the environment, culture, activity, and context that helped the newly initiated to *recognize*, and more deeply enter into, their community of practice.³⁴ This enabled them to appreciate the implications of who they had become as members of the Christian community, and so *relate* this change to their new life in the world.

Relate begins as a response to what they have lived through: the events, ritual, instruction, and apprehension of meaning that inhered to the synthesis of what was experienced in initiation into the Christian community. Having encountered and put on the Risen Christ through the Holy Spirit, the newly initiated are now implicated—there is an ethical obligation with their new life. Having spent time *recollecting* what God has done for humanity in a history of which they are now part, and *recognizing* the meaning of who they have now become, a response to how they must live is required that includes *relating* the Good News to others. The ethical implications of baptism follow: to “put on Christ” and become a “new creation” is to be marked and claimed and conformed to the One who embraces, restores, listens, forgives, heals and walks with those who suffer—the poor and insignificant ones. To have embraced the gospel is to acknowledge where reality in our world falls short, and correct that reality with great love.

This, of course, is the ideal. Harmless presents Chrysostom lamenting the lack of a demonstrable shift in identity among many of the newly baptized:

I see many after their baptism living more carelessly than the uninitiated, having nothing particular to distinguish them in their way of life. It is, you see for this cause, that neither in the market nor in the Church is it possible to know quickly who is a believer and who

³⁰ *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. Part III Sermons. Vol. 7: Sermons 230-272 B on the Liturgical Seasons, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, N.Y.: New City, 1993), 300.

³¹ Kubicki, Judith Marie. "Recognizing the Presence of Christ in the Liturgical Assembly." *Theological Studies* 65, no. 4 (2004): 823.

³² My study of this Greek term reveals that it comes from a form of ἐνδύω (*enduo*) and shows that some form is used throughout the New Testament, particularly in Matthew. In this case it refers to its use in Galatians 3:27: Meaning “put on, array.” From *en-* in, and *duno-* sink into a garment.

³³ Roosien, Mark. “Putting on Christ: Metaphor and Martyrdom in John Chrysostom’s Baptismal Instructions.” *Studia Liturgica* 43, no. 1 (March 2013): 58.

³⁴ See Lave and Wenger. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Learning in Doing*.

an unbeliever; unless one be present at the time of the mystery... whereas they ought to be distinguished *not by their place, but by their way of life*.³⁵

The demands of ethics and justice run throughout ancient mystagogical formation. Indeed, Harmless suggests catechesis is an art, and Augustine “insisted that the measure of artistry depended on God’s good grace and expressed itself in people who enfleshed the faith, embodied its charity, and enacted its justice.”³⁶ To put it differently, the *telos* of mystagogy is for the neophytes to embody the characteristics of the Gospel and God’s love for the poor after coming to recognize who God has been for them and apprehending its meaning.

Grafting New Roots

It was not until Vatican II and the promulgation of its first document *Sacrosanctum Concilium (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)* in 1963 that the Catechumenate and its practice of mystagogy was exhumed from ecclesial memory. “The catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, is to be restored and to be taken into use ... which is intended as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time.”³⁷ These distinct steps were: (a) evangelization (or precatechumenate), (b) catechumenate (from Greek *katēchoúmenos*, “one taught orally”), (c) enlightenment (the final stage prior to baptism beginning in Lent), and (d) mystagogy (following initiation). This was accompanied by three interstitial rites: (1) acceptance into the order of catechumens, (2) election, (3) sacraments of initiation.

Following Vatican II, mystagogy became the stage after the full initiation of baptism, confirmation, and eucharist—a time that was for “... a period of deepening understanding and experience of the mystery”³⁸ On the one hand, mystagogy in this context brought together the elements of the process into a fullness of meaning that suffused the affective and intellectual capacity of the newly baptized. On the other, it was a commitment by the community to accompany new members for the initial days of their new life in faith. However, mystagogy should be a fundamental affirmation and recognition that conversion is a lifelong process, and not to be collapsed into any one specific moment or experience. Karl Rahner’s theology and support for a recovery of mystagogy, helps us to explore this more deeply.

Rahner never explicitly or systematically works out mystagogy, but one could argue that the whole of his thought is a mystagogical theology. Rahner himself acknowledges this in *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*:

Even though there are many books about my theology, it is my opinion that this one is particularly notable because it deals with a concept (mystagogy) which on the one hand gives access to much of my theology and on the other has not been so fully developed by myself...³⁹

Rahner’s approach to theology incorporates an experiential, anthropological hermeneutic to rightly order an inductive approach to the central common reality of all human existence. God has always chosen human persons to be the receivers of revelation and saving grace—the

³⁵ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 74.

³⁶ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 407.

³⁷ Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963) § 64, in *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. A. Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1980).

³⁸ Bugnini, Annibale. *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948-1975* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), 593.

³⁹ Rahner, Karl. “Introduction” in Bacik, James J. *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery: Mystagogy According to Karl Rahner* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), ix.

hearers of God's Word, the speakers of our creeds, the builders of God's Reign. Rahner remarks on the mysterious world we live in:

The secular world, as secular, has an inner mysterious depth, in all its earthly mysteries from birth to death, through which, by the grace of God, it is open to God and his infinitely incomprehensible love even when it is not, before receiving the explicit message of the gospel, aware of it... For whenever its demands and its reality are really met and endured in the whole breadth and depth of natural human existence and in totality of human life, then... the grace of Christ is already at work and this response and endurance are already something Christian, though they maybe explicitly only secular and natural.⁴⁰

God chooses to reveal Godself in a human person and in the everyday by taking flesh in the world. The entire orientation of our lives, experiences, and world is suffused by the gratuitous offer of God's self to us, and all of creation is revealed to us in, and sanctified by, Christ. Mystagogy for Rahner, enables our capacity to apprehend this truth.

In the first place a mystagogy (if we may use the term) of the mysticism of ordinary life is necessary; it must be shown that he whom we call God is always present from the very outset and even already accepted, as infinite offer, as silent love, as absolute future, wherever a person is faithful to his conscience and breaks out of the prison walls of his selfishness.⁴¹

However, mystagogy remains obscure to many Catholics despite its recovery of Vatican II. I recognize two reasons for this. First, the word "mystagogy" sounds alien, tinged with the arcane and hints of the magical. In the flatness of our instrumental, technical rationality and data driven existence, this word (and the concept) can be met with distrust and skepticism. Second, the mystagogy period lacks the emphasis that the preparation and celebration of the sacraments have—they have no "public" appearance in the life of the church. In so far as there is no ritual or liturgical celebration of mystagogy, nor is it preached about, or spoken of, in the liturgical year, it remains hidden to the wider community. It leaves little wonder that mystagogy becomes a much-diminished aspect of the catechumenal progression and life of the church, and points to the need for a far more effective mystagogy.

Rooted in Experience

Through faith, then, we enter into the mystery that all life, all being, all created things are "graced" because the Triune God gives God's self to them. God holds in being all things that are not God because God loves them. I propose (with Rahner) that the primary and essential characteristic of mystagogy is the epistemological category of experience – the source for encountering the mystery. The whole created order is set up to reveal Godself. Experiences of God, "which transcend the human, always require interpretation."⁴²

Religious education is one way to engage that interpretation, which, for Catholic Christians, always happens within the context of community and tradition. Enter the religious educator as mystagogue. Religious education that engages people's lives and emotions *is* a mystagogy. Regardless of particular theological content, at the most foundational level, religious education has the potential to be a mystical act: its proper object is the Divine. Undeniably, the

⁴⁰ Rahner, Karl. "The Parish Bookshop," *Christian in the Market Place* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1966), 97.

⁴¹ Rahner, Karl. "On the Theology of Worship", in *Theological Investigations*, volume 19, 149.

⁴² Vorgrimler, Herbert. *Sacramental Theology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 6.

object of our discourse, inquiry, and scholarship is a *Someone*, who wants and desires to be known and reaches out to us through the ordinary and everyday.

Experience is an indispensable companion to theology and religious education. In truth, all we know of God is a mediated encounter, experienced and revealed through the sensible world. The careful dialog and reflection on these encounters within tradition is the mystagogical task: to stand at the edge of what is knowable.⁴³

Whenever we plunge into the depths of our life and existence— seeing it emerge at birth, grow, preserve itself, multiply, undergo consecration, healing from ruptures and the like— we do not simply touch the mystery of life. We also penetrate into that dimension of absolute Meaning we call God and its manifestation in the world we call Grace.⁴⁴

A mystagogical praxis acknowledges and compliments how religious education participates in the sacramental economy, honors the epistemological category of experience, and addresses current inadequacies of religious education.

Precisely because it was to affirm people toward a lived and living faith, mystagogy in the Patristic Age was also affective, based in the sensible, and made use of evocative and lyrical language, ever disposing people toward following the way of Jesus. Harmless summarizes brilliantly the foundations of mystagogy arising from early Christianity:

Mystagogical thinking is not difficult; it is simply different... mystagogy is an oral art and differs from a scholarly text on sacramental theology. Mystagogy moves by a logic more associative than discursive, more poetic than philosophical. This logic is not its only salient feature. There is another: a preference for surplus, whether a surplus of cultural images or scriptural echoes or both. The mystagogue tends to let these images and echoes pile up so that the meanings cluster and set off vibrations among themselves; the scholar, by contrast, tends to sort them out into discrete bits of meaning.⁴⁵

A mystagogical praxis presupposes God's *a priori* reaching out to humanity through the created order of which we are part:

God wishes to be present to the consciousness of human beings, to come to an understanding with them, to open up to them the meaning and goal of their lives. This happens in that God reveals Godself... one who is interested in human beings. Humans cannot be aware of this utterly different God, this spiritual reality living in a different dimension, except by some sensible mediation.⁴⁶

Rahner, however, writing shortly after Vatican II, points to a crisis of relevancy confronting the Church and religious education. He depicts the predicament of inadequate theology to address the modern mind and a well-educated populace that helped precipitate the Council, and characterizes some of the backlash following it. Much of his description rings true today. As a corrective, Rahner suggests the need of a "mystical theology."⁴⁷ Prophetically,

⁴³ Karl Rahner writes in *Foundations of Christian Faith*, "wherever a person allows himself to fall into the abyss of the mystery of his own existence with ultimate resolve and ultimate trust, he is accepting God."

⁴⁴ Boff, Leonardo. *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments: [story Theology]* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1987), 60-61.

⁴⁵ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 367.

⁴⁶ Vorgimmler. *Sacramental Theology*, 29.

⁴⁷ My research has come across several independent references to Rahner's contribution to a book entitled *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie (Handbook of Pastoral Theology)* regarding mystagogy and its importance to the future of theology. However, I could find no English translations. This seems like an important work to be translated.

Rahner states, “The devout Christian of the future will either be a ‘mystic’, one who has ‘experienced’ something, or he will cease to be anything at all.”⁴⁸

Recovering a robust reflection on human experience along mystagogical lines could be the key to addressing this crisis in religious education in today’s world. “Experience,” Regan writes, “marks our Judeo-Christian tradition indelibly: from the Exodus to the Christ event, it is founded on religious experience. We ignore that experience at our peril.”⁴⁹ Boff draws our attention to this dynamic so beautifully and poetically throughout his book *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*:

The Hebrew people were masters at interpreting human history as a history of salvation or damnation. On the basis of some very important experience, they continually reread their whole past history. New syntheses arose, in which their present was found implicitly announced and slowly prepared way back in the past. It gradually emerged into the light and then broke clear in their present experience of faith. The past was a sacrament of the present.⁵⁰

We should be cautious and vigilant, however, to ensure mystagogical praxis in religious education enables and includes the experience of persons without being or becoming, individualistic. This is what Boff alludes to in the quote above: The Hebrew *people* collectively reflected on their *communal* experience and history and tradition. Reflecting on experience within tradition and the community is essential. “We always receive the gospel from someone else, rather than through an inner experience directly from God. The gospel is not my own private revelation or relationship with God, but a gift given through the hands of others.”⁵¹ How might we begin to utilize this praxis of mystagogy alongside our current approaches to religious education?

Branches of New Growth: Mystagogical Praxis

The Patristic Era taught us that scripture, experience, and even creation itself may be read like a book of revelation.⁵² We have further received a framework for moving through the rites with the restoration of the Order of the Catechumenate from Vatican II. While mystagogy is most closely affiliated with the catechetical process of deepening an understanding of the rites of initiation, this essay argues that our understanding of mystagogy may be applied more broadly. I assert its value in this broad sense as an important (if not critical) methodological partner to religious education. What might a framework look like that orients our vision to reveal God’s presence, fullness, and abundant grace teeming through all creation and in the ordinariness of our everyday lives?

As we have seen from the pattern of *recollect*, *recognize* and *relate*, mystagogy begins with a steeping in scripture and tradition within a community, then pairs it with active reflection on experience and mystery, ultimately leading to that which must be articulated and expressed in a life that gives witness. This pattern is an integral part of the mystagogical process and is

⁴⁸ Rahner, Karl. *Further Theology of the Spiritual Life*. Rahner, Karl, 1904-1984. *Schriften Zur Theologie*. English, 15. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁹ Regan, David. *Experience the Mystery*, 39.

⁵⁰ Boff, Leonardo. *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, 38-39.

⁵¹ Sawicki, Marianne, “Tradition and Sacramental Education”, 45. Seymour, Jack L., and Miller, Donald Eugene. *Theological Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 45.

⁵² See Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei*, Book XVI for the notion that God has set all of creation as a “great book” to be read in order to “discover” God.

primarily inductive in nature. “The inductive method begins from the concrete, sensible, visible world and the tangible experiences of the person... and moves towards insights, principles, and conclusions of faith.”⁵³ The recognition required in the mystagogical process is experiential knowing, through direct relationship, and through encounter. Incorporating mystery, reverencing emotion, validating experience, and upholding revelation are all necessary components to the enterprise of religious education in our world and church today.

Conclusion

Contemporary religious education must be responsive to the challenges of the modern context: a frame that is influenced by secularity, excludes experience as a way of knowing, commoditizes and espouses a form of reason more geared toward production and consumption than humanization. However, there are signs that modernity—and even more so, late modernity—still pursues a fullness to break through this frame, to echo Charles Taylor.

Mystagogy emerges as a relevant and important contribution from the early church for religious education this modern context. An emphasis on a mystagogical approach nurtures a sacramental imagination. It honors the category of experience and places mystery at the heart of the life of faith. It militates against the instrumentalization of creation, materialism, and commodification so emblematic of our current circumstances. Indeed, experience and mystery are the only way we can come to know the meaning of our relationship with Absolute Mystery. Mystagogy is about growing into mystics—a life-long process of becoming alert to God’s hidden presence.

The religious educator is a mystagogue, one who participates and enables others to participate in the sacramental mystery and revelatory work of God through religious education. Proceeding with awe, caution, and reverence, religious educators are empowered to integrate the phenomenological and the mystical into their teaching. Mystagogy takes the category of experience seriously—as *prima theologia*—and empowers the experience of those without status, those on the margins, and those who are excluded to speak and be revelatory of mystery. Aided by the ancient notion of mystagogy, I suggest a praxis that includes the inductive movements of *recollection*, *recognition*, and *relation* to benefit the integration of mystery and experience at the heart of all religious knowledge and formation.

⁵³ Kelly, Francis D. *The Mystery We Proclaim: Catechesis at the Third Millenium* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1993), 129.

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The L'Arche *Habitus*: A Way of *Being* That Builds Unity in Difference

Abstract: This paper seeks to address three questions: *How* does community shape and form a person's *way of being* in the world? *What* aspects of L'Arche support a person in welcoming and valuing difference. And, what insights might L'Arche have to offer other communities? Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* provides the framework in which to understand *how* community forms people into a new way of being. This framework is utilized to look specifically at four aspects of L'Arche, a community where people with and without intellectual disabilities share life. The conclusion offers implications and insights in seeking to form communities and people that build unity in difference.

"Do you want to become my friend? Do you love me? Will you come back to see me?"¹ These are the questions Jean Vanier heard from people with intellectual disabilities upon his earliest visits to asylums and psychiatric hospitals in France.² The cry was for relationship—to be seen and loved.³ It resonated with Vanier's own deeply felt need for relationships as well as the invitation he heard from Jesus in the Gospels. In 1964, responding to this cry for relationship, Vanier invited three men with intellectual disabilities from an institution in France to share life with him in what became the first L'Arche home. He did not intend to start a movement, yet he "was on the road to an amazing discovery, a gold mine of truth, where the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor would be brought together in community and find peace."⁴ Vanier grew to identify that forming relationships across difference was a vitally important aspect of the mission of L'Arche. Many people across the world responded to similar invitations for relationship and L'Arche is now an international federation of 154 communities of people with and without intellectual disabilities sharing life in 38 countries on five continents.⁵

Mutual relationships are at the heart of L'Arche. It is in and through relationships with those whom our societies often deem as "other," "weak," and "vulnerable" that people in L'Arche learn to live in communion—truly seeing the other as their brother or sister—while also announcing the unique gifts of each person, especially those with intellectual disabilities. Unity in L'Arche exists through an understanding of our common humanity and an appreciation for, and welcome of the distinct gifts our diversity brings. Relationships of communion shape the L'Arche way of being, specifically relationships between people with diverse abilities.

¹ Jean Vanier, *We Need Each Other: Responding to God's Call to Live Together* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2018), 51–52.

² Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, Wit Lectures (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 12.

³ Vanier, *We Need Each Other*, 51–52.

⁴ Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness*, Resources for Reconciliation (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2008), 25–26.

⁵ "In The World - L'Arche Internationale," accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.larche.org/en/in-the-world#all>.

Vanier's response to his encounter with people with intellectual disabilities was to draw close in friendship. Often when we encounter people who look, walk, or think differently than "we" do, we push the other person aside or seek to control or dominate them. Sometimes the other person embodies what we try to hide deep within ourselves. The human tendency, when faced with the discomfort, is to build walls of separation based on superiority, inferiority, or difference. Instead of building these internal (and external) walls of separation, Vanier made a life-altering choice to live with three men from the institution. He learned that "[l]ife in community is painful but it is also a marvelous adventure and a source of life. [His] hope is that many people can live this adventure which in the end is one of inner liberation – the freedom to love and be loved."⁶ Vanier's desire to follow Jesus' commandment to love one another led him to build small communities where people with differences in abilities shared life. Since 1964 many people have chosen to share life in L'Arche communities and experience the freedom in drawing close in relationship rather than building walls of separation. The people in L'Arche absorb a new way of being that builds unity and celebrates diversity.

Three questions emerge: *How* does community shape and form a person's *way of being* in the world? *What* aspects of L'Arche support a person in welcoming and valuing difference? And, what insights might L'Arche have to offer other communities? This paper turns to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) and his concept of *habitus* to probe *how* community shapes a person's way of being. Then, the paper will turn to the unique way that L'Arche approaches transformation and growth to demonstrate how particular aspects of the community facilitate building unity in a divided society. And finally, the paper will conclude with four insights from L'Arche that apply to other contexts.

Pierre Bourdieu

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) was concerned with "the theory of practice, or, more precisely, the theory of the mode of generation of practices."⁷ The ability to understand a practice is not as simple as treating the practice objectively, detached from the history that shaped. Bourdieu's interest is the "*dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*, or, more simply, of incorporation and objectification."⁸ For this paper, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* explains the process of socialization, internalization, and reproduction of the L'Arche culture. It is a process which altogether is the formation of people into a *way of being*.

Habitus

Bourdieu's word for this process is *habitus*. His formal definition is "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures...."⁹ In the words of Colleen M. Griffith, "*Habitus* is a referent for acquired ways of thinking and acting that individuals and groups develop in response to absorbed conditions of social structures. Socialization ensues at a bodily level in what is often a preconscious or at least pre-reflexive way."¹⁰ Merely by living in a L'Arche community, a person absorbs a way of being

⁶ Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 10.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology; 16 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

⁸ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁰ Colleen M. Griffith, "Practice as Embodied Knowing: Epistemological and Theological Considerations," in *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*, ed. Claire E. Wolfeich (New York / Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 2014), 59.

that is expressed in concrete practices as well as in one's body. It does not require one to be aware of what is happening while they are learning and absorbing the L'Arche *habitus*.

An interesting aspect of the *habitus* is that it continues to generate practices without much prompting. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu uses an example provided by G. W. Leibniz, in which Leibniz describes two clocks that have the same time.¹¹ There are three possible reasons why the clocks have the same time: they could be mutually influencing; there could be a person who is constantly keeping them at the same time; or, the clocks could have been made in such a way that they would keep synchronized time.¹² The last answer reflects the functioning of the *habitus*—the *habitus* is the undergirding principle that enables them to maintain the same time. If a person visited three L'Arche communities in different contexts, the consistency of valuing, celebrating, and living in a way that builds unity in difference would be consistent. There is something distinct about L'Arche that even across different cultures, many of the dispositions remain the same. There is no person constantly adjusting and directing the practices; rather they are expressed externally as part of the person's way of being (their *habitus*). To the extent that a group has similar experiences, they will share a *habitus*.

Reproduction

An important note about the *habitus* is the way the *habitus* is ever-evolving. It constantly reproduces itself and creates new structures based on previous experiences. The earliest experiences “have particular weight because the *habitus* tends to ensure its own constancy and its defense against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information, if exposed to it accidentally or by force, and especially by avoiding exposure to such information.”¹³ The *habitus* is predisposed to reinforce itself, selecting data that does not challenge its dispositions but, instead, chooses situations that are most consistent with past experiences. Bourdieu adds further, “[...] the basis of all the avoidance strategies are largely the product of a non-conscious, unwilling avoidance.”¹⁴ The *habitus*, often unconsciously, seeks like-minded environments in which to reproduce itself.

Some scholars raise a concern surrounding Bourdieu's *habitus* because of the determinative nature of one's earliest formation and the perceived lack of human agency. Since the *habitus* seeks to preserve itself, by selecting data that is consistent with earlier socialization, it is difficult to adjust. Since it is always evolving as it encounters new situations, there is room for the *habitus* to be changed. Might an immersion in a community that offers a counter-*habitus* provide an avenue to adjust the *habitus* formed in the earliest years? Communities such as L'Arche can offer a new way of being that challenge existing practices and dispositions that lead toward division.

One cannot control the outcome or results of formation into a way of being. People are complex and carry with them, often unconsciously, the history of their previous communities. Bourdieu notes, “In practice, it is the *habitus*, history turned into nature, i.e. denied as such, which accomplishes practically the relating of these two systems of relations, in and through the production of practice.”¹⁵ No two people share all the same experiences, nor do they internalize

¹¹ Bourdieu is quoting G.W. Leibniz, “Second éclaircissement du système de la communication des substances” (1696), in *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. P. Janet (Paris: de Lagrange, 1866), vol. II, p. 548

¹² Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 80.

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 60–61.

¹⁴ Bourdieu, 60–61.

¹⁵ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78.

the structures in the same way.¹⁶ However, inviting people into a social structure with particular practices and experiences does produce similar dispositions.

Another concern could be that a person would lose their uniqueness by adapting to a different *habitus* and their behaviors become merely a mechanical reproduction. Bourdieu believes humans are **not** limited to a mechanical reproduction even though they are predisposed to act in particular ways. L'Arche welcomes people from a variety of backgrounds and each individual contributes and adds to the community. The internalization of the way of being is not separate from one's history and experiences. Individuality comes through in a person's contribution to the community and in how they appropriate the *habitus*.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* ("systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures...."¹⁷) provides a framework to see *how* a community shapes and forms a person's way of being in the world while also maintaining their unique integration based on past experiences. Using this framework, we turn to the second question of the paper, *what* aspects of L'Arche support a person in welcoming and valuing difference?

L'Arche

L'Arche is a way of life—a way of being—that forms a person to live *in* communion with and value people who are different than themselves. The very people who are pushed aside in society and deemed "weak" are the heart of L'Arche—they are cared for and loved. L'Arche offers the world suffering from division an invitation to a renewed sense of the value of diversity. Four aspects that shape the L'Arche *habitus* in welcoming and valuing difference are a foundation in Christ, mutual relationships, the structure of the community as a body, and the role of the physical body.

Foundation in Christ

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love...

That is the commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:9, 12-13)¹⁸

The first aspect of L'Arche is the foundation in Christ. Vanier's relationship with Jesus guided his whole life. Vanier's prolific writing is replete with stories from scripture intermixed with stories of his own life. He shares about his relationships with people with intellectual disabilities and ultimately of his and others' transformations. L'Arche was born out of his desire to know Jesus more intimately and follow the Gospel. He heard Jesus' question to Peter, "Do you love me?" in the cries of people with intellectual disabilities. His Catholic upbringing, prayer, and spiritual mentors guided him. Throughout his life, Vanier came to know a God who desires to be in relationships, especially with the most fragile and neglected in society. He found that in and through relationship, one comes to know Jesus and oneself more fully. His faith inspired him to start L'Arche, and throughout his life, he nurtured and guided the community from a strong belief in the love of a God who desires to be in relationship.

Vanier tells a story of an eleven-year-old boy with intellectual disabilities who received his First Communion. At the celebration after the event, the boy's uncle, and godfather, said to the mom, "The only sad thing is that he didn't understand anything." This was overheard by the

¹⁶ R. McGee and Richard Warms, *Theory in Social and Cultural Anthropology: An Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks, California, 2013), 93, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452276311>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁸ Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 12.

boy who, “with tears in his eyes, said to his mother, ‘Do not worry, Mummy. Jesus loves me as I am.’”¹⁹ “You are loved as you are” is a message woven throughout L’Arche, and this message is and grounded in the Gospel. Each person is precious in God’s eyes. Vanier hopes that community is the adventure, “which in the end is one of inner liberation – the freedom to love and be loved.”²⁰ The undergirding love is the love of Jesus, and it is a love that is unmerited. When one knows they are loved, truly loved as they are, they are able to grow and do wonderful things. The way walls of separation are broken down between people is through telling them *you* are important. You are precious. You matter. Vanier highlights this through a story of someone in the community:

A few years ago, we welcomed Eric into our community. Eric has his own story, which began with a lot of pain. When his mother discovered the seriousness of his disability, she was devastated and heartbroken; she did not want a child like him! Both mother and Eric were wounded. At [the] tender age of four his mother took him to the local hospital, where it was recommended that he be put into a regional psychiatric hospital. This is where we found Eric twelve years later. He was sixteen [...] His mother had only come to see him once because she could not bear the lack of love and care that she saw in the hospital. I can say that I have never met a young person so vulnerable and with so much anguish. Eric was living with so much inner pain, yet within that pain lay a mystery.²¹ [...]

