

4-6 November  
Wyndham Grand  
Pittsburgh Downtown  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

# REA Annual Meeting 2016 Proceedings

## generating hope

# The Future of the Teaching Profession in a Globalized World



<http://religionseducation.net/rea2016>

The Religious Education Association (REA) is an Association of  
Professors, Practitioners, and Researchers in Religious Education



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# Table of Contents

<b>R 2.01</b>	Sabrina Jafralie	<i>Religious literacy and the leadership role of the Canadian teacher in the Montreal classroom, school and community in a multi-religious globalized world</i>	<b>1</b>
	Wing Yu Alice Chan	<i>Religious literacy and the leadership role of the Canadian teacher in the Toronto classroom, school and community in a multi-religious globalized world</i>	<b>13</b>
<b>R 2.02</b>	Theodore Brelsford	<i>Breaking Out of School</i>	<b>21</b>
	Jos De Kock	<i>How apprenticeship learning in everyday life is challenged by current developments in youth ministry</i>	<b>29</b>
<b>R 2.03</b>	Marc Silverman	<i>Hope in Janusz Korczak's Pedagogy of Realistic-Messianism</i>	<b>39</b>
	Siebren Miedema	<i>Pedagogy is Coming Back! Some Hopeful Signs for (Worldview) Education</i>	<b>53</b>
<b>R 2.04</b>	Courtney Goto	<i>Beyond the Black-White Binary of U.S. Race Relations: A Next Step in Religious Education</i>	<b>63</b>
	Callid Keefe-Perry	<i>Called into Crucible: Vocation and Moral Injury in Public School Teachers</i>	<b>87</b>
<b>R 2.05</b>	Charles Chesnavage	<i>Re-imagining Prayer as Creative Liturgies: From Resistance to Revelatory and Religiously Educative</i>	<b>101</b>
	Sang-Il Kim	<i>Theology's Messy Orientation: Teaching Jesus' Incarnation as Antidote to Racism</i>	<b>115</b>
<b>R 2.06</b>	Barbara Javore	<i>Recovering The Transformative Role of Beauty in Christian Religious Education</i>	<b>123</b>
	Aldona Lingertat	<i>Whole Person Theological Education for Ministry: Five Building Blocks</i>	<b>133</b>
<b>R 2.07</b>	Rachelle Green	<i>Beyond Moral Damage: "Imagining Future Possibilities" as a Pedagogical Practice of Hope</i>	<b>149</b>
	Sarah Farmer	<i>Restorative Hope: Exploring Pedagogy through the lens of Incarceration</i>	<b>157</b>

<b>R 3.01</b>	Erin Reid	<i>Religious Literacy in the English as a Second Language University Classroom</i>	<b>169</b>
	Ryan Gardner John Valk Kate Soules	<i>The Urgent Need for Teacher Preparation in Religious and Secular Worldview Education</i>	<b>177</b>
<b>R 3.02</b>	Hannah Ingram	<i>Critical Thinking or Cultural Reproduction? Generating Hope With Students Who Aren't Like Us</i>	<b>195</b>
	Carmichael Crutchfield	<i>Generating Hope By Teaching The Millennial Generation Synchronously In Church And Academy</i>	<b>205</b>
<b>R 3.03</b>	Timothy Hanchin	<i>Redemptive Reading as/as Theological Education in the Academy Today</i>	<b>211</b>
	Boyung Lee	<i>When Critical Pedagogy and Engaged Spirituality Meet: Generating and Sustaining Hope for Social Change in Religious Education</i>	<b>217</b>
<b>R 3.04</b>	James Nagle	<i>How We Get Somewhere Religiously: Deconstruction, Deconversion and Teaching Meaning Today</i>	<b>231</b>
	Mary Hess	<i>Playing our way into complex adaptive action in religious education</i>	<b>239</b>
<b>R 3.05</b>	Alexandria Egler	<i>Pilgrimage: Sacred and Transformative Movement of Hope</i>	<b>251</b>
	Mark Hearn	<i>"From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces:" Working through Microaggressions in Religious Education</i>	<b>265</b>
<b>R 3.07</b>	Alfred Pang	<i>Cultivating the Virtue of Teacher Presence in Transformative Education: Inspirations from the Spiritual Writings of John Baptist de La Salle</i>	<b>273</b>
	Carl Procaro-Foley	<i>Mission Education as a form of Teaching: examining dynamics in a contemporary context</i>	<b>285</b>
<b>R 4.01</b>	Emily Kahm	<i>Becoming the Sexpert: How to Teach Sex Ed, According to Young Adult Women Who Were Raised Catholic</i>	<b>297</b>
	Kieran Scott	<i>The Tragic Aspect of Teaching: Hope in the Face of Uncertainties</i>	<b>309</b>
<b>R 4.02</b>	Tom LeGrand	<i>Connecting the dots: Service learning as a viable option for discipleship curriculum</i>	<b>321</b>
	Peter Gilmour	<i>Religious Education for a Structural Reorganization of a Roman Catholic Diocese</i>	<b>331</b>

---

<b>R 4.03</b>	Aaron Ghiloni	<i>Hope, War, and Education: A Deweyan Analysis</i>	<b>343</b>
	Dennis Gunn	<i>Teaching For Cosmopolis: Bernard Lonergan's Hopeful Vision for Education in a Globalized World</i>	<b>349</b>

---

<b>R 4.05</b>	Grace Kim	<i>Gratitude as a Spiritual Path: the Art of Ministry from the Heart</i>	<b>357</b>
	Amanda Pittman	<i>Pressing On: Pauline Perspectives on Forming in Hope-filled Vocation</i>	<b>371</b>

---

<b>R 4.06</b>	Arokia Anita Vincent Chris Kiesling	<i>Hope embodied in human hands: faith formation in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd</i>	<b>383</b>
	Natascha Kienstra M.C.H. van Dijk- Groeneboer	<i>Religious Thinking Through Bibliodrama: An Empirical Study to Student Learning in Classroom Teaching</i>	<b>393</b>

---

<b>R 4.07</b>	André Mulder	<i>Metalheads in the classroom: encountering the stranger as a hermeneutical and spiritual exercise in learning diversity</i>	<b>401</b>
	Mary Elizabeth Moore Francisca Ireland	<i>Pivoting toward Hope: Interplay of Imagination, Fear, and Life Experience</i>	<b>411</b>



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**The future of religious literacy and teacher education in the Montreal classroom**

## **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, it constructs an account of the challenges facing secondary school ERC teachers in the Montreal region. The discussion will focus primarily on teachers' commitment to the program, their frustrations, what I refer to as the "illusion" that there is such a thing as an ERC teacher, the vital need for professional development, and reflection on the question of neutrality and professional postures of teachers. Finally, the paper offers recommendations on how current and future ERC teachers can navigate the program in Quebec.

## **Introduction**

The advent of the ERC program marks a significant change in the history of religious education in Quebec. Prior to 2008 courses in religion were primarily designed as either Catholic or Protestant. Public schools in Quebec were still designated as confessional, as either Protestant or Catholic. These schools continued to offer a confessional course in religious instruction. Changes were happening with the rise of The Bouchard-Taylor report, which generated a great deal of controversy, debate, and even hostility, particularly regarding the issue of reasonable accommodations for religious minorities. The fact that both the report and the program were released practically at the same time contributed to create a climate of resistance toward the new program (Bouchard, Haeck, Plante, Venditti, 2016).

The developments described above say a great deal about the significance of the new ERC program. The program reflects a new social reality as it attempts to cultivate an ethos for the kind of society Quebec aspires to be (Morris, 2011b). Not surprisingly, the advent of the program has generated a substantial body of academic literature. Surprisingly, however, very little of this academic literature is based on field studies. Most notably, hardly any attention is given to the experiences of teachers responsible for the implementation of the ERC program. In their comprehensive review of the scholarly literature on the program, Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti (2016) conclude that there is "a flagrant absence of empirical data" on the teaching, formation, implementation and the appropriation of the program by teachers (p. 38). The need for empirical research on teachers' experience is particularly pressing considering that the program was implemented quickly and that teacher training, as a result, was precipitated, and then suddenly abandoned altogether (p.31). To date we know very little about teachers' experience with the program. How do they view the program? Do they feel prepared to teach it? What challenges do they face? What kind of support do they need?

In their review of literature on the ERC program, Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti (2016) also found that the religion competency has generated a great deal of resistance, ambivalence and questioning. Although some scholars note that the religion competency of the program is "highly innovative," most teacher educators worry that teachers do not have adequate knowledge for this competency (p. 36). These reservations expressed in the literature, combined with my own observations of teacher colleagues, is the main reason I have decided to focus specifically on the challenges teachers face with the religion competency. Moreover, as noted above, the research

that has been conducted to date is limited to exploratory surveys of elementary school teachers. No empirical study to date has focused on secondary teachers.

The ERC program's position on the professional posture of teachers is another area where empirical research is clearly needed. Here the program states that teachers must remain viewpoint neutral, objective and impartial. Teachers are not to convey their own values, positions or beliefs so that students can think on their own. Bouchard, Haeck, Plante and Venditti, (2016) found that this is also one the most discussed and debated aspects of the program in the academic literature.

### **Teachers' Perspectives on the Role and Value of the Program**

The findings clearly indicate that all the teachers interviewed positively embrace the ERC program. Unlike the elementary school teachers surveyed in another study (Morris, Bouchard, De Silva, 2011c), the teachers in this study are especially positive and enthusiastic about the religion component of the program. They view this component as a way to prepare Quebec students for living in a diverse world. At the same time, these teachers are frustrated by the absence of a concrete commitment to the program, on the part of both the Ministry of Education and School Boards. They abhor the fact that this program is often a filler course and, as such, assigned to teachers who have no background, or even worse, no interest in the program. In spite of being enthusiastic about the program, they also wish the Ministry and School boards would provide teacher formation, particularly on the religion component so that they can feel more confident in their teaching. This findings bear out concerns expressed in the scholarly literature over the lack professional training offered during the expedited implementation of the program (Bouchard, Haeck, Plante, Venditti, 2016). It is particularly striking, and even disconcerting, to see that committed and passionate teachers feel abandoned by the institutional authorities that should support them. It is as if these authorities have offloaded their responsibility for the success of the program entirely onto the shoulder of teachers.

In my positions as a secondary school ERC teacher and Head of Department for the ERC program at my school, I more than identify with the frustrations of teachers. It is maddening to see how most teachers are "selected" to teach a course with little support and guidance. I too have concerns about the way teachers are selected. However, I see the problem from a different angle. As the Head of Department, one of the impediments is the limited input I have in the selection of teachers. I see teachers who are clearly better suited for the ERC program. Those teachers, however, cannot be assigned the course because managerial imperatives take precedence. I do not place the blame the administration because, in most cases, they are doing their best to juggle a number of complicated administrative decisions. However, as someone who is committed to ERC, it is very frustrated to see such wasted opportunities. Teachers are deprived of the opportunity to teach an area they value, and students are deprived of highly motivated teachers who could provide meaningful learning experiences for them. Seen from the perspective of the wider society, the predominance of managerial imperatives undermines the goal of learning to live together in a diverse society.

Given this situation, I am often in a position of unpleasantness with some of the teachers who are clearly unhappy and irritated with having to teach ERC. Being in this position, I often find myself reverting to Kelly's (1986) posture of neutral impartiality. When the teacher is less than happy to teach ERC, as the Head of Department I am more than hesitant to offer my opinion about the situation. Like the teachers in the study, I seek the safe place of neutrality as a way of not having to deal with my conflicting loyalties and commitments. I remain loyal to the administrators because I recognize their efforts and I see that they value the course. They also solicit my input. At same time, I want to remain loyal to my teacher colleagues because I recognize their concerns and I am committed to the program. So I hesitate to take sides. In this case, the posture of neutrality is my attempt to maintain a professional and amicable relationship with both teachers and administrators.

It is ironic that the ERC program continues to be marginalized in schools given recent court battles. Since 2008, the Quebec government has gone through a number of court challenges from both parents and, more recently, with Loyola High School. In 2015, after a six-year battle, seven years after the course's implementation, Loyola High School won the right to teach their version of the ERC course. The MEERS' commitment to the lengthy court battles importance of the program. However, in reality the program has been without any investment since 2009. It is ironic to see that MEERS does not hesitate to take on these costly court battles, yet it does not invest the same time and financial resources needed for the success of the program.

### **The Illusion of the ERC Teacher**

One of the concerns expressed in the ERC academic literature relates to the rapid implementation phase and how this exerted a great deal of pressure on teachers. In this study, the burden placed on teachers involves the pressure of planning for a secondary subject, one that is outside the teacher's subject specialty. In the Montreal region, specifically in the English school boards, the specialized ERC secondary teacher is almost non-existent. An ERC teacher is someone who teaches only secondary ERC. This is a teacher, like myself, who has background in ethics and religion. Undoubtedly, the rarity of the specialized ERC teacher is one of the major challenges to the successful implementation of the ERC program. Currently, I am aware of handful teachers who are full-time ERC teachers. This situation begs the question as to why such an important course, a course the Ministry of Education is willing to go to court over, has so few specialists trained specifically for the program. Is this situation the consequence of Ministerial guidelines, requirements or financial investments in teacher education programs? To what extent are universities committed to the creation of teacher education programs for ERC? Does this situation exist because the few hours attributed to ERC renders the specialty unattractive to future teachers?

It's helpful to look at this situation through my auto ethnographical lens, as both researcher and member of the group culture. The findings of this study suggest that the community of ERC teachers is both fragmented and disjointed. It is even difficult to identify an actual group, even

more so to identify what binds it. This difficulty is most likely the result of the marginalization of the subject, the absence of a subject specialty and the fact that teachers are left to fend for themselves. If there is a binding element for the teachers interviewed, something that could resemble a community of ERC teachers, it is their commitment and enthusiasm for the subject and their shared concern for students.

Moreover, the teachers all share the experience of working in the margins. This is probably one reason why they were so eager to participate in the study, why they cherished the opportunity to voice their concerns, and why they especially enjoyed the group discussion. I would also add that these teachers are all bound by their shared experience of fear, fear of having to teach a subject that is not their specialty, and this with limited resources and support, and in a context where they perceive themselves to be susceptible to parental attacks. I clearly recognize these concerns. The ERC program is often seen as the “parental sweet spot” due to its sensitive content and the history of public legal challenges brought forth by parents. Because of the sensitive nature of the topics, ERC teachers are more vulnerable and more at risk than teachers in other subjects. This is exacerbated by the fact that they may not have the knowledge required for the program, and by the absence of adequate resources. ERC is the course where parents are more than likely to question, debate, or criticize teachers. The teachers in the study, however, work hard to overcome these challenges.

As an ERC teacher and department head, the problems discussed above challenge me to achieve three interrelated goals: 1) attempt to teach my own classes as effectively as possible; 2) support other teachers in their efforts to teach the program well; and 3) work at reducing the anxiety of my colleagues. The void left by ineffective or absent resources puts me in a position of having to create resources specifically for non-specialized teachers. I need to create resources that are accessible, clear, and exciting for the teachers and their students. However, it is especially challenging to provide in-serve training and support to teachers who view and teach the program with disdain, and, as a result, do not use the resources available in the class. Although this situation is especially frustrating, I understand the lack of enthusiasm for ERC when the course is a secondary or additional subject, and hence not a priority. It is an illusion to think that because the course is required, and because it is taught on a daily basis, that the ERC program will necessarily be taught by competent well prepared teachers.

### **The Urgent Need for Professional Development**

The pressing need for professional development was clearly identified by all the participants. Three of the participants interviewed felt overwhelmingly ill-equipped to teach the program, a state of affairs that is clearly one of the major roadblocks for the success of the program. As noted previously, the Ministry offered professional development workshops in the initial implementation phase. Over a two-year period, some Quebec elementary and secondary school teachers were provided with professional development that included an array of knowledge and pedagogical approaches in the form of McGill workshops and courses, visits to holy places, and conferences. These selected teachers were to train other teachers. Other teachers were offered

professional development ranging from practical in-class teaching, school board workshops spanning over twelve hours, a McGill initiated workshop to in-school training from a colleague. However, since then the Ministry of Education has failed to offer any professional development (Bouchard, Haeck, Plante, Venditti, 2016). For the Ministry this program was to mark a turning point in the history of Quebec education. Yet, in its seventh year of implementation, the Ministry still refuses to take responsibility for teacher formation. This is another chapter in the ongoing paradox of the ERC program.

## **The Religion Component**

One of the aims of this study is to specifically uncover how teachers fair with the religion component of the course. The findings indicate that the absence of professional academic formation contributes to the fear of teaching about religion. As Bouchard and her colleagues observe, this fear is exacerbated by the fact that the program was implemented in controversy and the religion component continues to raises strong concerns and resistance from the teachers and university teacher educators (Bouchard, Haeck, Plante, Venditti, 2016).

In my view teachers do not necessarily need a Master's degree in theology or even, as one participant suggested, a Bachelor in Religious Studies. However, they do need at least elemental professional training given the demands of the program on teachers' knowledge. The ERC program describes teaching about religion in the following way: "Instruction in religious culture promotes an understanding of the main components of religions that is built on the exploration of the sociocultural contexts in which they take root and continue to develop. Sacred texts, beliefs, teachings, rituals, ceremonies, rules of conduct, places of worship, works of art, practices, institutions, and types of organization are some of the aspects on which it focuses" (MEERS, 2013, p. 461).

ERC teachers have a responsibility to engage with specialized knowledge. They must teach about religious traditions and focus on the religious heritage of Quebec. And they must do this by situating religion in its cultural context. In the scholarly literature on the ERC program several authors emphasize that teachers have the demanding task of conveying the theoretical and cultural knowledge required to understand the various religious representations in Quebec, and this in order to promote togetherness (Gravel, 2015). In the religious education literature, Moore (2007) argues that religion cannot be studied effectively without addressing its political and cultural contexts. This adds another layer to teacher preparation. It is unrealistic to expect that teachers will achieve this kind of religious literacy competency on their own.

And even though teachers yearn for more support, they still enjoy teaching about religion. The participants agree that the religion competency is particularly important. However, considering the importance of learning to live together in a diverse world, and the role religious knowledge can play in this process, they are frustrated by the lack of pedagogical support. They do their best to find first-rate material to assist them with the religious content. At the same time, however, they all recognize that teaching the religious content requires a great deal of background in the

area. In addition, they believe that teachers need to understand what is most appropriate pedagogically for different age levels. In other words, good professional intentions are vital but insufficient.

As was seen above, the teachers consider the religion component important. They enjoy teaching it. However, at times they shy away from teaching about religion. This appears contradictory. However, seen holistically the findings suggest that this is not a contradiction. Teachers shy away at times because they feel that they are not in a position to do the job they need to do or would like to do. In other words, they prefer to avoid it rather than do a bad job. Again, this is an indication of professionalism, of their commitment and respect for the subject matter and the students.

The Ministry is missing the point on this matter. The most difficult part of educational reform is to get the support or interest of teachers for the new programs. The MEERS and, indirectly, school boards and schools, have created a situation where the teachers are underprepared and overworked. As a result, students are missing out on the full potential of the ERC program. Not only are teachers being asked to go above and beyond in a subject that is not their specialty, they are also being asked to learn a specialized knowledge. As such, there are times when some teachers reduce their instruction to the transmission mere comparative facts, as opposed to exploring the rich history of religious diversity.

### **The Professional Posture of Teachers and the Question of Neutrality**

The ERC program's position on the professional posture of teachers is one of the most discussed and debated aspects of the program in the scholarly literature. Some argue that teacher neutrality is an appropriate goal given the objectives of the program. Others argue that teachers need to be more fully engaged if students are to perceive their teachers as authentic (Morris, 2011, b). I used Kelly's (1986) typology of professional postures as a heuristic. I found that most teachers argue against the posture of "neutral impartiality." The teachers really don't like the idea of being neutral. They suggest that neutrality is neither practical nor possible. They react much more positively to what Kelly describes as the posture of "committed impartiality." However, the findings show that teacher stances are not fixed. Their posture tends to be circumstantial. In deciding which posture to adopt, they factor in a number of variables, such as the nature of the topic, their own level of knowledge, how they feel about that topic and the classroom dynamics at work in a given discussion.

One participant noted that he would rather avoid a topic entirely if he does not feel comfortable addressing it in class. This applies especially to the teaching of religion. Some teachers emphasize that when faced with highly controversial or sensitive topics, they do not "stick" with one posture. They choose the posture that best suits the situation. One of the teachers who favour committed impartiality emphasized that it is important to know when to divulge one's point of view in the class. When pressed, even the teacher who sees neutrality as "hogwash" recognizes

that the tensions that pull them in different directions are not always so straightforward. These tensions are apparent in teaching ethics and religion.

The participants' views on the professional posture of teachers have important implications for teacher training. Teachers need opportunities to engage with these kinds of issues in a formal training context. The complexity of the issues became apparent for the participants as they engaged in conversations with their colleagues. The research gave the teachers the space to explore salient ideas and tensions.

### **Future Direction**

If I were asked to develop a model of teacher formation that takes into account the teaching contexts described above, I would look to Moore's (2014) model of professional development. Moore's cultural studies approach proposes atypical training for both pre- and in-service teachers that includes learning from peers, in the model of expert-peer training. This is a model of professional development that can reduce the isolation of teachers by offering courses that are designed, developed, and taught by teachers and facilitators. This approach could be particularly effective for the kind of teachers interviewed in this study, that is, teachers who are highly motivated but long to strengthen their academic formation. These teachers are already drawing from other teachers as a survival mechanism. An approach centered on collaborative ventures could also reinforce and sustain their commitment to the program and help to foster a community of ERC teachers. For teachers who are not ERC specialists, Moore's model could also be helpful because it encourages teachers to draw on their primary subject as an access point for the teaching about religion. Drawing upon both their primary subject and on the resources of their colleagues could go a long way in reducing their uneasiness with the program.

The question on the professional posture of teachers generated a great deal of reflection. Although the academic literature reflects a common concern about this issue, I did not expect the extent to which the teacher participants would be engaged. Nor did I expect that the issues raised by the teachers would have a significant impact on my own teaching. The interviews generated extensive self-reflection. This is an unexpected finding of the study. The professional posture teachers should adopt for ERC is not so cut and dry. The complexity of teaching highly sensitive and controversial requires a great deal of nuancing. The implication here is that teachers clearly need in-service formation that helps them navigate through these nuances and complexities. Ideally professional development for ERC teachers should incorporate three aspects: 1) content; 2) pedagogical approaches; and 3) training on professional postures.

There is an indication that ERC teachers are in need of ongoing professional development. It is disconcerting to see that highly motivated and dedicated teachers are left to figure out how to teach the program on their own. This is clearly not a recipe for success. The kind of complex and multi-layered knowledge required to teach religion from a cultural perspective cannot be found in an encyclopedia of religion. Nor can it be acquired in a two hour workshop. Moreover, the findings indicate the professional formation for ERC teachers needs to incorporate an element of

self-reflection. Educators need to unpack and evaluate their personal beliefs. As Moore (2007) points out, teachers must be able to recognize their own assumptions. This is especially important for teachers who may have preconceived or stereotypical notions about religion. This is one way in which teachers become religiously literate.

The Ministry of Education needs to take responsibility for teacher formation. It is difficult to reconcile the Ministry's willingness to go to court over the ERC program with its total disengagement from the process of professional development. If the program constitutes an important turning point in Quebec education, and if ERC teachers are expected to contribute to the larger goal of an education for co-existence in an increasingly pluralistic society, than to abdicate the responsibly to adequately prepare teachers is a violation of the moral contract between the Ministry and teachers. It represents nothing less than moral failure. Universities also need to take responsibility for in-service teacher education. At my current university, the pre-service training for ERC is minimal. In the undergraduate program, students in the elementary education program are required to take only one course in religion. The students in the secondary program, where teachers are expected to be subject area specialists, must take seven three credit courses (21 credits) out of 120 credits over a four-year program. Students applying for a Master of Teaching and Learning can only take minor in ERC minor. This minor requires only one course in religion. Suffice to say, this is far too little. It is no wonder that Morris (2011a) sees teacher formation as the Achilles Heel of the program.

School boards also have a responsibility in this process. Although administrators are often strapped by managerial constraints, to actively petition the Ministry for more support, both in terms of human and financial resources, would go a long way in recognizing the value of the ERC program and in affirming the value of the teachers who are assigned to teach it. Policy that supports teacher efforts benefits all stakeholders. This would give the ERC program a chance for success. Without a shared engagement to professional development on the part of the Ministry, school boards and universities, it is difficult to imagine how the program can succeed in achieving its goals. The pressure presently placed on teachers is difficult to sustain in the long haul. Minimally, it is vital that policy recognize the need for a formal qualification attesting that teachers are adequately prepared to teach the program.

Looking toward the future, I would like to see those committed to ERC set up a pilot program in English universities that would be entirely dedicated to the formal qualification of ERC teachers. Setting up such a pilot program would benefit pre-service and in-service teachers. I also envision a researcher project where academics work cooperatively across groups such as community members, teachers, parents, and students. This project could work at forging international research alliances that could provide exposure to model schools in other countries. For example, countries like the Netherlands and England have successfully implemented effective models of religious education. Knowledge of these programs could guide Quebec policy.

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### **The future of religious literacy and teacher education in the Ontario classroom**

*The Canadian multicultural policy is shifting its focus onto religious identity. Concurrently, individuals in society have begun to self-identify based on religious grounds rather than other aspects of one's identity, such as ethnicity. As Ontario is the most multi-religious province in Canada. I argue that teachers must recognize this aspect of students' identities too. I contend that religious literacy needs to become a standard part of citizenship education in teacher training programs in the province, similar to the inclusion and recognition of sexual orientation, physical disabilities and other aspects of identity that currently exist in teacher education. In doing so, this presentation discusses current challenges and presents future suggestions for Ontario pre-service teacher training.*

Kymlicka (2015) contends that Canada is now moving into a third stage of multiculturalism; the stages have transitioned from a focus on ethnicity, to race, to religion. Although his analysis centres on Canadian multicultural policy rather than multicultural ideology, critique, practice or multiculturalism as an empirical fact (Fleras and Elliot 2002), this transition is a result of the perception of religious and non-religious identity in the Canadian context.

At the individual level, there is a change in the self-perception among Muslims in Canada (Kymlicka 2015). As a result of 9/11, governments around the world are seeking ways to understand “the Muslim” psyche and how Muslim organizations can partner with governments to “reduce alienation, monitor radicalism, and promote cooperation among state officials” (Kymlicka 2015, p. 27). Thus, because Muslim community members are not perceived by their ethnic or racial backgrounds, they, especially youth, are more interested in associations based on their religious identity. While my discussion does not focus on the Muslim population in particular, it is noteworthy to consider how social and political events have instigated this shift, and how society needs to respond to it accordingly, especially as Islamophobia is reportedly rising within Ontario<sup>1</sup>. As a vital member of any community, I believe teachers, when

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<sup>1</sup> A 51-page survey on this topic was released by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and Mass Minority, an advocacy group; however, after a newspaper

equipped appropriately with religious literacy and the pedagogical approaches to teach it, can be a leader of change within this shift.