The anguish of Eric arose as he sensed that he was not wanted, that he was alone and unloved [...] At the beginning of his life at L’Arche, Eric was incontinent, so one of the first things we did was to try to help him urinate in the toilet. One day he did! We all had champagne that day. People came in and asked what we were celebrating, and we said, ‘Today Eric has peed in the toilet!’ Life is made up of little things. You do not have to do big things to celebrate together in joy. Every morning, one of us living with Eric would give him his bath. Even though he was sixteen, he was small. Bath time was a very precious moment. Through the touch involved in bathing Eric, we helped him to relax and to discover that he was loved.”²²

Starting at an early age, the way Eric had been treated communicated to him he was unloveable. Unconsciously, he presumably expected the same at L’Arche, only to confirm his *habitus* (his dispositions, ways of thinking, and acting). The message in L’Arche that he was loveable confronted his *habitus*. Through practices such as tender touch and care, he began to learn the message he was precious. His *habitus* of seeking and reproducing situations where he was told he was unlovable was being confronted and transformed. It was not merely words that were used to tell Eric he mattered; it was the way he was celebrated, cared for, and nurtured.

Much like the clocks that keep a synchronized time, Vanier's response to the question from Jesus and the men in the institution, “do you love me?” informs the L’Arche *habitus* from the beginning. Vanier's desire to be in relationship with Jesus led to the founding of L’Arche. L’Arche exists all around the globe, and people come to L’Arche from a variety of religious backgrounds and professions of faith, or no faith. The practices and dispositions of L’Arche originate in a model of Jesus' love for each person. Regardless of one's professed faith, Jesus' message, “You are loveable as you are,” undergirds the practices at L’Arche.

¹⁹ Vanier, *We Need Each Other*, 28–29.

²⁰ Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 12.

²¹ Vanier, *We Need Each Other*, 20–21.

²² Vanier, 22–23.

Mutual Relationships

The second aspect of L'Arche contributing to a *habitus* that builds unity in diversity is mutual relationships. Mutual relationships are the center of life in L'Arche. People with intellectual disabilities (core members) and people without intellectual disabilities (assistants) share life: eat together, clean together, celebrate together, pray together, and attend to daily life. Assistants arrive at L'Arche for a variety of reasons. They might be seeking community, or potentially, coming to "serve the poor." If the relationship remains stuck at the level of the giver (assistant) and the receiver (core member)—the assistant who seeks to be generous remains in a position of power. The relationship changes when the two become friends. Vanier shared, "[w]hen I become your friend, I become vulnerable to you. When I am vulnerable to you, I listen to your story; I hear how much you have suffered; and you listen to my story. In some mysterious way, friendship is the beginning of a covenant whereby we are all tied to each other. You have to know that once you become the friend of someone with disabilities, much of your life begins to change."²³ Friendship takes time to develop. Friends need time to learn how to communicate with one another and care for each other. Mutuality is possible when the power dynamic is no longer one of a generous giver who is "serving the poor," and instead has become mutual in vulnerability and care. To truly see and love someone is to see their gifts and to reveal to them their beauty. It is looking at them with respect.²⁴

Vanier describes this relationship as being in communion; "[t]o be in communion means to *be with* someone and to discover that we actually belong together. Communion means accepting people just as they are, with all their limits and inner pain, but also with their gifts and their beauty and their capacity to grow: to see the beauty inside of all the pain. To love someone is not to do things *for* them, but to reveal to them their beauty and value [...]"²⁵ Inner pain presents itself in L'Arche in core members and assistants alike. The path of L'Arche, and of liberation, is realizing you are loved as you are and able to love others as they are.

Friendship requires bringing down the walls of power and control. Friendship entails entering into a way of "being with" as to reveal to the other their belovedness. A person Vanier often shares about is Janine.

[She] came to L'Arche at the age of forty with one arm and one leg paralyzed. She experienced epileptic seizures and had a lot of difficulties understanding and learning. There was a huge amount of anger in her. She didn't want to come to L'Arche [...] She needed to express her anger, so she broke things and screamed and yelled. We took a lot of time to reflect, to try to understand where the anger was coming from. She was angry with her body, angry with her sisters, angry with God, angry because she didn't want to work in our workshops. But gradually, gradually, she discovered who she was and that she was listened to, understood and loved. Janine used to love those old French Parisian songs that most people don't remember now. She loved singing them, and she discovered that she could dance to those songs and that other people appreciated them as well. Then she discovered something extraordinary: she was loved by God [...] The last three years of her life were beautiful. I used to go and sit down beside her sometimes; she would see that I was tired and would put her hand on my head, saying, "Poor old man."²⁶

²³ Vanier, 53–54.

²⁴ Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 3.

²⁵ Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, 16.

²⁶ Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness*, Resources for Reconciliation (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2008), 25–26.

Janine brought a lot of pain into the community. The community welcomed her as she was, and through the consistency of being loved as she was, she gradually discovered her gifts. Janine began singing and dancing and sharing her gifts with the community. Her experience of love enabled her to unveil who she was and share herself with others, including Vanier. There exists a mutuality—Janine was not merely in a position of receiving; she too was sharing herself with the community. It is Janine's transformation that one can see the ability for L'Arche to serve as a counter-*habitus*. Janine absorbed the way of being in L'Arche, and while she resisted at first (preserving a *habitus* from earlier in her life), she slowly absorbed the L'Arche *habitus*. Not only did she adjust to a new way of being, but she also reproduced the dispositions she absorbed in the way she shared a tender moment with Vanier.

A community that places the most vulnerable at the center and enters into relationships of mutuality—relationships that take down the walls between the “strong” and “weak” and sees the giftedness and value of each individual—is a community working toward justice and peace. By opening one’s heart to the vulnerable person in the community, one grows an ability to welcome others who are weak and needy in other parts of society.²⁷ The L'Arche *habitus* can be absorbed and then reproduced in contexts both inside and outside of L'Arche.

Structure of the Community as a Body

The structure of the community also contributes to the formation of the *habitus*. Western society tends to favor the strong and marginalize the weak. The fear of being weak causes us to hide our weaknesses and separate ourselves from people who are deemed vulnerable. Our societies are often structured like a pyramid. The most "successful" person is at the apex and the weak somewhere at the bottom. Or, maybe some people are not even part of the pyramid at all. The L'Arche structure is quite different. Vanier references 1 Corinthians 12, where St. Paul speaks of the image of community as an interconnected body with the weakest parts as the most honored.²⁸ Jesus came to transform the pyramid into a body, "where each member of society has a place, is respected and is important."²⁹ In L'Arche, all members contribute to the community in a way that is reflective of their gifts. In a society that values efficiency over people, the community might have missed hearing what Janine was saying in her anger. Janine’s voice mattered. Listening to her, the way she communicated, enabled her to learn new ways of sharing herself and enriching the community.

In L'Arche, those who are most vulnerable are at the center of the community and given the title “core member” identifying the place of priority.

The vision of Jesus is that we meet people at the bottom and help bring them up to trust themselves. In order to break down the walls that separate people we must not hit the walls. We must begin at the bottom. Jesus came to announce good news to the poor, freedom to the captives, liberty to the oppressed, sight to the blind. Let’s help the poor to rise up, and then help those who have power and money to see for the sake of peace, which is the greatest good humans can seek, they too should enter into this vision and start helping the weak to rise up.³⁰

Entering into friendships of communion and discovering the gifts of the other—of the weak or powerless—is the path of L'Arche and the path toward peace.

²⁷ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 60.

²⁸ Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, 36.

²⁹ Vanier, *Befriending the Stranger*, 39.

³⁰ Hauerwas and Vanier, 71.

The structure of L'Arche requires a move from "how can community serve my needs?" to "how can my gifts serve the community." It is a vision that allows for and encourages each person to contribute. When a person feels cared for, seen, and loved they are free to encounter their gifts (as well as inner pain). When the need to protect oneself or prove one's worth is dominant, people set up walls of separation, and people climb the ladder or the pyramid pushing the vulnerable aside. L'Arche places at the center of the community (of the body) those who are weakest and most vulnerable and says, "you are important." This is the same message shared with each member of the body, regardless of ability or disability.

The structure of the community is a critical component when considering the *habitus*. The structure or practices alone do not fully reveal the *habitus*, however, the *habitus* is both generated from the structure as well as is the "structured structures."³¹ Two features stand out in the structure of L'Arche that contribute to a more inclusive *habitus*: placing the vulnerable at the center and honoring each person's contribution to the community.

The Physical Body

The physical body is of utmost importance in life in L'Arche an aspect that highlights the embodied nature of the *habitus* in welcoming and valuing difference. The strong emphasis on the body in L'Arche is rooted in the belief in a God who became flesh. The physical needs of people to the structural makeup of the community reveals the importance of the body. It is rooted in a God who came into the world as a fragile baby without power. How we value a person without "power" and how we treat the fragile body are both significant in communicating a broader message of value and importance across difference.

The message of "you are important" is communicated not just through words but through the body. The above narrative of Eric spoke of bathing Eric. As Vanier writes, "Bath time was a very precious moment. Through the touch involved in bathing Eric, we helped him to relax and to discover that he was loved."³² In the tenderness and care of Eric's physical body, he learned he was important. Words are not enough. In the story of Janine, she communicated with Vanier in words and also a tender physical moment. "She would see that I was tired," writes Vanier, "and would put her hand on my head, saying, "Poor old man."³³ Vanier spoke of the importance of touch in a 2007 interview. He said, "[i]t's the realization of how to create a culture which is no longer a culture just of competition but a culture of welcoming, where tenderness, where touch is important, and it's neither sexualized nor aggressive. It has become human. I think that this is what people with disabilities are teaching us. It's something about what it means to be human and to relate and to celebrate life together."³⁴ A person can come to know great truths, inaccessible in words, through a bodily knowing, including their worthiness. Bodies are also the site of profound abuses, especially for many people with disabilities, which brings to light how appropriate and tender care of a person's body is essential.

Living in L'Arche, a person almost immediately recognizes practices that are different from societal norms of power and efficiency. It could be the pace of the community, the way people communicate, or maybe even a dinner table full of people with diverse abilities. The daily life of L'Arche involves the care for the body through activities such as eating, bathing, and exercising. These and many other practices and dispositions become stored in the body. It is not

³¹ Ibid., 72.

³² Vanier, *We Need Each Other*, 22–23.

³³ Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, 25–26.

³⁴ Krista Tippet, "Jean Vanier — The Wisdom of Tenderness," The On Being Project, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://onbeing.org/programs/jean-vanier-the-wisdom-of-tenderness/>.

from explicit teachings or rules, although those exist in L'Arche, but from a lived experience. As Griffith said, this socialization "ensues at a bodily level in what is often preconscious."³⁵ The socialization becomes absorbed, often without realization and produces a set of behaviors or ways of being and thinking (*habitus*). The practices of L'Arche become deposited in the body; through what Bourdieu describes as "the process of acquisition - a practical *mimesis* (or mimeticism) which implies an overall relation of identification and has nothing in common with an imitation that would presuppose a conscious effort to reproduce a gesture, an utterance or an object explicitly constituted as a mode[...]. What is 'learned by the body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is."³⁶ The way of being in L'Arche carried in the body becomes part of the person.

The four aspects of L'Arche touched on above (foundation in Christ, mutual relationships, the structure of the community, and the physical body) are not an exhaustive description of practices and dispositions in L'Arche. They are, however, illustrative of the L'Arche *habitus*. These aspects of life in L'Arche support assistants, core members, and friends of the community to experience transformation. The transformation is marked by the dissipation of walls separating one from another, the lessening of fear and discomfort of difference, and a celebrating of unity in difference.

Transformation and Growth—Unity and Difference in L'Arche

Exploring L'Arche with more depth this paper explores a community that provides a different milieu, one where the *habitus* is often quite distinct from the previously acquired ways of being.³⁷ When people come to L'Arche, they arrive with a *habitus*; they naturally and unconsciously bring with them their own history full of inclinations, ways of being, behaving, and thinking. Through the experiences and socialization of living in L'Arche, transformation and growth are possible as the individual's previous way of being evolves to be more reflective of the L'Arche *habitus*. L'Arche offers a counter-*habitus* that builds peace and unity in a world marked by division.

The four aspects, along with the writings and narratives of Jean Vanier, demonstrate the capability for a *habitus* to adjust when confronted with a different environment. People in L'Arche use the language of transformation and growth when speaking of acquiring a new way of being reflective of life in L'Arche. As Janine realized her community would love and accept her as she was, her transformation became visible. She went from being angry to dancing and singing old French Parisian songs. Eric's transformation was witnessed in the way he began to relax—his body demonstrating the reception and trust of the love he was receiving.

Vanier himself experienced growth even after years of living in community. He was surprised when his inner anguish was awoken through the screaming of Lucian, one of his housemates. Vanier writes, "I could sense anger, violence and even hatred rising up in within me. I would have been capable of hurting him to keep him quiet. It was as if a part of my being that I had learned to control was exploding. It was not only Lucian's anguish that was difficult for me to accept but the revelation of what was inside my own heart – my capacity to hurt others – I who had been called to share my life with the weak, had a power of hatred for a weak

³⁵ Griffith, "Practice as Embodied Knowing: Epistemological and Theological Considerations," 59.

³⁶ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 73.

³⁷ "The word *disposition* seems particularly suited to express what is covered by the concept of *habitus* (defined as a system of dispositions). It expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*." (Bourdieu 1977, p. 214--note from chapter 2, point 1)

person!”³⁸ Life in community provides plentiful opportunities for one's inner darkness to come forward like what Vanier describes. The darkness within is often unconscious, controlled, or protected. Rather than ignoring the pain and anguish, the opportunity is to discover our common humanity through our anguish and brokenness.³⁹ In reflecting on his inner anguish, Vanier discovered shared brokenness between him and Lucian. What could have been an experience of division between him and Lucian became a more profound unity in our common humanity.

The process of transformation, of learning to live in love rather than fear takes time and a willingness to engage in relationships. Vanier explains, “[w]e are called to grow in order to become fully ourselves and fully alive, to receive from others, and to give to others, not being held back by fears, prejudices, or feelings of superiority or inferiority.”⁴⁰ Fears, prejudices, and feelings of superiority and inferiority create division. As Vanier (or Hauerwas) states, “[b]etween all of us fragile human beings stand walls built on loneliness and the absence of God, walls built on fear.”⁴¹ The walls separating one person from the other cause division in our communities and society.

In L'Arche, one discovers the liberation in experiencing *not* having to prove one's worth of bringing down the walls. Vanier discovered that when a person can grow and become fully themselves, unity is possible. The person can freely give to and receive from others without as many walls. It takes time to get to this place of inner liberation and requires facing one's brokenness and ultimately self-acceptance just as Vanier encountered with Lucian. Transformation is possible when nurtured through relationships that reveal one's beauty. Transformation does not come from force; it comes from a grounding of love—a real experience of feeling seen and loved as you are complete with brokenness and giftedness.

Some people come to L'Arche and stay, and others are on a different trajectory. Not everyone who comes experiences transformation; some leave unable to let their walls come down. Often, those who have entered wholly into the life of L'Arche, and choose to leave, have a new way of seeing and being in the world that they are able to share in other contexts. They share it in the way they enter into relationships of mutuality, in the way they place people who are pushed aside in society at the center, in the way they show up to the person who is in front of them. It looks different for each person—it has become a way of being and engaging the world. It has become their new *habitus*.

Implications—Unity in a Divided World

Division is everywhere. One does not need to look far to find people who are different than themselves. The uncomfortable feelings which arise are often accompanied by building walls of separation, consciously and unconsciously. However, exploring the concept of *habitus* in relationship to L'Arche four insights emerge that can be applied in other contexts where the desire is to build unity in difference:

- (1) Believe each person is valuable just as they are. Vanier's words are worth repeating, “[t]o be in communion means to *be with* someone and to discover that we actually belong together. Communion means accepting people just as they are, with all their limits and inner pain [...]”⁴² It is all too easy to value people based on what they produce. When people feel loved as they are, they become more fully themselves and

³⁸ Jean Vanier, *Befriending the Stranger* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2005), 62.

³⁹ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 2nd rev. ed.. (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 99.

⁴⁰ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 61.

⁴¹ Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, 26.

⁴² Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, 16.

freer to enter into relationships of communion. In what ways do we communicate to each person that they value because they *are* not because they *do*?

- (2) Prioritize the most vulnerable. Relationships are central, especially mutual relationships with those pushed aside in society. These relationships are marked by mutuality which enables a deep listening to the other. While fears and inner darkness may emerge, it is through the process of relationship that the unity between self and other is grown—often in our vulnerability and frailty. Who are the most vulnerable in our community? And, how are we listening to *all* members of our community?
- (3) Organizational structures contribute to the *habitus*. The structure of the community contributes to the socialization that becomes internalized and thus impacts a person's *habitus*. Often the pyramid model leaves some people behind. How can the structure of the community better reflect unity in diversity?
- (4) The body matters. How we treat and engage the physical body is not secondary, but a primary way of knowing. The body is an essential part of who a person is, and the *habitus* is deposited in the body. The body carries a knowledge not always available in other ways. In the community, what is being communicated and absorbed by the body?

Formation into a way of being that builds unity in diversity is all-encompassing. It is not limited to a particular practice, a good mission statement, or a fantastic program. The organization communicates a way of being in everything it does. The key to building unity in diversity is looking holistically at the community and asking honestly what is being communicated followed by, how can we consistently honor diversity as a way to build unity?

The practices and dispositions in L'Arche enable the breaking down of walls, celebrating difference, and building communion. The experience of inner liberation—the freedom to be loved and love impacts the way the person engages individuals and communities in other contexts as well. It is the very dialectic that Bourdieu spoke of: “*internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*.”⁴³ To conclude in the words of Jean Vanier:

There can be no peacemaking or social work or anything else to improve our world unless we are convinced that the other is important. You are precious. You—not just “people,” but you. And we have a call to make history, not just accept history. We are called to change things—to change the movement of history, to make our world a place of love and not just a place of conflict and competition.⁴⁴

⁴³ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

⁴⁴ Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, 63.

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Curriculum of Spiritual Friendship:

Learning for Mutual Witness within and across Borders of Religious and Spiritual Traditions

Abstract

This study presents a preliminary sketch, an academic experiment through a portrait of one religious leader based on studying her friendship with her select spiritual friend, to illustrate how spiritual friendship functions as a learning scheme for participants with religious and spiritual convictions continue to deepen their rootedness in their spiritual commitment, meanwhile learn from their spiritual friends from different traditions. By so doing, mutually witness and tap into the differences as a source for learning, adults' befriending lead to learning to balance and appreciate identity and diversity in daily life.

Introduction

In a post-modern world with increasing religious and cultural diversity, one critical opportunity for religious education to take on is to creatively find ways to orient adult learners towards continual learning and growth in everyday life, that enables them to balance and appreciate identity and diversity. A key learning task is to learn and practice mutual witness.

Adults continue to learn and further develop (Kegan, 1982), and there is an established link between learning, growth and human connection in adult learning and development literature. but how learning occurs in relationships in daily life and how it leads to growth is often implicit. Yet in this realm lies in huge potentials. In adult learning and development literature, there is a solid recognition of the crucial role of community in a person's development in both secular and religious settings (Bonhoeffer, 1934; Wenger, 1998; Getz, 2002; Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990), but there isn't much attention and understanding of the role of friendship, a more fundamental human association, on a person's developmental path. This study aims to investigate how spiritual friendship brings about learning and growth for people in their mature adulthood.

The first question that needs to be addressed here is: What is spiritual friendship? For people with spiritual convictions, spiritual friendship involves a transcendental being in the midst of the participants in addition to the general elements of friendship such as knowing each other to some extent and sharing joys and challenges of life. To start the exploration, I draw on the classical literature on Christian spiritual friendship by Aelred of Rievaulx, the Abbot of Cistercian monastery in England in 12th Century. For Aelred, the essence of spiritual friendship is: "Here we are, you and I, and... a third, Christ, is in our midst" (p. 51). Spiritual friendship functions to cultivate the participants towards deeper connections with the transcendental being. The maturity of the participants develops in proportion to their connection to the transcendental being. In Aelred's account, the only type of friendship that brings participants closer to God is spiritual friendship. He therefore names such friendship as "true friendship." As the participants of

spiritual friendship grow in their connection with the transcendental being, their spiritual potentials mature continually as a result.

If it is true human beings learn better in relationships, it is reasonable to expect friendship, as a fundamental and universal human relationship, can be utilized for cultivating learning. Spiritual friendship, as friendship with a particular nature can be envisioned to foster learning and development for folks who practice it or would like to.

There are different kinds of learning, such as experiential and transformational, etc. It is reasonable to perceive optimal learning as the kind that forms and transforms the learning person. As a result of integrating of learning into being, the learner lives it out in his relationships with others and the world. For adults who have a spiritual conviction, one expression of integration of life is to explore and live out their vocation or calling. Theodore Stylianopoulos in his essay titled *A Life Worthy of God: Vocation According to St. Paul* summaries Eastern Orthodox' understanding of vocation is to do with the questions of "who, what, and how." Stylianopoulos contends "the question of 'who' is about identity, character, personhood, true humanity in relation to others and the whole of life." The question of "the what" is related to the discovery of one's specific calling in a particular profession; and the question of "the how" pertains to the principles, attitudes and ways of conduct involved in the exercise of chosen vocation (Stylianopoulos, p. 72-73).

This study aims to present a preliminary sketch, an academic experiment on how spiritual friendship functions as a learning scheme for participants, how participants with strong religious and spiritual convictions continue to deepen their rootedness in their commitment, meanwhile learn from the differences lived by their spiritual friends; therefore, live to mutually witness with friends day to day.

In this sketch, I will focus attention on how people in mature adulthood learn, grow and develop through spiritual friendship. One concentration is on investigating how the research subjects in the study, Eva, the main subject, and Anna, her select spiritual friend, two practicing Christians in their middle age, from different Christian traditions learn to develop spiritual friendship, how spiritual friendship further their learning and growth, deepen their connection to their own "spiritual home" (Eva) – and meanwhile "enlarge their territory", widen their openness, and grow in their capacity to learn from other religious and spiritual traditions.

Portraiture

I have employed portraiture, a method of qualitative research in education for this study. Portraiture is fit for creating "a narrative that is at once complex, provocative, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 11) to delineate the pilgrimage of a pair of spiritual friends, to portray their engagement, development and learning from their spiritual friendship and Eva's developmental path towards a fully living out the "who, what, and how" of her vocation.

The following portrait of Eva, a committed Christian believer who serves in leadership function in both her home country and the US, was the result of four interviews I conducted with Eva, and

Anna, Eva's select spiritual friend. I have conducted three semi-structured interviews with Eva, and one interview with Eva and Anna.

My goal is to through scrutinizing Eva's spiritual friendship in relationship to learning and growth, to find out (1) how a spiritual friendship is initiated and developed, (2) what is involved in the learning through spiritual friendship, (3) how what they learn from the friendship contributes to their spiritual identity development; and (4) how their spiritual friendship influences their openness to others who hold different religious and spiritual convictions, and mutual witness to one another.

Meeting Eva

Upbringing. Eva, in her early fifties at the time of our interview, was born and raised to a loving family in the Philippines as one of the six children. Being raised in the tradition of Catholicism, she "came to value prayer, reverence in attending church service especially in partaking the holy communion, and its opposition to divorce." She saw herself as a religious person but did not have a personal relationship with Jesus yet, cultivated in a Catholic educational institution whose school motto is 'Ora et Labora' (prayer and work) "inculcated in her the discipline of praying and working hard as well as the consciousness of entrust all things to God while valuing human agency and the pursuit for excellence." Her Catholic upbringing has trained her to place a high value in piety and learning. Eva excels in her educational efforts. She went to the very top university in Philippines for undergraduate.

Deepening of faith. In her freshman year in college, after attending a series of renewal church services, Bible studies, and personal readings of the Scripture, she intensely experienced God's love and grace in Christ and surrendered her life to Jesus. She was no longer a religious person, but one with an intimate relationship with God. She learned to read the Scripture, pray, and worship daily. She was baptized in water and in the Holy Spirit. Since then she saw significant transformations in her life, seeing the fruit of the Spirit in her life: walking in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

From there, Eva considers herself as "a hybrid woman minority with Catholic, Evangelical, and Pentecostal background, but one committed to a multi-ethnic church, whose top core values are seeking God through prayer, worship, and meditation of scriptures; and in living a life of love and service to others as a reflection of her love for God."

Exploration of Vocation. Eva recalled an earliest desire for vocation as one time, in her senior year in high school, she approached their mother superior and informed her she wanted to become a nun because she felt a desire to be closer to God and a sense of calling to service. She remembered very clearly that Mother responded that she should complete her university studies so that she would not be simply cleaning the convent.

Radical Change of Life to Pursue Vocation. Eva, with wholehearted support from her husband and their three children, pursued her passion to go to seminary in the US. They uprooted themselves from an established and comfortable life in their hometown, that they had built for more than 14 years, where she had her own business centers and their home in the finest village,

to travel all the way to a seminary in a foreign land, where they found a complete change of life style. They faced big difficulties and challenges in their new way of living. Both Eva and her husband pursue graduate studies with no income, while raising three children. Eva said she had no regrets as she knows she is pursuing God's given passion even though the experience of living in America includes as someone unknown, marginalized, and at times overlooked as a minority.

It is during this new phase of pursuing theological education Eva went through a radically deepening encounter with God, herself, and others. She reflected:

“This is most meaningful to me because I felt strongly God's grace and mercies and mighty provision and faithfulness. In addition, the incarnation of Christ has been most impactful to me: Christ who left his place of glory in heaven so that he may be able to identify with humanity's suffering and pain. Further, most meaningful to me is Christ coming to be among the common people, spending his energies in caring for the vulnerable, showing God's unconditional love, being among them, emptying himself, and offering grace, mercy and God's presence through his genuine love, care, and acts of compassion.... I came to relate with the pain, difficulties, and hardships of those living in vulnerable situations and learned to offer pathways in providing care for those in vulnerable positions. In my own vulnerability, I learned to share my life and identify with the hardships of the common people.”

Living behind a super comfortable life and “being replaced in a much more lowly living situation” opened up new pathways for Eva for further spiritual growth.

The Thread of Spiritual Friendship

Through Eva's Christian walk, there is a thread of spiritual friendship. For Eva, spiritual friendship is characterized by (1) spiritual connection, (2) mutually empowering, (3) commitment to care, (4) authentic and transparent, (5) living life together but don't have to do so regularly, and (6) inter-changeability of knowing the work of the Spirit and know and be known by a spiritual friend.

Initiation and development of spiritual friendship.

In response to what first led her to develop spiritual friendship, Eva recalled the time when “a friendship beyond flesh and blood” helped her to commit her life to Christ. From the experience Eva learned “the model of ministry”. Eva recalled:

...my family was breaking apart. My brothers are going to college, they have their own lives. [My sisters] They have their own boyfriends, my mom and dad were having a hard life together and it's just messed up. So I found, Christ in me...and my friends started inviting me to attend a Bible study. And for me, as in different ways and how people teach the Bible and I said when I became a Christian, I embrace a new family. And yet, after I became a Christian, God used me to win my family to Christ. But what I'm saying is that the reason why I emphasize on the friendship is that because my friend would care

enough to invite me and she and her mom would always make time to invite me for dinner or lunch. It's such a friendship. That is, ... they're invested in me and they really care for me and I've embraced a family. That is beyond flesh and blood, but you know... they just care because they know Christ would want people to be brought to them to His kingdom.

So for me that model of ministry is very impactful for me because I was having a hard time with my family falling apart. And then here I am experiencing the love of [God] in the church. After church she would invite me for dinner or just to have conversation with the family.

Spiritual connection

For Eva, spiritual friendship is more focused on *spiritual connection*. This distinguishes spiritual friendship from other types of friendships. Spiritual connection requires and incubates authenticity and transparency that “differs from acquaintances, or surface friendship.” Further, it advocates for and believes in you; meanwhile it’s authentic and transparent that affirms and corrects. Eva described:

Because I've been in the theological side for so long, I tend to define it in such a way that it's when you talk more about vocation and relationship, it's all about basically for me spiritual friendship. When you're able to bear your soul to another. And there's something sacred about it. And it's a spirit connecting to spirit... So...it's something that's really what describes the Holy Spirit for me, it's a breath of life, its life giving.

If I think about the Holy Spirit, it's the advocate. So it's a spiritual friendship that coaches. I don't use the word coaches, but it advocates for you, it fights for you and believes in you and helps you make it through life, and the Holy Spirit is gentle, confirming, comforting. And yet at the same time there's a conviction. So even in spiritual friendship, it's being upfront and being real and being authentic and transparent that you're able to tell and rebuke at the same time without offending because love overlooks matter. So it's all encompassing.

... There's a transparency and authenticity that differs from acquaintances, or for me surface friendship. So that's why, for me, some could be some friendship, some could really be spiritual friendship... It's not just a friendship. But there's a spiritual friendship. So that's why it focuses more on the description of the spirit of the spiritual connection. It's beyond just your playmate in playing sports or watching TV or watching movies together or eating together. But for us, even as Asian eating together something that’s sacred or even in the Bible. Because eating itself is a way of showing that you care. It's a real hospitality.

[The] Connection is not just mere friendship like playing basketball together, but it's more focus on the spiritual connection. This is most ideal I feel I mean... because some

friendship doesn't want to go to the spiritual level. What I mean they don't want to speak about God. So I think that's why I tend to say spiritual level goes to a level where...you talk about life meaning and purpose and of God, of values.

Eva stresses spiritual friendship entails that “people live life together,” that creates “sense of belonging.” In a Bible study group, members “live life together” makes it distinguishable from “a typical classroom setting.”:

I don't agree with people studying the Bible and they don't become friends and they don't live together and the people tend to not attend regularly leave, if you don't make the group friendship, because there's no sense of belonging, as our sense of family. It becomes something like a typical classroom setting. That you don't live life together. But I think spiritual friendship is still about not just talking about life, but also living life together. But you don't have to live it regularly together. I would say we have spiritual friendship Julia, even though we don't talk regularly, but there are moments that we share life together.

Commitment to care

What makes spiritual friendship occur, Eva believes friendship happens when one is *willing to care*. She shared when there is an initiation of connection either reaching out for a need, or initiate willingness to help. Then a mutual support and edification gets developed when one responds to the “olive branch” sent by a potential friend:

...for me it's always initiating to reach out and at the same time initiating to be willing to help because for me, I would always say friendship always starts when you're willing to care. I would always tell that to my son who says mom, why don't I have friends. I said, you have to be a friend yourself to have friends, very good friend. Your plant is what you will reap. What you will so is what he will reap. It's the same thing, whether it's money or love or time.

Barrier for friendship

It was revealed that a barrier for a friendship to develop lies in the area of connection and communication due to the fact people live in a stance of being so independent and self-reliant despite the fact there is a need for a friendship. Eva pinpointed:

There are people like that because we do not want to call people when we need help, unless we're forced to just like education. If you don't need anything, even though we are connected well. Julia, we connect so well. But because we are so independent. The two of us are so self-reliant and so independent, we would not bother to reach out, even though we're feeling lonely or we're not feeling well, because we're so used to taking care of ourselves.

In Eva's experience, she would connect with a friend if "the Spiritual tells her to." She experiences such a call as "spirit calling to spirit:

So I would only do that when the Spirit would tell me to do it. So, or if there's an occasion like our time before, it's Christmas. Now I will tell you it's Thanksgiving to the professor [I reached out] that we've built a spiritual friendship, but I don't dare communicate with them regularly. So it depends upon the moment the need. I don't want to exclude, I realize it, but it's spirit calling to spirit.

It's indicated in the interview with Eva and Anna it is a challenge for them to connect with one another when there isn't a task requirement for them to or the Spirit moves one to. It is a situation shared by adults to manage multiple demands simultaneously, which may make it challenging for regular contact with friends. For Eva, a spiritual friendship remains regardless of the frequency of contact.

I think there could be, it depends upon the person because there would be some people who would have a steady phone conversation or email conversation, but I'm not that type, but if you want to communicate with me in that way it happens. And then life goes on because there would be time [for different things]. Like if I would remember my spiritual friends like my friends in the Philippines. They're both pastors, for two years, we would be talking once a month, like we're coaching together, but we've gone a long way from college from our ministry together. But now we stop, but it doesn't mean we're not spiritual friends.

Levels of spiritual friendship

One theme from Eva's experience of spiritual friendship is that spiritual friendship to Eva can take place in any moment, a mutual spiritual edification and empowerment can occur in an instant encounter. Therefore, there are different levels of spiritual friendship depending on the depths it gets to mature. It can be decided by the fact the period of time the connection remains and how active it is. Eva stresses spiritual friendship does not have to be held in regular contact, or long term. As life can be shared in moments.

That characterizes the friendship between Eva and I. We met at a women's leadership meeting at an academic conference over two years ago. Things clicked when I shared assisting three professors was one main financial source for living as an international student, as Eva shared this experience through her Seminary years. This sharing brought our conversation towards deeper communication around life, value and meaning. Then I joined the leadership team which was led by Eva. She *absolutely struck me as a leader of a kind that stewards superb capability in her leadership and knowledge, and character of humbleness, softness and warmth at the same time. She has a big and able heart to embrace my thorny uniqueness.* Most amazingly, I experience in our interaction and collaboration within her a "honed program" as part of her being, that she responds to those who approach her with inquiry and seeking for certain things "automatically" for the seekers' best. I mean for me often I need to have a

reflective moment and land on this decision and then try to act on it. But she has grown that maturity as part her to be spontaneously functioning this way.

Martin Buber delineates “the between” or “between-human” spontaneously created when two persons get together. That makes it possible “a turn” - “turning with one’s whole being to meet the other” – which leads to “turning towards the other” followed by “turning away from a self-reflexive monologue consumed in self-enjoyment”, by this series of “turning” a person shifts from “I-it” to “I-thou.” When in “I-it” phase the person treats fellow humans as objects, in “I-thou” stage a person turns away from “self-indulgence” toward another person metaphorically and thus embarks on opening to fully acknowledge and acceptance of the other. Buber (2002) classifies interactions between individual persons as either “monologue” when in “I-it” relation, or “dialogue” provided by “I-thou” relationships. In the latter, “each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them” (Buber, 2002, p. 19). As such, spiritual friendship appears to be at different levels. One decisive factor of the levels goes to the levels of *sharing*.

One distinction of adults is they possess rich life experiences that a human person with full agency would engage in – professional, personal, political etc. These experiences constitute source of learning and teaching. Sharing decides the level that unleash the resource for utilization. Therefore there holds great potential for learning and teaching to occur if sharing is facilitated when two or more adults gather together. Spiritual friendship, as an in-depth “between-human” space paves way for sharing in depth and breadth.

Different depth and breadth of sharing can lead to different levels of spiritual friendship. For Eva, while “sharing life” is a condition for spiritual friendship, she perceives that people do not “have to live it regularly together.” She believes between she and I we have spiritual friendship, even though we don't talk regularly, “there are moments that we share life together.”

Seek Presence of God in Spiritual Friendship

Spiritual friendship is a sign of God’s favor to Eva, as she experiences the presence of God in spiritual friendship especially in a time or place where she’s removed from abundance in many ways, when she moved from a very comfortable life at home to a foreign land to pursue her passion to study theology.

I asked Eva how her spiritual friendship affect her connection to God, she says:

...as I reflect on being taken away from a place of having many friendships to a place where totally without one. When I started here, I knew it helped me to continually to know the presence of God's favor and goodness. And I know it. I could not quantify it, but I know it's continually helping me. When I first became a Christian, I was taught well to have my daily devotions to read my Bible, to pray and to do my praise and worship. That I thought that the only means that's a way that I'm experiencing spiritual growth, but I think having spiritual friendship add spice.

To my relationship with God in such a way that I could easily see God's goodness in favor I because I come alive, not just in God's presence alone. I've come to a place of feeling somehow isolated. Now you know what it means when your spiritual friendship is a sign for me of God's favor and goodness. Just like what the Psalter would say that surely God's mercy and goodness will follow me all the days of my life, whatever journey. I would be whether in the deepest darkness of my life, there will always be a friend that God will bring to me or bring before me, that will make me realize that. And he's real and alive because sometimes we need more than just simply reading the Bible and pray and worshiping or even beyond being in church.

It's coming to know another human being. A few you know [and] you have known. It's just like it's our friendship with God. Only then that we shall be fully known, when the time we come to know God. And yet, when we come to have love relationships with people here, you may not be fully known. But, you know, there's a continuous disclosure of yourself. You come to know your strengths, your weaknesses.

Therefore, in addition to providing an arena to seek and experience the presence of God, spiritual friendship furthermore offers an “between-human” space for the participants to allow “continuous disclosure” of the self to a “significant other” – a trusty and loving friend that welcomes and invites such disclosure. One outcome of this continuous disclosure is a growing self-knowledge.

Learning Through Spiritual Friendship Across Traditions

Continuing learning about oneself and become the best self is part of the result of having spiritual friendship for Eva, as well as for her spiritual friend Anna.

Anna, also comes from the Philippines over a decade ago, in her late forties, full-time housewife and mother to two children. Ana and Eva met at a mutual friend's place. Ana is a devout Catholic believer, claimed by Eva. Ana shared in our interview it took her forty years to come to actively seek to become close to God. Eva says what bonds them is their common love towards Christ even if Eva left Catholicism.

Witnessing the spiritual friendship between Eva and Anna through our two-hour interview was a nurturing and beautiful experience. It displayed before my eyes a documentary “fantasy episode.” Two beings deeply appreciate, respect, uplift and nurture each other. Despite their different belonging in terms of their Christian beliefs, they are committed to respect each other, and continue to learn how to relate to one another. As they do so, Eva sees greater spectrum of color of God.

They share a core commonality in their spiritual commitment. Both Eva and Anna believe the primary vocation for a Christian believer is to “get closer to God”, while it is termed differently. For Anna, her primary vocation is sainthood, and it is a daily struggle to get closer to God. For Eva, it is minister God's love to people.

The cross-tradition spiritual friendship between Eva and Anna is perceived as “work of the Spirit” by Eva, of whom she claimed “knows no boundary.” :

When you come into good friendship with different people with different doctrines you come to embrace God and not put that in a box.... You fully understand the work of the Spirit that has no boundaries and you don't know where it's coming from and what it means to be gentle comforting. To be providing conviction and at the same time encouragement I think you see those manifestation to other people. And when it comes to no boundaries. He doesn't just relate with people have the same faith or even the same tradition you relate with other people, whether I am a Pentecostal might relate with Catholics, or even I would not just be exclusive to talking with Christians, but even to Muslims and Hindus and other faith traditions. It knows no boundaries and you don't know where it's coming from. For me, it's just being open to friendship.

Eva’s claim that the Spirit knows no boundary is demonstrated by how Eva and Anna learn from each other despite their “education gap.” Eva has advanced theological degrees (M Div and M Thil.) from one of the best seminaries known to offer most qualitative theological education in the States, in addition to going to the very top university in Philippines for undergraduate study, whereas Anna did not finish her college. Eva continues to learn from Anna of her “child-like faith,” her openness and transparency encourages Eva as she treasures authenticity. Eva shared she undertook a “style change” in her leadership as she grows older. She changes to be more authentic and vulnerable with the people she leads. Inevitably, I trust, the friendship with Anna must be a strengthening force that continue to support and invite such transformation.

As it’s exemplified by Eva and Anna’s friendship, spiritual friendship creates space at intra-personal and inter-personal level to bring together dialogue and praxis for the concrete form of the mission - witness – martyria, the sum of the three dimensions of Christian church mission: be - koinonia, community, presence, etc., do - diakonia, care, service, and say – kerygma, proclamation of the gospel, dialogue (Guder, 2000). Eva and Anna’s friendship testifies that their friendship helps them to become better selves. Anna shared it took her forty years to come to the point pursuing after sainthood. It is a daily struggle for her and that entails her going to educational programs at church beyond Sunday services, etc. But devotion and efforts as such are not fully understood and supported all the time by the people around. But, Eva, always encourages her to engage in further learning. Despite the fact there is limited shared common knowledge from theological training nor higher education, they help each other to live out the primary Christian vocation, to become closer to God, and to minister God’s love to people. This works towards maturation of the person, in becoming “the who” dimension of their vocation. As such, even if “the what” and “the how” might be constrained by existential conditions like knowledge and professional experiences, there remains opportunities for “the who” to be edified and cultivated through mutual witness in an in-depth “between-human” – spiritual friendship through the spiritual connection.

Eva’s experience that her spiritual friendships manifest different communication focus and style depend on the needs and possibility. For example, with her seminary professor with whom a spiritual friendship had been developed, their topic of dialogue often centers around knowledge

in theological realms. The “what” and the “how” are complimented well in other spiritual friendships Eva has.

Contemporary Ruth and A Missionary in A Foreign Land

What emerged to me around Eva, character wise, is a contemporary Ruth, who grows resilience out of vulnerability and lowliness in a foreign land. Walking the path creates in Eva deepening encounters with God, herself and others. It unleashes her spiritual potentials, and becomes a source of strength for her to live out her vocation to become more able to “love people and help them and to empower people.” In one of Eva’s writings, she reflects that: Ruth’s exemplar resilience is rooted in Ruth’s identity and loving kindness under cultural and spiritual frameworks...As a minority foreign woman, Ruth offers pathways towards resilience by caring for others, identifying with a particular faith community, and taking initiatives while maintaining integrity. So does Eva. She always seeks to serve in a leadership role wherever she finds herself at. In our interaction, either in addressing my personal quests or our collaboration as part of the women’s leadership team colleagues, Eva always imparts a generosity beyond the call of duty. I witness and experience how such a “generosity, loving kindness” is a powerful force that serves effectively those in privileged positions and in vulnerable situations. Eva, lives an illuminating, humble and powerful life to bring those who she interacts with closer to God, as I experience, and her friend Anna testifies. Eva’s life models a missionary in a foreign land to me.

Spiritual Friendship and Adult Religious Education

In an essay entitled "The Marks of a Christian College," D. Elton Trueblood, a known philosopher and theologian noted Christian convictions, an interest in wholeness, a passion for truth, and the role of fellowship as the chief characteristics of the institution devoted to Christ. Harris claims “curriculum is about the mobilizing of creative, educative powers in such a way as to fashion a people.” Religious education is called to explore in creative ways to facilitate learning in the religious and cultural diversity in the pluralistic context of the modern world. I see a great potential lies with a curriculum of spiritual friendship. I argue, for learners in mature adulthood, there might not be an environment set as a Christian college functioning as a arranged learning environment, adults have capacity of free human agency at their disposal to create such environment for themselves to aid their further learning and growth. Spiritual friendship, appears to be such soil by nature: spiritual conviction, an invitation and demand for wholeness as an in-depth, heart-to-heart or soul-to-soul relationship entails by nature, a passion and need for continual pursuit after truth, and the role of fellowship, i.e. a fundamental and in-depth fellowship - spiritual friendship, is inevitably a rich, under-utilized source for such learning and growth. By intentionally developing and practicing spiritual friendship, adults can create for themselves incubators for learning and holistic growth as human persons. Spiritually held by and accounted to spiritual friends, they set on a path for incarnation of “becoming human” increasingly reflecting image of God and growth towards likeness of God.

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"Creating New Spaces for Persons with Disabilities"

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Abstract

The passage of the Americans with Disabilities, the most comprehensive, civil rights legislation for the Disability community led to advancements in accessibility. However, we face challenges as religious educators who serve in places of worship, denominational structures, and institutions of higher education. The development of the internet and the rapid pace of technological advancements are an unexplored frontier yet to be fully accessible for all people. By definition, Network Theology¹ is concerned with the intersectionality of theology and the various forms of communicate that “network” us together. In this paper, we explore ways religious educators, service providers, and disability advocates can work towards creating an accessible learning environment whether virtual or in person.

Keywords: Network Theology, Religious Education, Disability Studies

¹Campbell, Heidi A., and Stephen Garner. *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith In A Digital Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI, MI: Baker Academic, 2016.

The Americans With Disabilities Act and the Church

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act provided protections for people with disabilities against discrimination. This game-changing legislation allowed accessibility provisions in employment, education, transportation, accommodations, state, and federal government programs. Under Title III, the ADA provides 12 categories of businesses and service providers who must use accessible public space for all people with a variety of abilities.² Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other places of worship are not required to follow ADA regulations.³ Whereas, we believe that providing accessible spaces for play, worship, community, celebration, and education is essential. Faith communities should not only be considering how to make physical spaces accessible but also virtual spaces that people may access.

Hans S. Reinders wrote, in *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, “The times that I have asked ministers and pastors about members of their congregations who are disabled, the most frequent response is, we don’t have them.” Often times places of worship do not realize they have persons with disabilities in their faith community or within the geographical population surrounding the Church, because they do not see them or are unaware of individual’s needs. If you don't currently have persons with disabilities in your faith community, you should begin to ask “Why?” Are there barriers that prevent persons with disabilities' (PWDs) participation in your local church?

² <https://www.churchlawandtax.com/blog/2016/july/churches-and-americans-with-disabilities-act.html>

³ https://www.ada.gov/ada_intro.htm

“According to a 2004 study, 84% percent of adults with disabilities and 84% of adults without disabilities, both found their faith to be “somewhat important” or “very important.”⁴ From this study, we can infer that lack of interest did not prevent participation in the faith community. Rather, barriers to full inclusion bared their access to the faith community. In *Including People with Disabilities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations*, Erik W. Carter explains, "Sometimes, barriers related to architecture, attitude, communication, programming, and liturgy within a congregation have the effect of pushing people to the margins or away altogether." We know that people with disabilities live within all of our towns and cities, they surround our communities of faith, their absence from our places of worship must be examined to find the root cause.

According to the United States census one in five people have a disability. In 2010, a total of 56.7 million people of the civilian population had a disability.⁵ The 2010 Americans with Disabilities report states that, “About 12.3 million people aged 6 years and older (4.4 percent) needed assistance with one or more activities of daily living (ADLs) or instrumental activities of daily living.” (IADLs) In our local communities, it is likely we have persons with disabilities whom the Church alongside state and federal programs can help. As ministers our job is to support people’s spirituality, empowering their mental, physical, and emotional wellness. Faith communities join in helping people wrestle with

⁴ Carter, Erik W. *Including People With Disabilities In Faith Communities: A Guide For Service Providers, Families And Congregations*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co, 2010.

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<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/miscellaneous/cb12-134.html>

the sacred and the secular, advocating for a just society that removes discrimination. The 2010 Americans with Disabilities report identifies, “The probability of severe disability was 1 in 20 for people aged 15 to 24, while 1 in 4 for those aged 65 to 69.” Given the statistics we have just seen, it is likely most religious educators, pastors, and volunteers will work with persons with disabilities. As our church population ages, the need for accessible spaces increases. Faith communities have the chance to reach out to PWDs, with the opportunity to enrich lives. The obstacle is often an absence of knowledge to do so, not a lack of desire

Disability Theology

In Genesis 1:26-27, it states that humans are made in the very image of God. Our first thought maybe to picture someone able bodied. But ponder what these verses reveal about both humanity and God. No one is outside the likeness of God whether in form or spirit.⁶ God invites people with a variety of abilities to accept the task set before them, even providing accommodations when there is a need. As seen through the lens of the Exodus, God calls Moses, a man with a stutter to speak for the Divine, interpret God’s will and deliver the Israelites from the bondage of slavery. In Exodus 4:10, Moses reveals he cannot speak eloquently as he has a “slow speech and slow tongue.” According to David Tabb Steward, a better Hebrew translation is that Moses spoke with a “heavy mouth and

⁶ Melcher, Sarah J. “Genesis And Exodus.” In *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*, edited by Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong, 31–33. London: SCM Press, 2018.

tongue” (kebad-pe ukebad lason).⁷ God revealed through Moses that the Divine has intentionally created people with a diverse spectrum of ability. In Exodus 4:11, it states “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” God does not see Moses’ condition as impairing and empowers him with an accommodation - Aaron. In other words, God does not see Moses' physical disability rendering him unable to be called and sent for the task the Divine set before him.

Another example of God calling someone to service who has a chronic illness is seen in the ministry of Paul. Paul was called through a conversion experience in Acts 9. He goes on to become one of the most influential leaders of the Christian movement. His disability is mentioned in both Galatians 4:13-14 and II Corinthians 12:7. Scholars are unclear of the exact illness he faced, but it was substantial enough to be mentioned in the Bible.

In the Bible, illness and disabilities are often viewed as the mark of a sin committed by a parent or the person impacted by the ailment. We read about Jesus healing women and men with infirmities. Illnesses and disabilities are viewed as something that must be overcome. In no way, should we make light of the hardships faced by those who lived in Bible times. Illnesses and disabilities that people live with today, with the help of medical advances and accommodations, were life threatening in ways we cannot comprehend fully. With new breakthroughs and knowledge, we understand the science behind

⁷ Steward, Tabb David, “What Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy Say: Text, Topics, and Themes” in *the Bible and Disability: A Commentary*, edited by Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong, 31–33. London: SCM Press, 2018.

disabilities better than ever. For most of us, when we see a person with a disability, our first response is not a connection to the sinful nature of previous generations or to the person who has the disability. We accept that these things happen, sometimes we understand why and at other times we do not. We do know that Jesus showed concern for those who were in need of his help. Jesus wanted the best life for people, knowing God loved them no matter their circumstances.

These biblical ideas serve as the foundation for our belief that faith communities, classrooms, and learning environments should be accessible for all people. God saw potential in Moses and empowered him, stutter and all, to serve a vital role as the Messenger between God and Israel. Paul continued his tireless work as he struggled with a chronic illness. Jesus recognized the struggle of the people he came in contact with and tried to help them live full lives. As religious educators we recognize the value in developing accessible spaces and places where people of all abilities can learn together and use their distinctive gifts for the advancement of God's Kin-dom in the world. Accessibility allows for independence, empowerment, and enfranchisement of people with disabilities to be equal within Church and Society.

Moving Toward a Welcoming Church

According to the law, accommodations are to be provided and barriers removed whenever "readily achievable" in existing facilities.⁸ Places of worship carry exemptions from implementing some ADA provisions. Yet, our desire should be to provide

⁸ <http://nwadacenter.org/toolkit/ada-standards-and-international-building-code>

accessibility whenever possible. Here are some suggestions for how faith communities, religious educators, and service providers can raise awareness about the experience of persons with disabilities.