To date, 76.85 percent of Ontario households self-identify with a religious affiliation (Statistics Canada 2013), yet there is no course to prepare Ontario generalist elementary teachers, or subject-specific middle school and high school teachers on how to incorporate religious identity or literacy into their lessons. In my Masters of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, training to teach English-Language-Learners was standard curriculum for all teachers alongside Anti-Discriminatory Education, but religion as an aspect of diversity was hardly discussed and only mentioned in detail during a course on Educational Professionalism, Ethics and the Law. Variations of multicultural education is currently a component of teacher training, yet the discussion of religious and non-religious identities (hereafter referenced together as “(non)religious” identities) and the pedagogical approaches to introduce them in curriculum are not thoroughly included. Accommodation for religious beliefs and practices are included, but I contend that this is insufficient training for the Canadian teacher today. As such, in light of the change Kymlicka highlights and the demographic need for religious literacy in Ontario, I argue that religious literacy needs to be a focused aspect of the current multicultural education programming in teacher training by introducing a mandatory religious literacy course for all teacher candidates in Ontario (as education in Canada is governed provincially), and that a stand-alone Additional Qualification professional development course for current teachers on religious literacy needs to be recognized by the Ontario College of Teachers<sup>2</sup>, the governing board of professional teachers in Ontario. Religious literacy—conceptualized as the ability to understand and discern the basic tenets of each world religion, the diversity within and across religious communities, and the role of religion within the social, economic, and cultural spheres of history and today (Moore, 2007)—provides a foundation to understand various events in history and today. Equipping teachers and eventually students with this form of literacy prepares individuals in society to better understand their

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article published by Nicholas Keung raised this matter

(<https://www.thestar.com/news/immigration/2016/07/04/ontario-facing-epidemic-of-islamophobia-survey-finds.html>), the province and the City of Toronto contacted OCASI to postpone the official release of the findings. This detail was shared by Keung via an email conversation on July 14, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> A search for “religion” in the Ontario College of Teachers website shows that Additional Qualification (AQ) courses related to religion only pertain to teachers who wish to teach religious education in the Ontario public Catholic school boards: <http://www.oct.ca/members/services/findanaqstart/findanaq?searchBy=aqname>. No, course on religion is offered for those who teach in the non-Catholic public school boards.

community and world, and one another, thereby making religious literacy an aspect of citizenship education.

On this basis, this presentation will elaborate on the current state of teacher training in Ontario and offer suggestions on how a course on religious literacy can be implemented in teacher training. As a segment of my doctoral research that explores the potential connection between religious bullying and religious literacy, this presentation will also consider how religious literacy as a form of citizenship education could potentially address religious bullying in the Ontario classroom.

### **Teacher training in Ontario**

Unlike post-secondary education in the United States, high school graduates in Canada enter college and university with a declared major or minor within their first year of studies. This leads many teacher candidates to specialize in one or two specific subject areas within the first few years of their undergraduate experience. In the province of Ontario, teacher candidates (henceforth referred to as TCs) are demarcated into those who will teach Primary-Junior grades (the equivalent of Kindergarten to Grade 6), Junior-Intermediate grades (Grades 4-10), and Intermediate-Senior grades (Grades 8-12). Primary-Junior TCs are expected to be generalists across all subject areas as they are required to teach all subjects, with the exception of French, Music, and sometimes Physical Education. Junior-Intermediate TCs select one subject area and Intermediate-Senior TCs select two subject areas. While sociology and psychology are mandatory course requirements for all Bachelor of Education students at the undergraduate level, no other compulsory training is required across the three streams of TCs. With respect to our discussion of religious literacy, only five of the 16 universities in Ontario that have a Bachelor of Education program<sup>3</sup> offer courses for the subject area of Religious Education<sup>4</sup>. Only Tyndale University College and Seminary requires the completion of one of “[EDUC 501] Democratic Values, Christian Perspectives and Education or [EDUC 510] Religious Education: Democratic Values, Catholic Perspectives and Education” as an aspect of “Concept Requirement” for their Primary-Junior and Junior-Intermediate TCs<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The 16 schools are listed here: <http://www.oct.ca/becoming-a-teacher/requirements/teacher-education-program-providers>.

<sup>4</sup> The five universities are Université Laurentienne, Nipissing University, University of Ottawa, Western University, and York University. These are listed on the Ontario Universities' Application Centre website (<https://ouac.on.ca>).

<sup>5</sup> Course details are listed here: <http://www.tyndale.ca/education/program/courses>. The school does not offer training for Intermediate-Senior TCs.

At the graduate level, individuals with the Bachelor of Education can enter Masters of Education or Masters in Arts programs, which offer elective-based courses. Individuals who have a non-education bachelor degree, are eligible for Masters in Arts programs and a Masters in Teaching, the latter is only offered at the Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education and provides a research component and a teaching certification upon the completion of two years of teacher training at the graduate level. Unlike the M.Ed. or M.A., the M.T. has compulsory course requirements for students within each stream. However, like the Bachelor of Education programs, religious literacy and Religious Education is only compulsory for TCs who are interested in teaching in the publicly-funded Catholic school boards in Ontario. This form of teacher training is beneficial in that it develops strong teachers within a specialized subject area, yet this same system can streamline teachers based on content knowledge without adequate preparation for the “average” student. Approaches to teaching the “average” student changes over time as the “average” student changes based on social shifts in society. Hence, the implementation of the theory of social-ecology needs to be revisited in teacher training continuously to encourage the development of students.

### **Conceptual analysis**

Bronfenbrenner’s theory of social-ecology (1979) posits that human development occurs under the influence of the biological, psychological, and social bearings of one’s lived context. As students spend numerous hours of their day at school with their teachers, teachers evidently play a noticeable role in a student’s development. With respect to the shift in the recognition of (non)religious identities in Canada, institutions must better prepare teachers by offering a religious literacy teacher education course that would inform teachers about the recognition of (non)religious identities and the pedagogical approaches to include it and teach it to their students. This development of religious literacy would then prepare students as members of a multi-religious society, and help additional facets of society actualize this recognition as well. In doing so, teachers who teach religious literacy in areas with lower levels of understanding about (non)religious identities would be leaders who initiate respect and citizenship education for the students and individuals in a given community. In this presentation, citizenship education is based on Kymlicka’s (2012) conception of *citizenization* - the process whereby individuals’ autonomy, agency, consent, trust, participation, and self-determination are respected.

## Potential solutions

Citizenship education is important because it informs individuals on how to be a contributing member of a cohesive society while fostering the process of citizenization; citizenship education considers the society as a whole. This relates to religious bullying – bullying that occurs when a power imbalance is intentionally created based on an individual’s religious or religiously unaffiliated identity – as all forms of bullying fragment the respect and cohesiveness that is promoted through citizenship education. As bullying occurs when an individual student is intentionally denigrated based on an aspect of their identity, the victimized individual is then segregated or made to feel segregated from the society. To address this concern, scholars have noted that bullying intervention requires the development of healthy relationships in a whole school approach that includes the community (see Craig and Pepler 2007, Pepler and Ferguson 2013), which harkens back to Bronfenbrenner’s theory of social-ecology. Thus (from the perspective of my research on the potential connection between religious bullying and religious literacy) if a religious literacy program is able to offer a holistic approach to form respectful citizens who listen and dialogue with one another despite differing perspectives, perhaps religious literacy courses may be able to address religious bullying. However, religious literacy can only be considered a form of citizenship education if it includes the discussion of the individual within religious literacy.

Several religious literacy courses may only address the basic tenets and practices of a religious group. The absence of human affect in this discussion removes the value of such beliefs and practices on an individual’s identity. As a result, a pseudo-barrier may be placed between religious beliefs that influence social, economic, and cultural events in history and today versus that which is experienced and embraced by religious believers. In contrast, the inclusion of the personal in a religious literacy program informs students of the value and importance of certain beliefs in people’s lives and may potentially develop an understanding of individuals, thereby fostering respect for differing beliefs and one another. Additionally, it bridges the reality that individual beliefs can influence social, economic, and cultural events in history and today.

An aspect of citizenship education can be explicitly included in religious literacy programs through the form of character development, as in the *World Geography and World Religions* (WGWR) Grade Nine course in the Modesto City School District in California, and the inclusion of dialogue, as in the *Ethics and religious culture* (ERC) K-12 program required across all public and private schools in the Canadian province of Quebec. Both programs recognize the human affect within religions. The WGWR is a grassroots course

that was developed by local teachers because they felt that geography and religion were missing components in the students' curriculum (interview with Y.T. 2014). The ERC is categorized as a course concerning personal development within the Quebec Education Plan. While the course content for both programs are context specific, the Ontario curriculum can adapt these courses for its own purposes of citizenship education as both courses aim to teach *about* and *from* religion, rather than the teaching *of* religion (Grimmitt and Read 1975); however, the success of any religious literacy program in Ontario would need to consider the level of teacher training first. Various elective courses on religion are available at the undergraduate and graduate level across many Ontario universities, but the elective nature of the courses do not adequately prepare TCs for the reality of their classroom or their community. To resolve this, I propose that religious literacy needs to be a focused aspect of the current multicultural education programming in teacher training by introducing a mandatory religious literacy course for all teacher candidates in Ontario, and that a stand-alone Additional Qualification professional development course for current teachers on religious literacy needs to be recognized by the Ontario College of Teachers. This will ensure that TCs and in-service teachers are both supported with religious literacy training.

### **Looking forward**

Studies on religious bullying and religious discrimination have not been conducted in Ontario but, from my personal experience teaching in an Ontario classroom, I know that religious bullying does exist there. The existence of religious bullying coupled with the shift in individual and policy recognition of religious identities in Canada calls the Faculties of Education in Ontario, the Ontario College of Teachers, and the Ontario Ministry of Education to adapt and expand its discussion of citizenship education and include religious and religiously unaffiliated identities and individuals in teacher training within the province. If well equipped with religious literacy to teach *about* and *from* religion, teachers could support their students, school, and society in implementing this change.

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## **BREAKING OUT OF SCHOOL**

### ***Abstract***

Sunday schools and church education programs are floundering in most Protestant churches and denominations in the US. In part this because we are stuck in schooling models, structures, practices, and assumptions born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Making those old schooling models work today is hopeless. We need to do something different. But this stuckness runs deep—in our psyches, our society, and the denominational structures, seminaries, and universities that shape and form each of us.

In this paper, after briefly discussing some of the factors keeping us in our stuckness, I tell the story of experimenting with changing patterns of worship and education in the congregation I serve as pastor. In the process I explore the dynamics of deep learning, the role of the pastor, religious education professional, and the religious education scholar, as well as implications of moving beyond the schooling model.

“Where are all the children?” she asks me, again. She is a long and steady presence in the church—among the founders of this ecumenical community church thirty years ago. The question is rhetorical. But probably in part she really does want an answer. She asks it at nearly every opportunity. It is not that we do not have any children. When they all show up, once or twice a year, there are more than a dozen of them. This is not bad representation of the future generation in a congregation with around one hundred members. But they don’t all show up. Some weeks none of them shows up. Many weeks only two or three or five are present. Considering the thousands of dollars we spent on the new *Godly Play* curriculum, and considering that I—their pastor—have a PhD in religious education, that *is* a rather pitiful showing of Sunday school children. The question is justified. Where *are* all the children? Why does our Sunday school seem to be languishing? Why don’t parents just get the kids to Sunday school and Church? It is a different era I tell her. Perhaps we need to do things differently.

Sunday schools, church education programs, parish-based Christian nurture initiatives are floundering throughout old line Protestantism in the US, and weakening in Roman Catholic circles, and shifting and morphing in evangelical contexts (cf. Wimberly 2015). It is a different era. Families are busy, sports take children to practices and games on Sunday mornings, the very idea of competency in Bible and Christian history and theology is unfamiliar to the point of being virtually incomprehensible to many. Being Christian is one option among myriad others in our culture. Being a weekly church attender is increasingly an option rarely exercised.

But we are still stuck—a majority of Protestant churches, and denominations, and church leaders—we are stuck in schooling models and structures and practices and assumptions born in the nineteenth century when families tended to be stationary and stable, and options for socialization and leisure activities were far and away more limited than today. Making those old schooling models work today is hopeless<sup>1</sup>. We are in a different era.

Most of us know this. But our stuckness runs deep. It resides not only in the eighty-something small church founder lamenting the missing children each Sunday. It resides also in the thirty-something and forty-something parents who want their children to “learn the faith,” but cannot figure out how to extricate themselves and their children from the river of life that rushes headlong past the church. It resides also in pastors, teachers, Sunday school directors, and curriculum writers. It resides in seminaries where pastors, and directors of religious education, and curriculum writers are trained and formed—formed in schools whose structures stubbornly reflect nineteenth century academic patterns and assumptions. Institutionalized schooling structures. The seminary, and college, and university are institutions. And institutions are built to withstand the storms of time. It is their job and purpose to resist change and preserve the past—to ensure that accumulated and established wisdom endures from generation to generation. We are stuck in our institutions. And it is not the fault of the institutions. We are stuck in our own patterns and assumptions, and it is not our fault. We are shaped by the institutions of education and culture that structure our society and structure our lives, and our minds, and even our souls.

I spent two months of the summer preparing the congregation for change. I talked about trying some “new patterns of worship and education.” I discussed it with the church council several times, and with the worship committee. I talked about it at the annual congregational

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere I have traced the history of the Sunday school and some of the reasons it does not fit our contemporary context, Brelsford 2005.

meeting. I brought it into sermons. I wrote about it in two newsletters. Most members of the congregation seemed excited about the possibilities. Almost everyone agreed we “need to do something.”

Like many churches across North America, the Orchard Park Community Church has not-quite-enough members, and the median age of members is rising into retirement. In fact, they are aging *out*. Well-established, long-time, high-contribution members are dying off. Others are becoming infirm, unable to be as active as they were, not available for committee work, or helping with the spaghetti supper. Through most of its thirty-year history, this independent, non-denominational congregation has sustained seventy to ninety members. A couple of years ago it topped one hundred, then dipped back down following a few more funerals and a couple of job transfers—taking some valued young families out of town. The finances have never been great, but also not catastrophic. They built a simple but very pleasant sanctuary in 1996 to seat 125, along with a spacious and welcoming narthex, a kitchen, offices, four Sunday school rooms, and fellowship hall. And they paid it all off about four years ago. But the young families who filled the church twenty years ago are no longer young, and have not all been replaced. It doesn't look so good. On a Sunday morning, in mid-summer, when there are twenty-nine people in the congregation, none of them children, and only a very few under age fifty—it doesn't look so good. Regardless of how much they like their church, or their pastor, or each other, they know this isn't really sustainable.

I brought a draft of a questionnaire to the church council. In preparation for changes in the fall we would distribute this questionnaire to get a sense of what people value most in the current patterns of worship and Sunday school, and what kinds of changes might be agreeable to most people. Some of us had been back and forth on email—re-writing, changing, and refining the questions over the past few weeks. Everyone liked the questionnaire and thought it was ready for distribution, beginning next Sunday. Everyone except Virginia. Another eighty-something member. She said she was willing to entertain some changes. She thought some changes were necessary, and might well be good. She had been part of council discussions about the changes over the past couple of months and had not so far objected. But the questionnaire terrified her. Questions like, “If there were a 40-minute worship service followed by twenty to thirty minutes of small group discussions for adults and classes for children, I (and my family) would most likely: a) attend both, b) attend worship only, c) attend the small group/classes time only, d) attend one or the other or both depending on the week, e) attend neither....” There were fourteen questions altogether. Most less complicated. But “I read this questionnaire” she said, “and I feel like everything is going to change, and it just scares me.” After some discussion there was a motion to move ahead with distributing the questionnaire the next Sunday—we just need to get this rolling, and we need to find out where people are. But, I interrupted before the motion could be seconded or voted. Virginia's feedback could be very important. Maybe we don't need the questionnaire right now. It's all just hypothetical at this point. We are asking people to imagine things and then tell us how they feel about those imagined things. And Virginia was imagining the worst. Perhaps, at this point, the questionnaire would only instigate fear.

We decided to hold the questionnaire and proceed in implementing some changes first, then maybe the questionnaire could gauge responses to actual changes already experienced.

This was a good decision. Sometimes we think way too much. We form a committee, do the research, design a questionnaire, make a proposal and debate it. Is there any evidence this will work? Is there precedent? Can we afford it? And we remain in school. All good questions.

All good strategies for gaining knowledge and understanding. And all part of the schooling model, the academic model—the modern knowledge transmission and acquisition model.

The way life actually works, the way the human brain actually learns—and the way, therefore, humans prefer to learn—is we do things, life happens, and then we think about it, then we assess what happened, try to understand it, try to be ready for it next time, or more ready for it, and more able to shape the experience into a good one. We learn by processing experiences. Not by experiencing processes representing examples of theoretical knowledge studied and explained in advance.

On the first Sunday of implementing a change in worship I was scared. I did not want to do it. I questioned why I had decided to stir things up, make things harder for myself. It felt awkward. This was going to be awkward. So, I confessed this from the pulpit—confessed my fear and trepidation. And I reminded them of what I had said previously, in a sermon a couple Sundays ago, about needing to be willing to fail in order to discover something new. Successful corporations that want their workers to create something other than, and better than what already exists must find ways to “make it safe to fail” (cite research).

Then we dove in. I had discussed with the council and worship committee numerous changes. I wanted to create immediate learning opportunities for everyone—all ages—from small children to aging adults. No more Sunday school, and no more (or at least fewer) traditional mid-twentieth century worship patterns. I envisioned small group discussions, and mission volunteer Sundays, and people doing art in the back room. But we would start slowly. We would start with small changes and let the congregation process them one at a time, and perhaps participate in shaping the next step.

The children went to their *Godly Play* class after the “Children’s Lesson” as usual, and then, following the shortened sermon (ten-minutes instead fifteen or twenty) I posed a question. I asked what they thought. What *was* the meaning of this parable about the shepherd leaving the ninety-nine sheep to go in search of one lost sheep? Did my interpretation make sense? What other interpretations could they think of? Turn to someone near you and talk about, I said. Talk to one other person, or maybe two, but no more than three in a group. In the long run, I envisioned groups of four or five or more in discussion for ten minutes or more. I had already rearranged the chairs in the sanctuary to make it easier to create such groupings when the time would come. But today I gave them “four to five minutes” and I didn’t want any chairs moved. The chairs would remain in their semi-circle pattern, divided by three aisles, like a concert theater, surrounding the chancel. After about four minutes I dinged my Zen singing bowl to bring conversations to a close. The unexpected gong also brought some laughter. Humor is always good for diffusing tension. And a spirit of playfulness is key for constructive learning (cf., Goto 2016, Berryman 1991). Then I pressed them further—another three or four minutes to discuss the implications of the meanings of this parable for us—for you, and for me, and us today in our context.

The conversation lulled after about two minutes. This was not a seminary classroom. I dinged the bowl again, thanked them for “playing along,” and continued on with the rest of the worship service. It was a small contained change—one new element in the service, given space by shortening the sermon and reading only the Gospel lesson and Psalm (not also the Old Testament lesson as is usual). As this experimentation expands we will go from singing three hymns to singing two, and one of them may eventually be contemporary. Perhaps the Prayer of Confession will also become very short and simple. Eventually, different groups will go to different parts of the building for the discussion period (and at that point there will be little

difference structurally—or in terms of process—between what the children are doing and what the adults are doing during the second half of the morning “church experience.” At least that is where I think we are going. We may or may not get there. It may or may not “work.” In any case, in the process we will be exploring and experimenting—and playing with—new patterns of worship and education. That is the goal, toward the end of revitalization of the church.

There are other patterns, of course, which we may or may not discover and may or may not explore. I do not know. I am determined to not know—working hard at not knowing. And I am asking my congregation to try to be OK with not knowing exactly where we are going—to *play along*. We are engaging a process of discovery. I am not teaching them something I already know, not sharing with them my secure ecclesial wisdom, not leading them like a tour guide through familiar territory.

What I *am* sharing with them, and what I am using to guide them along this process, is my knowledge and understanding, and perhaps even wisdom, *about pedagogy*—about processes of learning, and patterns of formation, and development, and growth toward enriched life. I am functioning as a teacher, and a practical theological leader.

This is what we have to offer as practical theologians, and as professionals in religious education. Our practical business is pedagogy. And our theoretical business also is pedagogy. It is easy these days to acquire information and gain technical knowledge (just “google it”—just do the research). What is not easy is deep teaching—facilitating deep and life altering learning. It is not easy to find ways to enable others to have *and* integrate new insights into their working patterns of mind and habits of living. Or perhaps “insights” is the wrong metaphor—a schooling metaphor for knowledge acquisition. Perhaps a better metaphor is the opposite—the real task of the teacher is to help learners acquire new *patterns* of mind and *habits* of living, which may yield new insights into the depths of meaning in the world around them.

I am not attempting in this paper to provide insights regarding modern western cultural shifts that precipitate the decline of the contemporary church in its traditional forms (this has already been hashed and re-hashed); and I am not trying to convince the reader of the necessity of making changes in patterns of worship and education in contemporary Christian churches (this too is widely known and accepted); I am also not seeking to share new examples of more effective and functional patterns of worship and education (which are in the process of emerging, and to which the reader might well want and expect me to make a contribution).

Rather, my concern here is pedagogy, which is the proper province of religious educators—and especially of scholars of religious education. As a scholar of religious education I do not know what should or should not be taught in any given community of faith. I do not know what is needed, or (deontologically) what is just or unjust in any particular community. I do not even know what will work or not work pedagogically in any given community. It all depends on context, the particulars of the community and the situation and the *sitz in leben*. As a person, and as a pastor, and as a religious education practitioner I have hunches, and opinions, and even insights about these matters. But, as a scholar and a theorist in religious education my expertise is in pedagogy—I seek to understand and explain the processes by which persons actually learn, actually come to know things, actually change their thinking and change their lives.

And, in a nutshell, the way people learn, and come to change their lives, and change their thinking, is through engagement in experiences. This too, we know already. Dewey knew it a hundred years ago, and supposedly shaped twentieth-century educational philosophy around it. Freire knew it, and made “transformation” ubiquitous in our educational vocabulary. And now

brain science and evolutionary theory argue in this direction as well. Learning happens and ideas are formed—not primarily by reason, but by images, habits, non-cognitive experiences, and cultural patterns and assumptions constituting an implicit curriculum (cf. Blevins, Hogue, Gardner, Eisner). We know this. Especially the “progressives” among us. We know this<sup>2</sup>.

And we are still stuck in school. We call would-be pastors away to three years of post-graduate schooling to provide the basic knowledge and understanding necessary for the pastorate. And the most common degree desired or required for those who teach those would-be pastors is a Ph.D. A Doctor of Philosophy—the highest academic degree possible in North American institutions of higher education—representing a pinnacle of success *in school*. At the same time, the educational structures and processes in the culture at large continue largely in their traditional modern forms, despite growing disillusionment and dissatisfaction with both the outcomes and the processes. It is little wonder, then, that churches find it extraordinarily difficult to imagine anything other than “Sunday school” when they think of educating themselves and their children in the faith. The most successful school students (and therefore the most heavily invested in the schooling system) become the teachers of the leaders who lead the churches, and the non-profits organizations, and government agencies, and businesses, and the country. A pastor with a Master of Divinity Degree is one who has made it through school, and been certified as educated and authoritative by the school.

This is not to say the schooling model is evil, or that schools should be abandoned, or professional training requirements should be completely changed. I have a Ph.D. I love learning. I love academic learning. I stayed in school as long as I could before launching a work life. And I continue to value and treasure all of those academic experiences, and all of that academic learning. Rigorous, and formalized education is valuable and important. But education need not always follow a traditional (modern) pattern of schooling.

I am suggesting that, in the church at least, we should uncouple ourselves from the schooling model. There are patterns of education and formation that prevailed in the church for a vast majority of its history—at least the first 1800 years—before the schooling model took root (cf. Wimberly 2015). Churches, pastoral leaders, religious education professionals should mine these resources. Some of this work is being done (cf. Yust & Anderson 2006, Goto 2016, and others). More needs to be done.

Such resources from the past provide ideas. They stimulate the imagination of possibilities. And the issue of pedagogy is key. *How* do pastors create changes in a congregation? *How* do teachers change students’ life patterns and habits? Understanding how this has been done in the past is helpful, as is understanding the psychological and biological dynamics of how it happens in the present. But, what is needed more than understanding is experiences, and an informed imagination of how to nurture them.

I conduct worship under the assumption that people come to church for two primary reasons (regardless of whatever reasons they may articulate): to experience community, and to experience God (probably, most often in that order). And, their instincts are exactly on target. If they experience genuine community, and if they experience God, their lives *will* be changed... as well as their minds, and their attitudes and beliefs and commitments. This is what we have to offer as leaders in religious faith communities—we offer (the possibility of) a kind of genuine

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<sup>2</sup> It is not even clear that reflection is necessary for learning. Experiences change our ways of living, and our ways of living shape and reshape our thinking—our understanding, our knowing.

community increasingly rare in western society, and we work at opening ourselves and creating openings for ourselves and others to (the possibility of) genuine experiences of God. Give them what they are truly seeking, and they will be transformed—usually in ways and directions they were *not* seeking. This kind of *transformation*<sup>3</sup> is what will revitalize the church. The western church needs revitalization, and it will not be revitalized by new ideas and insights; it will be revitalized by new patterns, habits, and structures.

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<sup>3</sup> I have intentionally avoided the term “transformation” previously in this paper. It is a worn and weathered word. It points to something important, of course. But, any sign that is too long in the same place saying the same thing becomes invisible. People just don’t see it anymore as they pass by.

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“2016 REA Annual Meeting, Nov 4-6”

**How apprenticeship learning in everyday life is challenged by current developments in youth ministry**

**Abstract**

In 2012 I proposed in the *International Journal of Practical Theology* the apprenticeship model as a promising catechetical model for church communities. My observation, however, is that the promising character of the apprenticeship model is challenged by a fragmented application of the original meaning of the model and by current developments in youth ministry practices. Main question in the paper is: how can the original meaning of the apprenticeship model be presented in a clearer way and how can we understand how the very heart of its meaning is challenged by current developments in youth ministry practices? The paper concludes that in its application, the apprenticeship model should focus on the formational power of faith practices in faith communities and the particular role of the material dimension in these communities of practice. This very heart of the meaning of the apprenticeship model is challenged by an accent in youth ministry practices on the individual relationship between youth minister and youngster and the accent on finding individual forms of religious sense in life in favour of the ideal to acculturate a new generation in faith communities.

**Word count:** 3.000 (excluding References in Footnotes and Bibliography)

## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to two core questions in the 2016 REA Annual Meeting: what is the professional role of the youth minister in the faith community and how does he/she relate to normative conceptions of religious education in the church context? This paper is doing so by discussing the apprenticeship model of catechetical learning environments, a model that is aiming at the religious identity development of young people participating together with the catechist in the shared world of congregational life.

In 2012 I proposed in the *International Journal of Practical Theology* the apprenticeship model as a promising catechetical model for church communities.<sup>1</sup> Two years later, I placed the apprenticeship model next to and compared it with other models in a typology of catechetical learning environments.<sup>2</sup> The model is presented as promising because “... one might argue that the main features of the apprenticeship model (a) meet important challenges of today’s youth culture in relation to the identity formation task of the church and because this model (b) aids the church in its aim to *be a community*.”<sup>3</sup> When it comes to (a), young people seems to be helped with inspiring exemplary believers: in this regard, the apprenticeship model focuses on the important role of the person of the catechist. When it comes to (b), the inspiring exemplary catechist is at the same time a representative of the wider church community and functions as a gateway to participation to that church community.

My observation, however, is that the promising character of the apprenticeship model is challenged for different reasons. In the first place, because the model seems to be used in recent academic and professional reflections primarily focusing on the relationship between catechist and catechumen, instead of the whole praxis, environment or community in which catechist and catechumens are participating. In the second place, current developments in youth ministry practices are challenging the heart of the apprenticeship model of catechetical learning environments, namely the full participation in (practices of) a faith community.

The problem statement for this article is as follows. How can the original meaning of the apprenticeship model be presented in a clearer way and how can we understand how the very heart of its meaning is challenged by current developments in youth ministry practices?

Core concept in my argument is the apprenticeship *model* of catechetical learning environments. The word ‘model’ can be used at least in four ways. In the first place, it can be used as a way to *describe* learning environments in which (religious) learning processes occur. It can be used as a way of *interpretation* of the environments in which (religious) learning is at stake. In this meaning, a model is a try to *heuristically search for explanations and meanings* in how things are going on in learning environments. A third way to use ‘model’ is in a normative sense. In this understanding of the word, a model *prescribes from a particular normative position* how learning environments should ideally be arranged with the aim to actualize religious learning processes. Fourth, ‘model’ can be used as an *instruction, a practical recommendation* for how to arrange learning environments for the enhancement of religious learning. In this paper, I aim at presenting the apprenticeship model in the sense of the second meaning: a try to interpret, to heuristically search for explanations and meanings in how things are going on in apprenticeship learning environments.

## 2. Apprenticeship and apprenticeship learning

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<sup>1</sup> De Kock, A. (2012). Promising approaches to catechesis in church communities: towards a research framework. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 16(2), 176-196.

<sup>2</sup> De Kock, A. (2014a). A typology of catechetical learning environments. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 18(2), 264-286.