- Develop a team consisting of trustees, staff, and members of the congregation willing to evaluate a church's accessibility. It's essential to address architectural, attitudinal, communication, liturgical, and programmatic barriers.
- Review ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities available online, the guide will provide specific instructions and surveys that help you to evaluate the space.⁹ Begin to familiarize yourself with the guide, walk through your facility and consciously consider what barriers may be in place.
- Begin the evaluation process with a tape measure, carpenter's level, a pen, and a clipboard. Can individuals enter your building? Once participants enter your building are spaces between pews wide enough to accommodate mobility aids? Addressing architectural barriers can prove helpful for PWDs from birth as well as helping other individuals who face disabilities later in life.

Dealing with architectural barriers is important but as Erik W. Carter reminds us "Efforts that begin and end with ramps, pew cuts, automatic doors and designated parking spots will fall short of what is needed to communicate welcome."¹⁰

⁹ <https://www.adachecklist.org/doc/fullchecklist/ada-checklist.pdf>

¹⁰ Carter, Erik W. "Designing Inclusive Religious Education Programs." In *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families and Congregations*. Baltimore, Md: Paul H. Brookes Publishing, 2010.

We recommend establishing intentional relationships with families in local congregations. Parents may have suggestions for managing behaviors in the learning environment to best help their child. Establishing dialogue with adults with disabilities is another strategy towards meeting individual accommodational needs. It is important to realize that all persons with disabilities are different and their individual needs unique. In other words, what strategies and care plans work for one person, may not work for another. Carter suggests, developing a religious educational plan that may include questionnaires and/or biographies for each person detailing their individual needs. These plans can shape how religious education programs adapt to meet their needs.¹¹ Just as public schools develop accommodation plans for students, faith communities should take the same opportunity to consider best practices and strategies to meet the needs of people in their care. By developing a streamlined process, we can reassure volunteers and empower them to serve people with disabilities.

Often overcoming attitudinal barriers is the most challenging step for faith communities. If a religious education program is functioning effectively, it is most likely already taking steps to meet people's needs. Functioning programs are finding ways to adapt, evolve, and include people in their care. In reality, caring for individuals with disabilities shouldn't be treated any differently than learning how to administer an EPI pen for a congregant with an allergy. We aren't trying to trivialize the ongoing struggle of becoming an inclusive church. This illustration demonstrates what it means to identity an

¹¹Carter, Erik W. "Designing Inclusive Religious Education Programs." In *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families and Congregations*.

individual need, develop an action plan, and adapt accordingly to meet congregational needs.

In order to be an inclusive church, faith communities need to have a shared vision among pastor, staff, and congregants, centered around the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The goal of religious education should be to remind all people that they are created in the image of the Divine, all persons are called to kingdom building, and fully welcomed at God's bountiful table. Our approach towards ministry matters most, we as religious educators, pastors, and leaders set the example for others. If our attitude towards a new ministry venture is confident, optimistic, and supportive, then it is more likely we will receive buy in from the congregation.

It is important to remind ourselves that we can learn how to be more inclusive as we work with PWDs. It is often the little things we can do for others that is the most meaningful. It doesn't take a whole lot of training to say hello, smile and welcome others in, even if you don't receive verbal response. Individuals who are nonverbal are no less human than their verbal counterparts. No matter a person's ability the church should be a welcoming place. All people, verbal or nonverbal, deserve the same kindness, welcome, and dignity. The way we treat others sets a precedent for how our congregation engages with PWDs. Staff and volunteers may feel reluctant undertaking the process of making religious education programs disability friendly. In whatever forms faith communities decide to engage in ministry to PWDs, one thing is consistent, a shared value for extending God's grace to all persons as we work together to create a Beloved Community is essential.

The Church And The Call for Accessibility

From our research, we found that most mainline Protestant churches in the United States have passed resolutions and policies that advocate for inclusivity. It is our experience that levels of accessibility vary from denomination to denomination and furthermore from church to church. Below, we describe several actions taken by the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Most denominations call for adherence to the ADA, fair and equitable hiring practices, and the recruitment of persons with disability for church leadership.

The United Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church has several provisions for adhering to equal employment, higher education, and opportunities within their doctrinal policies. *The Book of Resolutions* adopted Resolution 3302 titled “The Church and People with Intellectual, Physical, Psychological, and/or Neurological Disabilities” in 1984 that called for inclusivity, affirmative action, and accessible spaces in places of worship. Another notable feature of Resolution 3302 is the affirmative action calling for equal access to employment, hiring, and higher education opportunities, barring all forms of discrimination. *The Book of Discipline* defines inclusion as, “Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the life of the Church, community and the world; inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination.”¹² Further, paragraphs call for training for clergy, and the recruitment of PWDs in leadership roles.

¹² *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*. Nashville, the United Methodist Publishing House, 2016 (§140, p. 101)

The United Church of Christ

The United Church of Christ's General Synod adopted a resolution in 2005 affirming its commitment to be accessible to all and adhere to the Americans with Disability Act.¹³ The resolution is titled "Called to Wholeness in Christ: Becoming A Church Accessible To All" which defined specific goals of the denomination. Like the United Methodist Church, UCC calls for the establishment of a governing body to oversee disability related concerns, implement ongoing change, manage accessibility grants, and advocate for inclusion. The UCC joined the National Organization on Disability which is committed to overcoming physical, programmatic, and attitudinal barriers to full inclusion for PWDs. Local churches are encouraged to overcome physical barriers in UCC owned facilities. Congregations can establish inclusion committees to provide evaluation of accessibility and adhere to the ADA.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

In 2010, the Church Council of the ELCA adopted a stance similar to both the UCC and UMC's promises to provide accessible spaces, equal employment, and higher education opportunities. The ELCA partners with Lutheran Services in America-Disability Network, a national organization to advocate for PWDs, lobby for federal legislation, and offer assistance as a service provider to Lutheran run facilities. The ELCA resolved to

¹³http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/261/gs-25-called-to-wholeness-in-christ.pdf?1418423620

continue working with interdenominational bodies such as Definitely Abled Youth Leadership Event, the Definitely Abled Advisory Committee¹⁴ (DAC) the Lutheran Network on Mental Illness/Brain Disorders¹⁵ (LNMI), and the Deaf Ministry, Blind and Braille Ministry within the ELCA. The denomination continues to make progress towards overcoming physical, attitudinal, and programmatic barriers that prevent the Church from being fully inclusive.

Web Accessibility

It is obvious that church bodies wish to be inclusive of people with a wide range of disabilities. Although we mentioned only a few, it is our perception that many churches are expanding their online presence as well. As communities of faith increase their use of technology, another critical public accommodation we should be aware of is ensuring virtual spaces are accessible for all persons. Having a medical condition, mobility disability, auditory processing disorder, epilepsy, vision impairment, deafness, or blindness could hamper a person's ability to access websites, blogs, and social media pages. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) provides measurable accessibility for a wide spectrum of disabling conditions that may interfere with a person's ability to access a website¹⁶ WCAG 2.0 provides an expansive list of accommodations churches, and other organizations can use to make their websites accessible for all people that range from relatively simple to complex.

¹⁴ <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Disability-Ministry>

¹⁵ <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Disability-Ministry>

¹⁶ https://seesparkbox.com/foundry/getting_comfortable_with_wcag

The four principles of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 include perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust.¹⁷ The WCAG 2.0 provides 12 guidelines to measurable accessibility of text, video, and audio. It measures the accessibility in three levels. Level 1, is the easiest level of accommodation empowering a person to use a website with the functions of their keyboard. Level 2, requires a minimum contrast ratio of 4.5:1 so that the size of text can be made smaller and larger depending on a person's need. It is expected that Level 2 guidelines will eventually become the standard of website accessibility for federal and state agencies. Level 3, is much more complex and will require the assistance of a person who can code websites. For example, the program Userway provides coding for universal access for all websites.¹⁸ However, Userway requires the ability to access a website's code and add a new line for the program to be added to the pre-existing structure of the website's programming.

We will illustrate some examples of simple accommodations. Whenever using a picture, write a short caption titled Alternative Text or Alt. Text for short describing the photo so that a visually impaired or blind person can interpret the photo. If producing a video, provide closed captioning and transcripts of spoken speech. Be aware of presenting large blocks of text. Instead, break up passages of writing into more readable paragraphs. Below are a few examples on how to present information in a way that is more easily accessible.

¹⁷ https://seesparkbox.com/foundry/getting_comfortable_with_wcag

¹⁸ <https://userway.org/>

- Use concise, clear language
- Visual Illustrations
- Alt. Captions
- Expand acronyms before using shorthand.
- Write short paragraphs

Other attainable ways to be more inclusive is to provide electronic versions of all print materials. It is a good idea to provide a link for any slides, graphics, and announcements made during service. Strive to post all electronic materials before the event to allow PWDs to convert the material into a useable format with their preferred programs including screen readers, PDFs, and word to voice programs. Avoid using content that may induce seizures such as flashing lights. If you use PDFs, use the Optimized Character Recognition setting, this can be done with Adobe Acrobat. Whenever you post a photo include a short caption describing the photo, this is known as “alt. text”. You should use “alt text” for all non-text features on your online platforms. Chose easy to read fonts such as Sanserif and Arial to ensure a higher level of readability for your audience.

The Church In the 21st Century

Faith Communities now more than ever are constantly in contact through the internet. Navigating the unexplored frontier of technology is an ongoing process as pastors, religious educators, theologians and people of faith try to understand how our society and the Church communicate. *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in the Digital Culture* defines our current iteration of the Web 3.0. The unexplored frontier of the

internet continues to grow faster than we can keep up. Web 3.0 is significantly different than earlier iterations of the internet due to the rise of personal mobile devices with internet capability and increased world-wide access. Internet capabilities are no longer confined to computers alone. People can access the internet from their smart watches, tablets, and mobile phones. We also have the ability to access documents and files through file-sharing programs such as Google Docs or Dropbox.

Web 3.0 is a vast web of collaboration between content creator and content consumer with those roles having incredible flexibility. From these advancements in technology, the broader religious research community continues to study how people interact online and engage religiously. A study titled *The Sacred and the Virtual: Religion In Multi-User Virtual Reality*¹⁹ explores the possibility of building virtual worshiping communities and determines whether authentic experiences can be felt through attending Church in virtual reality. The paper studied an E-Church, an online virtual world where users attend worship via networked VR systems. E-Church offered the researchers an opportunity to analyze both the implications of social interaction with VR and in-text functions. The E-Church community meets at a set location and time each week with 5 to 10 participants. The E-Church functions with a leader calling the meeting to order, leading the call and response. The other participants engage with the liturgical response with a responsive “Amen” or “Praise the Lord.” Researchers Schroder, Heather, and Lee explain, “The service will go through a number of stages; various prayers, a sermon,

¹⁹ Schroeder, Ralph, Noel Heather, and Raymond M. Lee. “The Sacred and the Virtual: Religion in Multi-User Virtual Reality.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 4, no. 2 (December 1998). <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=2001-03105-006&site=ehost-live>.

giving thanks, discussion of issues of conce (Schroeder, Noel and Lee 1998)rn to members, and the like.” The model structures that of a religious meeting as a real-world ritual would. The researchers in *The Sacred and the Virtual: Religion in Multi-User Reality* concludes, “A prayer meeting in the virtual world may not provide the same type of religious experience as a conventional church service, but it certainly reproduces some of the essential features of the latter - albeit in novel ways.” Although the E-Church model may not be our goal, discovering new ways to make the church assessible using current technological advances should be a value we desire to pursue.

Conclusion

This paper is a result of a class project for Theology In Ministry at Oklahoma City University. After reading the book *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith In A Digital Culture*, students were challenged to use practical theology and technology as they examined Christian Education. The idea of using technology with people with disabilities came the topic of interest after some discussion. Students contributed various elements to the group assignment including spiritual exegesis, teaching strategies, worship planning, communication practices, and discussion on disability theology. The students produced a video interviewing fellow peers about their knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act and experience of PWDs in the Church. In addition to writing a paper, presenting a PowerPoint, and making a video, the class produced a PDF with suggestions for how places of worship could improve their use of online communications. We later used the basis of this project to inform religious educators on how to work with people with disabilities. For more information, see Appendix C.

Although many faith communities have set standards, many churches still struggle and fall short of meeting the ADA guidelines. This project has shown us that, it is time to become more creative and look around to see what is already being used and build on established ideas. We have talented people in our churches that can help us move forward, but we must be intentional about the work we do. Technology gives us a new opportunity to meet the needs of people who have a variety of disabilities. It can be a tool that develops community and offers an entrance to ministries that may have been closed to many. Using Erik W. Carter's book *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*, is a good place for churches to begin. Identifying people in your faith community who understand and use technology is important. Asking them to use their experience and knowledge to help the church reach out to a broader community is a ministry we need people to help with if we are going to be the Church for ALL.

Appendix A

Specific Measures of Disabilities for Adults:

Listed in the American With Disabilities 2010 Report

Seeing, Hearing, and Speaking Limitations

- Difficulty Seeing – experiencing blindness or having difficulty seeing words and letters in ordinary newsprint, even when wearing glasses or contact lenses (if normally worn).
- Severe Difficulty – blind or unable to see the words and letters at all.
- Difficulty hearing – experiencing deafness or having difficulty hearing a normal conversation, even when wearing a hearing aid.
- Severe Difficulty – those who are deaf or unable to hear a normal conversation.

Upper and Lower Body Limitations

- Lower body limitations – include difficulty walking, climbing stairs, or using a wheelchair, can, crutches or walker.
- Upper body limitations – include difficulty lifting and grasping.

Cognitive, Mental, and Emotional Functioning

- Mental disabilities encompass a wide range of symptoms that can appear from the moment of life or come about later because of illness or injury.

These include learning disability, Alzheimer's, senility, or dementia, intellectual and developmental disabilities and other mental/emotional conditions with one or more selected symptoms including depression or anxiety, trouble getting along with others, trouble concentrating, and trouble coping with stress.

Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL)

- These are skills that under normal circumstances a person would not struggle to master. A disability in these areas means that there is a need for some level of assistance.
- The ADLs include difficulty getting around inside the home, getting into/out of bed, bathing, dressing, eating, or toileting.
- The IADLs include difficulty going outside the home, managing money, preparing meals, doing housework, taking prescription medication, and using the phone.

Appendix B

ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities

All guidelines and images below can be found at on the online PDF file published by the New England ADA center, printed and developed with a grant from the Department of Education.²⁰

Door Clear Width

Open the door to a 90-degree angle, measure from the face of the door until you reach the edge of the door stop.



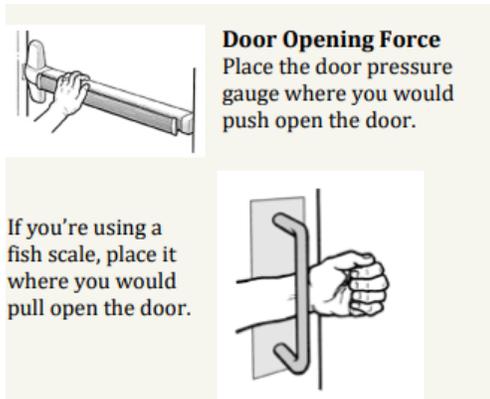
Door Clear Width

Open the door 90 degrees, measure from the face of the door to the edge of the door stop.

²⁰ <https://www.adachecklist.org/doc/fullchecklist/ada-checklist.pdf>

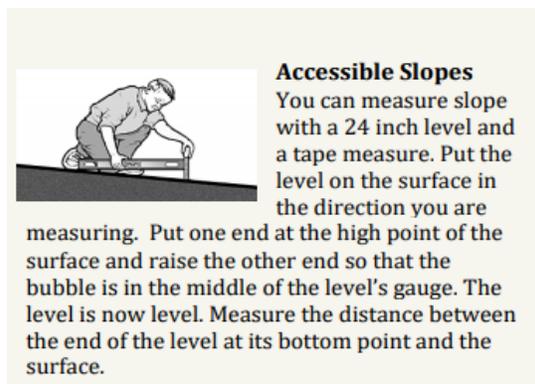
Door Opening Force

Using your door pressure gauge determine how much force is needed to open a door.



Accessible Slopes

Measure for a 1:12 ratio. For every inch of height, there should be at least 12 inches of ramp space.



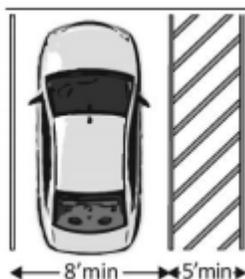
Accessible Entrances

A wheelchair requires a minimum of 36 inches wide to allow a wheelchair use access through the space.



Parking Spaces

A parking space should be at least 8 inches wide with an aisle access 5 inches wide.



This checklist was produced by the New England ADA Center, a project of the Institute for Human Centered Design and a member of the ADA National Network. This checklist was developed under a grant from the Department of Education, NIDRR grant number H133A060092-09A. However the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Questions or comments on the checklist contact the New England ADA Center at 617-695-0085 voice/tty or ADAinfo@NewEnglandADA.org

For the full set of checklists, including the checklists for recreation facilities visit www.ADAchecklist.org.

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Appendix C

HOW TO MAKE SOCIAL MEDIA MORE ACCESSIBLE TO THOSE WITH DISABILITIES

THE IMPACT

- Following Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 makes your content accessible to a wider variety of people.
- It will make content more accessible to those with blindness, vision impairment, deafness, hearing loss, learning and cognitive disabilities, limited movement, speech disabilities, photosensitivity, combinations of these disabilities, as well as many more.
- Updating your social media to follow these guidelines will not only expand your ministry to a new community, but it would expand your ministry to online users in general.
- It won't cost you a penny.

A FEW STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO BECOME A MORE INCLUSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

- Provide electronic versions of all print materials that are used for the congregation. This could include newsletters, bulletins, graphics that will be used in service, etc. You may even consider sending this information out prior to service (via email or website) so that those with disabilities have the proper time to convert the documents into their preferred programs.
 - Avoid content that is known to cause seizures, such as flashing lights.
 - Design your website and social media in a way that the background and foreground are easily distinguishable.
-
- Ensure that the text in all PDFs are set to Optimized Character Recognition (OCR). This can be done with Adobe Acrobat.
Open PDF File in Acrobat > Edit PDF > Acrobat automatically converts to OCR
 - Include "alt text" with all non-text items on your website and/or social media.
 - Use an easy-to-read font.
 - Make sermon slide shows available online so that members who have disabilities may follow along.
 - Make your website completely functional via keyboard.
 - If you choose to have a video on your website or social media, make sure to provide access to closed captions and transcription.

A FEW WAYS TO INCORPORATE DISABILITY THEOLOGY INTO MINISTRY FOR THE BENEFIT OF THOSE WITH DISABILITIES

- Designate volunteers who can help to "be the eyes" of those in your church who may have vision impairments.
- Designate volunteers who can help to "be the ears" for those in your church who may have hearing impairments.
- Print out a handful of bulletins with enlarged print before service.

- Encourage all speakers to use the microphone during service, no matter how little their part. We want our friends and family with disabilities to be able to participate in the service as fully as anyone else.
- Provide large-print versions of hymnals, bulletins, offertory materials, etc. This is a helpful tool for those who have vision impairments, but also for those who may have dyslexia or other reading impairments.
- Use an easy-to-read font for all documents and materials.
- Look into helpful resources such as braille Bibles, large print Bibles and hymnals, etc.
- Narrate visual elements of the service or program.
- Ask your congregation members if there is anything you can be doing to be more inclusive of their needs.

HOW DOES THE BIBLE SUPPORT DISABILITY THEOLOGY?

- King David and Mephibosheth | 2 Samuel 9
- A Man Born Blind | John 9:1-3
- Fearfully and Wonderfully Made | Psalm 139:13-16
- One Body, Many Members | 1 Corinthians 12:2-27

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Soul Tending and the Pedagogy of Hope: A Mixed Method Study Examining the Experiences of Racialized Students in Southern Ontario Catholic Schools

Abstract

This study seeks to answer the following question: How effective are the equity and inclusive policies, implemented by Catholic schools in Ontario, in supporting the culture and identity of racially marginalized students who are not Catholic? The effectiveness of these policies, and their grounding in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995; Gay 2000), are examined within the context of the Catholic interpretation of the Christian gospel message of human right to dignity, and the common theme of education for liberation, found in the philosophical views expressed by writers such as Jacques Maritain (1943), Paulo Freire (1970), and Grant Shockley (1988). Using the explanatory sequential mixed method model, former Catholic school students and teachers were surveyed for this study.

Keywords: Soul tending, Catholic education, culturally responsive pedagogy, racialized students, equity, and inclusive education.

Paulo Freire once wrote that, “authentic education is not carried on by “A” for “B” or by “A” about “B,” but rather by “A” with “B,” mediated by the world...”¹ The writer goes on to explain that this mediation is precisely the content on which education can be built. Part of that involves, in Freire’s view, acknowledging the real situations of people. In decrying the need for what he terms “authentic humanism” he echoes Pierre Furter’s call for “permitting the emergency of the awareness of our full humanity.”² The opposite in terms of education, Freire purports, is the banking style – knowledge organized by the educator without thought for the student’s situation that is then imposed upon them. “Many political and educational plans have failed,” he wrote, “because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed.”³ For over 100 years in Canada, education that failed to recognize the humanity of Indigenous people was delivered in the form of residential schools. Similar models were imposed on brown and black and othered bodies throughout the European colonized world. Evidence shows that remnants of this structure still remain enshrined in our education system, and in the minds of those tasked with implementing it.

This study sought to answer the following question: How effective are the equity and inclusive policies, implemented by Catholic schools in Ontario, in supporting the culture and identity of racially marginalized students who are not Catholic? The effectiveness of these policies, and their grounding in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995; Gay 2000), are examined within the context of the Catholic interpretation of the Christian gospel message of human right to dignity, and the common theme of education for liberation, found in the philosophical views expressed by writers such as Jacques Maritain (1943), Paulo Freire (1970), and Grant Shockley (1988). Using the explanatory sequential mixed method model, former Catholic school students⁴ and school staff were included in this study.

While the overall findings of this study will be laid out in the latter part of this paper, the more extensive report included an overall conclusion summarized thus: “It can be fairly concluded that the Equity and Inclusive policies implemented by Catholic schools in Ontario are not as effective as they could be in supporting the culture and identity of racially marginalized students.”⁵

Background and Context – Racialized students in Ontario Schools

Providing some background on the education experience of racialized students in Ontario is important to contextualize this present study. While very little academic research exists to document the specific experience of racialized students in Catholic schools, recent media stories coupled with academic studies in the public school system, paint an unsettling picture of a system wrought with racism and racially oppressive practices. In 2019 *CBC News* reported a lawsuit filed against the York Region District School Board alleged that a school failed to adequately respond to repeated racially based attacks on a black student. Several physical altercations between the alleged victim and perpetrators were caught on video. *The Toronto Star* reported in 2019 that a mother sued the Toronto District School Board for failing to protect her

¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2000), 93.

² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 93.

³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 94.

⁴ Throughout this paper I use the word “students” interchangeably with “respondents” to refer to study participants.

⁵ Marie Green, “Examining the Experiences of Racialized Students in Southern Ontario Catholic Schools” (PhD diss., University of St. Michael’s College/University of Toronto, 2019) 156.

daughter after a white student allegedly punched her in the face. *The Toronto star* also reported in 2017 on a York Region District School Board school trustee publicly used the N-word to describe a parent seeking racial justice for her children, blamed the usage of the word on a head injury and refused to resign until protest forced her hand. As startling as these events sound, the climate they portray would come as no surprise to scholars like Carl James of York University. James' 2019 report "We Rise Together" documents issues of racism in public school systems. While the 2019 report targeted specific communities within Peel District School Board, it echoed some of the same concerns captured in a previous study for the Toronto District School Board in 2017 also conducted by James. Conducted in order to interrogate the issues concerning schooling, academic performance, and overall education outcomes for black students, both studies highlighted students experiencing low expectations, disproportionate streaming to non-university track courses, and racial profiling. The Peel District School Board study in particular found that the racism black students encountered "fostered a schooling environment that made learning tough and challenging."⁶

Anisef et al (2010) examined the effect of family income and poverty on high school completion rates of immigrants in Toronto and found that "students from the Caribbean are significantly more likely to enter school one year late, live in alternate family structures, find themselves placed in non-academic streams and be at risk of not completing their course of study."⁷ Most of the students included in the qualitative portion of the study to be outlined in this paper are first generation or immigrant youth from Caribbean backgrounds. When examining black student high school completion in Quebec and Ontario, Livingstone and Weinfeld (2017) built on Anisef et al by factoring in family structure and concluded that "income and family structure together explain a large part of any black/white gap in high school completion," but "does not imply that antiblack racism in schools is either inconsequential or nonexistent."⁸

Across Canada, Indigenous and Black students are disproportionately represented in academic failure, school to jail pipeline statistics, child welfare cases and incarceration. In the province of Ontario, the disparities between these two groups and the general population do not end with education. A report by the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CCAS Toronto) revealed that black children are 28% more likely to be placed in care than white children.⁹ A 2018 report by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) found that despite making up less than five percent of the child population in Ontario "Indigenous children represent approximately 30% of foster children" and "Indigenous children are over-represented at all points of child welfare decision-making."¹⁰ The Aboriginal Advisor to Ontario concluded that "Children at risk in Aboriginal communities face major issues that include but are not limited to

⁶ Carl James, "We Rise Together," Peel District School Board, March 11, 2019, 33

⁷Paul Anisef, Robert S. Brown, Kelli Phythian, Robert Sweet, Davide Walters, "Early school leaving among immigrants in Toronto secondary school," *Canadian Review of Sociology* 47, no 2 (2010): 122, accessed August 14, 2019, https://linkgalecom.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/apps/doc/A229302110/CPI?u=utoronto_main&sid=CPI&xid=4e71ab59

⁸ Anne-Marie Livingstone and Morton Weinfeld, "Black Students and High School Completion in Quebec and Ontario: A Multivariate Analysis," *Canadian Review of Sociology* 54: 193, accessed August 14, 2019 <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1111/cars.12144>

⁹ *Interrupted Childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare* (Toronto, ON: Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018), 20.