<sup>3</sup> De Kock, A. (2012a). Promising approaches to catechesis in church communities: towards a research framework. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 16(2), pp. 188-189.

Apprenticeship, in the first place is a system in which people get trained into a profession by participating in the actual practice of the job, “on the shop floor”, learning from observing and imitating more experienced workers. Facilitating apprenticeship learning is, like in the medieval guild system, facilitating a development from apprentice (novice) through journeyman to master (expert). The participation of the learner into a practice is not only developing himself but also developing the practice itself. Learning processes in an apprenticeship are thus dynamic, in the sense it is not only changing the learner but also the practice or community in which the learner is developing himself.

Apprenticeship learning is based on the idea that learning is a constructive, situated and social activity, a vision that is also reflected in the work of John Dewey and his colleague George Herbert Mead.<sup>4</sup> Besides a vision on learning, apprenticeship learning also includes a particular vision on role division between teacher and learner. Farnham-Diggory (1994) for example distinguishes an apprenticeship paradigm of this role division reflecting a social system in which the learner must participate in the expert’s world to learn, through acculturation.<sup>5</sup> This apprenticeship paradigm reflects the situated learning theory of Lave and Wenger (1991), who assume that “the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community”<sup>6</sup> and more in general social theories of learning like Wenger’s (1998) theory on communities of practice in which learning is conceived as a form of social participation.”<sup>7</sup>

The very idea of apprenticeship and apprenticeship learning has also been widely applied in education and formation contexts that are not directly preparing for professional practices, among which are also religious or faith practices. This is the reason why models like the apprenticeship model of catechetical learning environments have entered the discourse in religious education. In such a model the church community is conceived, in terms of Lave and Wenger (1991) as a community of practice. Mercer (2005) describes the church as a community of practice in the following way:

“By community I mean a group defined by a particular experience of social relations (expressed in the New Testament Greek term *koinonia*) gathered in relation to a peculiar set of practices, activities, and ways of making meaning that persons share and engage in over time and that produce identity both corporate and individual. (...) Congregations constitute communities of practice as groups whose membership is defined by participation in the activities, discourse, and ways of meaning-making shaped in relation to Jesus and his proclamation of the kin-dom of God.”<sup>8</sup>

### **3. The original apprenticeship model of catechetical learning environments**

How can the apprenticeship model of catechetical learning environments be described? In his description of the apprenticeship model of catechetical learning environments in an international publication in 2014, De Kock concentrates in particular on the aspect of role

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<sup>4</sup> De Kock, A., Slegers, P., Voeten, M.J.M. (2004). New learning and the classification of learning environments in secondary education. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(2), 141-170.

<sup>5</sup> Farnham-Diggory, S. (1994). Paradigms of knowledge and instruction. *Review of Educational Research*, 64(3), 463-477. See also De Kock, A. (2012a). Promising approaches to catechesis in church communities: towards a research framework. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 16(2), 176-196.

<sup>6</sup> Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Wenger (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; see De Kock, A., Slegers, P., Voeten, M.J.M. (2004). New learning and the classification of learning environments in secondary education. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(2), 141-170.

<sup>8</sup> Mercer, J.A. (2005). *Welcoming children. A practical theology of childhood*. St. Louis (Missouri): Chalice Press, pp. 171-172.

division between catechist and catechumen.<sup>9</sup> De Kock differentiates between role divisions according to a behavioural, developmental and apprenticeship model. This division harks back to a division between three teacher-learner roles as introduced in a classification scheme of learning environments in secondary education originally presented by De Kock et al.<sup>10</sup> Whereas a behavioural model reflects a high status expert role for the teacher and a low status novice role for the learner and a developmental model reflects a supporting, coaching role for the teacher and a self-directing role for the learner, a role division according to an apprenticeship model entails: "... that the catechist and catechumen participate in a shared world, the faith community. The catechist has considerable expertise within this world and tries to model his expertise. The catechumen learns by participating in this world and imitating the activities of the catechist."<sup>11</sup>

In his earlier publication in 2012, however, De Kock presents the apprenticeship model of catechetical learning environments not primarily as a role division between catechist and catechumen but primarily broader, as an 'instructional paradigm'. Catechetical learning environments following an apprenticeship model show "... an apprenticeship paradigm reflecting a social system in which the learner must clearly participate in the expert's world to learn (through acculturation)".<sup>12</sup>

The difference between the accent in the 2014 publication and the accent in the 2012 publication is on first sight not very large but close reading reveals that there is an important difference. Whereas the 2014 publication explains the apprenticeship model of catechetical learning environments foremost in terms of (1) role division between catechist and catechumen and (2) processes of modeling and imitating, the original explanation of the apprenticeship model in the 2012 publication is explained in terms of (1) a paradigm that guides all aspects of the learning environment and (2) processes of participation and acculturation. This original explanation is in sound with what Mercer sees as learning in the church as a community of practice:

"Learning, especially learning in relation to religious faith, fundamentally involves the construction of an identity, a process that is social in nature and takes place through participation in a community of practice in which the identities of persons take shape through sustained participation in that community of practice."<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. How the apprenticeship model of catechetical learning environments is actually used and why the original meaning of the model should be brought to the foreground again**

The very idea of an apprenticeship model of catechetical learning environments has been used during the past years in several publications, both academic and more professional and in consultancy practices. The model is used as a way to *describe* learning environments in which (religious) learning processes occur. This actually happens in discussions, meetings with professionals in the field of religious education, youth ministry or in particular catechesis practices: the model then is often used to try to direct our observations. The description

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<sup>9</sup> De Kock, A. (2014a). A typology of catechetical learning environments. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 18(2), 264-286.

<sup>10</sup> De Kock, A., Slegers, P., Voeten, M.J.M. (2004). New learning and the classification of learning environments in secondary education. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(2), 141-170.

<sup>11</sup> De Kock, A. (2014a). A typology of catechetical learning environments. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 18(2), p. 277.

<sup>12</sup> De Kock, A. (2012a). Promising approaches to catechesis in church communities: towards a research framework. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 16(2), p. 185.

<sup>13</sup> Mercer, J.A. (2005). *Welcoming children. A practical theology of childhood*. St. Louis (Missouri): Chalice Press, p. 193.

function of the model can also be at stake in empirical research, for example in the PhD research project of Meerveld.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the model is also used as a way of *interpretation* of the environments in which (religious) learning is at stake. The apprenticeship model as a try to *heuristically search for explanations and meanings* in how things are going on in learning environments is primarily at stake in the different journal articles I already hit but also in other research projects we conduct in our Research Center for Youth, Church and Culture (OJKC).<sup>15</sup> How learning and learning environments are conceptualized in a variety of OJKC research projects is reviewed in De Kock (2015c).<sup>16</sup>

Next, the apprenticeship model is also used in a *prescribing* way: it then prescribes from a particular normative position how learning environments should ideally be arranged with the aim to actualize religious learning processes. This is done for example in De Kock (2012b).<sup>17</sup> And lastly, the model is also used as an instruction, a practical recommendations for how to arrange learning environments for the enhancement of religious learning. This is done for example in the Dutch handbook on catechesis practices “Altijd Leerling”.<sup>18</sup>

What I observe in all these different reflections on apprenticeship learning is foremost a particular concentration on the role division between catechist and catechumen and the corresponding processes of modeling and imitating. The original explanation of the apprenticeship model in terms of a paradigm that guides *all* aspects of the learning environment and corresponding processes of participation and acculturation has, however, a minor position in these reflections. Most of the times the very idea of apprenticeship learning is applied in a narrow sense, focusing on the worth of personal interactions between older and younger generations, rather in a broad sense, focusing on living and acting in shared faith practices.

Three recent “reactions” to the apprenticeship model as originally presented<sup>19</sup> underline the need to bring the original meaning of the model to the foreground again.

First, Holmqvist (2014) argued that in the reflection on enhancing religious learning more emphasis should be laid on the role of material objects or tools and materiality.<sup>20</sup> Holmqvist analyses: “In his concept of the ‘learning environment’, De Kock understands environment in terms of the surroundings in which action is taking place, and learning as an individual activity occurring between the catechist and the catechumen”.<sup>21</sup> In 2012, Dutch scholar Meijer plead for taking the material aspect of religion serious, preventing ourselves as researchers to only focus on (abstract) belief systems.<sup>22</sup> The original meaning of the

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<sup>14</sup> Meerveld (20XX). The learning results of catechesis practices. *Dissertation in progress*.

<sup>15</sup> See [www.ojkc.nl/en](http://www.ojkc.nl/en)

<sup>16</sup> De Kock, A. (2015c). What about *learning* in practical theological studies? Toward more conceptual clarity. *SAGE Open*, 5(2), DOI: 10.1177/2158244015592682

<sup>17</sup> De Kock, A. (2012b). Een veelbelovende benadering. *Catechese volgens het meester-gezel-leerlingmodel. Handelingen*, 39(2), 21-31.

<sup>18</sup> De Kock, A., & Verboom, W. (e.a.) (2011). *Altijd leerling. Basisboek catechese*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum.

<sup>19</sup> In De Kock, A. (2012a). Promising approaches to catechesis in church communities: towards a research framework. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 16(2), 176-196; and De Kock, A. (2014a). A typology of catechetical learning environments. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 18(2), 264-286.

<sup>20</sup> Holmqvist, M. (2014). Learning Religion in Confirmation: Mediating the Material Logics of Religion. An ethnographic case study of religious learning in confirmation within the Church of Norway. *Dissertation MF Norwegian School of Theology*; see also Kaufman, T.S. & Sandsmark, A. (2015). Spaces of Possibilities. The Role of Artifacts in Religious Learning Processes for Vulnerable Youth. *Journal of Youth and Theology* 14(2), 138-154.

<sup>21</sup> Holmqvist, M. (2014). Learning Religion in Confirmation: Mediating the Material Logics of Religion. An ethnographic case study of religious learning in confirmation within the Church of Norway. *Dissertation MF Norwegian School of Theology*, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> Meijer, B. (2012). *Mediation and the genesis of presence towards a material approach to religion*. Inaugural lecture, 19 oktober 2012, Utrecht University, The Netherlands.

apprenticeship model has indeed the potential to focus not only on belief systems and personal interactions of participants in which belief is at stake, but also on faith practices in faith communities and the particular role of the material dimension in these communities of practice.

Second, Meerveld (20XX)<sup>23</sup> problematizes that De Kock (2014) couple the apprenticeship learning model directly with one of three definitions of catechesis as distinguished by Westerhoff (1987):<sup>24</sup> Westerhoff distinguishes three ways of defining catechesis: (1) as Christian instruction, (2) as Christian formation, and (3) as Christian education. According to De Kock (2014) an apprenticeship model of role division reflects catechesis as formation, meaning in the words of Westerhoff “experience Christian faith and life”. But Meerveld (20XX) argues that you should not take apart formation from the other two functions of catechesis: instruction (to acquire knowledge and skills considered necessary and useful to Christian life), and education (to reflect on experience in the light of Christian faith and life). According to Meerveld (20XX) the unique character of religious learning in faith communities is the innerconnectedness of instruction, education and formation. From this observation of Meerveld we can learn that indeed the original meaning of the apprenticeship model indeed is hinting on this interrelatedness.

Third, De Kock (2014b) empirically underlines the argument of Meerveld (20XX).<sup>25</sup> In his interview study among catechists in Dutch protestant churches, he concludes that “... the respondents’ conceptions of role divisions of catechist and catechumens only partly reflect the different categories found in the typology, i.e. role division following (a) a behavioural model, (b) a developmental model, and (c) an apprenticeship model. At the same time, configurations of catechist and catechumen roles were found that cannot be easily captured by this differentiation in the typology.”<sup>26</sup> The same type of conclusion is formulated when it comes to learning goals catechists strive for.

## **5. Developments in youth ministry challenging the original meaning of the apprenticeship model**

Not only a ‘narrow’ use of the apprenticeship model in academic and professional reflections, also current developments in youth ministry practices, initiated either by congregations or par-church organisations, are challenging the original explanation of the apprenticeship model in terms of a paradigm that guides *all* aspects of the learning environment and corresponding processes of participation and acculturation.

A first development is an increasing emphasis on liquid communities instead of static/fixed faith communities.<sup>27</sup> A young generation that is religiously interested feels often not helped with a traditional form of religious community like the local church congregations or the Christian school but is helped with light, temporal and flexible (online or streetlevel) communities. Church leaders and youth ministry leaders alike are embracing this development and seek to be relevantly present in these liquid communities. This results in a pedagogical focus on the ‘inspirational modelling figure’ of the youth minister which is modelling the good Christian life in the hope it will be observed and imitated in a way by young people. Participation in church practices and acculturation in an existing (traditional or not) faith community is not at the foreground of the pedagogical task.

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<sup>23</sup> Meerveld (20XX). The learning results of catechesis practices. *Dissertation in progress*.

<sup>24</sup> Westerhoff, J. (1987). Formation, education, instruction. *Religious education*, 82(4), 578–591.

<sup>25</sup> De Kock, A. (2014b). Catechists’ conceptions of their catechetical learning environments. *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 2014, 14(1), 3–21.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> See De Kock, A. (2015b). Schools and religious communities’ contributions to the religious formation of Christian youth. *International Journal of Christianity and Education*, 19, 121–134.

A second development I observe is an increasing emphasis on the role of parents in youth ministry practices.<sup>28</sup> After a period of professionalization of youth ministry practices, including the appointment of paid professional youth ministers in church congregations, nowadays the role of the own parents of young people in the faith formation endeavour is accentuated again. An important reason for this is the too fragmented situation that can be observed in many faith communities in which church education is completely isolated from the faith formation at home, and in the case there is any faith formation at home. Current generation of young parents are, partly as a result of the first development towards liquid communities, however loosely coupled with local church congregational life and much more focussed on guiding their children towards an individual religious stance in life: a focus which is to a certain extent in contrast with a focus on acculturation in a community of practice of the faith community.

A third development is an increasing emphasis on missionary practices in church's youth ministry.<sup>29</sup> The point here is that the ideal in these practices is often much more about the *sharing of the story* of the Gospel than about the (full) *participation in the faith community* that conserves and lives the story. Then, youth ministers become a type of modellers who show how you can uphold certain religious beliefs and how you can understand the Gospel, much more than modellers of how can be participated in faith communities.

These current developments in youth ministry challenges the original meaning of the apprenticeship model and, thus, underline in its own way the need to bring the original meaning of the model to the foreground again.

## 6. Conclusion

The problem statement for this article was as follows. How can the original meaning of the apprenticeship model be presented in a clearer way and how can we understand how the very heart of its meaning is challenged by current developments in youth ministry practices? The apprenticeship model of (catechetical) learning environments in faith communities is about a social system in which the learner must clearly participate in the expert's world to learn, to construct an identity, through acculturation.<sup>30</sup> To present and to reflect on this original meaning of the model in a clearer way the model should be used as a paradigm that guides *all* aspects of the learning environment (and not solely the interaction between catechist and catechumen) and corresponding processes of participation and acculturation (and not solely the processes of modeling and imitating). This means a pedagogical and theological focus on the formational power of faith practices in faith communities and the particular role of the material dimension in these communities of practice. Furthermore, this means a pedagogical and theological focus on the interconnectedness of both instruction, education and formation in faith learning processes. This very heart of the meaning of the apprenticeship model is challenged by current developments in youth ministry with an accent on the individual relationship between youth minister and youngster and the accent on finding individual forms of religious sense in life in favour of the ideal to acculturate a new generation in faith communities.

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<sup>28</sup> See De Kock, A., Elhorst, W., & Barnard, M. (2015). The comeback of parents in catechesis practices. *Journal of Youth and Theology*, 14(2), 155-171.

<sup>29</sup> See De Kock, A. (2015a). Being a church through religious learning at the street level. *Ecclesial Practices*, 2, 217-234.

<sup>30</sup> De Kock, A. (2012a). Promising approaches to catechesis in church communities: towards a research framework. *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 16(2), 176-196; Mercer, J.A. (2005). *Welcoming children. A practical theology of childhood*. St. Louis (Missouri): Chalice Press.

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## **Hope in Janusz Korczak's Pedagogy of Realistic-Messianism**

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### Abstract

This paper explores the approach of 'Realistic – Messianism' to moral education developed by the humanist-progressive moral educator Janusz Korczak, and the role hope plays in it. This pair of terms seems to be an oxymoron. However, their employment is intentional and the paper will demonstrate their dialectical interdependence: 'Messianism' encapsulates the educative drive to humanize the world and 'Realistic' sets up empirically verifiable, ethical limits to messianic strivings, and serves as an anti-dote to the dangerous pitfalls into which romantic and mystical forms of Messianism fall.

# Hope in Janusz Korczak's Pedagogy of Realistic-Messianism

Marc Silverman, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

## Opening

In this paper I will explore an approach to moral education developed by the outstanding humanist moral educator Janusz Korczak and implemented by him in the two orphanages he led from 1912 to 1942. I call this approach 'Realistic – Messianism'. In the course of describing and analyzing its main features I will examine the role hope plays in it.

As Korczak is relatively unknown to the educated English speaking public, I want to share some words on Janusz Korczak's life before entering into the heart of this paper's argument. Henryk Goldszmit, known to the world by his pen name, Janusz Korczak was born in Warsaw to a highly acculturated Polish Jewish family, in 1878/9, and was murdered in the Treblinka death camp, in 1942. Those familiar with his life, writings, educational thought and work consider him as one of the twentieth century's outstanding humanist moral educators and an exceptionally gifted, path-breaking social-pedagogue.<sup>1</sup>

In the two orphanages he headed, a Polish one (1919-1936) and a Polish-Jewish one (1912-1942) he developed and implemented a rich array of educational practices, methods and frameworks later known as the Korczakian system. This 'system' enabled emotionally deprived and abused children from broken families with considerable social-interpersonal pathologies to undergo significant processes of self-re-formation during and through their residence in the orphanage over a period of six to eight years.

Lending respect to human beings in general, and to children, in particular, in their respective concrete, physical, and mental particularities including (paraphrasing Dostoyevsky) the–person-coughing–next-to-you-on-a-bus is the hallmark of Korczak's humanism. The type of respect to human beings in their concreteness and particularity that Korczak accorded to them differs considerably from the self-proclaimed humanism of so many highly educated people who greatly respect their ideal conception of humanity while encountering great difficulty in actually respecting the real people who comprise it. Korczak translated this humanism throughout his adult life into actual educational practices devoted to accompanying, supporting and advancing persons' – mainly children's - well-being, positive growth and development.

## The Messianic Component in Korczak's Realist Messianism

The Messianic component of realistic-messianism as I conceive it, in the apparent oxymoron-like nature of this conceptual pair, connotes a strong educative drive, more precisely a powerful existential drivenness to humanize the world. From his early years as a secondary school student (in the early 1890's) to the very end of his life (August 5, 1942) Korczak sought to make the world a better place for human beings and to make better human beings for the world. His struggle to realize goodness in an evil world was indefatigable<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Kohlberg, 1981; Frost, 1983; Lifton, 1988

<sup>2</sup> *Janusz Korczak: The Struggle for Goodness in an Evil World* is the title the accomplished scholar of Korczak's life, writings and educational work, Dr. Shimon Frost, may his memory be a blessing,

This drivenness was inspired by two main sources: One related to Korczak's personal consciousness, his sense of self; the other to the world-view he developed and held.

### **Korczak's sense of self**

Evidence garnered from his auto-biographical writings suggests that Korczak was a child of ethical and psychic sensitivity; indeed he was a bearer of "... a dangerous excess of sensitivity." (Neverly in Wolins,1967:12). Korczak's sense of being called upon to serve humanity and the world and to make a significant contribution to improving things, coupled with *Weltschmerz*, feeling the painfulness of existence, and compassion for suffering - "for all that lives, suffers and wanders"(Korczak, 1998: 357) appear consistently throughout his life and are expressed in many of his writings. The following passage quoted from the diary Korczak kept during the last months in the Warsaw Ghetto (May-August, 1942 ), later published as *The Ghetto Diary*<sup>3</sup>, suggests that already at a very early age – to be precise at the age of five - Korczak experienced such feelings and held such thoughts:

In an intimate chat, I confided to grannie my bold scheme to remake the world. It was—no less, no more—to throw away all money. How and where, and what to do next I probably had no idea. Do not judge me too harshly. I was only five then, and the problem was perplexingly difficult: what to do so there wouldn't be any dirty, ragged and hungry children with whom one was not allowed to play in the backyard...

(<http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf>:17)

In a semi-autobiographical work which reflects his sense of self as an adolescent we find the following passage (a good number of others in a similar vein appear in this work):

I was walking on a board-walk over a stream and noticed a small insect drowning in it...I wondered why - for what- is this insect struggling so hard to survive? ...Is its minuscule life so precious to it? And suddenly the thought "to human beings?" crossed my mind. Saving the life of this insect would entail getting down from the board-walk and getting the bottom of my feet wet. Is this worth such efforts? And then all of a sudden I heard a voice: - If now, young man, you are unwilling to make a small sacrifice to save this insect's life, when you become an adult you will not be willing to make a larger sacrifice to save the life of a human being. How ever-so delighted I became when I observed the insect spreading-out, drying and

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considered giving to his work-in-progress on Korczak's humanist legacy. Unexpectedly and unfortunately he died before completing this work.

<sup>3</sup> Internal self-reflection in the wake of various experiences and autobiographical accounts play a significant role in much of Korczak's writings. Korczak had considered writing a personal diary before the outbreak of World War Two, in August, 1939. However, he actually only managed to begin writing it on May 15, 1942 and continued writing it until his deportation to the Treblinka death camp with the children of the Jewish orphanage he headed and its educational administrative staff on August 5, 1942. Thus the diary covers less than three full months. In this diary Korczak relates to a rich variety of subjects and topics: Distant memories from his childhood and adolescence; his hopes for the future; mysterious matters beyond and above him; responses to major perennial questions on the world, society and human beings; sincere, harsh and painful reports about daily life in the ghetto, and his struggles with its difficulties and with himself, on dreams, visions and fantasies, and more.

straitening its tiny wings in my hand. We won't meet again - Fly away and be happy!"(Korczak, 1999: 189)

Jumping ahead some 40 years later to two passages from his Ghetto diary mentioned above, and thereby skipping over other passages expressing these feelings from his writings in his young and older adult years, Korczak states:

My life has been difficult but interesting. In my younger days I asked God for precisely that. 'God, give me a hard life but let it be beautiful, rich and aspiring'.

(<http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf> :64)

I exist not to be loved and admired, but myself to act and love. It is not the duty of those around to help me but I am duty-bound to look after the world, after man.(Ibid: 53)

### **Korczak's world-view**

Korczak was endowed with superior analytical-conceptual skills, and he adopted a strict empirical-statistical approach based on in-depth observation of phenomena – behavioral modes, physical expressions (body language) and more – to gain knowledge of human beings, especially children and their worlds. At the same time, his precise in-depth observation of phenomena and his exceptional ability to read people and children accurately with an impressive minimum of subjective bias<sup>4</sup> led him to a religious-ethical perspective generated by the radical wonder he experienced in his encounter with the mysterious, impenetrable aspects of life. In strong contrast to many positivists whose scientific-empirical observation of the world lead them to a certain conclusion that God does not exist and that human beings should not believe in anything beyond what they can learn from their reason and senses, it is precisely these observations in their intricate details that inspired Korczak with religious-ethical belief.

An examination of Korczak's writings and life experiences from his youthful through his mature and older adult years discloses that Korczak's religiosity was inspired by his encounters with the 'world and all its inhabitants' (Psalms,24-1) and was composed of the following main sensibilities: i. A Supreme Being exists; ii. This Supreme Being is infinite, and experienced in terms of an infinite harmony; iii. Human reason cannot grasp the Supreme Being; iv. However, this Being can be experienced in "everything"; v. God's presence is especially evident in ethical behavior and prayer. (Korczak, 1999:146-147; 156-157).

Korczak's experience and understanding of Creation and not of any particular-historical revelation is the centerpiece of his religiosity. His religious faith and the demands it made on him flowed from his understanding of God's presence in Creation and in human phenomena emerging out of it. In many of the passages in his writings Korczak relates passionately to the power of growth in nature, often using poetical language. These passages, which can be called odes to creation, are essentially personal prayers of gratitude to God for His gifts. As one illustration among many<sup>5</sup>, in the following passage from his Ghetto diary Korczak contrasts his world view to

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<sup>4</sup> Simon, E., 1949

<sup>5</sup> Korczak, 1999; 1998: 357-360; 2003: 209

Nietzsche's:

I intend to refute a deceitful book by a false prophet. This book has done a great deal of harm.

Also sprach Zarathustra.

And I spoke; I had the honor to speak, with Zarathustra. His wise mysteries, profound, difficult and piercing, have landed you, you poor philosopher, behind the dark walls and the heavy bars of a lunatic asylum, for that is how it was. It says so in black and white:

“Nietzsche died insane, at odds with life!”

In my book I want to prove that he had died painfully at odds with truth. The very same Zarathustra had taught me something different. But perhaps I had better hearing, perhaps I listened with greater care. In this much we are together: the road of the master and my own road, the disciple's, were both difficult. There were more defeats than successes, many deviations and thus much time and effort wasted, or seemingly wasted.

For in the hour of reckoning I am not inside a solitary cell of the saddest hospital in the world but surrounded by butterflies and grasshoppers, and glowworms, and I hear a concert of crickets and a soloist high up in the sky—the skylark.

Merciful Lord!

Thank you, Merciful Lord, for the meadow and the bright sunsets, for the refreshing evening breeze after a hot day of toil and struggle.

Thank you, Merciful Lord, for having arranged so wisely to provide flowers with fragrance, glowworms with the glow, and make the stars in the sky sparkle.

How joyous old age is. How delectable the silence.

How sweet the repose.

“Man is so immeasurably blessed with Thy gifts, whom Thou hast created and saved” (<http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf>:15-16)

Borrowing the terminology of the sociologist of religion, Peter Berger, we may state that Korczak experienced “signals of transcendence” by which “the tragedy of man is bracketed...and ultimate redemption is intimated” (Berger, 1969: 69-72) - in all that grows and lives in Nature, and in these human phenomena:

- Human longings, aspirations and hopes for a better life and world; and the frequency people turn to pray to God to assist them to realize these hopes.
- Human strivings to realize goodness in the world;
- The respect, love and support human beings can and often do lend to human others (as well as to animate and inanimate ones).

Korczak understood Creation in terms of two recurring and interdependent processes of life: growth and decay, development and death. Korczak's view of all natural life in terms of an endless cycle of birth and death led him to believe that in a spiritual sense, death is an aspect of life, a necessary stage in the generation of new life. Several passages in his writings<sup>6</sup>, such as the one below from an entry in his Ghetto Diary suggest that he believed in the immortality of the soul:

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<sup>6</sup> Korczak, 1999: 80-81; 2003:206-7

The spirit feels a longing inside the narrow cage of the body. Man feels and ponders death as though it were the end, when in fact death is merely the continuation of life, it is another life. You may not believe in the existence of the soul, yet you must acknowledge that your body will live on as green grass, as a cloud. For you are, after all, water and dust. "The world is the metamorphosis of evil, everlasting" Tetmajer<sup>7</sup> has said. This unbeliever, pessimist, nihilist, he too speaks of eternity. The amoeba is immortal, and man is a colony of sixty trillion amoebas." (<http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ghettodiary.pdf>:24)

Radical amazement<sup>8</sup> at the interrelatedness of these two processes underlies Korczak's three major responses to them:

- Hopefulness – it fortified his belief in the human capacity to grow, flourish, love and do good and gave him great strength to inspire this capacity in people in general and in the children he educated in particular.
- Consolation - it assisted him in dealing with the inherent, natural limitations that impede human growth, providing him with consolation in response to these limitations.
- Equanimity - it led him to adopt an attitude of stoical equanimity in the face of the given ineradicable destructive forces in the world – in nature and humanity.

### **The Realistic Component in Korczak's Realist Messianism**

While Korczak's resolute determination to try to humanize the world is encapsulated in the noun messianism, realistic, this worldly, empirically verifiable criterion encapsulate the way he defined the substance, the aim and the means of approaching the realization of this messianic drive. His realistic messianic perspective posited a direct positive correlation between expanding people's response-ability, increasing their ability to accompany others, and sanctity. Formulated in more theological-metaphorical terms, in his eyes, life-constructing inter-personal relationships, enhancing the conditions of human life, inspiring cooperation between people, and reducing animosity, harm and alienation between them advance the footsteps of the Messiah.

Korczak's realistic-messianic pedagogy rests upon the arduous, complex, and perpetual effort to arrive at the most realistic possible evaluation of human potential and limitations: To uncover the secret of achieving a sensible balance between them, while ever-maintaining the tension between ideal aspirations and practical feasibility. The prayer for tranquility lends shape and gives form to this pedagogy:

"My God, give me... the tranquility to accept the things that I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can change, and the intelligence to distinguish between the two" (Niebuhr, 1926)

As deeply moved, consoled and inspired by the powers of creativity, construction and growth he experienced in nature, Korczak was at the same time 'aware-too-aware' of the endless evil, destructiveness, injustices, sorrow, suffering and pain in human life. Korczak took serious issue with Rousseau's understanding of human nature<sup>9</sup>. He

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<sup>7</sup> The name of a [Polish poet, novelist, playwright, and representative of "Young Poland" (1865-1940).

<sup>8</sup> Heschel, 1955

<sup>9</sup> "Publishers sometimes print the golden thoughts of great men. It would be far more useful to put together a collection of frauds published by the classics of truth and knowledge. Rousseau begins Emile with a sentence, which all the contemporary science of heredity contradicts." (Wolins, 1967:201)

attributed great importance to heredity, and, from his experience as a practical educator working closely with children over many years, he knew how much work had to be invested—sometimes with no positive result—to cope with the weighty burden of pathological heredity. In Korczak's view every child at its birth enters the world with a package of drives: negative ones, such as hatefulness, hostility, jealousy, aggressiveness, violence...and positive ones, such as love, cooperation, mutuality, generosity. In his best known pedagogical work *How to Love a Child*, he warns educators to refrain from adopting a sentimental view of children as pure and innocent beings:

A teacher starting out with the sweet illusion that he is entering a little world of pure, affectionate and open-hearted souls whose good will and confidence are easy to win will soon be disappointed. ... There are just as many evil ones among children as among adults ... All adult passions are latent in [children]...I may be able to create a tradition of truthfulness, tidiness, hard work, honesty and frankness but I shall not be able to make any of the children other than what they are. (Wolins, 1967: 246-247)

In Korczak's view human evil, in addition to emerging out of these innate negative impulses some of which cannot be controlled completely or channeled in positive directions, arises and develops out of negative personal and social encounters. Korczak thought that parents and teachers could either reinforce and deepen a person's negative impulses or promote positive impulses and channel the evil ones in positive directions, thus fostering positive growth. Korczak's bouts of despair and isolation were caused by the many instances in which he witnessed adult society exacerbating evil instead of promoting goodness.

Consequently, according to Korczak, evil is inherent in human nature and cannot be entirely removed from the world. Although the presence of evil limits people's responsibility for their actions and reduces the presence of goodness in humanity and the world, they are not exempt from the duty of trying to achieve goodness, or from seeking to improve the world. Improving the world is a demanding task, involving hard and persistent intellectual and emotional work. The possibility of human goodness is not a gift but a matter of giving and investing great effort.

In light of Korczak's understanding of human reality, Korczak's messianic drive of humanizing the world was based on the more realistic aim of world-improvement rather than that of world-redemption. The significant difference that is made when world-redemption is replaced with world improvement can be understood in terms of Korczak's strong sense that the ideal of "redeeming the world" carries with it a number of psychological-ethical-educational pitfalls. The primary one among the latter is intellectual and ethical arrogance that almost always leads to the creation of unbridgeable gaps between declarative expectation and realistic achievement. The primary educational danger derived from these exaggerated and unrealistic intellectual and ethical demands and expectations is that they represent ones that human beings cannot fulfill, and justifiably so.<sup>10</sup> There undoubtedly is educative

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<sup>10</sup> Korczak's political orientation was social-democratic and humanistic. He identified with the Polish social democratic party, which advocated human fraternity and workers' rights, but he never joined a political party or engaged in politics. He avoided lofty rhetoric and grandiose plans to reform the world, because he believed in improving things on the micro level, with diligent work, and that improvement of the world would come with the reform of education. Pedagogy is about humanity, not just children. In his own strong words: "One of the worst blunders is to think that pedagogy is the science of the child; no! It is the science of man." (Wolins, 1967:204) Education was not meant to reform adults directly, because their defaults were too solid and deep; but

power in striving to reach beyond one's grasp, as intimated in these words of the poet Robert Browning:

“Ah, but a man's grasp should exceed his reach / Or what's the heavens for?”  
(Browning, 1970: 673)

However, here too one should draw limits. Achieving a wise balance between the ideal and the real is a delicate secret, and “the greater the expectation – the greater the disappointment”. As is well known, frustration, anger, despair, even aggression, violence and destructiveness are the very possible emotional companions of grave disappointment when expectations are raised too high.

‘Improvement’ includes an awareness that rejects the possibility that human beings can indeed “repair the world into the kingdom of the Almighty.” More precisely, it rejects the exhortatory rhetoric and the concomitant policies and actions pursued in its name, employed by those who believe that the world can be repaired with finality - especially if they have discovered, and they usually believe they have, the single or unifying principle by which the world can and should be redeemed – cf. totalitarianism. In this context the warning of Sir Isaiah Berlin, the renowned Anglo-Jewish philosopher, is particularly telling:

One belief, more than any other, is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals.... This is the belief that somewhere, in the past or in the future, in divine revelation or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or science, or in the simple heart of an individual thinker, there is a final solution. This ancient faith rests on the conviction that all the positive values in which men have believed must, in the end be compatible and perhaps entail one another (Berlin, 1969:127).

In light of these perspectives, as will be discussed immediately below, Korczak attributed decisive importance to the human will, along with human beings' two other central powers: intellect and emotion. His entire educational project was based on the persistent effort to encourage his pupils to subject the good and evil impulses that control them to their will, so as to strengthen the goodness and creativity within them while moderating the negative impulses. However, he knew that some things resist the will: certain genetic and social factors that cannot be channeled or completely neutralized. As he states in *How to Love a Child*:<sup>11</sup>

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indirectly, by improving children. The proper education of children will produce a reformed generation of humanity when they grow up. Hence, the best social activism was work with youth in the field of education. The humanization of mankind depended on the education of children, would emerge from it, and could be built solely upon it. In his own words: "To reform the world is to reform education" (*With the Child*: 1973:45)

<sup>11</sup> In the eyes of educational thinkers, researchers, educators and teachers Korczak's Tetralogy *How to Love a Child* is considered his pedagogical masterpiece. Its first part is called "The Child in the Family"; its second part "The Boarding School"; its third, "Summer Camps"; and its fourth, "The Children's Home. Educators and teachers in the diverse fields of education are likely to enjoy and gain insights from this work. However, each of its four parts seems to address specific types of educators: The first part, which focuses on early childhood development, is of special interest to parents of young children and to educators and teachers in this field; the second and third part, that address children's development from their youth and up and through their adolescence, as well as the fourth part, which reviews and describes most of the educational frameworks Korczak created and implemented in the two orphanages he led, are directly related to formal and informal educators who work with children from the age of primary school to the last years of secondary school.

"I may be able to create a tradition of truthfulness, tidiness, hard work, honesty and frankness but I shall not be able to make any of the children other than what they are. A birch will stay a birch, an oak an oak, and a thistle a thistle. I may be able to rouse what is dormant in the soul but I cannot create anything. It will be stupid of me to be annoyed with myself or the child."  
(Wolins, 1967: 247)

### **‘Compassionate amelioration’: The Translation of Korczak's realistic-messianic pedagogy into educational practice**

Korczak's educational practice and writings lend testimony to his strong conviction that true education worthy of this name is moral education.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, in his eyes, the quintessential aim of education is educating children's character in the fullness of their personalities in the present while encouraging and strengthening their will towards goodness. In light of their positive growth powers on one hand, and the genetic and social forces inhibiting, limiting and in some cases eliminating these powers, the main educational question his realistic-messianic pedagogy was called upon to address was: Through what processes can children's will towards goodness be strengthened and advanced and their will to badness be reduced and re-channeled to more constructive life-building directions?

Aware of the profound difficulties to confront effectively the very problematic gap between the life-improving possibilities emerging out of constructive work on the human will, and the serious limitations negative genetic and social forces exercise over it, Korczak developed an educational approach that can be called “Compassionate amelioration”. This approach can be viewed as the translation of Korczak's realist-messianic pedagogy into educational practice.

Education is here conceived as an existential calling to undertake wholehearted responsibility towards the present given personalities of the children and to the possible facilitation of their ethical development and advancement. Response-ability, the ability to respond in compassionate amelioration – care and critical-ethical concern – to the real worlds, aspirations, dilemmas and struggles of their charges in the here and now of their existential presence is the hallmark of good educators. In his article on Theory and Practice (Wolins, 1967: 392-395) Korczak asks: Who are the true educators? And he answers: Those who while clearly recognizing their charges' faults and failings continue to confirm, trust, support and encourage them to improve themselves.

**Korczak** constructed and implemented an interrelated net-work of educational practices, methods and frameworks that at once were grounded in and fostered a social climate of “compassionate amelioration”. The most outstanding among these were: the children's parliament and court; this court's constitution; the apprenticeship system; gradated citizenship status; ethical-improvement wagers and growth-charts; work assignments, units and points. Each of these independently and through their interrelationship encouraged educational processes that sought to realize a persuasive integration between a relational ethic of caring (a compassionate accompanying of human others) and a cognitive-reflective-critical ethic of justice (fairness) - committed to seeking just social relationships between people. A profound and uncompromising

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<sup>12</sup> Wolins, 1967: 392-395.

respect for persons is the thread that ties these two distinct types of ethics and moral education together.

How do these educational processes leading to ‘just caring’ – caring and caring for justice – work itself out through the frameworks mentioned above? They work themselves out in three crucial interrelated practices. I’ll demonstrate the nature of these three practices through an exploration of them in the context of the children’s court and its constitution.<sup>13</sup>

i. Educational understanding and genuine respect for the child's present personhood

Korczak’s uncompromising insistence that education of children must be with them - through genuine dialogue with them - and his translation of this principle into affording them self-governing institutions with ‘real teeth’ are expressed in his establishment of a children’s parliament and court, and in his composition of a constitution for this court’s proceedings. The pre-amble to the constitution that he penned contains the phrase “if a person does something bad, the best thing is to forgive her/him”. This phrase repeats itself twice as if Korczak sees it as a given postulate of any work with people, especially with children, worthy of the name education.

A deep respect and a deep caring for children combine together in offering them forbearance regarding their bad deeds through adopting a compassionate-understanding of the many circumstances and causes that diminish their capacity to do good things or increase their capacity to do bad ones. As pointed-out above, in Korczak’s eyes good educators are those individuals who despite their close familiarity with their charge's faults and failings continue to believe in them, to trust and encourage them to undertake paths of further self-improvement.

Furthermore the forbearance inspired by this compassionate understanding is not conceived as a special favor or unwarranted gift but as an imperative commanding ethical respect for the child's given-presence. Indicting children for their present respective personhoods not only demonstrates a lack of respect towards them. It strongly militates against, indeed often eliminates any possibility of the children re-considering the problematic aspects of their respective personhoods. Angry accusation and blaming locks-up children's possible entrance into the gates of self-transformation, pedagogical forgiveness unlocks and opens them widely.

ii. **Offering self-reformation practice-fields**

The compassionate understanding and forgivingness offered to the orphanage's children is not meant in any way to lend them a do-wrong-freely pass. This forbearance of bad deeds is accompanied by and predicated upon the hopeful notion that in the future, hopefully the next time around, these children will not commit these unethical deeds again. Or, phrasing this point in terms of the traditional Jewish norm of repentance articulated in the spirit of Maimonides (1135, Cordova; 1204, Cairo): When opportunities for these children to repeat their unethical deeds present themselves again, they will mend their ways and refrain from committing them. (The Laws of Repentance, Ch. 2-1). They will undergo self-reformation.

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<sup>13</sup> These three practices are employed in all of the educational frameworks, programs and methods Korczak and his staff developed in the orphanages he led. Several of these are mentioned above. Depending on the way they are counted the number of them ranges from eighteen to twenty two. Due to limits regarding the length of this paper I can only explore the children's court and its constitution – the two most important frameworks in Korczak's eyes - in the light of these three practices.

Korczak's system of education abounds with 'offerings' of second, third, fourth and more self and social re-formation behavior opportunities. Were space available we could explore a good number of these among the practices mentioned above, such as children entering into a wager with Korczak regarding a negative behavior they wanted to overcome (ethical-improvement wagers); the preponderance of non-indicting over indicting by-laws in the children court's constitution; the possibility of re-applying to the orphanage three months after expulsion from it on grounds of considerably improved behavior of the expelled child; raising one's citizen's status on grounds of having become a more socially cooperative person (upgrading citizen status); raising the breadth of one's working responsibilities as well as becoming efficient in the specific type of work to which the child is assigned (work units and points); and more...

The ubiquity and abundance of self-reformation opportunities clearly demonstrate that Korczak's hope that his charges would undertake response-ability under their own volition to mend their unethical ways was not pious, rhetorical, idle or empty. On the contrary, it was based on his and his leading educational workers conscious, creative, often joyful and humorous, wise, pro-active design and devising of a relatively inexhaustible – perhaps, as well, at times exhausting – individual and inter-personal re-formation opportunities.

### iii. **Not just caring but Just-caring**

Pedagogical forgivingness is not only predicated on encouraging the orphanage's children (as well as its educational leaders and staff of councilors) to pursue paths of personal and social re-formation. There are also borders which such compassionate accompaniment should not be allowed to traverse. Such forbearance cannot, encourage, or advance the development of an unjust social-climate in which the strong, aggressive, violent, mischievous, manipulative, lazy, irresponsible children become stronger and stronger while the weaker, quiet, shy, reserved, cooperative, industrious, responsible ones become weaker and weaker. The last sentence of the passage from the pre-ambule to the constitution that Korczak composed states clearly that the pursuit of justice and truthfulness is the very core of the children court's *raison d'être* :

“The children's court is not justice, but its mission is to aspire towards justice; the court is not truth but its members seek truth.” (Wolins, 1967: 313).

Retributive justice provides the grounds on which the array of diverse self-reformation practice-fields is built. A relational paradigm of justice underlies and shapes the very substance of the children' law court's constitution and its procedures. Constructing these fields on these grounds assisted the children, educators and administrative staff of the orphanage to learn and internalize rational ethical principles of give and take, effort and outcome and in-put and out-put. On the other hand relational justice not only encouraged but actually 'compelled' children, educators and councilors to develop emotional-intellectual capacities necessary to make informed, intelligent and responsible ethical judgments and decisions.

More specifically the many social frameworks that engaged them and in which they engaged, and the interest in and commitment to justice, fair-mindedness, rationality and truthfulness underlying them, 'called-out' to them to work on gaining self-knowledge, and to develop and actually exercise moral reasoning based at once on rational thinking, critical reflection and judgment, beneficence, empathy and compassion directed towards themselves and to others.

## Conclusion

As stated in the opening of this paper, Korczak's originality as an educator is embodied in the educational system he developed and implemented, discussed above, which enabled children suffering from considerable social-interpersonal pathologies, to undergo significant processes of self-reformation over the six to eight year period they resided in the two orphanages he headed. This paper has attempted to shed light on this system of education, on the educational ethos of ameliorative compassion underlying it, and on the world-view of Realistic Messianism which provides philosophical grounds for this system and ethos.

In 1933, Korczak conducted a follow-up study of all the children who had spent a number of years in the orphanage for Polish-Jewish children in Warsaw, which he founded in 1912. He found that only a very few had turned to crime or prostitution as adults. The overwhelming majority of his graduates was living normative lives, had found decent employment, and had established families of their own.

The effectiveness of this system under his supervision and leadership earned him world-wide recognition as an exceptionally gifted pedagogue and moral educator of the highest order. In many European educational circles he was called the twentieth century's Polish Pestalozzi – after the famous Swiss social-pedagogue and educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) whom Korczak himself greatly admired. In some very significant ways, once one accesses his educational theory and practices, it would be fair to say that Korczak is the twentieth century Polish version of John Dewey (1859-1952).

Korczak's tireless efforts and steadfastness throughout his life to increase good and diminish evil in the world is an inspiring example that offers hope for possible victories – even if only partial – of hope over despair, good over evil, beauty over ugliness, of the gentle, the decent, and the just over the harsh, the rigid, the brutal, and the malicious. To a very impressive, indeed awe-inspiring extent Korczak's humanist moral pedagogy achieved this goal through his development and implementation of educational frameworks and processes that encouraged the growth of free, reflective and critical human persons who sincerely care about the world and work to improve it.

Freely employing several phrases borrowed from John Milton's poem "Paradise lost" it seems appropriate to close this article by suggesting that those who become familiar with Korczak's life and legacy will likely 'gain reinforcement from Hope', or at least, 'resolution from despair'.

## Tam Ve'Lo'Nishlam<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>*Tam Ve'lo Nishlam* - A Hebrew phrase appearing at the end of many traditional Jewish Rabbinic works. Translated freely into English it means "Concluded Yet-Ever-To- Be-Completed".

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Pedagogy is Coming Back! Some Hopeful Signs for (Worldview) Education

### **Abstract**

Neo-liberal voices are still very strong in education broadly speaking and have a marginalizing impact on normative pedagogies like religious and worldview education. But there are clear and hopeful signs that pedagogy is coming back. After sketching the current situation and its antecedents, I will address the views and ideas here provided by pedagogical spokespersons, teacher-leaders and teachers most of them working in the domain of religious education or worldview education. How do they perceive the current changes in more normative and pedagogical-laden directions? What precisely has caused these changes? What have been the consequences for them professionally and personally speaking? It is my intention and hope that this presentation will encourage educators in general and religious educators in particular.

### **The current situation**

There is, in my view, still an urgent need for a continuing awareness in education towards pedagogy as a necessary counter-voice against the still influential neo-liberal rhetoric, politics and practices in which labor-market orientation and schooling as preparation for the knowledge-based economy are praised as the core aims of education in schools. These neo-liberal voices are not only a threat for education in general but have a marginalizing effect on normative oriented pedagogical approaches such as moral, aesthetic, civic and religious or worldview education.

This still tremendous neo-liberal impact in education has to do with the fundamental changes that have taken place since the 90s in the educational systems of many countries like the US, the UK and also the Netherlands. Since

that time there has been a shift towards far greater external, mostly governmental control over the curriculum, and a far greater emphasis on measurable output and accountability, often related to tight systems of inspection. In this process the purpose of schooling has become increasingly defined in terms of the effective production of a pre-determined output, often measured in terms of exam-scores on so-called 'core subjects' such as mathematics and first language (Biesta & Miedema 2002; Miedema 2014).

This last development of education's orientation focusing on Europe and the Europeanization of education on the labor market and education seen as preparation for the knowledge-based economy in terms of employability, flexibility and mobility, has been carefully reconstructed by Peter Schreiner on the basis of documents of the Council of Europe (being the 'conscience' of Europe) and the European Union. Schreiner has convincingly shown that notions such as 'learning society' and 'knowledge-based economy' cannot mask what he has been adequately characterized by him in Habermasian terminology as the 'colonization of education policy by economic policy imperatives', and the determination of national educational policies on the basis of economical-educational analyses (Schreiner 2012).

Even when the notion of edification (Bildung) is recently used again by politicians and school administrators this could not hide away the fact that in educational policy and practice the basics are still overemphasized to the detriment of the formation of the whole person of the students.

In respect to the fact that the use of the very concept of edification or Bildung is all over the place now also internationally speaking (see for example Nussbaum 2010), we need carefully look at what kind of connotation is really at stake here most of the time especially used by politicians and administrators. Quite often the connotation in using this concept is that personhood formation of students means having the possibility to make those subject matter choices that fit best with the students' own personality. Thus the personality, the personhood of the student, is something that already exists and this already fixed personality need to be discovered by the student her/himself. The students should be able to discover who they in essence are and what their already existing capacities are. However, a dynamic conceptualization of the notion of Bildung doesn't presupposes an already existing, an already given personality, but personhood formation or Bildung is conceptualized as the development of the student in relationship, encounter and dialogue with the other persons and the surrounding world and thus also being confronted with oneself. This is happening in a process of socialization or participation and distantiation, that is liberation as an emancipatory process (see Wardekker & Miedema 2001a, 2001b; Wardekker 2016).

So, the shift towards a one-sided and even narrow conception of the aim of schooling and a narrow conception of the very notion of Bildung, edification, makes the question as to whether there still is or could be more space and place for 'education' or 'pedagogy' in the school an urgent one for those who are in general concerned about the purpose of schooling.

This especially holds for the teachers in the schools who quite often feel that these developments miss the very point of what they think the aim of their work is all about. Our own recent research on principals of Dutch Christian elementary schools has convincingly shown that their view is fully in line with this kind of criticism. It is clear that the principals are in favor of a concern for the whole person of the students instead of instructional and transmission approaches of a reductionist kind. One of the most important threats the principals experience is the discrepancy between their view on edification (Bildung) as the core and embracing aim of their professional work, and the strong emphasis on instruction, on the basics, and on particular outcomes as such embodied in governmental policies and the way the Inspectorate of Education is operating in assessing their work (Bertram-Troost, Miedema, Kom & Ter Avest 2015).

I notice, however, that the neo-liberal tanker is very slowly heaving now in more pedagogical directions. Some principals and a young generation of teachers are organizing themselves on a national scale and have a loud and strong pedagogical voice in the public domain. How do a few selected spokespersons experience the current situation and their own stance and positioning in all of this? How do they perceive the current changes in more normative and pedagogical-laden directions? What precisely has caused these changes? What have been the consequences for them professionally and personally speaking? This is the hard core issue of this paper, and I will deal with that in the remainder of this presentation.

However, before doing this I will also briefly point to something that in my view is really necessary too. This is that we, religious educators, should act in society at large as public intellectuals for the benefit of children and youngsters to support them in developing their self-responsible self-determination, their personhood in education and in religious and worldviews education. This is necessary, because religious educators and educationalist are nearly invisible in the public arena characterized by clashes of 'power-knowledge', by knowledge-politics (Foucault 1980). We might think that our arguments for the need of religious or worldview education from a pedagogical point of view are self-evident and don't require directing attention to this need of a wider public. However, we definitely need to voice our views in the public square otherwise other parties will take over our scarce space, for example loud-voiced diehard secularists. What might also be helpful is to try from a pedagogical-strategical

perspective to position new generations of educationalist and religious educators as gate-watchers in governmental and semi-governmental organisations and institutions to voice from within our 'know-how' and 'now-that'.

So, I plea for religious educators especially in academia, in religious communities and working as civil servants to act as public intellectuals in society at large (Miedema 2016). Intellectuals are the fortunate possessors of a certain amount of *cultural capital*, with this capital they play a *public role* visible for everyone, and always are *political issues* at stake here (Nauta 1992, 92). Public intellectuals share two characteristics:

- i) they have an obsession for public debates and the corresponding commitment to give account in a very comprehensible way, that is in clear and easy comprehensible language; they are not writing articles for double-blind refereed and highly cited academic journals, but are visible on radio and TV and to follow in daily and weekly newspapers;
- ii) they are allergic for discrimination and the exclusion of particular groups from taking part in the debates; when such groups are not acquainted with the existing rhetorical traditions the public intellectuals are willing and able to help such groups and are in service to allow them to ask to speak and to speak up (see also Nauta 1987, 28-29).

What is most threatening and mostly results in not taking the role of a public intellectual? It is overstretched rationality as a means of balance or equilibrium as well as looking for the mid-position, self sought or a position pushed towards by others. The consequence is that voicing a radical and clear cut stance in the public square is avoided.

Striving as religious educators for impact in the public domain as public intellectuals from a strong societal commitment should, in my opinion, always go together with following a few very pragmatic rules:

- a) enjoy the public debate and give a comprehensible way account of the insights and knowledge in our discipline;
- b) avoid doing this as a fundamentalistic 'believer', that is in a grim, bitter and pedantic voice, but do this skilful, crystal-clear, and with humour and irony;
- c) ask your opponent in a debate again and again for information in respect to arguments and underpinning of her/his stance, and call them to account on their intellectual integrity (Miedema 2007).

Thus, what we really need now is religious educators acting in society at large as public intellectuals for the benefit of children and youngsters to support them in developing their self-responsible self-determination, their personhood in education and in religious and worldviews education. We should take our responsibility at the place where we are or will be located nationally and globally (see Miedema 2016).

### **A Hype, Return or Revitalization of the Pedagogical?**

I have sent the same question to a few selectively chosen persons respectively working as P1) identity advisor for an intermediate organization for Christian education in the Netherlands for staff as well as administrators, P2) working as teacher trainer and researcher in a teacher training institute of one of the classical and very prominent Dutch universities, P3) a teacher working in international bridge classes in one of the big cities in the area of Western Holland (Randstad), and P4) a vice-school leader of a secondary school.

*My question to them was:*

In respect to the paper I am preparing for the REA conference in November 2016 with the title 'Pedagogy is coming back', I like refer to the view of young (but also some older) people a) working as a teacher in secondary schools; they might be dealing with religious or worldview education but could also be those who teach other than religious or worldview subject matter, b) but it might also be people who are dealing with religious or worldview education from a teacher trainer or advisory perspective. Do you notice the return of pedagogy in education? If so, what does this mean for you as a professional and as a person?

Mostly I had some email exchanges with them after I had invited them to answer my question via mail. Due to their further questions and comments I have sent them the proposal that I had submitted in May. That turned out to be very helpful for them to provide me with some clear statements from their side.

Here I will briefly present some of the insights I got from reading their responses and will present this in 4 vignettes:

1. The teacher trainer/researcher (P2) had just finalized a research project with 20 RE teachers (younger and older) in secondary schools and they all state that the pedagogical in respect to certain relationally loaded practices is very important for them. They also criticize a recent plea by an associate professor for a just knowledge based curriculum in RE of worldview education. However, more than half of them state that

this is what they want and do but that they experience it at the same as very difficult to realize due to time constraints that have to do with pressure from the program and caused by the setup of tests and the fixed finalization of programs with an eye on the final exams. The teacher trainer's conclusion is that they possess 'the pedagogical will' but there is huge tension with the constraints of the general programming. These RE teachers haven't been part of organized actions or initiatives in respect to what the experience as a huge tension between will versus possibilities.

2. As it seems in contrast with P2 input, the identity advisor (P1) who is referring to his in service courses with teachers in secondary schools (so, not focusing exclusively on RE teachers) is positive about the way educational advisors, professional teacher training centers, administrators and a few teachers who are writing about this issue on a national level are dealing with the return of the pedagogical debate. He is very critical on the teachers who when dealing with personhood formation (Bildung) translate this only in socializing terms: the want students to learn to be themselves, to be social and to have and show respect, instead of the students learning to reflect on themselves related to their surrounding and the teachers providing them and guiding them in finding their own way – also different from the aim the teachers have in mind. His conclusion is that in the school practice the pedagogical is not realized yet.

3. The vice-school leader's view (P4) is that the pedagogical discourse is indeed coming back in education but in disguise. Bildung is a core concept in the school's policy and this has even led to the predicate 'excellent' given by the Inspectorate of Education. The school is providing a lot of learning and thus developmental possibilities for students, and learning is not just aiming at a diploma/certificate but focusing on broad edification (Bildung). Crucial is the teacher as a person and his/her normative professionalism. The school is exemplifying a sort of newly invented pedagogy, with attention paid to the whole person and the human development.