¹⁰ *Interrupted Childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare*, 20.

addictions, lack of suitable housing, poverty, unemployment and one of the highest suicide rates in the developed world.”¹¹

Given these dismal numbers, reflection on any progress made since the residential school era requires a reconsideration of how we define education, and in the context of Catholic school, how we understand Christian education. What has been made abundantly clear is that what took place in residential schools, was not Christian education but rather, education delivered by individuals who identified as Christians. For over 100 years, Catholic, Anglican, United, Methodist, Presbyterian, and other Christian denominations, operated residential schools in partnership with the Government of Canada. Indigenous children were ripped from their land, their families, their culture, and religion and forced to adapt the culture of white Europeans, deemed more suitable and acceptable. While their language, food and customs were relegated to the sidelines as savage, children were beaten, raped, starved and sometimes murdered at the hands of their teachers and wardens.

Today, both black and Indigenous students are more likely than their white peers to leave school without graduating, are more likely to be incarcerated and are more likely to suffer from poor health outcomes. Another common thread found among black and Indigenous students is their struggle with identity and how this impacts their school performance. Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac and Zine (1997), Bhyat (2003) and Hallet (2008) confirmed that when students from these communities identify with their culture, it significantly impacts their educational experience and academic outcomes. Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac and Zine (1997) and Tuck (2012) contended that the term “push out”¹² more accurately reflected the fact that non-completion was an outcome of the racism, oppression and marginalization expressed by Indigenous and black youth.

The Literature on Catholic School Experience

Currently, more than half of Ontario’s 29 Catholic school boards admit students who are not Catholic.¹³ Catholic schools are the second largest providers of education in Canada, exceeded only by the public secular school system. As Brennan (2010) notes, despite belonging to different faith backgrounds, one in two parents in the province of Ontario choose to send their children to Catholic school.¹⁴ The present study reveals that many black parents view the Catholic school as a better option than the public school system. Before embarking on a study to examine the experiences of racialized students in Southern Ontario schools a review was undertaken in order to determine what the literature says about the experiences of racialized students in current Catholic school systems in Ontario and what gaps might exist in that literature.

¹¹ Laurel Broten, *Children First*, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2012, 18.

¹² George J. Sefa Dei, Josephine Mazzuca, Elizabeth McIsaac, Jasmine Zine, *Reconstructing Drop-out: A Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students’ disengagement from School* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 3.

¹³ Louise Brown, “Ontario Catholic elementary schools quietly admitting students of all Faiths,” *The Toronto Star*, August 29, 2014, accessed March 28, 2017, https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2014/08/29/ontario_Catholic_elementary_schools_quietly_admitting_students_of_all_faiths.html

¹⁴ Terri-Lynn Kay Brennan, “Spiritual Diversity in Modern Ontario Catholic Education: How Youth Imbue an Anti-Colonial Identity through Faith,” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 107, accessed March 8, 2019, <http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/docview/869528120?accountid=14771>.

The main themes that emerged from the literature review include the prevalence of “othering” in Canadian school systems, marginalization experienced by certain communities in the school curriculum, school environment and education policy making, and challenges with cultural and religious diversity and Catholic schooling. The overall findings indicate that positive academic performance, the existence of policies, and the Christian posture of Catholic School Boards have not provided an atmosphere “where all students feel encouraged to express their individual faith and celebrate their differences, especially differences that do not align with Catholic teaching.”¹⁵

Donley (2009) acknowledged the need for a comprehensive response to the changing cultural and religious demographics of the Catholic school system. Bhyat (2003) found that black students in two Toronto Catholic schools encounter the “playing white” and “black athlete” phenomenon¹⁶ which affects their overall experience in the education system. The study concluded that, “Curriculum, teachers and extra-curricular activities made up a significant part of the school experience for students and made an important difference in how students experienced racism in school.”¹⁷ The study also found that “the impact of racism flowed from society into the schools and that schools were able to filter and mitigate racism in varying degrees depending on how anti-racist and effective they were.” Brennan (2010) found that despite 54 percent of parents identifying concerns with spirituality as the number one reason for sending their students (both Catholic and non-Catholic) to Catholic schools,¹⁸ students were “not experiencing the complete freedom of identity that is unique and valued in their schools.”¹⁹ Ellwood (2014), Patridge (2014) and Segeren and Kutsyuruba (2012) all point out that the Ontario’s *Equity and Inclusive Policy* failed to trickle down to the classroom level and bring about the meaningful changes for which it was intended.

Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Policy

In an attempt to acknowledge the “poorer outcomes for disproportionate numbers of students from low-income environments, racialized students, Indigenous students, students who identify as LGBTQ,”²⁰ the Ontario government released the Capacity Building Series on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as part of *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*. The strategy was later accompanied by Policy Program Memorandum or PPM 119, which required all school boards to implement equity and inclusive education policies. In addition to the policy, programs such as The First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Policy Framework (2007) Ontario Black Youth Action Plan (2017), specifically targeted the two communities (black and Indigenous) most adversely affected by negative academic outcomes.

¹⁵ Green, “Examining the Experiences of Racialized Students in Southern Ontario Catholic Schools,” 17.

¹⁶ Alice Janet Bhyat, “The Impact of Racism on Black Students in Two Catholic Schools” (PhD diss., University of Toronto – Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, 2003), 232.

¹⁷ Bhyat, “The Impact of Racism on Black Students in Two Catholic Schools,” 229.

¹⁸ Terri-Lynn Kay Brennan. “Spiritual Diversity in Modern Ontario Catholic Education: How Youth Imbue an Anti-Colonial Identity through Faith” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 106, accessed March 9, 2019, <http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?url=https://search-proquestcom.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/docview/869528120?accountid=14771>.

¹⁹ Brennan, “Spiritual Diversity in Modern Ontario Catholic Education: How Youth Imbue an Anti-Colonial Identity through Faith,” 144.

²⁰ *Ontario’s Education Equity Action Plan* (Toronto, ON: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017), 14.

Catholic school boards for their part, seat the Equity and Inclusive policy within what Mario D'Souza has termed "the distinctiveness of Catholic education."²¹ This distinctiveness is attributed to the view that Catholic education shares the vision of the mission of the church, affirms our Imago Dei characteristic, has union with God as its ultimate God and commands the cooperation of the three main spheres of education, Church, family and school.²² In short, culturally responsive education is purported to be imbedded in the DNA of the Catholic school by Catholic education leaders and therefore thought to be a natural progression for an evolving education system. Teachers interviewed for this study, confirmed receiving training for the implementation of PPM 119. But they also acknowledged that it was not mandatory, and teachers could decide if they wanted to participate or not. One teacher noted that only a handful or teachers in her school had participated in any kind of training.

Based on the Ontario Human Rights code prohibited grounds of discrimination. the *Equity and Inclusive Policy*, along with its forebearer *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, was heavily influenced by the concept of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), which had its theoretical base in the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). When read separately, there appears to be little connection between education theory largely pursued from a secular standpoint and a philosophical approach imbedded in a religious system perceived to be dominated by white, Eurocentric values. However, when taken together, similarities between the concept of CRP and the Christian Philosophy of Education (CPE) are glaring. Since both provide the lens through which the present research was pursued, a brief exploration of both will shed light on the significance of the findings. I begin with comparing the two concepts and end with a concept that compels a paradigm shift in the delivery of Catholic education and Christian education in general.

The Christian Philosophy of Education and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Theory

One would be remiss to embark on any discussion about the relationship between the Christian Philosophy of Education (CPE) and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) without considering the work of Paulo Freire. The activist educator seemed to possess an almost perspicacious ability when it came to education theory and practice. This clear insight left the education community with a body of work that is still widely revered today. Part of the appeal of Freire is how his theories are in fact interdisciplinary in nature. They can be applied to political, philosophical, educational, anthropological, religious, and sociological topics. As such, his theories present as an appropriate basis upon which alignment between CPE and CRP can be established and illustrated. The main Christian education philosopher relied on for the theoretical framework of this present study, Jacques Maritain, heavily influenced Freire's work. While the fact of Freire's Christian grounding and inspiration has largely been ignored by an academia in its tendency to strive for that which is secular, neutral, and void of any religious affiliation or motivation, several recent books have revealed this important aspect of his life.²³ The central thesis of Freire's work, as borne out in his seminal publication *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is education as the facilitator of human formation. Ultimately, Freire contends, education must

²¹ D'Souza, "The Distinctiveness of Catholic Education," in *Discipline, Devotion and Dissent: Jewish, Catholic and Islamic schooling in Canada*, edited by Graham Patrick McDonough, Nadeem A. Memon and Avi Mintz, 45. Waterloo, Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012.

²² Ibid.

²³ See Irwin Leopando's *A Pedagogy of Faith: The Theological Vision of Paulo Freire* (Bloomsbury, 2017) James Kirylo and Drick Boyd. *Paulo Freire: His Faith, Spirituality, and Theology* (Sense Publishers, 2017).

serve to fulfill the human ontological quest for completion, to become who we are, to accomplish the creator's potential for our lives. He defined "authentic liberation" as the "process of humanization" and "liberation" as "praxis."²⁴ He called for the rejection of the "banking concept" of education and for educators to instead embrace "problem-posing" education, which essentially responds to the consciousness inherent to a student's humanity.²⁵

Ladson-Billings invokes Freire's contribution to the promotion of social and cultural critique²⁶ in describing the traits of successful students of African American students.²⁷ Due to the lack of research into academic success among African American students, Ladson-Billings' 1995 work "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" was a welcome breath of fresh air. Ladson-Billings challenged preconceived notions about how culture intersects with the institution and the tendency to locate student failure within the "culture mismatch between student and school."²⁸ Rather than the goal of education being how to make students fit into the educational structure, she identifies this approach, which had been conceived by previous educational theorists, as cultural congruence,²⁹ she proposes the concept of "culturally responsive" as a preferred way to conceptualize the necessary "relationship between home/community culture and school culture."³⁰ What Ladson-Billings identifies as cultural congruence, Freire identifies as the outcome of the banking model of education where "bank-clerk" teachers see their students as containers into which they make knowledge deposits. In this model, "the educated individual is the adapted person," which is ideal for the oppressor because "tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it."³¹

Grant Shockley also based his Intentional Engagement Model on the liberation education theories of Paulo Freire. Shockley held the black religious experience as a model for addressing the inequities in education. He charted the history of a people who developed a relationship with God and a theology made up the wholesome pieces that could be gleaned of the colonizer's Christianity. Black people, he said, selected from this religion what they needed to survive and rejected what was meant to destroy them.³² Shockley's work would inspire one of his students, James H. Cone, to pursue this line of inquiry and become one of the most influential liberation theologians of our time. When Cone insists that overcoming oppression requires one to embrace that which the oppressor "ridicules,"³³ he is foreshadowing what Django Paris would later theorize about the need for education to act in maintaining "our multiethnic and multilingual society."³⁴ It is not good enough, Paris asserts, for education to be "relevant" or "responsive," it must actively help to maintain the student's culture.³⁵ In Paris' model, language and cultural

²⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Towards a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Education Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 477.

²⁷ Ladson-Billings, "Towards a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," 478.

²⁸ Ibid., 475

²⁹ Ibid., 467

³⁰ Ibid., 467

³¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 76.

³² Grant Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Religious Experience." In Charles E. Foster *Ethnicity in the Education of the Church* (Nashville: Scarritt Press, 1987), 38.

³³ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, (Seabury Press, 1969), 18.

³⁴ Django Paris, "Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice," *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 3 (2012): 93.

³⁵ Ibid., 93

differences are not seen as “deficiencies to overcome.”³⁶ He echoes what Ladson-Billings promoted regarding the sociolinguists’ notion about the likelihood of students to experience better academic success if their home language could be incorporated into the classroom.³⁷ Further support for the necessity of authentic cultural inclusion in the classroom can be found in the work of Geneva Gay whose seminal work *Culturally Responsive Teaching* is often referenced as part of the CRP canon. Writing in 2013, Gay lays out some specific characteristics of what she terms “culturally responsive teaching.” Teachers can do culturally responsive teaching by “restructuring attitudes and beliefs about ethnic and cultural diversity; resisting resistance or countering opposition to cultural diversity; centering culture and difference in the teaching process; and establishing pedagogical connections between cultural responsiveness and other dimensions or areas of teaching.”³⁸ Banks and Banks (2010) assert that students learning is improved and students are more highly motivated “when the school curriculum reflects their cultures, experiences, and perspectives.”³⁹

When it comes to education, there is broad agreement between CPE and CRP which fall into three main areas: Recognition of the student’s humanity, the critical role of the spheres of education (home, church, community, school), and willingness to engage social justice issues. Due to the context of the present study being Catholic schools, the Christian philosophy of education emphasized herein will be that which is embodied in Catholic education.

The common thread of humanization that runs throughout CPE and CRP is amply present in the work of Shockley, as well as Maritain and Catholic education documents. The Christian Anthropological idea of personhood, the idea of existing as a being with divinely endowed rights, is emphasized by Maritain who disavows the relegation of training people merely for the service of the state but allowing for the special giftedness to shine through into “fulfillment of the deepest potentialities of the human being.”⁴⁰ Catholic school boards, for their part, seat this in the concept of Imago Dei which is promoted through reference to Genesis 1:27 across their literature. Many school board websites stress their belief that “all people are created equal, in the image of God, with inimitable characteristics and deserving of dignity.” The idea of not seeing the student as empty vessels to be filled, is also echoed in the work of Maritain, who decries students being treated as “tabula rasa” or something to be molded.⁴¹

Maritain also espoused the importance of the spheres of education⁴² in his 1943 work the *Education of Man*. These spheres of education are acknowledged through education documents produced from the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (Vatican II) such as *Gravissimum Educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education). The document invokes the spheres of education by identifying the family as the “first school of the social virtues.”⁴³ D’Souza (2012), affirms that Catholic education is dependent “upon the cooperation of the three agents: school,

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ladson-Billings, “But that’s Just Good Teaching: The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.” *Theory into Practice* 34, no 3 (Summer 1995): 159.

³⁸ Geneva Gay, “Teaching to and through Cultural Diversity.” *Curriculum Inquiry* 43, no. 1 (2013): 48, http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/03626784/v43i0001/48_ttatcd.

³⁹ James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks, *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, 7th Ed., (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 234.

⁴⁰ Gallagher, Idella and Donald Gallagher. Eds. *The Education of Man*. New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc.1962, 10.

⁴¹ Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1943, 30.

⁴² Ibid., 97.

⁴³ Declaration on Christian Education: *Gravissimum Educationis*. Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965. The Holy See, 2018, 2, accessed March 25, 2019.

family, and Church.”⁴⁴ Paris (2012) also advocated for a “third space” where school and family could coexist.

Furthermore, the declaration upholds that the true purpose of education is the formation of the human person which ultimately benefits society.⁴⁵ In keeping with the CRP emphasis on social justice critique, the Vatican II documents insists that the school community exhibit an “atmosphere” that is “animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity.”⁴⁶ The declaration goes further to state the importance of taking cultural and religious pluralism of society into consideration by “respecting religious freedom” and delivering education “according to the individual moral and religious principles of the families.”⁴⁷ With the foresight worthy of an organization of the Vatican’s status, the declaration insists that teachers be suitably qualified and upgrade their skills to keep up with current theories and practices.⁴⁸ Finally, the declaration calls for teachers to “bear witness to Christ” through their teaching as well as their life.

Indian residential schools were still being operated by the Catholic church many years after Vatican II. Kuper Island Residential School, for example, operated up until the 1970s and was included in the list of settlement schools for residential school survivors.⁴⁹ As recent as 2016 a lawsuit was brought against an Ontario Catholic school (with more than 50% non-Catholic student body)⁵⁰ regarding exemption from religious education classes. This is evidence that just as the *Equity and Inclusive Policy* did not trickle down to schools, teachings from Vatican II and the philosophers, theologians, and theorists, have also failed to resonate in many schools and classrooms. Many respondents to the present study, spoke about the discomfort with emphasis on pro-life teaching. In fact, when questioned about any negative experiences they had with the religious nature of Catholic schools, the pro-life program was a recurring theme. One student spoke about feeling somewhat imposed upon by Catholic religiosity:

Lots of interesting points in terms of participating in religious services. I had never taken Eucharist. There was a lot of symbolism – iconography – it was quite jarring at first. By the end of Grade 12 I had become agnostic.⁵¹

Though not explicitly stated, many of these theorists are implicit in their invocation of the spiritual aspects of a student’s being. Most cultures have a seamless bond between their faith and culture. From the Muslim students who leave my classroom for a few minutes to pray during Ramadan, to the mother who launched a complaint against the York District School Board for allowing her child to participate in yoga, which she believes is contrary to their Catholic beliefs, religion and the faith connected to that religion, cannot be ignored if we are intending to educate the whole student. Several of the students I interviewed for the purpose of this study, spoke of the importance of being able to be their authentic selves in a Catholic school setting. Two respondents who identified as members of a Pentecostal denomination, said it meant a lot to

⁴⁴ Mario O. D’Souza, “The distinctiveness of Catholic Education,” 45.

⁴⁵ Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1.

⁴⁶ *Gravissimum Educationis*, 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ A list of residential schools included in the settlement can be found here <http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/schools.html#British%20Columbia>.

⁵⁰ Michelle McQuigge, “Students can opt out of religious class after complaint settled,” *The Toronto Star*, June 13, 2017 <https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2017/06/13/students-can-opt-out-of-religiousclasses-at-Catholic-school-after-complaint-settled.html>

⁵¹ Interview transcript B-08-2019

them to be in an environment where worship and praying, though different in form, was similar in content. A number of respondents spoke of how much it meant to be taken by their religious education teacher to a mosque, a synagogue, or other places of worship where they could learn about other faiths.

What I have termed Soul Tending Pedagogy can serve as a uniting force for CPE and CRP, wherein the similarities are fused, and differences reconciled. Elsewhere, I have defined Soul Tending Pedagogy as “teaching with the perception of students as the embodiment of what Jacques Maritain refers to as “metaphysical mystery”⁵² and, acting as a partner on the human journey to fullness and completeness, buoyed by a willingness to employ praxis such as culturally responsive education.”⁵³ Soul Tending Pedagogy is the theological and ecclesiological retort to the challenges posed by racial inequities in education systems. It immediately requires a paradigm shift in the way that education, particularly Christian education, is delivered.

Methodology

Given the sociological nature of this study, which sought to examine the experiences of racialized students, a mixed methods model served as an appropriate method to facilitate the voices of students being heard. No longer thought to be anomalistic, mixed methods qualitative inquiry is often employed when there is a need to explain the quantitative data collected. This study employed a mixed methods explanatory sequential method (Creswell, Clark 2007).⁵⁴ Qualitative research was carried out with the specific aim of shedding light on data that might not fully tell the story of research subjects. In such instances, the stories of research subjects act as a cynosure for the entire project. The quantitative aspect of the project was used as a sampling framework to gain access to respondents who were representative of the population. This approach was further framed within a constructivist-transformative worldview (Creswell 2014), which is elsewhere described as a constructivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). The mixed method approach facilitated the “insider” or what Ladson-Billings describes as the “native” researcher element. I am a member of the community which is the subject of this research in more ways than one, as black woman, as a teacher and as a Christian. While the features of mixed methods qualitative research serve to validate my work, a benefit of my insider status can be found in the constructivist transformative worldview, similar to “action research” (Bhyat 2003), which gives me the ability to apply the research in my life as well as my practice.

Research subjects included individuals from racially marginalized groups 18 and over, and who attended a Catholic school between September 2014 and December 2018, and identify as racialized and/or Black (African, African-origin, African-Canadian, African-Caribbean, Caribbean origins), Indo- Caribbean, West Indian, Indigenous Canadian (Inuit, Metis, First Nations, North American Aboriginal), as well as teachers who teach in Catholic schools. Catholic school employees were also interviewed in their roles as administrators in order to inform school board policy. Multiple forms of data collection were used to support triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Data collection instruments included cross-sectional self-administered questionnaires, interview forms, audio recording, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Documents analyzed included reports from the ministry of education, Equity

⁵² Idella Gallagher and Donald Gallagher, Eds., *The Education of Man* (New York, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1962), 164.

⁵³ Green, Examining the Experiences of Racialized Students in Southern Ontario Catholic Schools, 12.

⁵⁴ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 156.

and Inclusive Policy documents and Catholic education documents including related Church documents.

A quantitative survey was implemented online and in paper format. Respondents to the survey were given the option to participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview. The results of the survey were analyzed to both inform the follow-up interview and identify prospective interview subjects. Forty-nine valid surveys were gleaned from a total of 211 responses to the survey and 11 semi-structured interviews were eventually carried out. Below, I share the overall findings of the research.

Findings

This study revealed that despite the implementation of equity and inclusive policies across all 72 Province of Ontario school boards, representations of diversity and inclusiveness still come across as token and superficial. Major changes to textbooks and curriculum, teacher training, need to be made in order for all students to feel the impact of what it is like to be in an environment where their culture and identity is supported. In the conclusion to my forthcoming dissertation, I summarize the findings thus:

“What this study found is that racialized students still experience racism in Southern Ontario Catholic schools. For many students, the Catholic school is not a place of safety and all students do not feel that they can live authentically within its walls. There are students who feel that their culture and identity is not respected and acknowledged in meaningful ways. Yet, despite the racism and the lack of a culturally nurturing environment, most students have maintained strong links to their ethno-cultural community and ethnic identity, and many do well academically. A major finding of this study is that positive outcomes, including academic and sustainability of culture and identity, for racialized students is due in large part to their families. This study confirmed family support as an important protective factor. Additionally, friendships and the health of those relationships, as well as the space for those relationships to flourish and not be impeded by school policies or school social norms, are of extreme importance to students.”⁵⁵

I consolidate the major findings of the study thus:⁵⁶

- Catholic school boards have formally implemented equity and inclusive policies in accordance with the Ontario Ministry of Education mandate, including providing training to teachers; however, the non-mandatory and selective nature of this programming results in inequities in how the principles are brought to life and practiced in the classroom and schools.
- Racialized students still experience discrimination based on race, cultural background, and religious faith in Southern Ontario Catholic schools.
- Catholics schools in Southern Ontario are still failing to be a place where all students feel they can be their true and authentic selves.
- Most students feel that the school environment recognizes that all people are created equal, in the image of God, with inimitable characteristics and deserving of dignity (Gen 1:27)
- Despite the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, the work of the First Nations, Metis, Inuit Education Policy Framework, and implementation of Equity and

⁵⁵ Green, *Examining the Experiences of Racialized Students in Southern Ontario Catholic Schools*, 155.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

Inclusive policies, Indigenous students are still experiencing discrimination based on race, culture, and religion in Catholic schools. They overwhelmingly rate their experience at Catholic school as not good or horrible.

- Despite the discrimination and a lack of more extensive experiences of acknowledgement of their community and culture, most of the racialized students who participated in this study have still managed to graduate from high school and go on to post-secondary education
- Despite the discrimination and a lack of more extensive experiences of acknowledgement of their community and culture, most racialized students have maintained strong links to their ethno-cultural community and ethnic identity
- The strong support of family and friends was a determining factor in successful academic outcomes for racialized students

Conclusion

Soul Tending Pedagogy offers a pedagogy of hope that will allow for teacher, student, and their families to coexist in divided spaces. Over time, divisions may come to be seen as the outcome of the attributes that make us human, our ability to think for ourselves, and the ability for others to value those thoughts. What I heard loud and clear from respondents is the need for differences to be respected, for their humanity to be recognized. They eschew any attempt at assimilation, to make everyone they same. They want to be in an environment where they can stand in their full cultural context, in the blackness or brownness of their skin, and still be given equal footing with their white counterparts. They echo the words of James Cone who said that “mutual meaningful dialogue is possible” in an atmosphere where “integration means that each man meets the other on equal footing, with neither possessing the ability to assert the rightness of his style over the other.”⁵⁷

Jacques Maritain wrote that “What is most important in education is a respect for the soul as well as for the body of the child.”⁵⁸ When teachers begin to see students as souls, the embodiment of a higher being, which is even higher than their authority in the classroom, they will be compelled to transform their treatment of students. Another aspect of being able to perceive students as souls, is the acknowledgement of the presence of evil and the possibility of its counterpart which is “good.” In the course of my research, one of the experiences relayed involved a presentation being made by a group of students who happened to all be black. The respondent shared that as they gathered at the front of the classroom to make their presentation, “the teacher said, ‘Turn on the light’ and she did this little laugh - he heh - ‘I can’t see you.’”⁵⁹ I think of incidents such as this and the other micro-aggressions described by respondents and I cannot help but place them in the same category as the evil that produced the abuse suffered by thousands of Indigenous students in residential schools.

Christian educators cannot lose sight of what is a core teaching, a similarity shared with many other faiths, about the presence of good and evil. By ignoring spiritual things and speaking only the language of secular theorists and practitioners, we run the risk of only addressing the symptom of poor educational outcome, and not the root cause, part of which is the withholding of equitable education. Another tenet of Christian education is the common good, and the failure of individuals impacts our overall society. As D’Souza states, “The common good has material,

⁵⁷ Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 17.

⁵⁸ Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, 9.

⁵⁹ Transcript from group discussion, Group - A28

moral, and intellectual dimensions, but if human flourishing is relegated to the private spheres of religion and ethnic culture, then even the constricted liberal depiction of the common good as life bound by economic and political union will be compromised, leading to the further miniaturization of human beings.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ D’Souza, *The Distinctiveness of Catholic Education*, 60-61.

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Title: Principles and Practices of Buddhized Education in Hong Kong:
The case of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association

Abstract: Buddhism is a prosperous religion in Hong Kong, and a number of Buddhist bodies run schools with government subsidies. This article takes the Hong Kong Buddhist Association's current Buddhized education programme as an example and reviews its principles and practices. The Association sees the local social environment as unhealthy and considers it urgently necessary to foster in students a proper philosophy of life and moral values by strengthening their life and spiritual education with a Buddhist orientation. While keeping Buddhist doctrines as the major source of values and resources in its programme, the Association has expanded its coverage to include current issues related to students' daily lives. It has also revamped its teaching materials and pedagogy and has sought to provide diverse learning experiences beyond regular lessons. Contemplative education and green education have also been given more emphasis. This article also discusses the problems and prospects of implementing the programme.

Keywords: Buddhism, Buddhized education, Hong Kong, Life education, Values Education

Introduction

With Hong Kong's historical background as a British colony, religious schools and religious education continue to have a salient presence. In this special schooling system, religious education plays a crucial role in instilling students with the proper personal, moral, civic and spiritual values. Religious education exists under a variety of names, and it is conducted through various channels and formats in different religious schools. There has also been ongoing reform in these religious education programs. Most studies of religious education in Hong Kong are about Christianity (Chan 2015; Cheng 2004; Tse 2015), and we know little about non-Christian religious education. To fill the gaps in the literature, this article reviews the principles and practices of the current Buddhist religious education curriculum.

Over the last several decades, religious education has transformed a great deal in response to changing social, cultural and educational landscapes (Conroy and Davis 2010; De Souza et al. 2006; Franchi, Conroy, and McKinney 2015). Immigration and secularization undermined the influence of dominant religious beliefs that different from the mainstream. Many faith schools have a substantial population that is not part of their religious tradition or that has varying degrees of religious attachment. Significant cultural shifts around marriage, sexuality and technology in many places have resulted in conflicts over values, beliefs and lifestyle practices. Accordingly, school religious education must respond to these demographic and cultural changes.

Under the influence of educational studies and education reform at large, new ways of thinking about religion and new models of religious education have also been developed. An explicit 'faith-nurture' approach has gradually been replaced by 'learning from religion' or 'learning about religion', with a focus on encouraging students to understand the major religions. Schools today are burdened by many expectations, and religious education within the school is also an area with many varying demands. Religious education has had difficulty securing a legitimate place within a crowded curriculum despite claims of its overriding importance made by many bodies (Franchi, Conroy, and McKinney 2015).

As a highly secular and multi-cultural city, Hong Kong has a wide variety of vibrant religious beliefs. Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity (both Protestantism and Catholicism) are the mainstream religions in Hong Kong, with numerous followers and many different sects (Information Service Department of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2019; Kwong 2002). Benefiting from Hong Kong's aided school system, religious groups are dominant sponsoring bodies for kindergartens and schools, and religious education has been allowed to develop with little government intervention.

Buddhism is a religion with a long history, and its first adherents in Hong Kong can be traced back 1600 years. For hundreds of years afterward, religious activities by Buddhist monks in Hong Kong were scattered and rare, and were mostly limited to self-meditation in the

countryside. It was after the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the start of the Republic of China, when many monks from mainland China migrated to Hong Kong for shelter and settlement, that Buddhism began to prosper in Hong Kong (Tang 2015). Around 1949, political turmoil resulting from the Chinese Civil War led thousands of Buddhist monks fled to Hong Kong. Some of them stayed and built Buddhist temples in Hong Kong, the number of which increased drastically (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 1978). Buddhism in Hong Kong includes many schools, mainly of Mahayana Buddhism. Today, Hong Kong has more than a million Buddhists and several hundred Buddhist organizations (GovHK 2016), which illustrates that Buddhism in Hong Kong is quite prosperous.

When the welfare system in Hong Kong was immature, religious bodies were the pioneering social service providers of the city. They have provided services to the poor and vulnerable for a long time. Relying on donations from the general public and later support from the government, these bodies became non-profit social welfare organizations. In the era of colonial governance, Hong Kong's education relied on Christian groups, which merged education with missionary work. These faith schools developed rapidly from the 1870s onward. A salient characteristic of education in Hong Kong is that most schools are subsidized by the government but run by sponsoring bodies that are responsible for drawing up the school mission and for the administration of the schools. As the government and sponsoring bodies became working partners in public education, the main religious bodies in Hong Kong gradually joined the business of running schools, which helped to popularise education. Tung Lin Kok Yuen established the first Buddhist school in the 1930s. Since the 1960s, the Buddhist circle has put a great deal of effort into establishing and operating schools. There are now many Buddhist sponsoring bodies in Hong Kong, including The Hong Kong Buddhist Association (HKBA), The Heung Hoi Ching Kok Lin Association, Chi Lin Nunnery, Tung Lin Kok Yuen, Miu Fat Buddhist Monastery, To Chi Fat She, Chi Hong Ching Yuen and the Hong Kong and Macau Regional Centre of The World Fellowship of Buddhists (Tang 2015). These sponsoring bodies operate 15 kindergartens, 16 primary schools, 20 secondary schools and 1 special school, serving around 4% of the total student population in Hong Kong in 2019.

Orientation of Buddhicized Education

Schools run by these Buddhist bodies show their distinct religious culture. Students from the above-mentioned schools are exposed to Buddhist doctrines and practices. For example, the largest Buddhist sponsoring body, the HKBA, has 8 kindergartens, 7 primary schools and 13 secondary schools, all of which keep the Buddha's spirit as their school vision, with 'to illumine wisdom and manifest compassion' (*Mingzhixianbei*) as their common motto, representing a philosophy of cultivating morality with knowledge. These schools strive to merge the teaching of knowledge with morals to promote students' spiritual wellness and achieve whole-person

education through Buddhicized education (*Fohuajiaoyu*). With Buddhist education and moral education with Buddhist doctrine as underlying principles, the schools value the cultivation of students' moral values and character, which includes telling right from wrong and understanding karmic relations and the wisdom of altruism that benefits oneself. This is to guide students towards positive thinking and moral values and to help them build a positive philosophy of life.

At an HKBA joint-school graduation ceremony in 2007, Ven. Kok Kwong stated that it is a common goal of human beings to build a harmonious society (*Wen Wei Po* 2007). Although material life has improved due to technological advancement, people suffer from spiritual emptiness. When people lose meaning in their lives, social unrest results. As 'the building of a harmonious world starts from the heart', Buddhicized education is education for the heart. Ven. Kok Kwong hoped that teaching fellows could work to build a harmonious and happy society by means of compassion and benevolence. In 2013, Ven. Sik Yin-chi, the secretary-general and vice-chair of the school administration committee restated this idea (*Ta Kung Pao* 2013).

The running of Buddhist schools not only follows the curriculum set by the Education Bureau but also focuses on teaching Buddhist moral and ethical principles, the concepts of wisdom and compassion, and how to make these teachings widespread in society. Although it is important to promote students' knowledge and wisdom, it is essential to acknowledge the fact that the nurturing of moral values is the underlying principle of self-cultivation. As students now live in an era full of competition, in which society values materialistic enjoyment and utilitarianism, the promotion of moral education and caring for the heart have become more significant than ever (Ven. Sik Yin-chi 2015).

Ven. Sik Yin-chi (2015) also stated that the greatest and the most obvious drawbacks of modern education are ignorance of spiritual education, the lack of teaching of ethics and morals and the failure to cultivate character. Fundamentally, Buddhicized education means education of the mind. Self-cultivation equals cultivation of the mind. Through Buddhist doctrines the confused and reckless mind settled and every hostile thought is purified. The cultivation of character is the core of Buddhicized education. By passing on Buddhist doctrines to students and teaching them to apply those principles in their daily lives, Buddhicized education teaches students to treat people with the spirit of 'compassion and selfless dedication' (*Cibeixishe*), and it thus promotes students' ability to self-reflect and reflect on the meaning of life, better enabling them to cope with the pressure and confusion of society.

Due to humans' unwholesome behaviors the environment we rely on for survival is continuously deteriorating. Only by changing one's moral values can one's external behaviors be changed. Buddhist schools can use one of the functions of Buddhism, enlightening people's minds, to promote the protection of environment in terms of the mind and spiritual wellness. Under the positive influence of Buddhist doctrines such as karma and by appreciating, cherishing and cultivating blessings, students can learn how to better cherish the natural

resources of the earth, make good use of materials instead of wasting them, protect the environment at the domestic level and practice vegetarianism to cultivate compassion, thus helping to save the planet.

Moreover, in this era of information explosion, Buddhicized education can guide students in filtering massive amounts of information with Buddhist wisdom and to internalize useful and correct information after careful and sensible consideration.

The recent development and implementation of Buddhicized education has arisen from a number of factors. Since 2000, HKBA has focused on reinforcing ‘Buddhicized moral and value education’ and ‘life-wide learning’ to train students in problem-solving in daily life and to achieve whole-person development and life-long learning in their ever-changing society. Given the rampant trends of juvenile drug addiction and compensated dating, teenagers’ moral values are a subject of concern, and that their mental and spiritual wellness requires more care and attention. Social issues such as broken families and bullying are also worries. In addition, to act in concert with the government’s implementation of Moral and Values Education, HKBA has attempted to blend elements related to Buddhicized education, life education and values education into schools’ curriculum and activities to strengthen students’ sense of social responsibility, mutual respect and consideration for others, which help them develop a proper philosophy of life and moral values (*Wen Wei Po* 2010; Ven. Sik Yin-chi 2015).

To safeguard the time spent on religious education, HKBA has signed agreements with the incorporated management committees of individual associated schools so that the schools will adhere to their mission. HKBA believes that the subjects of Buddhism and moral education should be combined into one, called ‘Buddhicized Moral and Value Education’, and stipulates that the relevant curriculum should be no less than 120 minutes per week for primary schools, no less than 80 minutes per week for junior secondary classes and no less than 40 minutes per week for senior secondary classes (Ven. Sik, H.H. 2016).

Formal Curriculum

Although the Education Bureau has never set up a curriculum guide for Buddhicized education in kindergartens and primary schools, Buddhist schools design activities and arrange lessons according to their schools’ circumstances to pass on knowledge of Buddhism to students. In general, kindergartens instil basic knowledge of Buddhism to children through interesting activities, and schools have weekly lessons on Buddhism at the primary and junior secondary levels. HKBA and The Heung Hoi Ching Kok Lin Association have also published textbooks for Buddhist schools.

Concerning Buddhicized education for junior secondary school students, in 1999, the Curriculum Development Council (1999) compiled a curriculum guide for junior secondary school religious education, which includes a section on Buddhism subdivided into a section on Buddhist doctrine and another on basic knowledge, important figures and sects of Buddhism.

This curriculum guide can be regarded as an outline for Buddhicized education in junior secondary schools. However, generally speaking, the learning of Buddhism is left to the Buddhist sponsoring bodies, which have their own school-based programs.

Buddhist Studies was also an independent school subject in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination between 1960 and 2011 that Form 5 students could take as an elective. The syllabus was revised in 2003, with a new section on the application of Buddhist teaching in daily life on top of the original three sections on Buddhist history, Buddhist teachings and related scriptures. The average number of day school candidates taking 'Buddhist Studies' was 1,791 between 1996 and 2007, less than 2% of all day school candidates (Wong and Lee 2012).

Under the new senior secondary 3-year curriculum introduced in 2009, students have to take four core subjects, with a new course, 'Ethics and Religious Studies', replacing Buddhist Studies as an elective. The new curriculum includes basic knowledge of ethics (such as utilitarianism, deontological ethics and virtue ethics) and ethical reflections on social issues such as human rights, demonstrations and protests, euthanasia and surrogate motherhood. With regard to the elective part of religious traditions, students may opt for Buddhism and study the history of Buddhism, basic Buddhist doctrines and Buddhist practices. However, it is uncommon for senior secondary students to take this course. Between 2012 and 2016, the numbers of day school candidates taking Ethics and Religious Studies (combining those taking Buddhism and Christianity) were 870, 797, 785, 693 and 649, merely 1% of the total student population. Only 152 students from the HKBA's associated schools took the new course in 2012 (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 2012).

The public examination data show the learning of Buddhism at the senior secondary level was impeded by the new senior secondary curriculum reform because students now have more core subjects than previously. Most students also took electives helpful for their further studies. The replacement of Buddhist Studies with Ethics and Religious Studies in the new senior secondary curriculum actually led to a drastic drop in the number of students taking the course.

To implement the recent Buddhicized education program, the HKBA entrusted the Centre of Buddhist Studies of the University of Hong Kong with compiling teaching materials and has provided supplementary teaching materials to its associated schools since the academic year of 2010/11. Since 2010, its junior secondary school curriculum has changed in accordance with changes in the curriculums of Buddhicized education and value education. For secondary 1 students, the textbook *The Road to Enlightenment (zhengjue de daolu)* was adopted, and the senior forms have gradually adopted new textbooks in response to curricular changes (Hong Kong Buddhist Association, Reform and Policies, n.d.). The HKBA has extended the enrichment course of *The Road to Enlightenment* (compiled by the Centre of Buddhist Studies of the University of Hong Kong) for life education based on the concept of dependent origination to senior primary and junior secondary school students (see Table 1 for the themes across years).

Table 1: New Curriculum

Level	Unit/Theme
Primary 4 Vehicles of men and gods	Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, Sangha
Primary 5 Vehicle of liberation	The Four Noble Truths
Primary 6 Bodhisattva vehicle	Four All-embracing (Bodhisattva) Virtues
Secondary 1 Vehicles of men and gods	Comprehension of Life: Three Jewels, Dependent Origination of Life, Five Aggregates, Impermanence and no-self. How Life Operates: Karma, Observing the Five Commandments
Secondary 2 Vehicle of liberation	Two Paths in Life: The Four Noble Truths, Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, The Eightfold Path
Secondary 3 Bodhisattva vehicle	Compassion and Wisdom: Four All-embracing Virtues and the Spirit of Bodhisattva

The feature of Buddhicized life education is that the course is based on dependent origination, a fundamental doctrine of Buddhism. Things appear and exist in the world because of a coalescence of causation and conditions. The rule of origination explains how matter changes because of formations and extinctions, including the formation and operation of human life and sentient beings (Ven. Sik H.H. 2005, Yu, 2008). Life education based on the concept of dependent origination is a philosophy of life, values and conduct. It is also a way of thinking and learning that guides students to learn about the world, life and how to deal with problems and the meanings of life. The course focuses on comprehending life, managing life and finding meaning in life (Anotonovsky 1987). Comprehending life means to learn about the dependent origination of life, to understand that there is no fixed 'real me' and to envision endless possibilities. Another important concept of dependent origination is causation. According to Buddhist doctrines, dependent origination is not led by randomness, but by the mind, and it thus emphasizes the importance of the mind. That is, a person's mind determines his future and leads and directs his life. After learning about life, students learn to use commandments, meditation and wisdom to deal with problems. Observing commandments is part of a disciplined life that creates favorable conditions for achieving auspicious outcomes and eliminates hostile factors to eliminate suffering. Meditation is the power of focus arising from determination and perseverance, which is crucial for achieving goals. Wisdom is the right direction and way to deal with affairs: to stay aware, to keep learning, to keep reflecting on oneself and to actively put thoughts into practice.

The course also requires students to learn about the meaning of life and to establish a right direction for their lives. Meaningfulness also arises from dependent origination: to appreciate the power and wonder of life; to feel grateful for people and events after witnessing the importance of the many favorable factors that facilitate and support our existence; to be willing to cooperate with others, perform charity and share after witnessing the interdependent

relationships between causes and conditions; and to learn to cherish and let go after witnessing impermanence based on dependent origination.

The course structure includes three levels: vehicles of men and gods (Primary 4 and Secondary 1), vehicle of liberation (Primary 5 and Secondary 2) and Bodhisattva vehicle (Primary 6 and Secondary 3), making it a spiral of development from primary to secondary years. In terms of pedagogical principles, the course incorporates ‘three kinds of knowing’ (*wensixiu*): 1. wisdom consisting of learning, 2. wisdom produced by thinking and 3. wisdom realized by practice.

The course package contains 24 interactive and activity-based lesson plans, which involve video clips, news footages, scripts for role-playing, worksheets, information from the Internet and related newspaper clippings (Yu 2008).

To prepare Secondary 3 students for the new senior secondary curriculum Ethics and Religious Studies, Introduction to Ethical Studies was incorporated into the Secondary 3 second-term Buddhicized education curriculum, and weekly lessons were increased from 2 sessions to 2.5 sessions. In tandem with the new curriculum, there has been a weekly Buddhicized education lesson for Secondary 4 and 5 students, with teaching materials are excerpted from the textbook *The Road to Enlightenment* and from movies, songs and articles related to Buddhism. There are also classroom activities such as discussions and worksheets that incorporate extra topics like caring for others and perseverance.

Informal Curriculum

Beyond regular lessons, Buddha’s birthday is warmly celebrated every year with rituals of prayers, chanting and bathing of the Buddha statue. Schools under the HKBA actively promote Buddhicized education through inter-disciplinary classroom activities beyond merely teaching knowledge from textbooks, such as visits to Buddhist monasteries, experiential learning at Buddhist monasteries, visiting the elderly, introductory courses on Buddhism, meditation classes for teachers and students, vegetarian fun days and interest classes related to Buddhism.

To enrich students’ knowledge of Buddhism, they are brought to various Buddhist institutes to learn more about the architectural style, rituals and process of traditional offerings. Led by masters at traditional temples, students have lunch in a Buddhist temple and learn about the daily running of a temple as and about the lives of monks and nuns. Students also visit Buddhist organizations and participate in day camps, which help them experience the true meaning of Buddhism (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 2002).

Many Buddhist groups provide opportunities for young people to come into contact with and participate in various good deeds such as relief, poverty alleviation and care for the aged, sick and disabled. For instance, releasing captive animals could help students learn to love and protect lives and to nurture kindness and care within themselves. Students can learn to treasure the present by experiencing the destitute lives of villagers in the remote villages of China

through poverty relief activities. They also learn to show mercy and lift others' lives from hardship by offering alms to the needy. These actions cultivate young people's positive beliefs, philanthropy and good thoughts.

Since 2000, subsidized by the Quality Education Fund, a government fund established in 1998 to finance projects for the promotion of quality education in Hong Kong, several Buddhist schools jointly organized 'An Exploration of Life – A Scheme to Rebuild Personal Values', in which meditation and volunteer work are promoted at the schools. Students experienced the influence of religion on their internal life, which soothes their anxiety and helps them establish a positive philosophy of life. Also subsidized by the Quality Education Fund, 600 Form 4 students from various Buddhist schools joined the Orientation to Life Enhancement Project, which was conducted between September 2004 and December 2005. They participated in various interactive activities, such as meditation practice, mini-lectures, videos, games and dramas. It was shown that contemplative education based on Buddhist teaching could enhance students' self-esteem and ability to handle stress (Sik and Wu 2015). This school-based life education programme was built on the work of the sense of coherence developed by Aaron Antonovsky (1987) and the concept of dependent origination developed by Ven. Sik Hin Hung (2005). Antonovsky proposed that a global orientation to view life situations as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful may influence a person's ability to handle stress and health. In addition, the concept of dependent origination is used for comprehending life, finding meaning in life and managing life.

The HKBA also founded an inter-school society, The Association's Buddhist Youth Fellowship, in 1973 to encourage teenagers to take part in Buddhist religious activities. Today, more than 30 schools belong to this society, which now has over 20,000 members. The joint-school activities held include Buddha's Birthday Card Design Competition, Buddha's Birthday Writing Competition, the Buddhist Youth Association Volunteer and Ambassador Scheme and singing contests.

To act in concert with the implementation of Buddhicized moral and value education, in 2011, the HKBA Primary Schools Headmasters Association established a Committee for the Promotion of Spiritual Education, which is responsible for examining the practicability of curriculum and activities. The Committee organizes various activities for education of the heart all year round so that students can apply Buddhist doctrines to real life.

Between 2011/12 to 2012/13, activities for 'Education for the Heart' included Buddhist Primary Schools (*Dizigui*, standards for being good students and children written in the Qing period), the Speech Festival, lectures on 'Environmental Protection for the Heart' for teachers (*Jiaoshi xinling huanbao jiangzuo*), day camps for students' spiritual growth (*Xuesheng xinling chengchang riyong*), other seminars for teachers and the Heart Sutra Stiff Pen Calligraphy Competition cum Seminars (*Xinjing yingbi shufa bisai ji 'xinjing' mantan*). A recent initiative was 'Visiting and Exploring Program of Hong Kong Buddhist Temples' (*Xianggang fosi zhi*

canfang yu tanjiu jihua) between 2017 and 2018, which featured the participation of 400 students and 35 teachers from primary schools (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 2018).

The green campus is another feature of HKBA schools, as every primary school has a garden for farming and takes part in the Green Monday scheme to teach students about the importance of a balanced diet. The Vegetarian Luncheon is held to enable students to experience and appreciate the value of mercy and enjoy a vegetarian diet. In concert with the concepts of environmental protection, health regimens and vegetarianism, these Green Education activities promote the idea of respect for life to students.

Every HKBA school has a prayer room, a tranquil environment with statues of the Buddha, mats and talismans. Dharma masters come to the schools from time to time to teach Buddhist etiquette. The schools care about students' emotional control and resilience. Through meditation and contemplation, students learn to be grateful and reflective, which helps them cope with pressure from their studies and examinations. Between the school years 2016 and 2019, the HKBA also carried out a project called 'Bringing Awareness Meditation into Secondary Schools' under the sponsorship of the D.H. Chen Foundation. The HKBA aims to introduce contemplative practices to secondary school students to cultivate their ability to handle the pressure and stress life presents. Students can learn the art of staying in touch with their emotions and strengthening their mental capacity to find inner peace. Recognizing the benefits of mindfulness practices and based on Mahasatipatthana Sutta, the program serves to develop a holistic meditation curriculum for HKBA secondary schools with the support of hardware enhancement, regular teacher training and the provision of teaching materials over three years. It is anticipated that mindfulness practices will be brought into the wider education and the youth sector in Hong Kong in the future.

Moreover, for the effective implementation of 'Buddhized moral and value education', the HKBA introduced an on-campus Buddhized education platform called Bodhi360, on which there is a database for Buddhized education teaching and examinations, the latest news of activities related to Buddhism and value education, epigrams from Dharma masters, tips on how to turn risks into opportunities and interesting multimedia animations and comics (*Sing Pao* 2017). The website promotes the implementation and development of Buddhized moral education, which can inspire students and instil positive values in them, thus cultivating resilience. The website also enables teachers from different schools to share resources and experiences on school-based and inter-school activities (Leung and Hung 2018).

Challenges and Opportunities

Many people still misunderstand Buddhism as an ancient, old-fashioned and superstitious religion. They regard the teachings of the Buddha as difficult, abstract and detached from daily life. However, religious education provided by Buddhist schools aims not only at preaching but at addressing individual and social problems: to implement moral, life and spiritual

education by means of the religion. The changes in the Buddhized education curriculum show that teaching focuses have shifted from merely passing on Buddhist doctrine to addressing contemporary social problems, as elements of individual and social problems have been incorporated into the curriculum. Today, Buddhized education involves education for the heart, environmental protection and values education. Buddhized education treats Buddhism not as ordinary knowledge, but as a philosophy of life that is applicable, inspirational and helpful in dealing with challenges arising from religious and social problems, including the meaning of life, identity, sex and marriage, suffering and afterlife. The HKBA expects Buddhized education to play a positive role in cultivating positive values and good morality in students.

The teaching of Buddhist doctrines is still an important element of Buddhized education. The challenges of teaching arise from the question of how to apply abstract Buddhist theories to daily life. The cultivation of morality and values is based on theory alone and, more importantly, the assimilation and internalization of the knowledge in students' minds. Changes in teaching methods are therefore necessary. 'Daily life application' and 'moral reflection' are means of inquiry learning that help students think about religious and moral questions, critically reflect on their life experiences, build understanding of and confidence about their own religious beliefs and cultivate ideal morality and character. Experiential learning is also important, as it helps to transform theory into a part of life with practice and experience. This teaching mode combines both the theoretical and the practical with religious experience. Teachers try to help students purify their spirits and release pressure through Buddhist doctrine using methods such as meditation and reflection on life, which are becoming increasingly diversified (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 2011). Learning activities include activity-based learning, field trips and topics related to daily life such as reflection on news; extra-curricular activities such as seminars, Buddhist storytelling competitions, wall decorations, journal writing, visiting the elderly and exchanges in mainland China, conducting rational and logical analyses and discussions on current affairs with students; playing songs and music, chanting the name of Buddha and reading Buddhist sutras, meditation, movie viewing related to spirituality and discussions on Buddhist doctrines with students; field trips to cemeteries; and video clip or movie viewing on poverty to inspire students' compassion and teach them to cherish food.

Over the years, religious education in Buddhist schools has been hindered by a shortage of suitable teaching personnel and a lack of continuous professional development and support. Teachers who teach Buddhism in schools are often non-specialists. The teaching load is usually shared by two to three teachers. Many ordinary teachers who have little knowledge of Buddhism or who are non-Buddhist teach the course as moral education. There is no systematic training requirement to teach Buddhism.

Fortunately, in recent years, school-based programs and the HKBA's Buddhized Education programs have benefited from various kinds of support from the Quality Education Fund, charitable trusts and university centres such as the Centre of Buddhist Studies of the University of Hong Kong (established in 2002) and the Centre for Religious and Spirituality Education of the Education University of Hong Kong (established in 2006). This external support aids teacher professional development, curriculum development and research through various events and activities. Joint-school efforts in Buddhized education, including the website Bodhi360 and other initiatives, could also increase synergy and facilitate the sharing, interchange and dissemination of experiences and resources across schools and teachers. In addition, the Hong Kong Buddhist Ambassador (*Hongfa shizhe jihua*) program established in 1998 under the HKBA rewards college students who are Buddhists or who would like to study Buddhism. In the last 20 years, it has attracted many college students to study Buddhism. Some ambassadors also became school teachers after graduation and have helped promote the Dharma. Taken together, the measures above are conducive to building a community of religious education educators in Buddhist schools.