4. The teacher of the international bridge classes (P3) is working in a school with 50 different nationalities in which 10 years ago worldview education disappeared from the curriculum. Since 2011 and led by the new school leader a process started of staff reflection on the broad identity of the school. A few values were collectively chosen and form the basis of the school policy and the education in the school. At the same time a new curriculum subject matter was chosen under the title 'Personal Edification/Bildung' (Persoonlijke Vorming) and presented to the lower classes only. Core aim is to reflect with the students on identity and values, and the pedagogy of this approach is meaningful

education. It touches the teachers in their professionalism and personality and also the students in their sense of being and dealing with meaningful aspects of life. Other colleagues have shown curiosity in the way the pedagogy of the 'Personal Edification' is concretized and try to use this approach also in their own lessons. So, the pedagogical voice is getting greater volume. However, she also notices some constraints. These might consist of personal experiences i) with the lack of freedom in religious terms, ii) with neo-liberal no nonsense policies, and iii) with certain soft pedagogical or/and didactical novelties which has hampered their ability to teach due to which they have developed an aversion for pedagogy. She concludes by saying that there still is a long way to go.

## **Epilogue**

Neo-liberal voices are still very strong in education broadly speaking and have a marginalizing impact on normative pedagogies like religious and worldview education. But there are clear and hopeful signs that pedagogy is coming back. After I have sketched the current situation and its antecedents, I have given the floor respectively to an identity advisor from an intermediate organization for Christian education in the Netherlands for staff as well as administrators, to a teacher trainer and researcher in a teacher training institute of one of the classical Dutch universities, to a teacher working in international bridge classes in one of the big cities in the area of Western Holland (Randstad), and to a vice-school leader of a secondary school.

Yes, pedagogy is back on the agenda, but the four spokespersons I have introduced here briefly have different opinions on who are at the moment the most active actors for realizing the pedagogical in the educational domain. They also have different opinions on what precisely the constraints are now that hinder further realization of the pedagogical.

However, it is my intention and hope that notwithstanding the fact that I cannot present a harmonious choir now that this presentation will encourage educators in general and religious educators in particular to go along the road for embodying and strengthening the pedagogical in their distinctive practices.

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Beyond the Black-White Binary of U.S. Race Relations:  
A Next Step in Religious Education

Abstract:

Many if not most people in the academy as well as the public sphere tend to regard race and racism in the United States in terms of a default frame of reference (that is, a paradigm): the black-white binary. Although this frame is constructive as well as compelling, it displays serious liabilities. This paper outlines, for religious educators, nine expressions of the black-white paradigm—three variations of the binary, three approaches from black studies/theology, and three models that express efforts to transcend binary thinking. A concluding comparative exercise illustrates how participants may discern, address, and ideally revise the paradigm.

Discussing issues of race in the United States, W.E.B Du Bois famously said that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (2007, 20). This well-known and often-cited declaration about a black-white divide has defined American experience—even mine, American born, but neither white nor black. Whereas Du Bois’ words fail completely to speak to and of my experience, Frank Wu’s hit home: “[Outside of family and Asian American circles], I alternate between being conspicuous and vanishing, being stared at or looked through. Although the conditions may seem contradictory, they have in common the loss of control. In most instances, I am who others perceive me to be rather than how I perceive myself to be. Considered by the strong sense of individualism inherent to American society, the inability to define one’s self is the greatest loss of liberty possible” (Wu 2002, 8). Like Wu, sometimes I am

“conspicuous”—when I am seen as a foreigner or as a token representative of “my people.” At other times, I “vanish” as someone seen as an honorary white or as nonblack and therefore considered temporarily as one of “us.” I have lost not only the authority to define myself, as Wu says, on a more basic level I am also denied an accurate sense of personhood, as my experiences of racial oppression that inform who I am do not matter. I speak from my perspective as an Asian American religious educator, who hails from a Japanese American Christian community with its own history of experiencing racism in the United States.

In this essay, I argue that a common practice of interpreting race and racism is itself problematic: framing discourse in a black-white paradigm. Many if not most people in the academy as well as the public sphere tend to take the experiences, practices, and histories of white racism against African Americans as the default frame of reference, choosing to remember history, construct identity, and view the present in terms of black and white relations.<sup>1</sup> One cannot underestimate the degree to which the legal, political, and social history of slavery, Reconstruction, and civil rights have indelibly influenced the formation of the United States and become embedded in its social imaginary. Given these customary habits of thought, it seems almost impossible *not* to think of black-white relations when one thinks of race and racism, despite a national history of racial oppression in the form of colonizing or exploiting multiple ethnoracial groups as well as growing minority-majorities in many parts of the United States.

My primary contribution is to examine the complexity and significance of the problem for religious educators. Providing some tools for analysis, I outline three versions of the black-white binary, three examples from black studies and theology, as

well as three models that attempt to move beyond the paradigm. A comprehensive approach that includes theological reflection and a more developed vision of anti-racism education must be saved for a larger project.

### *Pain Management*

For Americans of any race, race and racism are uncomfortable topics of conversation to avoid. Talking about racial oppression involves recognizing the injury and pain of victims as well as the guilt and shame of perpetrators both past and present. Any discussion is personal because in our midst are victims as well as perpetrators, including ourselves, loved ones, and community members. Many colleagues often feel tired of talking about race because it never seems to get anywhere, much less to help.

Unfortunately, religious educators are not immune to practicing resistance to exploring this delicate subject. When Russell Moy (2000) declared racism to be the “null curriculum” of religious education, he based his conclusion on a review of publications in this journal since 1994. Unfortunately, surprisingly few authors published in *Religious Education* (Moore 2012; Hearn 2009; Cross 2003; Hess 1998) have focused exclusively or significantly on racism since Moy’s survey. In our field, scholarly responses to racial oppression are often expressed implicitly, left to people of color to discuss in relation to their community, or incorporated within broader approaches to transformation, for example, multicultural education. Though racism is seemingly addressed everywhere, it is rarely the focal topic explored in depth.

Thinking of race in dichotomous terms has a self-protective benefit that accompanies the use of any binary. All human beings tend to make sense of and navigate

the world by sorting experiences, objects, and people into two broad, mutually exclusive categories—right or wrong, good or bad, or friend or foe, for example. Simplifying information through binaries reduces life’s many stressors, foreclosing awareness of information that is potentially ambiguous, challenging, or threatening. Of course, the cost of simplification is neglecting information that cannot be fitted in either/or terms.

In the case of American habits of reflecting on race, the black-white binary can be understood partly as a tool to orient knowers, as I discuss below, and partly as a means of limiting or titrating the painful and shameful implications of racism. Seeing race in terms of black-white allows people to protect themselves by inhibiting awareness of whites being implicated in racism against other racialized groups. Each additional history of racism experienced by Latino(a), Native, and Asian Americans threatens to overwhelm.<sup>2</sup> It is better not to know, not to see beyond black-white.

Most educated whites are aware that African Americans are different from Latino(a), Native, and Asian Americans, but this knowledge does not stop many people from thinking and acting according to a tacit assumption that all experiences of racism are basically the same. By this logic, if one understands how white supremacy led to the enslavement and disenfranchisement of blacks, one comprehends American racism more generally. Whether the black-white paradigm is appropriate for understanding other experiences of racism is irrelevant from the standpoint of pain management. People need some mechanism to cope with potentially volatile discussions of racial difference and oppression, even if the mechanism is itself problematic.

*Unfolding Variations on the Theme of a Black-White Binary*

The habit of interpreting race relations primarily as ongoing tension between blacks and whites has evolved subtly with multiple variations yet maintained its dominance in the American social imaginary. As I discuss below, the simple color-line of *black versus white* has shifted to *white versus “people of color,”* and subsequently to *black versus nonblack*. These interpretative moves are not exclusive. Rather, they coexist simultaneously.

W.E.B. Du Bois’ “color-line” epitomizes the most basic form of black-white thinking, in which members of the dominant group—that is, those with status and power who determine how to construe reality—differentiate between themselves and *those who are nonwhite*. This traditional way of sorting people is historically grounded in American jurisprudence that made distinctions between white and nonwhites in order to preserve the privileges of the majority (Dalmage 2008, 324). Under these racist laws, even one drop of black blood made a person nonwhite. All other racialized minorities were sorted accordingly. In the 1927 Supreme Court case, *Gong Lum v. Rice*, Chinese in Mississippi were considered nonwhite or “colored” (Bow 2007, 4). In certain regions and times, Mexicans were classified as “colored,” obliged to refrain from white-only spaces along with blacks (Vidal-Ortiz 2008, 1037).

As nonwhites began to organize and create coalitions, a newer binary arose in the late 1980s—whites versus “people of color.”<sup>3</sup> The history of the term “people of color” is somewhat murky, though the notion of “colored people” or a “person of color” has precedents in 17<sup>th</sup> century American property law to protect whites.<sup>4</sup> Progressing from derogatory terms such as “negroes” and “colored” people, the term “people of color” has broadened to include all nonwhites, including people of mixed race (Vidal-Ortiz 2008,

1037). “White versus people of color” is itself a binary, a variation on whites versus nonwhites that is curiously double-sided. First, unlike calling nonwhites “colored,” referring to “people of color” is not a derogatory term; yet it functions similarly by preserving whiteness as the standard of comparison and blurs distinctions among racialized minorities. In a sense, this newer dichotomy, though meant to be more sensitive, is little different from the classic black-white binary, except that “people of color” has been substituted for “black.” However, in a second sense, the practice of distinguishing between whites and “people of color” enables nonwhites to identify with one another. This creates an “us” among people of color and their allies who are resisting white privilege, being watchful of “them” (as in whites who have yet to take responsibility for their racism).

Unfortunately, we have not moved to a colorblind society despite declarations to the contrary, but rather whites (and nonwhites who “think white”) sort the racial economy along a third binary. Examining patterns of interracial and multiracial identification of Asians, Latinos, and African Americans, sociologists Jennifer Lee and Frank Bean (2010) conclude that the newest color-line to explain racial stratification is not “white versus nonwhite” but “black versus nonblack.” This updated version uses black as opposed to white as the point of comparison. In the traditional, historic practice of dichotomous thinking, whites use “whiteness” to establish “us” (friend) as a basis for identifying who is “them” (foe). Anyone nonwhite is a potential enemy, meaning blacks as well as Latinos for example would be considered other. In the newer practice of the binary, whites (and nonwhites who have internalized white racism) use “blackness” to identify the essence of “other.” Black=dangerous, and nonblack=safe. In this way of thinking,

for example, American-born Latinos, who are not black, would be considered potential friends. Lee and Bean find that newer nonblack immigrants (Latinos and Asians) are assimilating at higher rates, while blacks continue to be rejected and alienated (2010, 19-20). For whites, seeing black people triggers an entire history of black and white racial conflict, a history that is not associated with and therefore not set off by nonblacks (Williamson 2016). Categorizing Latino(a), Native, and Asian Americans as “nonblack” may serve to conjure less white shame, guilt, or fear as it creates a sense of security or insulation.

Although there seems to be multiple “color-lines” in operation, the black-white binary persists.

### *The Black-White Paradigm at Work in Theology*

Although there has been little attention to the black-white binary in religious education literature, theorists from multiple disciplines in the social sciences have been discussing it since the mid-1990s as a “paradigm,” borrowing from Thomas Kuhn’s seminal work (1970).<sup>5</sup> Latino legal theorist, Juan Perera defines the “Black/White binary paradigm” as “the conception that race in America consists, either exclusively or primarily, of only two constituent racial groups, the Black and White” (1997, 1219). He writes, “[T]he paradigm dictates that all other racial identities and groups in the United States are best understood through the Black/White binary paradigm” (1219-20). A Kuhnian paradigm refers to the tacit, shared understandings that guide a community of researchers in deciding how to approach and define theoretical problems (1216). The

“Black/White binary paradigm” determines and limits discussions of race and racism by ignoring the experiences of people who are neither black nor white (1219).

Christian religious education and theology more broadly have been deeply influenced by theorists and theologians who are formed by and reproduce the black-white binary.<sup>6</sup> For example, James Cone and Cornel West propose blackness as symbol or metaphor for oppression and racial evil that all Christians should resist (Choi 2015, 133). For Cone (1994), blackness is an “ontological symbol” of oppression, which in its re-appropriated form can stand for all victims of white racism (Choi 2015, 133). For West (1999), blackness is a metaphor for racial evil that can galvanize moral people to enact racial justice (Choi 2015, 133). West consistently conflates discussions of race relations with black experiences of racism, whether he comments on the Los Angeles riots of 1992, the cultural conservatism of white America, or cultural hybridity (Perea 1997, 1227-28). Writing from a situated perspective is quite different from elevating it as a universal, representing it as the experience of others, or failing to include more diverse perspectives on race.

Also perpetuating the black-white binary, Willie Jennings (2010) explores the incapacity of white Christians to sense how their everyday performances of the faith are informed by theological imagination steeped in colonialism. The racial violence that African American Christians experience (and by implication the oppression that other racialized minorities experience) can be traced to a long history of white Christians normalizing the objectification and domination of black bodies. When Jennings argues that Christian social imagination in the Western world is “diseased” (6), he refers to the

history of white Christian colonizers, particularly their investment in the African slave trade.

Investigating the “origins of race” seems overly ambitious, considering Jennings’ research sample includes only white and black Christians. Because black experiences of white supremacy are not presented as a case study, it appears that the author considers black experiences of colonialism as fundamental to understanding both race and the formation of Christianity itself. The text primarily reads (in my experience) as a black-white conversation to be overheard by others. Readers who are neither black nor white are expected to use black experiences of racism to understand what is wrong with Christian tradition and race relations. Like others who are neither black nor white, my experience remains invisible.

Black Pastoral theologian Homer Ashby (2003) provides critical insight on these African American authors in terms of a tendency to define blackness in terms of whiteness (in the cases of Cone and West) and/or, I would add, to define whiteness in terms of blackness (in the case of Jennings). For example, Ashby critiques Cone’s support for “ontological blackness” because it “requires whiteness, white racism, and white theology to justify its opposition to whiteness,” which robs blackness of the possibility of transcendence (Ashby 2003, 78). Drawing on the work of Anthony Pinn (1998) and Victor Anderson (1995), Ashby argues that defining blackness in ways that require whiteness limits black identity and theology by focusing on oppression and survival rather than also investigating possibilities of fulfillment and flourishing (2003, 78). His work causes me to consider that theologians such as Cone are powerfully compelled to mine repeatedly the experience of slavery and African heritage to define

both black identity and faith, which Ashby refers to as the “hermeneutics of return” (2003, 79). Retrieving slave narratives, Jennings also engages in some of these same hermeneutics but to explain white Christianity and its history of colonialism. If we apply Ashby’s logic, then defining white Christianity in terms of black experiences is both illuminating in some ways but limiting in others.

In seeking to engage students in addressing issues of racism and theology, many religious educators and other theologians turn to theorists such as Cone, West, Jennings (and others), whose work has been highly influential in theological education. The black-white binary paradigm habituates American theologians to taking the views of African American (especially male) theorists as primary and authoritative when it comes to race. However, if religious educators draw uncritically on black theorists who perpetuate the black-white binary, they unwittingly replicate and extend the problem.

### *The Strengths and Limitations of Thinking in Black and White*

Aside from its liabilities, perceiving race and race relations mostly in terms of white supremacy and black suffering in the U.S. has had multiple advantages. If we look beyond race for a moment, it is readily apparent that dichotomous thinking is effective in drawing attention to what is wrong with a situation, especially at an early stage of consciousness-raising. For example, Paulo Freire (2003) created new awareness by writing about the “oppressors” and the “oppressed.” Analogously, early feminists fostered new sensitivity toward issues of power in regard to gender by invoking the binary male/female. Similarly, in the struggle for civil rights and anti-racism, black-white has focused attention on how the historical communal injury of racism contributes to the

disadvantages, trauma, and violence that African Americans (especially low-income blacks) continue to suffer. However, just as postcolonial studies has advanced the study of oppression beyond oppressed/oppressor, and more recent feminist studies have problematized the polarity of male/female, the need to consider moving beyond black-white is long overdue.

While the black-white binary may benefit blacks by inspiring solidarity and empathy for what they have experienced, it also has significant undersides. For example, it tends to obscure complexity and diversity among African Americans who have particular experiences of racism that intersect variously with class, gender, and sexuality and according to various black cultures. For example, wealthy, well-educated, suburban African Americans' experiences of racism are related but not identical to those of low-income, poorly educated, urban counterparts (See Jimenez, Fields, and Schachter 2015). The paradigm misrepresents diverse people as monolithic.

Paradoxically, the black-white binary ensures the supremacy of whites by reinforcing the apparent inevitability of white domination (Alcoff 2003, 17). The dichotomy ultimately portrays whites as the pinnacle of what all other groups are attempting to attain or the standard by which all others are measured. Boxed into this narrow position, white people are caught in some of the same liabilities of the black-white binary. In relation to African Americans, whites are assigned the role of racists, colonizers, or victims of black crime, likewise creating too-simple images of white European Americans. In relation to blacks, white people of moral conscience are assigned relatively limited roles: listening to stories of racism, engaging in self-critique to expose white privilege, and showing support for black people. While white people *do*

need to engage this important work, it cannot be the only work they are allowed or encouraged to do. Regrettably, the binary places whites in a weak position to reflect critically on black views of racism, which risks being experienced as racist. Furthermore, when blacks are treated as if only *they* are qualified to speak about racism, it limits the potential of whites to develop any kind of moral authority other than in relation to white privilege. Ultimately, whites cannot become full and equal partners in conversations about racism in the black-white binary paradigm. The binary, in this sense, functions ontologically and has little flexibility in functioning as a pairing of social constructions.

The dominant black-white narrative treats black experiences of racial oppression as the standard by which all others are measured and by doing so, racism against nonblack racialized minorities are minimized if not rendered invisible. Consider, for example, how Latino(a) American experiences of racism are often erased as they are coded as immigration issues. People can debate U.S. immigration policies without ever discussing racism, partly because racism against people of Latin descent does not fit the dominant narrative about black-white conflict. The reality is that neither black nor white experiences of racism map well enough onto the experiences of Latino(a) (Gold 2004, 958-9), Native, or Asian Americans. For example, most Americans think of racism in terms of segregation and the struggle for civil rights. However, this narrative is less appropriate for Asian Americans, for example, whose experiences of racism are primarily rooted in a history of U.S. wars in Asia as well as American exclusionary laws that restricted immigration (Kim and Lowe 1997, x).

Finally, in a world where Americans are perceived to have only two locations—on either side of *the* color-line—complex relationships between members of all groups

are obscured and possibilities for solidarity are constantly disrupted (Gold 2004, 958; Alcott 2003, 17; Sethi 1994, 235-6). Conflict between African Americans and Asian Americans, for example, is rarely discussed.

*“Miles to Go Before [We] Sleep”*<sup>7</sup>

Although multicultural religious education that cultivates citizenship has advanced the field in some important respects, we have a long way to go in addressing racism.<sup>8</sup> One might assume that multicultural approaches effectively destabilize the black-white binary. After all, the civil rights movement of the 1960s gave rise to multicultural education (Banks 2013, 4). In the area of race, it has made critical gains in remedying Eurocentric bias in religious education settings, leadership, and curriculum (Moore et al. 2004). By emphasizing inclusivity and diversity, multicultural education for citizenship increases the participation of a range of ethnoracial groups and calls attention to ignorance of various cultures (Banks 2013, 17). However, multiculturalism that emphasizes pluralism *implicitly employs the binary “whites versus people of color.”* It preserves white privilege no matter how racially “diverse” a community appears, as “people of color” are expected to participate in community life on terms set by the dominant group.

Unfortunately, multicultural approaches that emphasize diversity and inclusivity are no substitute for anti-racism education. Most multicultural education tends to be too broad—treated not only as a response to racism, but to *all* forms of prejudice. Racism typically receives insufficient treatment and commitment (Moy 1993, 416; Banks 1988). Second, multicultural education that primarily cultivates citizenship emphasizes equality,

plurality, and inclusivity rather than addressing power and hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> Addressing “diversity” frames cultural pluralism as evidence of progress toward good citizenship or, in Christian theological language that has been co-opted, being “brothers and sisters in Christ.” However, cultural diversity implies norms set by those with power to which others are held (San Juan 2002, 5) and fetishized. It hides the complicity of whites in racial privilege. Third, most multicultural approaches can unwittingly and subtly reinforce ethnocentrism as it forces participants of diverse cultures to relate to whites as the center rather than to one another (Lee 2010, 285).

*Helping Learners to See Beyond Black and White: A Comparative Exercise*

To help members of faith communities and the academy to see beyond black and white, I propose that religious educators facilitate a small group exercise that could be part of a larger anti-racism curriculum. Learners compare different versions of the black-white paradigm as well as three models that attempt to view race relations in more complex terms—“middleman” theory, a “tri-racial system” theory, and “racial triangulation” theory. Ideally, one could facilitate this comparative exercise among small groups of learners who belong to the same ethnoracial group and repeat the exercise among groups of learners who must work across color differences.

With the intention of modeling for readers participation in a learning group, I comment on these theories from an Asian American perspective and include the critiques of others. In a group setting, comparing, contrasting, and evaluating these models from the perspective of each person’s experience of racialization would be the shared work of all learners.

### *“Middleman” Theory*

The “middleman” theory orders the racialization of groups in the U.S. with whites on top, blacks on the bottom, and other racialized minorities in between. In this way of thinking, nonblacks and nonwhites are intermediary or “middleman” minorities (Bonacich 1973; Bow 2007, 5) creating an important buffer between the two groups. A variation on the theme of being in the middle is the “colonial sandwich” (Brah 1996). For example, in Africa, there are “Europeans at the top, Asians in the middle, and Africans at the bottom” (Brah 1996; Bow 2007, 5) creating a tense colonial social hierarchy in which Asians serve as an intermediary between elites and those most oppressed by colonialism. Conceiving of “middleman” minorities acknowledges the experiences of those who are neither black nor white, which is an improvement over the traditional binary.

As an Asian American, I would share with other learners the pain of being locked between black and white, inviting others to discuss where they are located in this three-tiered racial hierarchy. As “middlemen,” Asian Americans are told, “At least you’re not black” (Kim 1998) or they tell themselves, “At least we’re not black,” which is supposed to be a consolation for being treated better than African Americans but never equal to whites. This racial hierarchy either encourages Asian Americans to side with whites, internalizing and practicing anti-black prejudice, or to risk further discrimination by siding with blacks. Either way, both blacks and whites use intermediary minorities like Asian Americans for political leverage, while denying to awareness the complexity and uniqueness of Asian American experiences of racial oppression. Elaine Kim argues that whites are invested in the “notion of Asian Americans as docile honorary white people whose very existence proves that other people of color are lazy and stupid and that

racism does not exist in U.S. society” (Kim 1998, 1). At the same time, blacks invite Asian Americans and other people of color to join in combating racism, while assuming the rightness of maintaining the leadership and agenda of blacks. Acknowledging the political power that African Americans have accrued since the civil rights era, Kim claims that African Americans are reluctant to share power with other racially minoritized groups and unwilling to admit that blacks have perpetrated racial violence against them (Gold 2004, 958; Kim 1994, 87).

### *Tri-Racial System Theory*

A second model to discuss is Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s (2004) tri-racial system for explaining racial stratification in the U.S. His model presents a hierarchy of three groups (white, honorary white, and the “collective black”). He argues that Americans abide by what he calls a “pigmentocratic logic,” which relegates people with darker skin to the bottom of the racial order and those with the lightest skin at the top (931). The tri-racial system is both like and unlike the middleman theory. It deviates from the middleman theory in that certain groups (Latinos and Asians) can have representation in all three tiers, depending on how light or dark skinned and assimilated they are. However, Bonilla-Silva’s theory resembles the traditional black-white binary and the middleman theory in that whites are never in the bottom tier with the “collective black,” and blacks are never considered in the top tier with those who are white.

Bonilla-Silva’s theory improves on the simple black-white binary and the middleman theory by helping to locate, distinguish, and explain differences and similarities between various experiences of racialization among multiple groups. It accounts for colorism, which adds dimension to how different groups and different

people in the same group experience racism to varying degrees. The model allows for all groups to have a place in mapping a racial order, possibly with greater precision and nuance than the middleman model.

As is true of any theory, the tri-racial system has its flaws. Discrimination based on race includes more than making value judgments about skin pigmentation, since it also involves, for example, evaluations based on natality and degrees of assimilation.<sup>10</sup> Bonilla-Silva himself takes assimilation into account but the model emphasizes a racist continuum of colorism.

In discussing this second model with learners, I would share my perspective as an Asian American and again invite others to share their experience of “pigmentocracy.” I find his sorting certain Asian groups into “Honorary White” and “Collective Black” somewhat arbitrary in terms of skin color. Supposedly Asian Indians are considered “Honorary Whites,” but there are certainly many South Asian Indians who are as dark as many African Americans, who are part of the “Collective Black.” Similarly, there are many Vietnamese Americans, who supposedly belong to the “Collective Black” category, who are as light skinned as I am in the “Honorary White” classification. The spectrum is more reflective of degrees of assimilation and class than skin-color alone.

### *Racial Triangulation Theory*

A third model that might be discussed with learners is Claire Jean Kim’s racial triangulation theory (1999). Rather than using a single measure for tracking racial stratification, Kim envisions two axes. This allows a racially minoritized group to occupy different positions on two measures at the same time. For example, on the superior/inferior axis, Kim claims that Asian Americans are esteemed more highly than

African Americans in the eyes of whites, which she calls “relative valorization” (107). However, on the insider/foreigner axis, African Americans enjoy higher degrees of recognition and acceptance as Americans than people who look Asian, which Kim characterizes as “civic ostracism” (107). Multiple studies have built on or rejected Kim’s original study, which could be explored (Xu and Lee 2013; Chou, Lee, and Ho 2015).

Racial triangulation does not overturn the notion that Asian Americans and other groups are in the middle, between black and white, but it provides a more complex picture of racial stratification in the U.S., revealing how a group experiences multiple facets of race and racism and varying perceptions by other groups.<sup>11</sup> Conceivably, one might test additional axes, beyond racial valorization and civic ostracism, allowing for tension and contradiction between ratings for a single group. As the case of Asian Americans shows, a group can be high on one axis but low on another. The theory also demonstrates how Asian Americans may be closer to being treated like whites in some respects and closer to being treated like blacks in others.

From my perspective as an Asian American, racial triangulation theory holds greater potential than previous models. Racial triangulation makes the notion of who is on the bottom of the racial hierarchy more fluid and variable, depending on what axis one is using to analyze racial stratification. Considering multiple axes of analysis reduces the risk of being mired in arguments about which group is most oppressed and assigning any one group the permanent role of victims. However, racial triangulation obscures the racial stratification within ethnoracial groups that Bonilla-Silva’s model reveals (Son 2014, 768). I would be interested in knowing whether the method can also show how Asian Americans are treated differently than some blacks and some whites.

This comparative exercise has multiple benefits. Discussing these three models as I have presented them, one sees a developmental progression as one model attempts to correct some of the limitations of others, providing more explanation for intra-group diversity and for the racialization of Americans who are neither black nor white. Learners can practice identifying the strengths and liabilities of each approach while reflecting on issues of power and privilege. In addition, comparing these models invites learners to find themselves within a given spectrum, sharing whether the model accurately portrays their own experience of racialization.

### *Implications for Religious Education*

Take heart in signs of progress in the discourse on race. The growing use of the term “people of color” shows increased sensitivity toward the need to account for cultural differences. Black theology enjoys greater legitimacy than ever. Multicultural education has led to greater institutional commitment to address Eurocentric bias in religious education and beyond. Theories to explain racial stratification have become more nuanced and complex.

While these are hopeful signs of change, gains are slow and not without limitations because black-white habits of thinking are thoroughgoing and difficult to challenge. Not only are people accustomed to binary thinking in general, in the U.S. people are invested in black-white thinking (or its variations) as a strategy for containing the problems of race, as a dominant narrative about American history, as a trope for understanding racial stratification, and in the case of Christian communities, a common frame for discussing race and theology.

*A revised paradigm must be built on the fact that there is no such thing as racism in general.* Therefore, we cannot assume that the relationships between blacks and whites can represent or can be used to interpret racism in the abstract. We need to seek and learn from multiple, particular lived experiences of racism. That is, we attend to the complexity of racism *in situ*. We assume that each ethnoracial subgroup has its own histories, languages, and narratives that capture how members see themselves and their experiences of racism. In the process, we discern how racial oppression continues to harm in ways of which we may not be aware, strengthening our capacity to address it.

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<sup>1</sup> One exception is Hawaii, where the black-white binary is not the default frame of reference for understanding race and racism, though its influence is felt indirectly (Sharma 2011).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the need for whites to protect their "fragility" when it comes to race, see DiAngelo 2011.

<sup>3</sup> I am estimating the timeline judging by William Saffire's op-ed piece (1988) in the *New York Times*, which discusses "people of color" as a new term.

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<sup>4</sup> Journalists have attempted to trace this history in Saffire 1988 and Malesky 2014.

<sup>5</sup> In note 2, Perea cites and quotes eight articles in various law reviews and journals from the mid-1990s that address the black-white binary in terms of a paradigm (1997, 1214).

<sup>6</sup> A major proponent of the appropriateness of black oppression as the appropriate frame of reference for all white racism, even globally is Feagin 2000.

<sup>7</sup> This is a reference from Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1969, 225).

<sup>8</sup> Hyun-Sook Kim (2012, 251) helps me to understand the varieties of multicultural education. The author identifies three perspectives: "(1) the critical race approach from a liberation perspective; (2) the citizenship approach from an inclusive perspective; and (3) the intercultural approach from a global perspective." I address citizenship approaches because I believe they are most common in religious education.

<sup>9</sup> Hess critiques her graduate studies in religious education as avoiding issues of race and power (1998, 121).

<sup>10</sup> Alcoff makes a similar critique of the black-white binary, recognizing that racism operates on more than the axis of color (2003, 19).

<sup>11</sup> Xu and Lee's study compares white and black perceptions of Asian Americans. They also analyze perceptions of Hispanic Americans and compare it with that of Asian Americans.

## **Called into Crucible:**

### Vocation and Moral Injury in Public School Teachers

This is an exploration of the psycho-spiritual concept of moral injury (MI) in public school settings. Many teachers must enforce practices (high-stakes standardized testing, suspension, etc.) that data suggest are unlikely to help children in the long run. Teachers enter their profession responding to a sense of call to do good and yet can encounter situations where they are expected to do and support actions that they think might be detrimental to the youth in their care. As a result of these converging vectors sometimes there is tension and fracture: on a regular basis, many teachers go to work knowing that they will encounter circumstances that challenge their moral conscience, identity, and the values that got them into teaching in the first place. This is a form of MI. Through an engagement with MI literature and scholarship from education, religious education, and spirituality studies, I argue that MI ought to be included in (1) teacher training programs, (2) the ongoing support of teachers who find themselves in morally injurious contexts, and (3) the development of policy that impacts educational and pedagogical mandates.

Parker Palmer opens his essay “Evoking the Spirit in Public Education” by noting that while he is a firm advocate for the US separation of Church and State he nonetheless believes that our schools are poorer as a result of excluding conversations about spirituality from the classroom. From my vantage point as a former high school and middle school teacher, I agree entirely.

As a teacher, I have seen the price we pay for a system of education so fearful of things spiritual that it fails to address the real issues of our lives—dispensing facts at the expense of meaning, information at the expense of wisdom. The price is a school system that alienates and dulls us, that graduates young people who have had no mentoring in the questions that both enliven and vex the human spirit. I reject the imposition of any form of religion in public education, including so-called “school prayer.” But I advocate any way we can find to explore the spiritual dimension of teaching, learning, and living.<sup>1</sup>

Though such conversations are usually marginal to most discourse about US public schooling, when they do occur they largely orbit about the spirituality of children.<sup>2</sup> Palmer suggests that “the spiritual is always present in public education whether we acknowledge it or not”<sup>3</sup> and that all the academic disciplines already always have spirituality embedded within them. It is not something that needs to be amended to the content at some later date. I agree, though for the purposes of this paper it is more important to turn to the teachers rather than the students or the curriculum.

While the dialogue pertaining to spirituality and education is increasing, it is certainly far from normative. It is even less common to have that conversation turn to focus on teachers and how their spiritual worlds support and nurture their craft. Rarer still is any attention paid to the spiritual *struggles* of the teaching profession. This paper does exactly that, examining the ways in which entry into public education resonates with ideas around vocation and what it means when one’s vocation is stymied by the very same system that was thought to be one of support.

### **Teaching, Vocation, and Spirituality**

Education scholar Laura Jones writes that “Spirituality in education refers to no more — and no less — than a deep connection between student, teacher, and subject — a connection so honest, vital, and vibrant that it cannot help but be intensely relevant,” arguing that “nourishment of this

1 Palmer, 6

2 E.g. “Is youth spiritual development a universal developmental process? An international exploration.” By Peter L. Benson et al; *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School* by Rachael Kessler, *Gateways to Spirituality: Pre-school Through Grade Twelve* by Peter W. Cobb, “Rituals in a School Hallway: Evidence of a Latent Spirituality of Children” by Donald Ratcliff et al.

3 Palmer (1999, 8)

spark in the classroom allows it to flourish in the world, in the arenas of politics, medicine, engineering — wherever our students go after graduation.”<sup>4</sup> This is resonant with Palmer’s definition of spirituality as “the ancient and abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and more trustworthy than our egos,”<sup>5</sup> as well as Mary Elizabeth Moore’s claim that education is self-development that “reflects the interrelated world and fosters our relationships with the world,” so that we become more able “to see the world from others’ perspectives.”<sup>6</sup> To teach is to be turned out beyond oneself for the benefit of others. Thus, while it may be appropriate to say that education can be seen as a spiritual practice in general it is also the case that it bears some resemblance to a spiritual vocation in particular.

The decision to enter into the teaching profession is rarely one of coincidence. The job of a teacher is one into which people are “called” and this is fact more than colloquialism. Data suggests that only 12% of new teachers self-report that they “fell into a career in education by chance” and of those who willfully and deliberately entered into the profession, 86% agreed with the statement that “only those with a true sense of calling should pursue the work.”<sup>7</sup> This suggests that those entering into education usually do so for reasons beyond their own self-gratification, monetary compensation, or social prestige. They do it for reasons of responsibility, service, or hope. They do it because they feel called: it is a spiritual vocation — in Palmer’s sense — even if the teacher herself is not confessionally religious.

Educator Scott Thompson writes of teaching as vocation as well, forwarding the idea that “educators are called to the sacred work of leading forth our children, unfolding the potential that lies within each child.”<sup>8</sup> Patrick Reyes defines Christian vocation as “God’s call to new life for all creation,”<sup>9</sup> and extracting a non-confessional framing from this gives us something like vocation as “a calling to new life.” Vocation is that which grips us and inspires us to wake up and make a difference, to order our lives so that we might flourish and, in turn, call others into a greater flourishing of life. There is a sense of education as vocation that functions regardless of explicit religious belief or disbelief.

A vocation is a calling... A person with a vocation is not devoted to civil rights, or curing a disease, or writing a great novel, or running a humane company because it meets some cost-benefit analysis. Such people submit to their vocations for reasons deeper and higher than utility and they cling to them all the more fiercely the more difficulties arise.

But if you serve the work — if you perform each task to its utmost perfection — then you will experience the deep satisfaction of craftsmanship and you will end up serving the community more richly than you could have consciously planned. And one sees this in people with a vocation — a certain rapt expression, a hungry desire to perform a dance or run an organization to its utmost perfection. They feel the joy of having their values in deep harmony with their behavior.<sup>10</sup>

4 Jones, “What is?,” 1.

5 Palmer, “Evoking,” 6.

6 Moore, “Narrative Teaching,” 258.

7 Farkas. Et al *A Sense of Calling*, 10-11.

8 Thompson

9 Nobody Cries When We Die, forthcoming

10 Brooks, 25. As cited in Reyes, *forthcoming*.

Vocation is the work that feels given to us by something beyond ourselves. It compels us to serve and to sometimes be courageous. But what happens when a “hungry desire” to teach is stunted? What if something stands in the ways of the “deep harmony” between values and their action? What happens when teachers who feel that teaching is a call cannot teach?

### **The Other Side of the Coin**

Though there is a slowly growing body of literature dedicated to exploring the benefits of spirituality in education, the negative consequences of that spirituality is rarely acknowledged. That is, because the profession itself is often bound up with an individual’s sense of call, meeting structural challenges in the classroom can be personal, even spiritually so. Moreover, succumbing to those challenges can feel like a spiritual loss as well. Thompson writes about this very issue, and though his conclusion is harsher than I would argue, his point is worth considering.

The temptations to compromise one’s integrity abound in the current educational environment. An unintended consequence of high-stakes, test-driven pressures for improving student outcomes, for example, is the growing temptation to push out — or fail to notice when they are preparing to drop out — those students who are most likely to drag down overall scores or scores within subgroups. Succumbing to this pressure is a sure indicator of moral purposelessness and cowardice.<sup>11</sup>

While I agree that there are certainly many trends within public education that challenge an educator’s ability to remain in integrity, I balk at placing the entirety of the blame on the failings of individual teachers and their “moral purposelessness.” For example, consider the situation regarding disciplinary suspension in schools.

The US. Department of Education recently released data showing that while 18% of African-American boys in kindergarten through 12th grade across the US. were suspended from school during the 2013-14 year, only 5% of white boys were during the same period.<sup>12</sup> We also know that young adults with “a history of suspension in school are less likely than others to vote and volunteer in civic activities after high school,”<sup>13</sup> and a 2005 study from The Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University found that having one or more school disciplinary referrals is “the single greatest predictor of future involvement in the juvenile justice system.”<sup>14</sup>

Evidence suggests that the rise of suspensions is tied to “zero-tolerance”<sup>15</sup> educational policies that mandate harsh punishments for certain classes of behavioral infraction and yet — damningly — research shows that “extreme disciplinary reactions are *resulting in higher rates of*

11 Thompson, “*Leading from the Eye of the Storm*,” 99.

12 Brody, “*Schools Move Away*.”

13 Kupchik & Catlaw, “*Discipline and Participation*,” 1.

14 Carmichael, “*Study of Minority Over-representation*,” 15.

15 Zero tolerance policies came into vogue during the 1980s during the period in which President George H.W. Bush proclaimed the “war on drugs” and his broken windows rationale, which argued that harsh punishment of lesser crimes prevented larger ones. Another directly contributing factor, was the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act, which required that schools had enact suspension policies for students that brought firearms to school or risk losing all financial support from the federal government.

repeat offenses and dropout rates.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, the US. Department of Education has explicitly referenced no less than thirteen separate studies that show that “suspensions are associated with negative student outcomes such as lower academic performance, higher rates of dropout, failures to graduate on time, decreased academic engagement, and future disciplinary exclusion.”<sup>17</sup> Even The American Psychological Association has a task force on zero tolerance policies for schools and they conclude that they “may negatively affect the relationship of education with juvenile justice and appear to conflict to some degree with current best knowledge concerning adolescent development.”<sup>18</sup> And yet there are still schools with zero-tolerance policies and high suspension rates...

Imagine then, that you are a first year teacher in Cityville High, that you are among the 86% of teachers that feel “only those with a true sense of calling should pursue the work,” that your work feels like a vocation to you, that you know these statistics, and you learn that beginning in September you are expected to comply with your school’s new “one strike” policy. Youth violence has been on the rise and your new employer has decided to respond with “tough love” tactics. Non-compliance means that your job could be at risk. What do you do? Why do you do it? The pressure and heat on you is immediate. How do you respond?

Situations are rarely this cut-and-dry and there may well be more moderate responses than the extremes of complete compliance or resistance,<sup>19</sup> and yet, this situation is hardly difficult to imagine. Plus, whether the issue is zero-tolerance discipline, the huge attention currently paid to high-stakes standardized testing, or any of a number of hot button issues, the tension remains: teachers often find themselves bound and caught between their sense of call and personal commitment to serve children and their need to follow organizational mandates. If you are a teacher and there is an educational mandate that you think doesn’t serve the children in your care and you are required to follow it I do not think that doing so is “a sure indicator of moral purposelessness and cowardice.” However, something serious is certainly going on there in Cityville and the situation is widespread.

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, comprised of annual data from 1984 to 2012, indicates that at a national level teacher job satisfaction has been on a steep and consistent decline. In 2008 the satisfaction figure was 62% but by 2012 data showed the lowest levels of job satisfaction in twenty-five years: only 39% of the national sample of teachers said that they were satisfied with their jobs.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the US. Department of Education’s “Teacher Follow-up Survey” shows that the number of teachers leaving the teaching profession has markedly risen

16 Ward, “School Start to Rethink,” emphasis added.

17 US Department of Education, “School Climate and Discipline.”

18 APA, “Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools?”

19 For example, Sandford Borins’ *Innovating with Integrity: How Local Heroes Are Transforming American Government* details the work of teachers and administrators who were part of the Massachusetts’ Student Conflict Resolution Experts Program and the way that they strategically built partnerships and coalitions to advocate and transform policy. Likewise, Meira Levinson’s Justice in Schools Project is at work to develop interventions that are actionable: <http://www.justiceinschools.org/aboutus>

20 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership, 45.

since 1991.<sup>21</sup> Something is at work across the profession, and while there is no undeniable data to point with certainty to the cause, there has certainly been speculation.

Houston Sarratt, an educator from Nashville says that “teachers are frustrated by lack of autonomy, lack of choices, and top-down control.”<sup>22</sup> Another, from Florida, has left the profession, noting in her resignation letter that “I have become more and more disturbed by the misguided reforms taking place which are robbing my students of a developmentally appropriate education.... I just cannot justify making students cry anymore.... Their shoulders slump with defeat as they are put in front of poorly written tests that they cannot read.... There’s no joy in it.”<sup>23</sup> Finally, consider the words of Louisiana teacher Alice Trosclair, who wrote an article for *The Educator’s Room* suggesting a number of reasons why she sees new teachers leaving the profession.

Fresh-out-of-college teachers... have a mistaken sense of what is waiting for them in the classroom. With idealistic professors and inspiring true stories motivating them, they set out to save every student and change the world. We all want to do that. Then we enter the classroom and discover that not all students want to be saved and teaching is no longer standing on desk top and yelling out “Oh captain, my captain!” Standards must be met and understood. Formal assessments and benchmark tests abound. Data must be collected and analyzed... It can be overwhelming to balance teaching, paperwork, and a personal life.<sup>24</sup>

People who have dedicated their lives to education and to teacher training now wonder if they can rightly encourage others to enter the field. Teachers report feeling adrift, overwhelmed, and frozen in the face of some challenges. Nonetheless, while there are certainly multiple factors at play in the declining satisfaction of teachers, I do not think that “moral purposelessness and cowardice” are among them. I believe that something else is going on.

Given that so many teachers enter into the profession as a result their experience of call, a failure to thrive in the professional context is bound up with a sense of failure of *call*. My argument is that *because* so many teachers conceive of their profession as vocation, the challenges of the job and their struggles with success are experienced dually as both professionally and spiritually difficult. Furthermore, there is a binding that catches at the intersection of a personal sense of vocation and structural dynamics that challenge the ability of teachers to live into that call with integrity. The moral fabric of American teachers is not diminishing: the pressures upon that fabric are increasing. The teaching profession is a crucible in which one’s sense of call is tested and the heat is rising. As a result, sometimes this binding produces a kind of internal tension and fracture, a decrease in our ability to encourage “deep connection between student, teacher, and subject,” and some damage is done to our sense of spirituality in education. That is, on a regular basis, many teachers go to work knowing that they

21 Teacher Follow-up Survey: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), “Current and Former Teacher Data Files,” 2012-13; Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2008-09 Teacher Follow-up Survey, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2010-353). [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/TFS1213\\_2014077\\_cf1n\\_001.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/TFS1213_2014077_cf1n_001.asp)

22 Thomas, “Why Teachers Quit.”

23 Thomas, “Why Teachers Quit.”

24 Trosclair, “Why Teachers Leave.”

will encounter circumstances that challenge their moral conscience, vocational identity, and the values that got them into teaching in the first place. There are – in short – instances of moral injury which regularly occur in classrooms across this country.

### **Moral Injury and the Classroom**

The psycho-spiritual construct of “moral injury” (MI) was first developed to address circumstances emerging from US military contexts.<sup>25</sup> The Moral Injury Project of Syracuse provides this definition:

Within the context of military service, particularly regarding the experience of war, “moral injury” refers to the emotional and spiritual impact of participating in, witnessing, and/or being victimized by actions and behaviors which violate a service member’s core moral values and behavioral expectations of self or others. Moral injury almost always pivots with the dimension of time: moral codes evolve alongside identities, and transitions inform perspectives that form new conclusions about old events.<sup>26</sup>

Drescher et al. articulate MI as a “disruption in an individual’s confidence and expectations about one’s own or others’ motivation or capacity to behave in a just and ethical manner”<sup>27</sup> and Silver refers to MI as “a deep soul wound that pierces a person’s identity, sense of morality and relationship to society.”<sup>28</sup> The US. Department of Veteran Affairs offers that “events are considered morally injurious if they ‘transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations’... [and] thus, the key precondition for moral injury is an act of transgression, which shatters moral and ethical expectations that are rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs, or culture-based, organizational, and group-based rules about fairness, the value of life, and so forth.”<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Shay has a more succinct definition:

Moral Injury is  
[1] Betrayal of what’s right  
[2] by someone who holds legitimate authority  
[3] in a high stakes situation.  
All three...

You can see that my 1-2-3 definition includes the brain as well, because the body codes moral injury as physical attack: [1] Betrayal of what’s right — that’s squarely in the culture; [2] by someone who holds legitimate authority — that’s squarely in the social system; [3] in a high stakes situation — that’s inevitably in the mind of the service member being injured, such as the love he has for his buddy. The whole human critter is in play here: body, mind, social system, culture.<sup>30</sup>

25 The phrase “moral injury” itself is believed to begin with the work of Vietnam War veteran and peace activist Camillo “Mac” Bica (Brock & Lettini, 2012; Bica, 1999, 2014).

26 Moral Injury Project, “What is Moral Injury?”

27 Drescher et al, “When they Come Home,” 9.

28 Silver, “Beyond PTSD.”

29 National Center for PTSD, “Moral Injury in the Context of War.”

30 Shay, “Moral Injury,” 59.

To date, almost all the literature on MI has pertained to the military, however, if the construct is valid then we should expect to see MI other places where there is “[1] Betrayal of what’s right [2] by someone who holds legitimate authority [3] in a high stakes situation.” It follows, then, that in circumstances of MI outside of the military we should also see some of the negative effects associated with it, such as “guilt, shame, alienation, reduced trust in others, aggression, poor self-care and self-harm”<sup>31</sup> as well as “changes in or loss of spirituality, problems with forgiveness, and depression.”<sup>32</sup> To this end, in 2014, the Moral Injury Working Group of the American Academy of Religion themed its session as “Extending Moral Injury: Examining Moral Injury as an Interdisciplinary Resource for Scholars and Practitioners.” To my knowledge, that gathering was the first large-scale consideration of non-military MI, focusing on systems pertaining to societal racism, immigration, and prison systems.<sup>33</sup>

I was present in the San Diego conference room during that session and had a slow-building feeling of dulling dread develop in the pit of my stomach: what one of the speakers described happening to guards in prison settings could be said of many teachers that I knew. A daily struggle between a desire to feel like you are part of a system that produces good in the world and piercing evidence to the contrary. Feelings of uneasiness, frustration, and defeat. Ultimately, a hardening of compassion or an exit from the profession.

Do I think that military MI and educational MI are entirely congruent? No. For example, compared by profession the lowest reported 2016 suicide rate — 7.5 per 100,000 — was among education, training, and library workers.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) the suicide rate among veterans of all wars averages almost one per hour.<sup>35</sup> And yet, there seem to be similarities which cannot be easily dismissed. If there were to be some numerical metric of assessment my guess would be that educational MI is both less pronounced than military MI on a case-by-case basis *and* more widely spread. That is, while the severity of each instance of educational MI might not be as profound as in other contexts, the sheer volume of its presence makes it worthy of commentary.<sup>36</sup> Consider Shay’s description of the effects of MI on those experiencing it.

[It] deteriorates their character; their ideals, ambitions, and attachments begin to change and shrink.... moral injury destroy[s] the capacity for trust... [and] when social trust is destroyed, it is replaced by the settled expectancy of harm, exploitation, and humiliation from others. With this expectancy, there are few options: strike first, withdraw and isolate oneself from others, or create deceptions, distractions, false identities to forestall what is expected.<sup>37</sup>

31 Drescher et al., 2011; Litz et al., 2009. As cited in Chaplo, “Harm from Harm,”2.

32 Currier, Drescher, & Harris, 2014; Drescher et al., 2011. As cited in Chaplo, “Harm from Harm,”2.

33 <https://papers.aarweb.org/AAR-Sessions-Mon.pdf>

34 Brooks, “Jobs With Highest Suicide Rates Identified.”

35 Palmer, “Moral Injury and the Role of Your Church,” iv.

36 I am aware that some scholars want to reserve the term “moral injury” for exclusive reference to the most profound instances of MI, discounting “less significant” instances of it from being counted as MI. For these scholars educational MI would likely not count. However, in lieu of forcing another neologism along the lines of “minute moral injury” or some such contrivance, I proceed assuming that MI exists along on a continuum.

37 Shay, “Moral Injury,” 59-60.

This is very much the sense of things we hear in narratives like that of a teacher from Gainsville, GA, who not only spent years in a public school classroom but also in the college setting of a teacher training program.

I recently retired from 18 years of teaching future teachers. I have been so distraught about the state of our education system in Georgia for many years, but especially the last few, that I have now found it very difficult to encourage students to get into the profession that I have loved and supported for my entire life. That is one of the reasons that I retired. I could no longer tell students to follow their passion into this world that for most of them will be exhausting, frustrating and ridiculously challenging.<sup>38</sup>

Her “capacity for trust” has been so damaged that she can no longer even support the idea that others should enter into the profession at all. What’s more, though significant, the implications of this are not limited to her exhausted internal state, moral dismay, or feelings of ambiguity regarding her profession and its utility and goodness. If teachers are, in fact, living in the wake of moral injury, then it is likely this influences the students in their care.

Educational reformer Frances E. Fuller wrote that “teachers teach far more than just intellectual content in their total interactions with students. Students learn from teachers’ attitudes and ways of responding which comprise part of their ability to cope, but which teachers may not be conscious of teaching...”<sup>39</sup> Not only are teachers struggling with the intense pressure of their call in conflict with structural limitations, but their own uneasiness likely affects students as well. When teachers themselves have come to question participation in the educational system, what does that communicate — even if unintentionally — to students?

The issue is not merely that sometimes it is hard to be ethical in a world that is complex and multifaceted. That reality is true for all people and professions. People in the teaching profession enter a particularly challenging context because their job is often bound up in their sense of calling. For teachers, professional educational challenges are often personal spiritual ones as well. The problem at hand is far larger than an individual’s failing: “where just action is both obligatory and impossible... educators suffer moral injury: the trauma of perpetrating significant moral wrong against others despite one’s wholehearted desire and responsibility to do otherwise.”<sup>40</sup> The “ought” of educational opportunity for all (justice) conflicts with the “is” of local financial restraints, federal educational policy mandates, and the realities of the teaching profession being both vocation and occupation.<sup>41</sup>

Teachers want the best educational experience possible for their students but sometimes that is not viable. They want justice but are up against systems and structures that are larger than they are and which may well be resistant to change. If, following Reyes, vocation is that which grips us and inspires us to wake up and make a difference, to order our lives so that we might

38 Yarbrough, “Georgia Teachers Frustrated.”

39 Fuller, “Intensive Individualization,” 3.

40 Levinson, “Moral Injury and the Ethics of Educational Injustice,” 7.

41 It should also be noted that the dynamics of intersectionality and overlapping oppressions should not be forgotten in this context either. For example, a recent educational flare up occurred in Atlanta with educator Patrice Brown, whose job was placed at risk as a result of her attractive physical appearance being deemed “inappropriate” for school settings. Many have suggested that this issue only *is* an issue as a function of racism and sexism. See, for example: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/this-sexy-teacher-isnt-inappropriate---you-are/>

flourish and, in turn, call others into a greater flourishing of life, then to stymie that call does moral injury. In US public schools teachers often face this reality and we do ourselves no favors by ignoring that fact.

### **Implications and Next Steps**

At least two areas of response seem evident. Firstly, there are concrete implications that follow from accepting that MI is present in the teaching profession. Acknowledging MI could influence education at the school level as well as in teacher training programs and educational policy. Secondly — and speaking more theoretically — this topic lends credence to the legitimacy of theological and religious reflection on the role and function of public schooling in the US. Though the US does maintain a strict separation of Church and State for confessional religion, the paucity of scholarship regarding academic exploration of spiritualities and theologies of education is marked.

As for the teaching side of things, some work has begun. For example, the utility of MI literature for education is beginning to be explored by Lauren Porosoff of The Teaching Tolerance initiative at The Southern Poverty Law Center.<sup>42</sup> Porosoff has done some initial exploration of the power and transformative healing that can emerge when school dynamics can be revealed as moral injury, developing an instrument to be used in classrooms with teachers to help them think through the ways in which they may be under strain that they have not yet come to recognize consciously. Academically, ethicist Meira Levinson has begun to reference the MI literature in her work on educational injustice. She writes,

Educators deserve resources to learn how to eliminate moral injury where possible (e.g. by learning techniques from expert educators that eliminate apparently intractable trade-offs and hence actually enable them to meet the demands of justice). They should be supported in their attempts to strive for justice, and enabled as much as possible to achieve it via education-specific and more general social and economic reforms. But since moral injury is to some extent inevitable, at least under the non-ideal conditions that afflict schools and societies worldwide, educators equally deserve resources to learn how to grapple with (even if not fully meet) the demands of enacting justice in ethically complex and challenging circumstances.<sup>43</sup>

The work of both Porosoff and Levinson points to the kind of efforts needed to more fully engage the topic in such a way as to support actual pedagogical change and engender transformation. They are providing “a calling to new life” in our educational systems. Yet while I fully support and want to promote their work I find it insufficient. To be clear, nothing more can be reasonably expected from either Porosoff or Levinson: they are doing exactly the kind of work that a curriculum consultant and an educational ethicist should do. But as a theologian I cannot help but look to this work and see an area for theory and theological reflection that has great potential and relevance but little extant literature.

42 Porosoff, “Healing from Moral Injury,” 49-51.

43 Levinson, “Moral Injury and the Ethics of Educational Injustice,” 33.

In 1984 religious educator John Hull called for the development of a “theology of education.” His vision was not a theology of education in the polemic sense of advocating for religiously confessional content in the curriculum, prayer in school, or the teaching of intelligent design, etc., but an inquiry into (1) how particular practices within public education may have an effect on the psycho-spiritual development of youth, and (2) why people of faith may have an investment in addressing current educational practices in public schooling.<sup>44</sup> More than three decades later there have been less than a half dozen major attempts at anything like this, and some of them lean very heavily towards a polemic of (re)Christianizing the public sphere.<sup>45</sup>

Given the continued absence of “theology of education” literature in general and what I believe is the increasing relevance of MI scholarship for education in particular, the time seems ripe for additional work in this area. Such a project seems a good fit for what Elaine Graham and her colleagues call “theology-in-action,” a public theology that reflects on the ways in which religion can interrogate questions of economics, politics, law, and justice, doing so from a theological perspective, especially as done with the intent to critique and offer constructive recommendations.<sup>46</sup> Educational reform can be informed and inspired by spiritual and theological reflection without inappropriately dipping into confessional proselytizing.

If we accept Paulo Freire’s claims that education is a political and moral practice<sup>47</sup> — I do wholeheartedly — the situation of MI in schools prompts several kinds of questions: What is the spiritual and moral impact of enforcing educative practices even when the teachers enforcing them feel conflicted about their merit? Ought the spiritual or religious convictions of people of faith inform their thoughts on pedagogy? What is the relationship between systemic oppressions in the broader culture and MI in schools? In what ways do these questions provide insight into a means to more fully engender a call to new life? The time is ripe for exploring these issues and the ways in which theology might contribute to constructive visions of education with a view toward an increase of human flourishing, toward that deep connection between student, teacher, and subject that is the hallmark not only of call, but of faithful response as well.

44 Hull, *Studies in Religion and Education*, 265-71.

45 E.g. Mary Elizabeth Moore’s *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method*; Francis & Thatcher’s *Christian Perspectives for Education: A Reader in the Theology of Education*; Davies’ *A Christian Theology of Education*; Hodgson’s *God’s Wisdom: Toward a Theology of Education*; Webb’s *Taking Religion to School: Christian Theology and Secular Education*.