In a utilitarian society such as Hong Kong, the preaching of Buddhism cannot be detached from reality, and Buddhist sponsoring bodies constantly face various expectations that may be mutually exclusive. Amid fierce competition in society, it is significant to enhance students' competitiveness while instilling positive values and philosophies of life and nurturing their healthy mindsets to prepare them for future life and social challenges by means of Buddhized education (The Hong Kong Buddhist Association 2012, 12-13). However, it is not easy to strike a balance in achieving these various goals.

The biggest problem in implementing religious or value education is class time. The school timetable is tightly packed with major academic subjects, and it is difficult to accommodate other subjects. Therefore, religious and ethics subjects need to work with the major subjects through integration with them. The HKBA tried to merge the Buddhist course with the new junior secondary course 'Life and Society' so that Buddhist content can be incorporated into the formal curriculum. However, this attempt was unsuccessful because the teachers were resistant to further integration. This also reflects the problem of school timetables.

Furthermore, as religious schools are subsidized by the government, most students at religious schools are not followers of a particular religion, nor are the principals and teachers. Therefore, Buddhist schools must strive to enhance the religious atmosphere on campus to strengthen teachers' understanding of Buddhist doctrines and to raise students' motivation and interest in learning Buddhism. In addition, Buddhized life education is only one of the environmental factors that affect teenagers' growth. Parenting and family factors may have more significant impacts on students beyond of the scope of schools. Moreover, in recent years, the population of schoolchildren has been shrinking. Some schools run by Buddhist groups

have been closed or had classes reduced, which means that they have lost students and cannot impart a unified Buddhist education to the younger generation in Hong Kong.

It is thus important to determine how the HKBA and its associated schools can sustain their Buddhized education programs in the future. Specific concerns include the delivery of projects at the school and classroom levels and their reception by teachers and students. The effects of adopting innovation and the success of these projects also deserve extra attention.

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Teaching Elementary School Students Tolerance in Pluralistic Society: Indonesian case

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Abstract

An understanding about tolerance should be implanted since early in life. This paper shows how tolerance education has been embedded as essential part of character development in one Christian school in Klaten, Jawa Tengah since the early 2000s. The students learn about the importance of living in a pluralistic society and applying tolerance toward anyone, regardless of their religion and ethnic. The general theme of love was chosen and it is reflected in loving God, loving oneself, loving others, and loving the environment. From here, nine characters were chosen and used to be developed in each grade, from Grade 1 to Grade 6. These nine characters are loving God, compassion, responsibility, self-control, discipline, critical, positive, creative, and efficient. The character development program is offered on a weekly basis in addition to annual outings to neighboring villages. This paper shows the blue print of tolerance education for Grade 1 until Grade 6 as an attempt to empower the students to learn how to appreciate others who might be different from themselves. Specifically, God is portrayed as above everything including religions. This is to avoid the superiority complex of being a certain faith believer. Whenever appropriate, the deliverance of the character discussion was also accompanied by certain Biblical verses to support the claim. Assignments were also given to be carried out off school in order to help the students understand the concept of tolerance and to act as a tolerant person. The cooperation between school staff and the parents is important to get the full benefit of character holistic development of the children.

Keywords: character development program, elementary school children, Indonesia, pluralistic society, tolerance

Introduction

With almost 262 million people (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018), Indonesia is a pluralistic society in terms of ethnic (consists of more than 1300 ethnic, Badan Pusat Statistik, 2010) and faiths (a variety of local faiths and beliefs, some of which are under 187 faith organizations (Kemendikbud, 2017). To live in such pluralistic society requires tolerance from everyone (Magnis-Suseno, 1974). Tolerance is understood as the ability and willingness to accept and to appreciate others who are different, including different in terms of ethnic and religion (Fiidyani, 2013). Even though Muslims is the largest group in Indonesia, the founding fathers of Indonesia agreed that Indonesia should be a secular country that would treat everyone similarly regardless of his or her ethnic and religion. As some cities providing schools, universities and offices that attract villagers to migrate, inevitably people of different ethnics and faiths have to live and work together. Nevertheless, conflicts between ethnics and faith believers often occur, despite the governmental efforts to accommodate everyone as equal citizen. Several conflicts among ethnics

are for example Sampit war, occurred in the year 2001 between Madura and Dayak ethnics in Kalimantan island; wars between Dani and Moni ethnics, both are in Papua province; fights between Lampung and Bali ethnics in South Sumatera province; between Aceh and Java ethnics in Aceh province; and attacks toward Chinese ethnics in several provinces since four centuries ago (see for instance tirto.id, 2016). Examples for conflicts among faith believers are Poso conflict in 1998 to 2000 between Muslims and Christians; Maluku fight in 1999 between Muslims and Christians; fight between Muslims and Christians in Singkil, Aceh province in 2015 (hukamnas.com, 2015). Some studies find that local government might even favors one group while disrespect another group (see for instance Hasan & Mursalin, 2011; Muqoyyidin, 2012; Rumagit, 2013; Wahid Institute 2010, 2011). Several studies report that efforts had been made to ensure high school Muslim students would not be radicalized by Muslim extremist and radicalists (see for instance Farikhatin, 2013; Mubarak, 2012; Munip, 2012; Wiyani, 2015). Basically, when high school students realize that pluralism should be reserved in Indonesia, they would be ready to accept one another regardless of their ethnic and religion. This has been tried by Listyarti (2013) who expects teachers to have significant roles to prepare their students to live in pluralistic society. Soemantrie (2011) asserts that multicultural education is important to provide everyone the understanding and the skill to live harmoniously with people of different ethnic and religion.

The school board, the principle and teachers of an elementary Christian school in Klaten, Sekolah Dasar Kristen 3 (abbreviated as SDK 3), Central Java (located 17 km from Yogyakarta) have long considered the importance of equipping their students holistically to live in a pluralistic society. As a Christian school, students with religion and faith other than Christian have also been accepted. The teachers also commit themselves to teach their students how to apply tolerance in everyday living as they see this as Christ' calling. The curriculum for Christian character development was then planned from Grade 1 to Grade 6. First it took a live-in week-end for Grade 4, 5, and 6 in a nearby village where the students stay for two nights in villagers' home. After several years, the school board and staff agreed to implement a Christian curriculum character as a weekly program, not only annually. More details on the character program follows.

The character development program

As noted by Brannon (2008), a child's character should first be developed at home then continues when the child enters school. However, it seems that some children come to school with problems in attitude and behaviors. Good character is understood as good traits that made individuals do good and right things while avoiding things that would create problems (Park, 2009). Certain indicators of good character such as hope, kindness, social intelligence, self-control, and having perspective are related to good leadership, tolerance, valuing diversity, and the ability to delay gratification while also reduced the effects of stress and trauma and reduced problems in substance abuse or depression and suicidal ideas (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Brannon (2008) insists that good character program is a joint responsibility of parents, teachers, community, and media.

Taking into account Erikson's stages of identity development and Kohlberg's moral development, Lickona (1992) suggests three goals in character development for elementary students as the following:

- a. To help children engaging more in cooperation and mutual respect rather than staying in egocentrism;
- b. To help children become a responsible moral agency, knowing what the rights things to do and to be willing to do those right things; and
- c. To develop a moral community in classrooms and school, based on fairness, caring, and participation,

Park (2009) mentions several virtues as part of character strengths of The Values in Action (VIA) project, and they are as the following:

1. Wisdom and knowledge that are categorized as cognitive strengths. Included in this category are the acquisition and use of knowledge, creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning and perspective;
2. Courage that is categorized as emotional strength and include activities needed to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, honesty, authenticity, bravery, perseverance, and zest;
3. Humanity that is categorized as interpersonal strengths and include caring for others, kindness, love, and social intelligence;
4. Justice that is needed to have a healthy community life, and this include civic strengths, fairness, leadership, and teamwork;
5. Temperance that is needed to protect oneself against excess and this include forgiveness, modesty, prudence, and self-regulation; and
6. Transcendence that is regarded as strengths that build connections to the larger universe and provide meaning. Included here are appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality and religiousness.

However, other character programs might yet have a set of different characters. Taylor (2017) compiled 39 character education programs that seem working well. and each of them uses a specific set of characters. It seems impossible to have a general agreement on what specific character to be taught.

The character program for SDK 3 was made possible after a series of discussion and analyses that involved Board of School Committee, School Principal and the teachers, and finally the consultants. The selection of the characters to be taught was not following any other character curriculum; rather, it was identified after careful observations from the schoolboard and teaching staff what made good and successful students as compared to failed students. The process in discussing the curriculum started in the year 2011 and until now the program is evaluated and updated. Apparently, the students' parents also agreed that the character program for parents would also be needed so that parents would be able to give their full support for the successful of this program.

Several assumptions (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lickona, Schwaps, & Lewis, 2003; Lumpkin, 2008) are used to develop the curriculum and some of them are like the following:

1. The character to be developed is one that reflects Jesus Christ' teaching on being children of God. As a Christian school, the Christian values should be clearly understood and practiced in daily life. The program should integrate four subjects in discussion: God, self, others, and environment. It means that the character to be developed is on how we should act toward God, toward ourself, toward other people, and toward environment. These four parties should always

be in harmonious relationship with each other. Altogether nine main characters are perceived as reflecting the Christian values. They are loving God, compassion, responsibility, self-control, discipline, critical, positive, creative, and efficient. Each of these characters include several other characters that are related as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Main characters and related characters in SDK 3 Christian character program

No	Main character	Related characters
1	Loving God. Loving God refers to how we as child of God should love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all your mind. (Matthew 22: 37, NIV)	Loving God, avoiding sin, ashamed when committing sin, joyful, being grateful
2	Compassion. Compassion is having a pity toward other people in need, and is willing to help them (Ephesians 4: 32).	Compassionate, humble, caring towards other people, creature, and nature, willing to sacrifice
3	Responsibility. Responsibility refers to do what one has to do, or been assigned to do (Matthew 25: 21).	Responsible, trustworthy, honest, sincere
4	Self-control. Self-control is important to live among people of different ethnic, religion and social economic status. Using several bible verse such as 2 Corinthians 12 verse 6 and Galatians 5 verse 22-23, since Grade 1 the topic of diversity has been introduced to nurture self-control, forgiving and being tolerant.	Patient, self-control, forgiving, tolerance toward others who are different, conciliator, cooperative, non-discriminative
5	Discipline. Discipline refers to willingly do according to what authority has ordered to (Colosians 2: 5).	Discipline, values time, keeping promises, faithful, committed
6	Critical. Being critical is not jumping into conclusion, but thinking clearly and orderly (Colosians 2: 8).	Rational, critical, analytical, reflective, careful in decision making
7	Being positive. Being positive is having hope that God really takes good care of us (Matthew 6: 25).	Enthusiastic, optimistic, positive thinking, dare to try, risk taker, bravery, diligent, perseverance, persistent, independent
8	Creative. Being creative is to think and to make something new (Genesis 1: 1; Genesis 1: 27).	Creative, innovative, having initiative, open-minded, explorative
9	Efficient. Efficient, practical, saving, refers to simple living (Proverb 21:20).	Thrifty, not wasteful, simple, efficient, practical

2. The curriculum should be built up continuously and progressively so that all intended characters are discussed in each grade. The character program meets weekly for 180 minutes (for Grade 1,2,3, and 4) or 210 minutes (for Grade 5 and 6).

3. The students should join this program happily and practice what they learn in daily living.

4. School staff demonstrate the desired character reflected in the relationship they build with the students and their parents, and among themselves.

Tolerance is taught since Grade 1 all through Grade 6. The students are given assignments to enhance their understanding of this concept and why it is such an important practice in Indonesia. In line with this, Javanese cultural values also put harmonious as a central aspect (Magnis-Suseno, 1995). This is very relevant to help students get the whole picture of the importance of tolerance in building a peaceful society. The character development curriculum is outlined from Grade 1 to Grade 6 with examples of how the assignments help the students to understand and practice tolerance. The outline is shown in Table 2. Notice that tolerance is not associated with only one main character, but with any other as well. In Grade 1 and 2, students are first introduced to a concept of living with other family members, loving them, caring for them, and also to get to know other friend in the same classroom. Gradually they are assigned to know their friends deeper and be helpful to others. In Grade 5 and 6 they are also asked to be

more alert to what happen at the national level, and to pray for those in leadership positions who are influential at the local, regional, or national level.

Table 2. How tolerance activities are inserted in the character program

Main Character	Grade	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
Loving God	Pray for other family members	Make a list of what they can do to other family members	Build a relationship with a friend and commit to pray for him/her.	Write down a prayer journal consists of a list of names they pray for and why they need to pray for them	Write down another prayer journal consists of a list of names they pray for and why they need to pray for them	- Write down their struggles in praying for other people. - Pray for leaders, from the top level, to the bottom level
Compassion	- Be good to one another in class - Let the teacher knows if there is one who does not do good to another	- Write down how they feel when they receive a good act from others - List down what they can do to help other family members	List down what they can do to help others, not family members	A class project on helping 1-2 friends in need.	Write a personal commitment to help at least 2 people in need. The people should be in their neighbourhood. The result is reported at the end of the semester.	Write an action plan to be humble.
Responsibility	Practice to be trustworthy, honest	Help parents and other family members at home	Being responsible to get ready for school and school work	Write a prayer asking God to be trustworthy and honest	Share the experience of being trustworthy	Share the experience of being trustworthy
Self-control	Do one good act to one of the classmates	Do one good act to at least 3 classmates	Be alert of classmates who are in conflict with each other, and try to mediate them	Ask a friend who has from a different faith/religion about his/her religious days and the meaning of those days	Ask a friend of a different faith to celebrate his/her religious days together	- Invite a friend of a different faith to celebrate your religious days together. - Be ready to explain the meaning of your religious days
Discipline	- Write daily routines (wake up and time to go to school) - Always bring healthy snack from home	- Write daily routines (wake up, take a bath, breakfast, go to school, lunch, take a nap, doing homework, watching television, take a bath, dinner, go to bed) - Always bring healthy snack and snack to share at school from home	- Add to daily routines schedules to wash hair, wash dishes, clean the house -	Write what rules (at home, school and community) have to be obeyed -	Sharing about why failed to keep promises	Make a list of daily learning schedule to prepare for final exam
Critical	Draw a picture of good behavior and bad behavior	Write the consequences of good behavior and bad behavior	Make some comments about acts of family members that are not nice	Analyze a case taken from immediate environment: what is the issue, what might cause the issue, how to solve that problem	- Analyze a case taken from local newspaper: what is the issue, what might cause the issue, how to solve that problem	- Analyze a case taken from national newspaper: what is the issue, what might cause the issue, how to solve that problem

Main Character	Grade	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
					- Make a goal to achieve in a year	- Make a goal to achieve in 5 years
Being positive	Find another student in class and build friendship with her/him	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find at least two students in class and build friendship with them - Find out the differences between oneself and the friends and discuss whether the differences will influence their friendship 	Find at least one person in the neighbourhood who is having a different faith, and befriend with him/her	Try to have 1-2 more friends of different religions	Ask your friends from different faith, what do they want you to pray about	Ask your friends from different faith, what the benefits of having friendship with you
Creative	Practice to ask questions freely in class	Be alert to find classmates who might need help	Be alert to help classmates who might feel lonely or sad, try to cheer them up	Class project to have a special performance for end of school year	Class project to have learning groups in class who can work together in doing homework, and to help friends who have difficulties in learning	Class project to help poor people to have regular income
Efficient	Bring snack from home	Bring snack and lunch from home	Share your snack with a friend	Share your lunch with a friend	Save some allowance to donate to those in need	Ask family members and friends from the neighbourhood to save money to be donated to those in need

For each academic year, the total meetings for the character program are 30, divided into two semesters. First semester is from the first week of August until the first week of December for a total of 16 meetings with two weeks in October are devoted each for mid-exam week and for outings. Second semester is from second week of January until first week of May for a total of 14 meetings with one week in March or April is a break for Easter week and one week in March for mid-exam week.

In addition to weekly meetings, in October Grade 4,5 and 6 students have an opportunity to live in for two nights in neighbourhood villages. They stay with the villagers, not necessarily of the same ethnic and/or religions. The students should use the time to learn about the family they visit and stay with, the family history, background and struggles, and to help doing the house chores. Before departing, the students should pray for their host family, after asking what items they can pray for.

Conclusion

What is described as the character development program above is a result of three-year process where the curriculum team met at least twice a month first to discuss the type of characters selected, the objective of each character in each grade, and the content of each meeting. The curriculum team consisted of the school chaplain, six teachers, two psychologists

and two religious teachers. The barrier faced so far is that the school only has limited rooms to accommodate three parallel classes of each grade (altogether around 70 to 80 students) when they get together for the character program. The character program takes place on Saturday from 7.30 until 10.30 or 11. The first hour is devoted as worship time for all students and this takes place in the school auditorium while the next hours the students get together with other students from the same grade.

It is clear that for a character development program to be effective, several parties should collaborate and be in harmonious relationship with among each other; these parties are school board, school staff, students, parents, and community. Each of the characters being developed should also be integrated in all school activities, and not only when the classroom discussion on that specific character takes place. Tolerance is practiced first in the family before gradually broadened into neighbors of different ethnics and religions.

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A Dialogical Cultural Approach to the Controversy between Israeli Traditionalists and Liberals

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Abstract

The contention of Israeli traditionalists' contention that Israeli Jews are not 'Jewish enough' and that of Israeli liberals that they are 'much-too Jewish' are among the most divisive issues in Israeli society. Inflated cultural self-images, inattentive listening and devaluation of each other's culture are disclosed in a social-constructivist analysis of their cultural assumptions. Employing a dialogical-cultural paradigm, the paper proposes that traditionalists should respect the liberals' search for human fullness in Jewish political nationalism on the one hand, and that liberals should respect the traditionalists' sense of the decisive importance of historical memory in human cultural creativity and of the intrinsic limitations of human autonomy on the other hand.

Introduction

Over the past forty years with what can be perceived as ever-increasing intensity, the many diverse groups that make-up the social-cultural mosaic of the Israeli polity are engaged in a vocal and, at times, violent public controversy regarding this polity's major political, religious, and ethnic issues. This controversy lends testimony to the corrosion of the discourse of "unity" that at least rhetorically characterized the Israeli polity from its founding in 1948 to the Six Day-War (1967), or the Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) War (1973).

The disappearance of this discourse of unity finds expression in the heated debates between Israeli "old" historians and sociologists and "new" ones (Waxman, 1997) as well as in academic works on the construction of Israel's collective national memory (Azarayahu, 1995; Zeruvabel, 1995; Kimmerling, 2004; Peled, 2019). These debates and works address the explicit and hidden struggles of the diverse groups referred to above over the symbolic and material resources of the Israeli polity. They also analyze the discourse through which the future nature of this polity is framed and debated.

The definition of Jewishness or Judaism and its desirable role in Israeli society, culture, and identity is one of the most prominent issues addressed and passionately debated in these works, conversations, and controversies. This paper is devoted toward a presentation, analysis and critique of the main prevalent voices participating in this specific dimension of these conversations and controversies.

In the first section of this paper, the review of the many, diverse, and often opposing voices resonating out of Israeli scholarly works and public printed media regarding this issue of the Jewishness of Israel and Israelis discloses that, despite the existence of significant countervailing voices, it is possible to divide the owners of these voices into two relatively large and distinct camps: the "not-enough Jewish" camp and the "too-much Jewish" one.

Notwithstanding the significant, different intonations and variations of the "not-enough Jewish" camp's voices, the main one emanating out of it claims that non-observant Israeli Jews who embrace a western liberal cultural ethos are not Jewish enough and are opponents of Judaism. In the unabashed words of General Ya'akov Amidror, "there is much wisdom in the claim the secular Israeli Jews are not much more than Hebrew-speaking Goyim [non-Jews] ...other than through the Hebrew language how do you secularists express your Judaism?" (in Berkowitz, 1996). Again, not discounting the significant, different variations of the "too-much Jewish" camp's voices, the main one emanating out of it claims that Israeli Jewish traditionalists who embrace a traditional religious cultural ethos are much-too-much Jewish and that they are opponents of modernity. In words no less arrogant than those of General Amidror's, the Israeli journalist B. Michael contends that the rabbinical leadership of SHAS (Torah Guardians of Sephardi Origins) "adulates and cultivates ignorance and illiteracy" and seeks to create "a new type of a Sephardi individual" -- one who is "a religious fanatic, an ignoramus full of superstitions, scorn toward science and hatred to universal culture, lacking commitment to the principles of democracy..."(1996).

The presentation of the "words" of these respective camps testify that both Israeli traditionalists (the people's voices identified here as the not-enough Jewish camp) and Israeli liberals (the people's voices identified here as the too-Jewish camp) generally hold cultural perceptions of themselves and of each other that are based on the following two mirror-like, shared "senses and sensibilities":

1. WE "HAVE" CULTURE.

We traditionalists have real culture -- the historical religious rabbinical one.

We liberals have real culture -- the western, liberal, democratic one.

2. YOU DON'T.

Traditionalists to liberals: "You are Hebrew-speaking Goyim."

Liberals to traditionalists: "You are opponents of modernity."

In its next section this paper, employing social-constructivist perspectives on the nature of culture and its production, argues that both the traditionalists and the liberals suffer from an inflated cultural self-image and, correspondingly, from an inattentive and unfair hearing of each other's voices and a devaluation of the latter. On one hand, the traditionalists' natural "given" respect and love of the historical religious rabbinical tradition and unreflective, unquestioned assumption that this tradition alone defines the parameters of what can be fairly and clearly called Jewish culture ineluctably leads them to the negation or devaluation of the historically-sociologically linked Jewish dimensions embodied in the national cultural production and expressions of non-observant Israeli Jews. In short, the traditionalists praise the Jewish religious tradition while burying its renewed and new national aspects. On the other hand, the liberals' natural admiration and devotion to Western culture in its liberal democratic version and their uncritical assumption that this culture alone defines the foundations which can inspire a decent and sane society ineluctably leads them to disregard the positive individual and social human features embedded and articulated in the traditionalists' culture and to its devaluation.

Formulating this in constructivist terminology, the adoption by these two camps, respectively, of essentialist and positivist understandings of the nature of culture underlies their self-congratulatory cultural self-perceptions and their exclusion and negation of each other's cultures.

In their unreflective loyalty to their respective cultural paradigms -- the traditionalists to the rabbinical one, the liberals to the western one -- they fall into the pitfall of reification and hegemony. Both camps thereby become "slaves" -- the traditionalist, of tradition; the liberal, of freedom.

The third section of this paper explores the social and cultural risks and dangers that arise out of the hegemonic nature of the traditionalists' affirmation of rabbinical culture and of the liberals' hegemonic affirmation of western culture. This section suggests that the hubris inherent in their hegemonic understanding of their respective cultures leads them to address each other in monologist dialects and to treat each other instrumentally as "serviceable others" to be dominated and oppressed (Sampson, 1993). In the particular language in which they have been socialized to understand, they refer to each other's "them," those who are not "us," those who create "us" by being "them."

In light of this critique, alternative ways toward cultural understanding and management are intimated and the benefits that each of these two camps could derive from their adoption of them are presented. These alternatives are inspired by a dialogical cultural paradigm anchored in recent critical multicultural perspectives, in which any multiculturalism that simply juxtaposes a multiplicity of cultures whose frontiers remain intact, or that supports the leveling of all differences, is not worthy of its name. Consequently, two possible models of multiculturalism are proposed.

In the first, through constructive dialogue, the adherents of the respective different cultures -- while lending weight to their differences, including the right to isolation -- reach agreement concerning the norms applicable to the public domain. In the second model, space in which multiple communities are able to interact is created, thus affording the enrichment of the ever-emerging cultures of these communities and the production of a shared dynamic culture in which each community can recognize reflections of their own identity.

This paper arrives at its ever-to-be-completed conclusion by intimating some of the major cultural benefits that Israeli traditionalists and liberals would gain by applying this latter perspective. The traditionalists might develop an appreciation of the genuine search for expressions of the full humanity of Jews embodied in Jewish nationalism coupled with liberal cultural affirmations, while the liberals might develop a similar appreciation for the human community and commitments embodied in traditionalist cultural affirmations.

1 Traditionalist and Liberal self-understanding and understanding of each other

The Traditionalists

Despite the very significant biographical, sociological, and cultural differences among members of the traditionalist camp, there is a shared view that Jewish culture must be grounded in the belief in a religious covenant between God and the Jewish people. All traditionalists could agree with the following words of the late Gershon Cohen, a leading figure of the conservative movement:

Israel can occupy an indispensable place in Jewish life only if it becomes and remains part of an inseparable dimension of greater centrality -- the centrality of the Jewish people. To this I hasten to add that even the Jewish people can only perpetuate its centrality if it, in turn, is a consequence of a higher mandate...namely the Torah. Only a religious, that is, transcendent, mandate can lead to a sense of consanguinity between my children and Jews of Moroccan origin living in Israel. Apart from that religious mandate, apart from the covenant that underlies such a mandate, no demand of loyalty on my part or anyone else's makes any sense (1977).

From religious, historical, or sociological considerations, or a combination of these, the traditionalists identify knowledge and conscious appropriation of the Rabbinical tradition as a prerequisite of the definition of Jewish culture. Though many of them do not share Cohen's religious viewpoint, they could readily comply with the statement made by the well-known conservative rabbi and accomplished Jewish historian, Arthur Hertzberg:

“In order to continue being an authentic Jew, the secular Israeli Jew must be knowledgeable of the Jewish religious heritage. If he is an ignoramus regarding Jewish sources, unattuned to their substance, he approaches the condition of being a Hebrew-speaking Goy”(1995).