46 Graham, et al., 2005.

47 E.g. Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

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## **“Re-Imagining Interreligious Prayer as Creative Liturgies: From Resistance to Revelatory and Religiously Educative”**

### **Abstract**

This article re-imagines interreligious prayer as a creative or paraliturgical experience beyond and outside of the official liturgies and rubrics of a given religious tradition. It proposes that principles of inculturation, like dynamic equivalence, can guide interreligious prayer. Central to this research is an understanding of one revelation, proposed by Gabriel Moran, of one God that is uniquely and humanly expressed through the various religious traditions of the world. This understanding of revelation acts as a bridge and not a barrier to interreligious prayer. It allows each religious tradition to be faithful to its own ritual practices and beliefs, while learning about and respecting the ritual practices and beliefs of other religious traditions. The article will begin with the purposes and historical background for interreligious prayer, followed by an exploration of resistance to interreligious prayer and different understandings of revelation. Important principles of inculturation will be presented as guides to interreligious prayer and conclude with how the two sides of religious education can contribute to interreligious prayer being both revelatory and religiously educative.

### **The Two Trumpets of Interreligious Prayer**

As a participant in the 2016 “Building Abrahamic Partnership” (BAP) program at Hartford Seminary I attended a Torah Study at Congregation Beth Israel with Rabbi Dena Shaffer in West Hartford, Connecticut. It was part of the program that involved a visit to a Jewish synagogue and an experience of a Saturday Sabbath service. One of the passages studied was from the book of Numbers 10:1-10. It records the directions God gave to Moses to make two trumpets and to blow them for different occasions. When both were blown everyone would gather at the entrance of the meeting tent. When one trumpet was blown only the princes and chief of the troops would gather. The sons of Aaron, the priests, were given the role of blowing the trumpets. When going to war against an enemy attacking the Israelites the trumpet was to be blown and God would remember and save them. On days of celebration and for festivals the trumpets would be blown to remind the people of God’s presence and that “I, the Lord, am your God” (Numbers 10:10).

These two occasions for blowing the trumpet often serve as occasions for interreligious prayer. Tragic occasions like 9/11, the Sandy Hook Shootings, the Orlando night club shootings, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters can all be reasons for various religious traditions gathering for prayer to console, comfort and strengthen one another. Civic occasions like Thanksgiving, New Year’s, World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Assisi Days of Prayer for Peace, and gatherings of different religious traditions for joyous reasons can also be occasions for interreligious prayer. While some of these occasions are based on the unpredictability of an event happening in real time and the aftermath of the event, some may have a historical past that is

recalled like the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the holiday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.. A few historical examples are provided that help contextualize the development and opportunities for interreligious prayer.

### **Historical Milestones for the Interreligious Movement**

The 1893 gathering of the World's Congress of Religions at the World's Columbian Exposition, in Chicago, Illinois could be considered as the birth of the interreligious movement in the United States. Twenty-four speakers representing the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions of Christianity gathered together along with representatives from the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Shinto, Confucian, and Zoroastrian traditions. Various talks were given by the different representatives to help others understand their religious traditions (Hanson 1894, 15-16). This gathering would give birth to the Parliament of World's Religions and the Global Interfaith Movement which gathered most recently in Salt Lake City, Utah, October 14-19, 2015 (Mangla 2015, 1).<sup>1</sup>

A second milestone would be the impact of immigration found in the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, which allowed people into the United States from countries other than Europe. A country perceived as Christian became one of the most religiously diverse countries with representatives that are often participants in interreligious services found in the Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Taoist, Jewish, Islamic, and Sikh traditions (Eck 2001 in Phan 2004, xix).<sup>2</sup>

The Assisi World Day of Prayer for Peace was started by Pope St. John Paul II in 1986, and was followed by similar gatherings in 1993 and 2002. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI continued the tradition by convening a Day and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World entitled "Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace." This gathering was attended by nearly 300 representatives from the world religions as well as non-religious/non-believers and marked the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since the first gathering. As of the writing of this article, Pope Francis is scheduled to continue the tradition in Assisi, September 18-20, 2016, titled "Thirst for Peace: Religions and Cultures in dialogue" (Harris 2016, 2). Each of these Assisi events produced many more interreligious services in the United States and around the world.

A final milestone that provides opportunities for interreligious prayer is the United Nations resolution passed on October 20, 2010, declaring the first week of February World Interfaith Harmony Week. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gave this statement: "Interfaith Harmony Week celebrates the principles of tolerance and respect for the other that are deeply rooted in the world's religions. The observance is also a summons to solidarity in the face of those who spread misunderstanding and mistrust" (Ban Ki-moon 2015). Like the Assisi Days of Prayer, World Interfaith Harmony Week has produced hundreds of interreligious events around the world, including an interreligious prayer service facilitated by this author.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2015 parliament in Utah included Mormons/LDS for the first time. The 1893 gathering in Chicago excluded Mormons. This raises the issue of who is invited and who is not to an interreligious prayer service.

<sup>2</sup> Today over 60 million displaced refugees, the worst refugee crisis since World War II, are contributing to the religious diversity in the United States and Europe, with increases in incidents of Islamophobia and xenophobia.

It is at some of these celebrations that resistance to interreligious prayer is found with some religious traditions prohibiting participation or viewing the services with suspicion that promote syncretism and relativism (Bell 2013, 2).<sup>3</sup> Both words require further exploration given the frequency used when negatively and pejoratively applied to an interreligious prayer service.

### **Re-imagining Syncretism and Relativism and Resistance to Interreligious Prayer**

Syncretism is “the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices, or parties, as in philosophy or religion” (Dictionary.com 2016). And, “the blending of two or more religious belief systems into a new system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated traditions” (Wikipedia contributors 2016). Michael Amaladoss views syncretism as the mixing of elements and symbols from different religions resulting in a deleterious way. In his book *Beyond Inculturation: Can the Many Be One?* (1998) he identifies leadership within a religious tradition that typically condemns practices that would be considered syncretistic and those who incorporate a variety of religious symbols as syncretists (1998, 124-125).

Re-imagining interreligious prayer as a creative liturgy outside of the official prayer of a religious tradition could reinterpret the syncretistic as having a positive and not deleterious impact. The bringing together of different religious traditions does attempt an experience that fosters reconciliation or union between the participating religious traditions while acknowledging and respecting the differences that exist and do not disappear within the service or afterwards. Amaladoss sees syncretism in today’s religiously diverse world as unavoidable and claims many people today have a positive appreciation for other religious traditions that fosters dialogue and relationships with other religious traditions rather than viewing other traditions as a threat (1998, 124-125).<sup>4</sup>

While relativism, paired with syncretism, can be a concern that views all religious traditions as the same, without recognizing the differences found in different religious traditions, interreligious prayer can be viewed as an expression of religious pluralism. Each religion can be “affirmed as important but only in relation to the others” so that “the plural and the relative are understood positively” (Moran 1998, 229). Rephrased or reinterpreted, interreligious prayer can result in the syncretistic and relativistic understood positively. Amaladoss describes an illegitimate syncretism as one that produces rituals that can be “instrumentalized and objectified by people” and can be a “danger in secularized societies where religions become private and individualistic” (1998, 125). Ritual becomes something that meets an immediate need or is reduced to magic and people pick and choose what they want or need while losing a sense of the community. Interreligious prayer can affirm a sense of community that extends beyond one

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<sup>3</sup> The Lutheran Church Missouri-Synod (LCMS) prohibit joint worship services and suspended Pastor David Benke after participating in an interreligious prayer service after 9/11. Rev. Rob Morris was reprimanded after participating in interreligious prayer service after the Newtown school shootings.

<sup>4</sup> The “many” Amaladoss refers to may not be representative of the “few” in many religious traditions that are open to interreligious dialogue and prayer given the increase in None’s, those claiming no religious affiliation, or SBNR’s (Spiritual But Not Religious).

religious tradition and is inclusive of other religious traditions. It can be re-imagined as a prayer that celebrates what is most important to a worshipping community “what moves them most” what reveals “the deep convictions and experiences of a community”— the praising of God and promoting right relationships among the various religious traditions of the world (Warren 1997, 12, 19-20).

Anscar Chupungco (1939-2013) in his book *Worship: Progress and Tradition* (1995) recognizes the tension between inculturation and the danger of eclectism and syncretism from a Roman Catholic perspective. He uses the term “eclectism” rather than syncretism and defines it as “a random, indiscriminate, and undigested borrowing of alien doctrines and practices regardless of whether or not they accord with the faith received by the Apostles,” and, describes it as “a kind of multiple choice whereby each one may select elements that one finds suitable or convenient” (1995, 3). He calls for the rejection of this and any form of eclectism in Christianity.

At the same time he recognizes principles of inculturation that involve not just the juxtaposition of unrelated elements, but the incorporation of elements that enhance the meaning of the official liturgy of the Church without danger to the original meaning (Chupungco 1995, 3). He states, “If the liturgy must communicate the church’s faith to people, it had to be experienced with words, rites, and symbols that were familiar to them. It had to become recognizably incarnate, that is, as having taken flesh in the cultural milieu of the worshipers. What inculturation means is that worship assimilates the people’s language, ritual, and symbolic patterns” (Chupungco 1995, 2). This author would apply these same principles to interreligious prayer. Interreligious prayer assimilates the language, ritual, and symbolic patterns of other religious traditions that re-imagines prayer as a creative prayer and promotes greater understanding and respect of other religious traditions.

A final re-imagining of syncretism in a positive way is found in the concept of *hybridity* in Jeannine Hill Fletcher’s book *Monopoly of Salvation? A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (2005). Fletcher views hybridity as all of the factors that influence our identity as Christians, including the influences of other religious traditions that have occurred over the course of Christian history (2005, 26-52, 82-101). This understanding of hybridity is based on an understanding of God as an incomprehensible mystery that no religious tradition can fully grasp. Examples of the influence of mystery religions of the ancient world and the cultural contexts that included the sports and legal arenas can be found in the development of the Christian rite of baptism. Every element including water and words, and the symbols of oil, chrism, white garment, lighted candle, and a process of initiation are borrowed from the mystery rites of the ancient world (Chupungco 1995, 17). Church fathers familiar with these mystery rites, or cultural practices like Justin Martyr, Hippolytus, Ambrose, and Tertullian incorporated these elements to enhance the rite of baptism to make it more meaningful for the Christian community. They aligned these beliefs and practices with Christianity while rejecting any form of idol worship (1995, 7-8). Interreligious prayer holds the possibility of a similar development that can lead to

the incorporation of elements from other religious traditions into the official prayer of a given religious tradition that enhances the meaning of the prayer.<sup>5</sup>

If an understanding of syncretism and relativism can be re-imagined in a positive way to act as a bridge and not a barrier to interreligious prayer, an understanding of revelation needs to be explored in the same way. The next section will survey various understandings of revelation and how revelation can be an important concept to explore among the various religious traditions of the world as a bridge and not a barrier to interreligious prayer.

### **Re-Imagining Revelation as Bridge and not Barrier to Interreligious Prayer**

Within the Roman Catholic tradition a major shift took place regarding an understanding of revelation between the Vatican I Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* (1870) and the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* (1965) and other Vatican II documents. The Vatican I Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* (1870) expressed an understanding of revelation as the communication of divine mysteries, the doctrine of faith, the deposit of faith and revealed truths. A distinction was made between a natural and supernatural revelation. Natural revelation was the understanding that God could be known through human reason, which challenged *fideism* as the belief that reason was not necessary given the primacy of faith and conviction of heart. Supernatural revelation was understood as God being known in the sacred scriptures of the Church and “the unwritten traditions which have been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself; or, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit have been handed down by the apostles themselves, and have thus come to us” (Manning 1871, 210). This understanding challenged *rationalism* as the belief that nothing could be perceived as true unless it is true according to human reason. Understanding of the scriptures was to be determined by the teaching office of the Church and no one else was permitted to interpret the scriptures apart from the teaching office of the Church.

This understanding of revelation can be identified as a propositional model of revelation found in other religious traditions. In this model God communicated basic truths to a specific group of people in history, who wrote down the truths in human language conditioned by culture and religious experience and contained in the scripture and tradition of the Church. This understanding of revelation does not consider other religious traditions as part of God’s revelation except to view them as excluded as receivers of this revelation and deposit of truths which “must be jealously guarded and defensively protected by the Church” (Lane 1981, 29).

The Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* (1965) made an important shift in the understanding of revelation as found in *Dei Filius*. Revelation was more than simply a body of supernatural truths contained in scripture and tradition and taught by the Church. It emphasized the personal and relational self-communication of God and God’s self to humanity in Christ. This understanding expressed an indissoluble relationship “between the experience of revelation and the faith interpretation of that experience” (Lane 1981, 47). Vatican II used language that

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<sup>5</sup> This has already happened in the Roman Catholic tradition as it pertains to initiation and marriage rites in different cultures. The Eucharist continues to be vigilantly protected against the incorporation of elements from other religious traditions.

was dynamic, experiential and personalist. The little written about the role of Jesus Christ as a source of revelation in *Dei Filius* was emphasized in *Dei Verbum* along with a Trinitarian understanding of revelation as an act of God's love expressed through Christ so humanity could share in God's divine nature in and with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, revelation is a personal invitation to humanity calling for a response to enter into the divine life of God in the present life of believers (1981, 46). While *Dei Verbum* (4) stated "no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ" (Flannery 1975, 751) it expressed the idea that growth and development can be experienced through: listening to the Word of God in scripture, the celebration of the sacraments, the teaching of the Church by the Magisterium, and the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community and the world at large (Lane 1981, 47). This statement does not express the belief that God is no longer active in the world or that God is no longer communicating God's self through the personal experience of humanity.

Other Vatican II documents affirm an understanding of God's present activity in the world and the call for a human response and responsibility. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes* (1965) states that the Church has a responsibility to read and interpret the signs of the times in "language intelligible in every generation," "in light of the Gospel (4)" (Flannery 1975, 905). This discernment of the signs of the times "may be genuine signs of the presence of the purpose of God" (912) expressed through events, needs and language in the present life of the community of faith. The call, response, and responsibility applies to the whole people of God, who "with the Holy Spirit," are called upon "to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and to interpret them in the light of the divine word, in order that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and more suitably presented" (946).

*Nostra Aetate* (2) *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (1965) expressed the Church's relationship with Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. It states: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men" (Flannery 1975, 739). Rephrased positively, the Catholic Church accepts what is true and holy in these religions. It affirmed the special relationship between Christianity and Judaism by acknowledging the "spiritual ties which link the people of the new covenant to the stock of Abraham. The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God's plan of salvation the beginnings of her faith and election are to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets" (1975, 740). *Nostra Aetate* (4) addressed the historical anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism that has been part of Jewish-Christian history, and rejects any charges of deicide brought against the Jews.

This document reversed previous statements of the Church that condemned other religious traditions. The Decree for the Jacobites of the Council of Florence in 1442 states: "those who remain outside the Catholic Church, including pagans, Jews, heretics, or schismatics, will go to the 'eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' unless before their death they join the Catholic Church" (Phan 2004, xxix).

The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium 16)* (1965) affirms the possibility of salvation for Jews, Muslims, and those from other religious traditions and others “who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation (Flannery 1975, 367).

The *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (Ad Gentes Divinitus 3,9)* (1965), speaks of God’s universal plan of salvation for mankind (Flannery 1975, 814). It recognizes the presence of “elements of truth and grace which are found among peoples, and which are, as it were, a secret presence of God” (823). In Article I: Christian Witness (11), Christians are called to be familiar with the “national and religious traditions and uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among them” (825). This document encourages interreligious dialogue when it states through “sincere and patient dialogue” with other religious traditions Christians might “learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations” (825). Further collaborative efforts that can occur as a result of interreligious prayer are encouraged between the Christian and non-Christian religions “in the right ordering of social and economic affairs” (826).

Peter Phan (2004) argues that Judaism and other religious traditions are “part of the plan of divine providence and endowed with a particular role in the history of salvation. They are not merely a ‘preparation’ for, ‘stepping stones’ toward, or ‘seeds of Christianity’ and destined to be ‘fulfilled’ by it. Rather, they have their own autonomy and their proper role as ways of salvation at least for their adherents” (Phan 2004, 143). He acknowledges that “Vatican II self-consciously refrains from affirming that these religions as such function as ways of salvation in a manner analogous, let alone parallel, to Christianity” (139).

While the Vatican II documents and post-Vatican II documents fail to explicitly recognize other religious traditions as revelatory and having a path or way of salvation that is analogous to or parallel to Christianity, the role of the Holy Spirit can support an understanding of one revelation of one God that is uniquely and humanly expressed through the different religious traditions of the world.

*Ad Gentes Divinitus* (4) (1965) speaks of the role of the Holy Spirit “at work in the world before Christ was glorified” (Flannery 1975, 816). *Gaudium et Spes* (22) (1965) states that “the Holy Spirit that offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery” (924) can support such an understanding of revelation. In *Redemptoris missio* (28) (1990) St. John Paul II states that the Holy Spirit is present “not only in individuals but also in society and history, peoples, cultures, and religions.”

Resistance to these ideas was expressed in *Dominus Iesus (DI)* (2000) issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The concern of the congregation was that religious plurality and diversity may lead to relativism. It rejected the idea as “contrary to the faith to consider the church as *one* way of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complimentary to the church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the church toward the eschatological kingdom of God (DI 2000, 21). While respecting other religious traditions 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.’” “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 (DI 2000, 22). This concern for relativism fails to re-imagine the relativistic nature of interreligious dialogue and prayer that affirms relationships with other religious traditions and views plurality and diversity in a positive light rather than viewing other religious traditions as being in a gravely deficient situation.

In his book *Models of Revelation* (1983, 1991) Avery Dulles surveys five models of revelation that are understood as: doctrine, history, inner experience, dialectical presence, and new awareness. Various theologians are identified with each model. While the models contain some elements helpful to understanding revelation, all of the models are located within a Christian context and critique. Except for the new awareness model all of them give very little attention, if any, to nonbiblical traditions being revelatory of one God. Some even take a hostile view towards nonbiblical religious traditions. These models of revelation are often a barrier to interreligious prayer given the lack of consideration and inclusion of nonbiblical religious traditions as being revelatory.

Revelation as doctrine was explored in the propositional truth model that was expressed in the Vatican I Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*. This understanding is expressed through propositional statements that affirm attributes of God and beliefs in God as authoritative teacher and Supreme Being. Emphasis is placed on God’s activity in the past. Protestants claim the Bible as a primary source of inspired and inerrant teachings, and Roman Catholics claim revelation expressed through Scripture and Tradition. As previously mentioned, Vatican II documents shift the emphasis from past truths to present experiences and everyone’s responsibility to read the signs of the times in light of the Gospel and the self–communication of God that is personal and relational. All members of the Church are called to be in relationship and dialogue with other religious traditions. A limitation to this model is a failure to consider how historical, social, and cultural circumstances have shaped and influenced biblical narratives. This can be found in a sexist interpretation of the Bible and the sacramental system in the Roman Catholic Church that did not take into consideration the lived experience of women (Hilkert 1993, 71).<sup>6</sup> Three helpful contributions from a Christian feminist perspective for an understanding of revelation as a bridge to interreligious prayer is the acceptance of sources of revelation in other religious traditions beyond Christianity, the recognition of Jesus as a unique and definitive revelation of God while emphasizing his liberating and inclusive love that was embodied and preached, and the limits of “any historical revelation of the mystery of the unknown God” (1993, 65).

Gabriel Moran’s understanding of an exclusive and inclusive revelation will be explored that can result in an understanding of one revelation of one God that is humanly expressed through the various religious traditions of the world. Martin Buber helps summarize this understanding of revelation as call, response, and responsibility (Buber 1957, 39) and Gabriel Moran as revelation found “in the present, personal, and more than personal experience of all peoples” (Moran 1992, 56).

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis has recently appointed a commission to explore the possibility of women to the diaconate, an ordained ministry in the Roman Catholic tradition.

### **Revelation as Inclusive and/or Exclusive: Bridge or Barrier to Interreligious Prayer?**

The background to understanding revelation as exclusive and inclusive comes from an understanding of uniqueness that contains the same paradoxical meanings. For Moran, uniqueness can be understood by that which is most exclusively particular and most inclusively universal. What is most particular can be the most nearly universal (Moran 2002, 222). What most people understand as unique or most different from others also contains elements that place the object, or subject of uniqueness in relation to other things that are similar. The comparison can always go in two ways, increasing exclusion or increasing inclusion.

When uniqueness is applied to human beings it is increasingly inclusive. While everyone is born of a particular culture, race, language, and religious tradition there is an inclusive uniqueness among all human beings belonging to a human family. An exclusive revelation is one based on the possession of truths. Other traditions would be viewed as threats (Moran 1992, 46). An inclusive revelation is one that is in relationship with other religious traditions and the meaning of revelation is discovered or rediscovered through important experiences of life and communication and dialogue with other people (46).

For Moran, three terms help orient an inclusive understanding of revelation: community, experience, and the present. “Revelation is not the moments, the rituals, the texts; but revelation needs concrete embodiment in moments, rituals, and texts” (Moran 1992, 53). Revelation is not something that a religion possesses, but revelation has a need for people or community with symbols, expressions, forms, and embodiments of revelation (53). Within the Jewish tradition revelation is understood by Gershom Scholem (1961) who states, “instead of one act of Revelation there is a constant repetition of the act” (Scholem 1961, 9 in Moran 1992, 54).

Moran relies on Martin Buber *Eclipse of God*, to connect the person and their actions as essential to the revelation that takes place (Buber 1957). While the world of nature reveals the divine teacher, the one who witnesses it and responds makes it revelatory. The role of sacred texts does not need to be denied, but revelation is located in the present experience. The past truths of sacred texts provide an interpretation of a never-ending process of revelation (Moran 1992, 55). Rather than describe a Christian revelation or a Jewish revelation. “the only revelation there is, the one in Jews and Christians participate” (Moran 1992, 56). This understanding is very conducive for the ongoing conversations with other religious traditions. A basic start to the conversation is a discussion of the meaning of revelation and finding words that are similar to revelation. The language and prayers that are recited and shared within an interreligious prayer service can be recited as a formal prayer or scripture from a given tradition, or they can be re-imagined as a creative prayer based on principles of inculturation found in the following section.

### **Principles of Inculturation as a Guide to Interreligious Prayer**

One of the results of Roman Catholic missionary experiences in China and India was the development of principles of inculturation. An instruction written by Propaganda Fide in 1659 under Pope Alexander VII addressed the incompatibility and absurdity of transplanting a European culture onto a Chinese culture (Chupungco 1982, 39). The instruction affirmed the rites and customs inherent to a particular people and culture “be preserved intact, in order, no doubt, to make use of them as cultural vehicles of the Christian message in those places” (Ibid).

The Vatican II document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 37, addressed the matter of uniformity as it relates to the official liturgy of the Church and elements of other religious traditions that one encounters during missionary activities. “Even in the liturgy the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or good of the whole community. Rather does she respect and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations. Anything in these people’s way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy, and, if possible, preserves intact. She sometimes even admits such things into the liturgy itself, provided they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit (Flanner 1875, 13).

These principles would lead to the incorporation of ancestral rites into the Christian liturgy in Taiwan after Vatican II by the Catholics of Nationalist China (Shorter 1988, 159). In the same way that ancestral rites were incorporated into the official liturgy of the Church, creative interreligious prayer brings different religious traditions together without the necessary approval from Church or religious leadership. Does this prayer offer a personal encounter with God (Chupungco 1982, 63)? How and what does the liturgy teach or instruct the faithful? Does the prayer praise God and/or promote right relationships with others? This last question can be used as criteria for those wishing to participate in an interreligious prayer service. It allows for both theistic and non-theistic traditions, and humanist traditions that promote right relationships between human beings.

*Dynamic Equivalence* involves replacing an element of the Roman liturgy with something in the local culture that has an equal meaning. These changes in an official liturgy require approval from the local conference of bishops in the Roman Catholic Church and the incorporation into the typical editions of the liturgical books and not subject to one’s imagination (Chupungco 1992, 37-38). He also identified *static equivalents*, which would be hard words to translate.

Some of the words that demonstrate dynamic equivalence and that can be incorporated into a prayer are: shalom, salam, shanti, and peace. All of these words mean peace. Inclusive God language can be examples of dynamic equivalence that theistic religious traditions could reflect on as words for a creative prayer: Absolute Being and Supreme Power. An example of a creative prayer that was meant to address Jews, Christians, and Muslims was recited by Saint John Paul II at one of the Assisi days of prayer: “Peace to all of you, peace from the God of Abraham, the great and merciful God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ‘God of peace’ (cf. Rm. 15,33, etc), whose name is just ‘peace’ (cf. Eph. 2:14)” (John Paul II 1993, 1).

While some would critique a creative prayer using the principles of dynamic equivalence as a compromise of Christian beliefs or a lowest common denominator quality to the prayer, Jacques Dupuis finds justification for this prayer in the “Guidelines for Interreligious Dialogue” (#82) of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI). It states: “The purpose of such common prayer is primarily the corporate worship of God of all who has created us to be one large family. We are called to worship God not only individually but also in community, and since in a very real and fundamental manner we are one with the whole of humanity, it is not only our right but our duty to worship him together with others (CBCI 1989, 68 in Dupuis 2002, 237).

Dupuis adds theological considerations to support this creative common prayer. He states, all human beings are created in God's image and likeness, all religions are part of the universal Reign of God established by God in Jesus Christ; that the religions of the world are God's gift to humanity, and together, each religious tradition can pray and worship God in a corporate manner (Dupuis 2002, 240-241). The acceptability of the creative common prayer can be greatly enhanced by the two sides of religious education that prepare people for participating in an interreligious prayer service. Knowledge about one's own religious tradition, or learning to be religious by participating in the liturgy and acts of service in one's own tradition can be enhanced by learning about the other religious traditions and what they have in common. This can help provide a greater understanding of what takes place at the interreligious prayer.

### **The Two Sides of Religious Education**

It is important to remember that the term "religion" suggests plurality. Interreligious education is inherent to religious education because the goal is to understand one's own religious tradition in relation to other religious traditions. If education does not involve a conversation between other religious traditions it would not be deserving of the term "religious education" (Moran 1989, 228). Krister Stendahl provides three rules of religious understanding helpful to the task of understanding other religious traditions within the context of the classroom or other learning environment. When trying to learn about another religious tradition ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies. This promotes interreligious dialogue and the possibility of team teaching, and site visits. This dialogue is enhanced if an understanding of one revelation of one God humanly expressed in various ways is embraced. Do not compare your best to their worst. This promotes a critical self-examination of one's own religious tradition. Finally, leave room for "holy envy" which is the recognition of elements in another religious tradition that are admirable and desirable.

### **Conclusion: The Two Amens of Interreligious Prayer**

This article began with the two trumpets blowing on different occasions that are conducive for interreligious prayer. It concludes with re-imagining the traditional word that concludes a prayer: Amen. Part of the discernment and sensitivity to planning a creative liturgy is the content of the prayers. If they are specific to a particular tradition or created as a common prayer using principles of dynamic equivalence can the participants say "Amen" at the conclusion of the prayer? This author proposes a second amen, an "amen" of acknowledgment and affirmation of the beliefs of the other even if not shared by all those gathered for prayer.

**Amen! Amen!**

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## Theology's Messy *Orientation*: Teaching Jesus' Incarnation as Antidote to Racism

### Abstract

Applying Educational Theorist Pamela Grossman's notion of *orientation* and Jewish Education scholar Barry Holtz's modification of it, I ask in this paper what theology's *orientation* is, which is vital for teachers of theology. In light of the answers garnered from such preliminary reflections, I argue that theology is *oriented to* being particularly open and organically connected to culture and life in all its messiness, connoting the wholeness of the connection between theology and life in all its messiness. This implies in turn that teachers of theology should be ready to acknowledge theology's open and organically connected nature to life in all its messiness. Such openness and organic connection of theology to life in all its messiness can take its cue from Incarnation of Jesus for his Jewishness, for the Incarnation tells us that Jesus in his humanness was deeply open and organically connected to everything in life in its messiness. It is in this regard that I finally attempt to make a case that such Incarnational orientation of theology tends to play itself out as an antidote to racist discourse, preemptively undermining any attempt to drain Jesus of his Jewishness, thereby cherishing our humanness as such regardless of our skin color.