Accordingly, the traditionalists share the assumption that the decisive parameter of the definition and identification of Jewish culture is the historical religious tradition of the Jewish people and the sensibility that the non-observant, liberal Israelis' ignorance of Jewish religious tradition, and their disinterested or negative existential relationship to it, represents a cultural disaster. This identification provides the background to several of their most significant ideological and educational positions. On the ideological plane, they contend that the present cultural state of these Israeli Jews embodies a genuine threat to the very existence of the State of Israel and of the Jewish people as a culturally distinct entity. By way of an example, according to the moderate orthodox Zionists belonging to Meimad:

“...the preservation of the Jewish character of the State of Israel is an existential necessity...we believe that the loss of Jewish uniqueness would endanger, Heaven forbid, the very existence of the State...” (1996).

The traditionalists claim, as well, that the phenomenon of Israeli "Hebrew-speaking Goyim," representing in their eyes, as it does, a severe and pernicious crisis, warrants in-depth educational treatment and the investment of considerable resources to combat this process of Israeli Jewish assimilation. They believe an all-out effort must be made to "turn" the secular Jewish Israeli population, particularly its younger generation, back to Jewish sources, values, and norms.

To sum-up, the traditionalists:

1. Evaluate the Jewish cultural level of non-observant or secular Israeli Jews committed to a western liberal ethos according to the latter's relationship to Jewish religious tradition.
2. Regard the ignorance and alienation of secular Israeli Jews from this tradition as a cultural disaster of Jobian proportions which threatens the very existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish State and of the people of Israel as Jews.

3. Call for educational policies and programs aimed at Judaizing the secular Israeli Jews, particularly the younger generation.

The Liberals

Despite their many significant philosophical, political, and religious differences, members of the liberal camp assume that western culture is superior to other cultures, in general, and to the traditional Jewish culture in particular. They all most probably would agree with Israeli sculptor Yigal Tomarkin's claim that

“...the concept of secular culture is an equivocation -- since all that which is culture is secular, there is only, simply and solely, culture. All the rest is traditions and folklore” (in Sheleg, 1997).

The following four dichotomous assertions that are frequently articulated by Israeli liberals of different shapes and colors underlie their attribution of this superiority to western culture:

1. Western culture places emphasis on the philosophical, scientific and spiritual aspects of human life, while Jewish traditional culture emphasizes the latter's functional, material, ritualistic, and concrete aspects.
2. Western culture is universal and humanistic, while Jewish traditional culture is particularistic, tribal, and ethnocentric.
3. It is present- to future-oriented and forward-looking, while Jewish traditional culture is oriented from the present to the past and backward-looking.
4. It encourages the development of an autonomous, free, and rational individual, while the Jewish traditional culture develops a heteronomous, bonded, and irrational individual.

The belief of Israeli liberals that western culture is philosophical, scientific, and spiritual, while Jewish traditional culture is functional, material, and ritualistic is clearly articulated by Shulamit Hareven (1995) who argues for the cultural superiority of secular Israeli Jews who tend to prioritize "pursuit of peace, the dignity of man, the elimination of discrimination, civil virtues...issues regarding the relationship between human beings" in their scale of values over ritual observance between God and people, such as the use of phylacteries, lighting candles, and keeping dietary laws as defined by Halakha [Jewish Religious Law]. She makes the unequivocal claim that she is unquestionably a better Jewess than the silk-garmented Yeshiva student who cries out Shabos at her....

“because her Judaism did not become fossilized and die, and because, ultimately, a democratic system of government, peace, and the dignity of people created in the "Image" are grounded to a significantly greater extent in the profound intellectual [and] spiritual foundations of Judaism than is automatic ritualism, which is scared to death by any innovation, whose obsessive nature approximates idol worship, and which has already led people to highly immoral acts(Ibid).

The universalism and humanism of western culture, as opposed to the particularism, tribalism, and ethnocentrism of Jewish tradition, are expounded by the critical sociologist, Baruch Kimmerling,(1995) who argues that, in the Israeli cultural mixture, the religious components, which are "by their very nature...more tribal and particularistic....," take precedence over the secular civil ones, and that the "outcome of this is that our culture does not have a civil religion but only a religious one." Another radical sociologist, Sammy Smooha (1996) in an effort to

refute the left-wing Zionist contention that all western liberal democracies are based on a primary national group possessing distinctive ethnic characteristics, claims that the ethnicity inherent in Jewish nationalism due to its inseverable link with a particular religion is especially potent -- hyper-ethnic and hyper-prejudicial.

Echoes of the superiority of western culture over Jewish culture because of the former's forward-looking orientation, as opposed to the backward-looking one of the latter, are heard in the author and journalist Amos Kenan's(1995) praise of Tel-Aviv, which he contrasts with Jerusalem. Only Tel-Aviv, he tells his readers, "has positive historical memories: memories of the effervescent present. Tel-Aviv, the city of the present, demonstrates that the present alone furnishes a safeguard against a terrifying future that takes its inspiration from the past." Zvi Lamm(1988) warns his readers that Israelis should be more than careful, lest they fall prey to the inevitable chauvinistic traps into which the worship of Forefathers has often led peoples in the modern period. By way of a highly sarcastic expression of this aversion toward the existential embrace of the past, we quote the following passage from an interview with Uri Ornan, a well-known leader of the Israeli Canaanite movement "This invention of 'connecting-up with one's roots' is simply and totally a bluff. If we would preserve our roots and allow them to guide our lives as human beings, we would still find ourselves hanging from trees" (in Lotenberg, 1992).

The supposition that western culture encourages autonomy and rationality while Jewish traditional culture develops heteronomy and irrationality is clearly articulated in the following selection of quotes of these Israeli liberals. Anat Maor, an MK from the left-wing political party Meretz, asserts that "an advanced or progressive society is one that believes in the rationality of man and refrains from placing its trust in God" (in Eilon, 1996). The journalist, Eddie Masoubi defines a free human being as one "who does not acknowledge God and definitely not his earthly representatives, whether they are ultra-orthodox, reform, Amish, or the devil knows what"(1998). Gadi Taub(1997) an Israeli cultural critic, accuses the use of charms and amulets by the leadership of the SHAS party as "the cynical political manipulation of the ignorance of poor people, a manipulation whose expressed purpose is to leave them in this ignorance." This recourse to amulets "perpetuates their pauperization" and prevents them from adopting the primary intellectual equipment toward socio-economic empowerment and mobility in an industrial society -- modernity and rationalism. The journalist Orit Shohat ends her polemic against the subservience of secular Israelis to Jewish religious tradition by insisting that they learn "to be independent, alone with themselves, and to face up to the necessity of making rational, autonomous decisions on their own without the 'help of heaven'" (1996).

2 A constructivist critique of the traditionalists' and liberals' cultural paradigms

Culture should not be conceived as a gold standard currency with only so much to go around. It is more like phonologies, in which each sound, each position in the mouth, is significant only as it is defined by the other sounds and no sound is any more real, any richer, or more privileged than any other (McDermott, 1993).

Culture in the constructivist perspectives employed in this paper whether it is viewed as something internal/intellectual (the humanities approach) or as something external/material (the traditional anthropological approach), is not and should not be considered a phenomenon that has

a real, objective, static, and permanent existence "out there." Instead, culture should be appreciated as being constantly negotiated and constructed (Nagel, 1994). Culture is therefore constructed through the joint, as well as at times disjointed efforts of groups and individuals. Individuals in narrative and biographical telling shape and reshape their selves (Kotre, 1995) while nations tamper with memory to construct significant presentations (Anderson, 1983). The constructivist perspective offered here views culture as a dynamic and ever-emerging product of human action and interaction (Schweder, 1990).

As Maurice Godelier (1977) argues convincingly, human beings do not just live in relationships - they produce relationships to live -- thereby producing culture and creating history. Accordingly, neither culture "outside" -- i.e., its material products -- nor culture "inside" -- its ideational and affective products -- entail the "stuff" of culture. Human beings and their identities, Jews being no exception (Horenczyk & Bekerman, 1999) are neither plastic nor passive. Indeed, they all have histories, but only inasmuch as they actively create them within given socio-historical contexts. Accordingly, culture is continuously produced and constructed anew, "wrestled down" through dialogical human interaction (Harre and Gillet, 1995); a dialogue of multiple voices -- heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) and argumentation (Billig, 1987) within ever-changing socio-historical contexts.

If this dynamic, interactive, and inter-relational nature of culture is not acknowledged, its adherents relate to its concepts and categories in a taken-for-granted manner, from which they construct a world that they view as objective, existing out-there, static, permanent, natural, and universal. Their uncritical acceptance of the "givenness" of this, "their" world, leads to a form of cultural ethnocentrism, which translates as a dominating posture toward other cultures. In short their cultural paradigms become hegemonic and thereby dangerous to others who do not share the dominant culture and are thereby excluded or oppressed by it.

In the specific context of this paper, both camps, the traditionalist and the liberal, while coming from different directions, do not appreciate this dynamic, interactive, and inter-relational nature of culture and therefore fall into the traps of reification and hegemony and the dangers inherent in them. In brief, out of their static and reified conception of rabbinical culture, the traditionalists negate or devalue the renewed and new national Jewish cultural expressions of the liberals, while out of their static and reified conception of western culture, the liberals negate and devalue the spiritual and ethical cultural expressions of the traditionalists.

The traditionalists' static approach to culture leads them to an exclusive identification of contemporary Jewish culture with the traditional religious culture. In this exclusive identification, the fluidity of the cultural production emerging out of the conscious and the no less important unconscious dialogue between Israeli nationalism and the Jewish past is ignored. Out of a thirst for continuity with the historical religious cultural identity of the Jewish people, they severely underestimate the powerful weight and influence of the present national context. In their devaluation of this context, they discount the Jewish cultural appropriations of the new Israeli Jews and are blind to the Jewish dimensions of Israeli secular culture.

Inattentive to the dynamic, interactive, and contextual nature of culture, they disregard the far-reaching cultural implications of the changing political and social contexts engendered by the

transformation of a large portion of the Jewish people from a collection of Diaspora communities to a sovereign nation State -- a transformation that has engendered a very consequential change in the nature and scope of their Jewish-human responsibilities, from highly circumscribed to those that are, in the most inclusive sense, politically comprehensive. As an independent Jewish polity, state, and society, Israel has radically altered the scope and nature of the human responsibility and accountability of its Jewish inhabitants. Paraphrasing Goethe, it can be stated that, *ex definitio*, "nothing human is alien" to Israeli Jews.

Regarding this point, it is worthwhile to remind ourselves that, from a critical historical perspective, all Zionists, including the orthodox, have been motivated deeply by the urge to overcome what they all perceived as the unhealthy and disembodied nature of Jewish life in the Diaspora. They sought a comprehensive life in which the distinction between the secular tasks of human life and the holy ones of Jewish life would be integrated. As recent research on Zionist ideals of the "New Jew" discloses, reclaiming land, language, physical labor, and prowess for Jews were viewed as Jewish tasks of the highest spiritual order (Rosenstein, 1985; Brinker, 1990; Don-Yehiya, 1980).

The comprehensive nature of Israeli Jewish life seriously challenges the natural, uninterrupted relevance and applicability of the Jewish religious tradition. This tradition was based historically on a very clear demarcation between spiritual, religious Jewish tasks and spheres of life and the political, material human tasks and spheres. As several scholars have pointed out, traditional Jewish culture was based on the existential celebration and reenactment of the past or on the existential hope of the messianic future in the present. Contemporary Israeli culture, however, is based on the existential celebration and enactment of the present for the sake of the foreseeable future (Fukenstein, 1991; Yerushalmi, 1989).

In the context of this Jewish national transformation and its cultural implications, cultural constructivist perspectives can provide us with some important insights. Thus, while Zionists "imaginatively" sought the national foundations of territory and language to foster and sustain the ethnic/national continuity of the Jewish people, they did not intend that this continuity would be identical with the traditional religious culture of Jews, as it was interpreted and practiced in the Diaspora. Indeed, as already indicated above, a powerful rejection of the human qualities of traditional Jewish culture, as they were perceived by most Zionist activists and pioneers, and a rebellion against these were at the root of the motivation of the Founding Fathers to create a renewed or new Jewish culture in the land of Israel (Rosenstein, 1985; Brinker, 1990; Don-Yehiya, 1980).

Taking a cue from D'Azeglio's statement (in Billig, 1995) that "we have made Italy, now we have to make Italians," we suggest that the Jews who "made" Israel are now in the process of "making" Israelis. By making this statement, we are not suggesting that modern nationalism entails creating or inventing a people totally anew -- especially as concerns the Jews (Shimoni, 1995). Jews have had a sense of ethnicity and peoplehood for a very long period of time which was sustained by religious, Rabbinical-Halakhic debate. Over the past hundred years, with its move into a new national context, a significant portion of the Jewish people is in the process of creating a new vocabulary that expresses Jewishness in national terms alongside terms that are religious, Rabbinic, and Halakhic. These national terms and discussions are frequently in

opposition to those that are religious; yet, no less frequently they are voiced both parallel to and within them (Aran, 1987; Lamm, 1975; Silverman, 1996).

It is an incontestable historical reality that, for close to 2000 years, the culture of the Jewish people was inextricably linked to the Jewish religion, as interpreted by the Rabbinical tradition. Furthermore, the social reality of large traditionalist sections of Israeli Jews for whom rabbinical Jewish culture is a life-constructing cultural reality is no less an incontestable one. These factors have served to reinforce the prevalent proclivity of traditionalists toward an essentialist reifying approach to their culture, as well as a hegemonic and devaluing posture toward the Jewishness of the culture of their liberal sisters and brothers. These two realities, the historical and the sociological, also foster the cooperation of liberals in these inattentive and devaluing processes and their acquiescence to them. Indeed, the ascription of their lack of Jewish culture is not simply an outcome of their culture's "victimization" by the traditionalists. The liberals' reification of their cultural perceptions of themselves and of the traditionalists actively contributes to the inadmissibility of their own Jewishness. To a significant extent, the problematic of the authenticity and legitimacy of the Jewishness of their culture is self-inflicted.

The liberals' essentialist understanding of culture leads them to the exclusive identification of a viable, worthy, and worthwhile contemporary human culture with the western liberal culture. Because of this exclusive identification, valuable human transcendent, communal, and material dimensions embedded and articulated in the traditionalist culture are ignored or denied. Out of their praise and celebration of "the effervescent present," liberals severely underestimate the powerful weight, importance, and influence of history and community. A reading of many of the passages from authors cited above discloses that Israeli liberals make distinctions between higher and lower culture: higher meaning, of course, "theirs," and lower meaning the one populated by Israeli traditionalists. In this distinction they are apparently adopting the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European "humanities" understanding of culture presented above at the beginning of this section. They assume that "real" culture is high culture and that the distinguishing mark of its high quality is that it is not connected to everyday life or functional activity. It is thereby opposed to supposedly "lower" traditionalist Israeli culture, which is very much anchored in material activity and not in the contemplative mind.

Integrating the constructivist approach to culture briefly outlined above and applying it to the liberals' relationship to the Jewish religious tradition, discloses that it is grounded in a double-barreled hermeneutic act of reification: at one and the same time, it reifies western culture (that of the disinterested mind) and traditional culture (that of the functional and the material). The former exists "out there" in the form of everlasting, static, and permanent Light and Truth; the latter also exists "out there" in the form of everlasting, static, and permanent Darkness and Falsity.

Simultaneously liberal Israelis seem, first, to affirm that the traditional interpretation of Jewish tradition is its only true interpretation, and second, to deny it any real standing or compelling existential relevance to their lives in the present. This devaluation of existential relevance is anchored in the complementary reification of western culture referred to above and is fostered by it. A brief exposition of the Israeli educational thinker Zvi Lamm's discussion of the desirability of teaching Jewish texts in Israeli secular schools can serve us well as a concrete illustration of

this double reification. In his critique of attempts to introduce traditional Jewish texts into secular education, he argues that individuation -- the educational process that facilitates the intellectual and moral growth of the in-built, unique powers of the individual -- should serve as the exclusive principle of legitimating such texts as part of the curriculum. After presenting an essentially accurate overview of traditional Jewish theological understanding and self-understanding at the threshold of the modern period, he registers the following claim:

Whoever teaches a chapter from the Bible or from the Mishna, a page from the Talmud...not as a text whose expressed purpose is to strengthen the belief that God is the Master of the Universe -- and that the Jewish people are His chosen people, that this people has been exiled from its land because of its sins, and must remain in exile until the Creator of the world sends His Messiah to redeem them - - is not teaching what is contained in Jewish sources, and whoever is faithful to these sources cannot but teach these principles whenever he comes to teach that which is called "Judaism."(1988)

Thus, according to Lamm, (a) the only real Judaism is the exilic Rabbinical one, and (b) this Judaism is totally irrelevant to the process of individuation, which, from his western educational perspective, is (c) the only acceptable educational ideal.

At the root of Lamm's concept of individuation as well as of many other educators, is the concept of the "individual self," which has been reified and is seen as natural in Western culture and powerfully dominates it. This very concept is also the primary source of the major risks and dangers that inhere in the uncritical affirmation of western culture. The liberals' unfair perceptions of Israeli traditionalists as being enslaved -- bounded and bonded by communal obligations and constraints -- as well as the liberals' celebration of the effervescent present coupled with scorn toward rootedness in the past, rests on an unreflective acceptance and reification of this concept of the individual self.

Today, western culture can be characterized by its strong concepts of self and individualism, constructs which have been reified and are seen as natural. Individualism can be defined as autonomous self-containment and as somewhat detached from socialization and contextual influences (Kitzinger, 1992) Human beings are thereby viewed as decontextualized, ahistorical, rational individuals. These western conceptions of the self and individualism have been challenged from a number of perspectives and alternate conceptions of the self, ones that can and should be viewed as more accurate. The eminent anthropologist, Mary Douglas has defined this western conception of the free, autonomous, rational, economic individual as a "non-person"(1998). Geertz has posited that the

“...western conceptions of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivation and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastingly against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures” (1984).

To these perspectives we want to add those of Taylor (1994) and Sampson (1993) both of whom have argued persuasively that the western conception of the monologist individual self-divorced from its dialogue with community, history, and tradition often leads to resentment and alienation.

All of these relatively new perspectives seriously challenge the unquestioning praise by Israeli liberals of the western conception of the self and their no less self-assured burial of the supposedly bonded self of Israeli traditionalists. Their proud vision of the independent individual self, contained and alone, who faces up to the necessity of making rational, autonomous decisions; their devaluation of the self-understanding of Israeli traditionalists as bounded and bonded by communal obligations and constraints by equating it to slavery; and their celebration of the "memories of the effervescent present," coupled with scorn toward rootedness in the past, are at one and the same time particularistic, far from universal, unrealistic, and potentially alienating and destructive. No past, no self and no group. People's voices feed on memories. Without them the grounds for establishing a healthy sense of self and for genuine dialogues between such selves are lost.

Liberal Israelis are usually deeply committed to one or another form of liberal political ideology. Kitzinger has argued persuasively that the assumption of the individual as a natural given of political reality in liberal nation states so much pervades western psychological and political thought that it has made many of its adherents oblivious to the crucial role that social institutions and economic power structures play in society (1992). Thus, for example, the social malfunctioning of minority groups is not treated in the accurate context of structural oppressions, but in the inaccurate one of flawed personality traits to be treated through individual therapy. Kitzinger's argument raises the serious possibility that the affirmation of Israeli liberals of "autonomous free-choosing selves" as a normative culture is, to a significant extent, self-serving, if not self-aggrandizing. Strong support for the validity of this argument is found in the not very surprising discovery that the very same Israeli liberals who so passionately embrace the individual and his/her autonomy, freedom, and rationality also predominate in Israel's political and socio-economic power structures (Bekerman, 1995).

Charles Taylor's cultural perspective is very germane to the points under discussion here. He argues that though a liberal world grants equality and the right of participation, it does not take into account existing cultural differences that impede the realization of equality (1994). More precisely, since its commitment focuses on individuals and not on their specific cultural affiliations and attachments, it does not lend dignity to these cultural groupings, but demeans and excludes them. These tendencies become most pronounced under conditions in which integration is seen as an urgent necessity, when serious cultural differences are viewed as threatening and dangerous to the polity.

Despite the pride they take in their commitment to pluralism, many Israeli liberals fall prey to the "intolerance of tolerance" traps of which Taylor and others have made us aware. This pluralism appears not to have room for those who, for diverse reasons, cannot or do not want to be pluralistic. Indeed, while these Israeli liberals do offer equality, it is an offer that is predicated upon the "others" relinquishing their differences. Equality is realized, in effect, only by those who are willing and capable of resembling the dominant parties and is thus often confused with

sameness. These liberals actively seek the integration of traditional Jews, but it must take place on their terms and on their turf (Bakhurst, 1995).

Adding insult to injury, Israeli liberals tend to attack traditionalists for their attempts to impose religious cultural norms onto secular Israeli society, while they look at their own norms as natural, legitimate, and universal. In other words, Israeli liberals deny the constructive aspects of their own cultural norms. Raising this last point is not meant to exempt the traditionalist camps in Israel from their attempts at vying, as well, for political cultural control and dominance. It does however seek to underscore that the same political cultural games played by culturally subsumed minorities are similarly used -- and usually more successfully -- by the secular regnant ideologies in order to sustain their hegemonic power.

To sum up, this sub-section has sought to offer cogent arguments towards demonstrating that the sharp distinction Israeli liberals make between higher (their) and lower (their "[br]others") cultures, their praise of the freely autonomous self, and their burial or rejection of the communal constrained one, and their uncritical allegiance to the liberal political ideology of the west are anchored in a constructed version of human culture that can be seriously questioned and challenged.

3 Exploring possible constructive constructivist cultural possibilities

Serious socio-cultural risks are engendered by the hubris-like hegemonic nature of the traditionalists and liberals in the embrace of their respective cultures. A strong argument can be made that the most severe among these risks is the mono-logic manner through which these two groups address each other. Through the language into which they have been socialized, they refer to each other as "them," those who are not "us" -- those who create "us" by being "them." Opting for this stand, both groups have fallen prey to the old Cartesian paradigm, which envisioned self as fully contained within personal boundaries, detached from the world around it; whatever lays beyond it was conceived as dangerous and threatening (Samson, 1993).

Sampson's notions of "the serviceable other" and of the "silent killer"(Ibid) can shed light on the relationship of Israeli traditionalists and liberals to each (br)other. According to Sampson,

"to create another...is to use a representation in a powerful manner designed to accomplish desired qualities for one's own group by constructing a contrasting other who will be serviceable to that mission" (Ibid:122).

Thus, cultural representations are often employed to construct a serviceable other -- that other whose inferior culture sustains the superiority of one's own. Sampson also points out that, throughout history, nation after nation has not only used physical force and military power to dominate others, but also the "more silent killer" -- the chronic social tendency to create through word and deed the "other" in a way that inevitably leads to his/her demonization. The strong "us/them" dichotomy articulated by both liberals and traditionalists can be "read" in terms of this construction of the "serviceable other." In many cases, the traditionalists are the serviceable others for Israeli liberals, and vice-versa. In this dichotomy, one can hear them clearly and vociferously directing the following claim at each other: "We have culture; you don't." One can also "see" images of Sampson's "silent killers" in many of the statements they make about each

other. A significant number in both camps, through their words and deeds, frequently tend to construct their respective (br)others in dehumanizing and even demonizing ways.

If the contentions raised above -- that selves are constantly in the making, creating meaning and "becoming" in an inter-subjective world, that culture is a "becoming" at the border, and that persons "become" only in dialogue with others -- reflect an accurate description of human reality, then the crucial question which arises is: Does the "becoming" between liberals and traditionalists necessarily have to be shaped, as it is now, by "monologist dialogue" turned into itself and turned forcefully against the other? Or perhaps, as Sampson suggests, it is possible to gracefully and courteously achieve "becoming" through a "dialogic dialogue" characterized by attentive listening to the (br)other.

This possibility of "becoming" through grace/deference/humility hinges upon the way difference and its relationship to autonomy and freedom is perceived. Clearly, difference is a necessary condition for the construction of identity, but it need not necessarily be judged or dominated by either partner in dialogue. Rather, it can be viewed as providing the occasion to translate individualism and autonomy into collaborative work instead of isolation (Silverman 1996).

Two models of multiculturalism emerge from the dialogical cultural paradigm we are suggesting. In the first, through constructive dialogue, the adherents of different cultures, while lending weight to their differences -- including the right to isolate themselves -- reach agreement concerning the norms applicable to the public domain.

The second is anchored in Giroux's recent critical multicultural perspective (1994). In his eyes, any multiculturalism that simply juxtaposes a multiplicity of cultures, but whose frontiers remain intact or which supports the leveling of all differences, is not useful for facilitating meaningful and effective dialogue. A serious multicultural approach is one that helps create a space in which multiple communities are able to interact, thus affording the enrichment of their ever-emerging respective cultures and creating a shared dynamic culture in which the different communities can recognize reflections of their own identity.

The realization of this latter type of multiculturalism is predicated upon the capacity of traditionalists and liberals to become critically reflective toward their own cultures. Such critical reflection would at once afford them some degree of "freedom" from their respective slavery, which at once excludes themselves and others, and "freedom to" a more attentive listening to, and perhaps enriching appreciation of, some of their (br)others' cultural forms.

Exercising such reflection, the traditionalists might develop a better appreciation of the search for a fullness of human expression embedded in the liberals' affirmation of Jewish political nationalism; and the liberals might develop a better appreciation of the importance of historical memory and community in the making of human culture and of the in-built social limitations of human autonomy and freedom.

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