### Theology and Its *Orientation*

What is the relationship between theology and culture, with teaching theology in mind?<sup>1</sup> While it is almost impossible to give a full answer to the question at hand in these limited pages, here I focus on how the Christian identity is formed under the complex interaction of the two in light of life in all its messiness. In this section, therefore, following Kathryn Tanner and Ted A. Smith, I am making a case that neither theology nor culture is insulated, either from each other or from life in all its messiness; rather, they actively affect each other because each is *open to* and *organically connected* with the other, and this means that both theology and culture touch all dimensions of life in all its messiness.<sup>2</sup> How does one know that theology and culture are *open to* and *organically connected* in this way then? By means of falsifying a theological movement in which theology and culture are neither open to, nor organically connected to each other, I am

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<sup>1</sup> I am not attempting here to define neither culture nor theology as I begin my exploration of the relationship between theology and culture. In fact, Kathryn Tanner, in her book *Theories of Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1997), 3, takes note of the fact that culture is notoriously difficult to define. For that matter, defining theology would not matter much either here. Instead, I am focusing on how the complex relationship between the two affects the formation of the Christian identity.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 4.

going to make a case for this. What I would like to argue eventually is, following Tanner, that the Christian identity formation “is established from the beginning through the use of borrowed materials.”<sup>3</sup>

Two of the representative examples running counter to Tanner's argument in this regard, and my argument for that matter, are radical orthodoxy and postliberal theology. For radical orthodoxy, theology seems to be predicated upon the existence of a Christian society parallel with a secular one. Tanner refutes such understanding of theology as follows: “But if the Christian community serves all the functions that a so-called secular society does and is organized along entirely different lines, as Milbank affirms, then Christian communities are still being imagined here.”<sup>4</sup> The point here is that no one can empirically prove the existence of the kind of Christian community Milbank seems to advocate, well bounded and self-contained within itself. For postliberals, one of the mistakes is their presupposition for theological method: “Theology projects onto the object studied what its own procedures of investigation requires—a coherent whole. The method of study itself thereby validates the conclusions of the theologian while disqualifying the people and practices it studies from posing a challenge to those conclusions.”<sup>5</sup> The reality is that theology is never a coherent whole, just as culture is never a coherent whole, but always responding to the changing dynamic of life in all its messiness. The presupposition that theology is a coherent whole makes sense only when our lives in the world never change and become static, which is not true at all. This is one reason that I put an emphasis on the openness and organic connection between theology and culture, as both respond to all the possible dimensions of life.

In the foregoing, the main thrust of Tanner’s arguments, at least with regard to this paper, is that both radical orthodoxy and postliberal theology posit “imagined” aspects of the Christian community and theological method respectively, and such imagination is not grounded in the messiness of life. Rather, these approaches picture some idealistic vision for either the Christian community or the work of theology. Interestingly enough, Ted A. Smith also captures these same “imagined” aspects of theology, arguing for the following three points. First, theology should be aware of its own limited standpoints; second, no theology is purely self-contained and bounded whole, but always in conversation with a hodgepodge of diverse cultural traditions and practices; third, theology not grounded in historical reality promises too much, yet achieves too little, while theology embedded in concrete historical reality is more realistic about what can be done, leaving the final redemption up to God.<sup>6</sup> What Smith is saying here could be crystalized in

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 76. Still, Tanner finds the postliberal notion of boundary somewhat helpful: “One can still agree with postliberal theology that the identity of a Christian way of life is formed by a cultural boundary. This is not, however, the sharp boundary of independent cultural contents as postliberalism at its extreme imagines. The boundary is, instead, one of use that allows Christian identity to be essentially impure and mixed, the identity of a hybrid that always shares cultural forms with its wider host culture and other religions (notably Judaism).” Ibid., 114.

<sup>6</sup> Ted A. Smith, “Redeeming Critique: Resignations to the Cultural Turn in Christian Theology and Ethics,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 24.2 (2004):89-113. In this article, Smith defines clearly what his understanding of theology’s turn to culture is. In fact, Smith begins his article with what theology’s cultural turn is: “taking the practices, beliefs, narratives, or traditions of a particular community as starting points for normative or theological reflections.” While there could be so many other ways of defining theology’s cultural turn, they all boil down to taking a particular community as the starting point of theological reflections, and it is in this regard that I take Smith’s definition here.

his engagement with Stanley Hauerwas's theology among others. Smith is sharp in seeing through Hauerwas's idealized vision of the church, which is nowhere to be found in real life. Smith also discerns that, while Hauerwas idealizes his own vision of the church, he is rather oblivious of his own standpoint, which is neither a theological whole, nor "pure symbols of moral and theological unequivocalness." Thus, a theology devoid of such pitfalls of Hauerwas's would be open to critical scrutiny of all kinds.<sup>7</sup> In other words, if one gets as close as possible to *what is*, rather than to its idealistic representation, one is obliged to abandon any picture of purism, a trap which radical orthodoxy and postliberal theology fall into.

Life is messy, and there is no place for theological purism, if theology is to be grounded on what is. Since I will draw later in this paper a fuller picture of theological purism in relation to theological pride and humility, I abstain from getting into any detailed account here in this regard; for now, suffice it to say that the relationship between theology and culture, sketched here as *open* and *organically connected* to each other, reflects that theological purism is not a tenable position given the messiness of life.

In light of this, then, how does one proceed to "teaching" theology?<sup>8</sup> Above all, what seems to be suggested in the discussions thus far is that an understanding of theology has to take seriously the messiness of life, especially in its relationship to culture in terms of setting up boundaries, more toward fluidity and malleability, rather than clear-cut rigor and strictness. This is precisely where I draw upon the Educational Theorist Pamela Grossman's notion of orientation, the phrase which I have occasionally alluded to from the beginning of this paper without further explanations. In coining the term *orientation*, Grossman was originally concerned with what bearings teacher's knowledge of the subject matter might have on teaching a subject, i.e., an academic discipline. Grossman discovered through her research that there was "little or no relationship between teacher's subject-matter knowledge and either pupil achievement or general teaching performance."<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of this paper, this means that doctrinal knowledge of the teacher would not matter so much for students' coming to form their identities. What is important for "teaching" the Christian theology then, especially for identity-formation? At this point, Grossman argues for what she calls *orientation*, which is "more than a casual attitude towards the subject matter, an orientation towards literature represents a basic organizing framework for knowledge about literature."<sup>10</sup> Jewish education scholar Barry Holtz has adopted Grossman's notion of orientation and applied it to Jewish religious education, and Holtz defines *orientation* this way:

A description not of a teacher's "method" in some technical meaning of the word, but in a deeper sense, of a teacher's most powerful conceptions and beliefs about the field he or she is teaching. It is the living expression of the philosophical questions... What is my view of the aims of education [in this subject], and how as a teacher do I attain those aims?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>8</sup> See footnotes 1, 3, and 16.

<sup>9</sup> Pamela Grossman, "What Are We Talking About Anyway? Subject-Matter Knowledge of English Teachers," in *Advances in Research on Teaching*, ed. J. Brophy (JAI: Bingley, UK, 1991), 2:245-64.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>11</sup> Barry Holtz, *Textual Knowledge: Teaching the Bible in Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: JTS Press, 2003), 48-49.

So then, what is the orientation of theology? Among other things, its orientation could be expressed as being open and organically connected to life in all its messiness. Such orientation of theology, i.e., openness and organic connection of theology to life in all its messiness, can take its cue from Incarnation of Jesus for his Jewishness, for the Incarnation tells us that Jesus in his humanness was deeply open and organically connected to everything in life in its messiness. In the next section, then, I will argue that theological racism as a corollary of anti-Incarnational orientation of theology, after which I will showcase how, among other theologies of Incarnation, Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology of Incarnation effectively precludes such theological racism.

### **Theological Origins of Racism and Its Cure: Supersessionism vs. Christ's Jewish Flesh in the Life of the Trinity in Hans Urs von Balthasar**

This section explores the church's social-theological mis-formation in theological racism through its theology of supersessionism, which is subject to, although not necessarily so, anti-Incarnational orientation of theology. Not only do I argue that theological supersessionism had generated the mis-formation of theological pride, I also contend that Jesus' Incarnation and his Jewishness understood in the context of the Trinitarian life in Hans Urs von Balthasar's theology can be an antidote to theological racism as well as to the pride and the desire for purity coming along such pride.

What is a theology of supersessionism then? R. Kendall Soulen in his *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* has defined a theology of supersessionism as follows: "God chose the Jewish people after the fall of Adam in order to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior. After Christ came, however, the special role of the Jewish people came to an end and its place was taken by the church, the new Israel."<sup>12</sup> While this story seems innocent enough, treating the Jews and Israel with perhaps respectful indifference, Soulen nails down his point that it was because of a theology of supersessionism that some German Christians in the 1930s "began to expel Christians of Jewish descent from their pulpits and parishes."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, after the World War II, when the church's position on the Jews began to change, "one of the most important features of this change has been a critical reevaluation of the teaching of supersessionism."<sup>14</sup>

Looked at this way, what seemed at first a dispassionate setting aside of the Jews and Israel from the main stage of God's work might be perhaps something much more heinous, for it seems hard to deny that behind their motivation for dispelling Jews was a desire for theological purity, namely, Jesus unstained by the mess of Jews, which many scholars assert to be the archetype of theological racism. For example, in her book *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*, Susannah Heschel explicates well the connection between stripping Jesus of his Jewishness (and thereby getting rid of all the Jews) and racialization.

Rejecting Jesus' Jewishness and defining him as Aryan was about not only redefining Christianity, but racializing Europe: reassuring Europeans that they were white. Images of Jesus were crucial to racism in establishing the primary criterion of whiteness: Christ

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<sup>12</sup> R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

himself. It is not the Caucasian male who was the model of the authentic white man, but rather an *idealized* (italics mine) “White Man,” namely Christ. For the European male to define himself as a “white man” he had to fantasize himself as Christ, a Christ who had to be imaged not as Jew but as Aryan.<sup>15</sup>

Notice that Heschel points out how Jesus has been idealized as the White Man. In light of our discussions on the relationship between theology and culture thus far, such idealization of Jesus the White Man is possible only when theology regards its work as coherent and whole, oblivious of its *openness* and *organic connection* to culture and life in all their messiness, symbolized in Jesus’ Jewish flesh.

In response to this understanding of supersessionism and the according theological racism, I am now looking into three theologians’ arguments not only against such racialization of Jesus, but also for the Incarnation of Jesus in the context of the Trinitarian life as antidote to it, particularly that of Hans Urs von Balthasar. For von Balthasar, Jesus’ Jewishness on the one hand, and Jesus’ universal salvific work on Holy Saturday on the other, cannot exist apart from each other, especially for the purpose of promoting racial peace. The particularity of Jesus’ Jewishness is necessary for the universal salvific work of Jesus Christ on Holy Saturday, precisely because Jesus’ Jewishness is the ground and context for God to open salvation to all, not depending on skin color or any other internal/external condition. According to von Balthasar, Jesus’ Incarnation is where Jesus’ Jewishness and his death not only on the cross, but also in the deepest part of hell on Holy Saturday all come together. In this regard, *recapitulation* is the most profound meaning of Jesus’ Incarnation. Below I will explicate why this is so.

Drawing upon St. Irenaeus’ understanding of it, von Balthasar puts his own version of *recapitulation* in perspective. “What he [St. Irenaeus] means [by recapitulation] is this: the second Adam is the repetition, in divine truth, of the first Adam, the Adam who turned away from God... St Paul coined the word ‘recapitulation’ to express the meaning of the Incarnation: it was God’s plan to ‘bring everything together under Christ as Head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth’<sup>16</sup> While to some this might seem to signal turning back to the universalist aspect of Christ’s work, the notion of recapitulation has as much to do with Israel as it does with Gentiles, for the reason that Christ is placed to be the second Adam is precisely because Israel has miserably failed what God has assigned Israel to be its mission, in place of which Christ has fulfilled the mission of Israel. In this light, Christ and Israel are inseparably related to each other, which is also why the recapitulation of Christ is the meaning of the Incarnation. Anthony C. Sciglitano, Jr. sums up this point nicely: “The credibility of Jesus’ call hinges on the continuing presence of the covenantal context so that what Jesus requires does not come out of the blue as an arbitrary demand... ‘Recapitulation’ for von Balthasar comes to mean that Christ is *the concretion of the Covenant* from both sides of the relation, the human-Israelite and the divine.”<sup>17</sup> At the same time, it is in this regard that Jesus’ existence as a Jew is where the encounter between God and humanity happens to the utmost degree, and this is why

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<sup>15</sup> Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 28.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus against the Heresies* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1981): 53.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony C. Sciglitano Jr. *Marcion and Prometheus: Balthasar Against the Expulsion of Jewish Origins from Modern Religious Dialogue* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2014), 86.

von Balthasar calls Jesus to be concrete *analogia entis* (Analogy of Being), the peak of God-creation relationship.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, for von Balthasar, the destiny of Israel and that of the Church are inextricable from each other in the drama of salvation history, just as the destiny of Jesus as a Jew and that of Israel are inextricable from each other, for “the Church remains rooted in the promise and faith of Israel on the one hand, and in Jewish flesh and blood through Christ on the other.”<sup>19</sup> Building on this point, von Balthasar argues for the justification of Israel and Judaism as God’s people even today, contending that Christians should stop mission work to the Jews.<sup>20</sup> The implications of this statement are numerous and go beyond the scope of this paper. However, for the purpose of this paper, this is at least a serious attack against the traditional theology of supersessionism (and thus against theological racism). In the last analysis, von Balthasar always cautions that both Israel and the Church should be reminded of God’s “whyless love,”<sup>21</sup> the ground of which is not on the merits of the objects of love, but on God who is love.

### **Concluding Reflections: Theology, its Orientation, and Teaching**

If the orientation of theology is, as has been expounded so far, inherently open and organically connected to life in all its messiness, i.e., incarnational, then teachers of theology should keep this in mind and teach theology accordingly. This is not necessarily to say that teachers of theology should not teach any theology exemplified as anti-incarnational (such as radical orthodoxy or postliberal theology); rather, it should be taken as a deep signal to which direction theology should move forward. At the same time, teachers should take into account such incarnational orientation of theology not only when they teach matters of racism versus anti-racism, but also other weighty issues. One of the ways to teach theology incarnationally might be that of teaching it with narrative, for according to Mary Elizabeth Moore, in her book *Teaching from the Heart*, the passions for teaching theology with narrative are “for people to connect with other persons and events across time, to root deeply in the cultural and religious stories of their own people, and to cross boundaries into the stories of other peoples and the earth.”<sup>22</sup> In fact, connection with people, life, self, and with God is what penetrates through the theme of this paper. Listening to others’ stories and crossing boundaries to make new connections through such stories are very important for teaching theology incarnationally in that they cultivate a sense of solidarity among all the members of humanity, since “the characters are

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<sup>18</sup> Adrian Walker, “Love Alone: Hans Urs von Balthasar as the Master of Theological Renewal” *Communio* 32 (Fall 2005). I am not explaining any further about what *analogia entis* is here, since my readers know and understand it well, and also since I think my point could be understood well apart from going into the detailed account of what it is.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony C. Scigliano Jr. *Marcion and Prometheus* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2014): 98-99.

<sup>20</sup> This does not necessarily mean that the national Israel established in 1948 is God’s people. Von Balthasar’s logic is more complicated than such a blanket approval of the national Israel. I cannot go into his detailed account as to this matter, considering the limit and scope of this paper. A hint into where he is moving could be found in his intimation of how to interpret Romans 11:26 (All Israel will be Saved) in *Dare We Hope that All Men Be Saved?* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1986), 185.

<sup>21</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the LORD A Theological Aesthetic V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1991): 31, 441.

<sup>22</sup> Moore, *Teaching from the Heart*, 131.

full and embodied; their lives are interwoven, and their ideas and actions are interwoven.”<sup>23</sup> Eventually I argue that racism, particularly the one originated from theology, is a social ill of one person or group’s illusive desire for purity over against another individuals or groups. Theological racism deriving from a theology of supersessionism shows that one group has a swollen group-identity over against others, and such swollen identity is formed when there is no sense of solidarity between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Once such a sense of solidarity is established, however, the members in the swollen group identity will get to see that the groups they deem inferior to themselves are just as human as they are, finding nothing to feel superior to. It is in this regard that teaching theology incarnationally, i.e., through narrating one’s story and listening to others’ will be an effective antidote to any type of theological purism, and helpful for cultivating theological solidarity, coming from the sense of deep solidarity that we are all connected to one another, and we are all members of humanity, and we ought to love and care for one another.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 134.



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*Recovering The Transformative Role of Beauty in Christian Religious Education*

**Abstract**

Beauty is intrinsic to the human experience. In a world that is growing increasingly violent and chaotic, the restoration of a primary emphasis on beauty is urgently needed. Restoring beauty offers a way to counteract chaos. It forms the connection between the human and the divine. The intentional incorporation of beauty into the Christian pedagogical framework invites the possibility for transformation and hope. It facilitates a process that leads to a holistic, integrated, formative approach to Christian education.

Humans engage beauty in countless ways. A world where the beautiful is absent is not comprehensible. Even in the most formidable circumstances, humans long for it, make accommodations for it, search for it and incorporate it. They are transformed by their experiences of it but are challenged to adequately describe their encounters with it. “There is an unsettling prodigality about the beautiful, something wanton about the way it lavishes itself upon even the most atrocious of settings, its anodyne sweetness often seeming to make the most intolerable of circumstances bearable:” (Hart, 2003, 22177) for the search for beauty in the human is a drive that will not be sublimated. Psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, an Auschwitz survivor recounts that, “As the inner life of the prisoner tended to become more intense, he also experienced the beauty of art and nature as never before. Under their influence he sometimes even forgot his own frightful circumstances.” (Frankl 1992, 50) Beauty is intrinsically connected to the human experience and offers a pathway of order even out of chaos that defies description.

But defining or fully describing beauty has been an elusive quest. It does not possess common properties or values. There is no universal concept of beauty that transcends cultural location or time. Yet, humans can acknowledge that they have experienced beauty in some way. The desire to encounter beauty is embodied in our very being. We recognize it when gazing at a sublime landscape, in the face of the beloved, in artistic expression or meaningful ritual. We know beauty because we are deeply affected by it, but words to adequately convey what we have gained from the encounter are never enough. Beauty holds an ineffable, elusive quality that brings us to awe and wonder, capable of initiating transformation.

### *A Brief Overview of Beauty and the Christian Faith*

Beauty’s history has been deeply intertwined with the story of the Christian faith. Drawn from its roots in the Hebrew Testament, attention to beauty to glorify God is in evidence in Exodus 26. God specifies the details of the construction of the Tabernacle and certainly there is no question of what is to take place. “For the Old Testament writer the concrete form of the tabernacle is inseparable from its spiritual meaning. Every detail of the structure reflects the one divine will and nothing rests on the *ad hoc* decision of human builders.” (Childs, 1974, 540) This is to be a sacred space set apart, reflecting the beauty of the divine. Whether or not the specifications could be acted upon by mere mortals is not the issue here. It is that God’s home among God’s people is to be beautiful in proportion and appointment. The beauty of the Tabernacle is the embodiment of the divine.

Beauty is an integral portion of the Christian experience. From its earliest expression on the walls of the catacombs to the present age, art has been used as a portal to the experience of the Divine. The artistic expression of Christian belief through architecture, art, music, sculpture and poetry reflects the historic and cultural contexts of the faith. The aesthetic experience that is enabled for those who encounter these artistic offerings provide a way to experience the awe and wonder of God.

For example, the artistic representation of John 1:5, “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”, is brought to fruition in Christian art. “John asserts from the beginning that the *logos* is and always was the exclusive source of light for men.” (Culpepper, 1983,191) Art illustrates the theological construct of this passage in John’s Gospel. The symbolism of light is captured in illuminated manuscripts, glowing icons and renditions of Biblical stories in mosaics. Perhaps, the most powerful illustration of the use of light as theology resides in the stained glass of the Medieval cathedral. “A basic structural principle of Gothic cathedrals was that they should give the effect of light erupting through an open fretwork.” (Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 1986, 46) Beauty, embodied in the Cathedrals, offered an aesthetic experience available for the royal personage and the poorest laborer. It offered a glimpse into the heavenly realm proclaimed by the Christian faith. The aesthetic experience provided by Cathedral architecture was available for all in Medieval society “It meant discerning in the concrete object an ontological reflection of, and participation in, the being and the power of God.” (Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 1986,15) The integration of symbol and allegory embodied in the structure of the Cathedral, was interpreted in sculpture, stained glass, architectural elements, and fabric. These incredible masterpieces remain a testament to the role of beauty as the representation of the divine in the Medieval period. However, in time, this era would no longer be able to sustain its incredible integration of religion, art and power. The reformers would initiate a different understanding of beauty.

The aesthetics of the Protestant reformation took a series of turns but the overarching construct involved a much simpler architectural style for worship. Religious art would be largely relegated to the context of the individual and the home. “The accusation of ‘idolatry’ resonated for a longtime in Europe, not only against the world of art, but also against the whole devotional and religious system of Catholicism.” (Brown, 2008, 252) This prompted a shift in religious expression that was directed toward the intimacy of the family rather than the large, imposing structures that dominated the community.

Ironically, the interiors of worship spaces took on an austerity that reflected the ascetic aesthetic promoted by Bernard of Clairvaux, a Medieval French abbot who was diametrically opposed to the highly decorative and elaborate artistic style displayed in the Medieval Cathedrals of his time. “Confronted with the beauty that perishes, security could be found in that interior beauty which does not perish.” (Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 1986, 9) The aesthetic principle of the reformation reflected Bernard’s concern with worship spaces that allowed the faithful to develop the interior life without distraction from too much visual stimulus.

“The drama of the ascetic discipline lies precisely in a tension between the call of earthbound pleasure and a striving after the supernatural. But when the discipline proves victorious, and brings the peace which accompanies control of the senses, then it becomes possible to gaze serenely upon the things of this earth, and to see their value...” (Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 1986, 6) The mystical union with God was facilitated by an environment that reflected the order and peace of the heavenly realm. Not surprisingly, Clairvaux would have a profound influence on two key figures of the Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin.

The Protestant aesthetic was redirected to personal reflection. More could afford books and the ability to read was on the rise. “The spread of new ideas was facilitated by the recent invention of print, allowing widespread circulation of texts and a rich pictorial output, based on the biblical representations and polemical images adopted in anti-papist propaganda.” (Brown, 208, 254) Beauty was still a factor in these illustrated texts but they were relegated to use in private. The aesthetic experience of these biblical illustrations were personal rather than communal. Congregational spaces featured an aesthetic of harmony and simplicity as the ideal, supporting the primacy of the sermon and the preacher.

The type of aesthetic experience and the impetus toward it shifted in the Reformation but it was still a part of the theological framework of Christian worship and pedagogy. This has often been overlooked or disregarded. The Reformation brought about a new understanding of beauty, not a denigration of it. The design of the worship space was vital to the theological framework of the Reformation. The concept of what was understood as beautiful had shifted, but the primacy of aesthetic experience did not diminish.

Beauty, however, is now often confused with decoration and the aesthetic experience is often relegated to a non-essential by-product of religious experience. The hermeneutic of suspicion regarding beauty continues to remain an issue of concern. The incorporation of beauty connects us to the experience of the sacred. “It is part of our everyday experience of powerful aesthetic experience that it can take you by surprise, and distract—or even abstract—you from the rest of the world around you.” (Starr, 2015, 59) An encounter with beauty is not mundane or ordinary. It provides the opportunity to engage the divine. The restoration of beauty as a theological and pedagogical construct is necessary to restore the sense of wonder, reverence and awe into the Christian experience as we live into the post-modern era.

### *Beauty in the Post-Modern Era*

Beauty in the realm of philosophical inquiry and as an artistic goal declined to a great degree in the twentieth century. Beauty was declared subjective and therefore, it reflected its perception through the lens of the individual. The concept of beauty was transitory, yielding its qualities to its situation in time and place. From a modernist perspective, beauty was viewed largely as commodity that was reduced to the quantifiable. “The new Beauty could be reproduced, but it was also transitory and perishable: it had to persuade the consumer of the need for rapid replacement, either out of wear and tear or disaffection, so that here might be no cessation of the exponential growth of the circuit involving the production, distribution, and consumption of goods.” (Eco, *The History of Beauty*, 2005, 376-377) Beauty was relegated to a shifting perspective that placed it on dangerous ground. Anything could be beautiful or nothing could be beautiful. Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*, a porcelain urinal, is a case in point. David Bentley Hart offers an explanation of the modernist perspective that encapsulates the problem beauty poses for our time.

“the modern disenchantment with the beautiful as a concept reflects in part a sense that while beauty is something whose event can be remarked upon, and in a way that seems to convey a meaning, the word “beauty” *indicates* nothing: neither exactly a quality, nor a property, nor a function, not even really a subjective reaction to an object or occurrence, it offers no phenomenological purchase upon aesthetic experience. And yet nothing else impresses itself upon our attention with at once so wonderful a power and so evocative an immediacy. Beauty is there, abroad in the order of things, given again and again in a way that defies description and denial with equal impertinence.” (Hart, 2003,16)

As the modern era recedes the traces of Cartesian dualism still stalk the post-modern landscape. There are strains of compartmentalism and a continued emphasis on the product rather than the process that creates disunity and division. Although advances in science have given us incredible tools to face human challenges the scientific perspective has also caused a focus on distinct parts instead of on the integrated whole.

“Modern science has therefore rent asunder what the classical imagination brought together: the physical world and the semiotic world, the world of nature and the world of culture, have been split apart from each other, such that what was once considered knowledge—indeed the highest form of knowledge, the contemplation of the True, the Good, and Beautiful—is now appropriated as no more than private belief or personal preference.” (Turley, 2014,5)

The concept of the sacred has been replaced by what can be quantified. The need for a worldview that establishes beauty as a primary focus can provide the possibility for a framework that restores a reverence to life. “Much of the stress and emptiness that haunts us can be traced back to our lack of attention to beauty. Internally the mind becomes coarse and dull if it remains unvisited by images and thoughts which hold the radiance of beauty.” (O’ Donahue , 2004, 4) One does not have to search for collaboration on the condition of the mind when it is fed a diet of reality television, films and video games inundated with gratuitous violence and a lack of any aesthetic experience that establishes a connection to wonders of nature or artistic expression. The role of Christian pedagogy in the restoration of beauty is of primary importance, for it is here that the connection between Beauty and the Divine can be explored.

In the past decade, there has been a resurgence of interest in beauty in philosophy. Howard Gardner reflects on the importance of beauty in the context of the present age. While he moves beyond the classical understanding of truth and beauty, he acknowledges the necessity to reconsider their intrinsic value.

“Despite the postmodern and digital complexifiers, the trend toward firmer established truths is solid. In contrast, traditional conceptions of beautiful objects and experiences no

longer suffice. The experience of beauty is ever more dependent on the creation of objects and experience that, whatever their provenance, engender interest, are memorable, and invite further exploration. Moreover, and importantly, what will be judged as beautiful cannot be predicted in advance; historical, cultural, and accidental factors overwhelm any brain-based or economic considerations.” (Gardner, 2011,76)

Neuroaesthetics provides insight into how these experiences are perceived in the human brain and why they offer transformational possibilities.

### *Beauty and the Brain*

Neuroaesthetics have fostered the exploration of the human brain and its reaction to beauty. The intersection of evolutionary construct and encounters with our environment form the framework for the aesthetic experience.

“Our mind has been sculpted by nature and it is tightly coupled to the environment. We cannot ask questions about the structure of our minds without bumping into properties of the world. The question of whether beauty lies in the world or in our heads might be reframed as follows: what in the coupling of mind and world gives us the experience of beauty?” (Chatterjee, 2014,4)

Some neuroscientists advocate that beauty is a product of survival instincts that have been deeply imbedded in our brain composition. Our reaction to beautiful landscapes comes from a survival response that indicate that these experiences yield safe environments. “Strong evolutionary forces selected minds that find some places more beautiful than others. Powerful emotional responses evolved to guide and encourage actions that improved our ancestors’ chances of survival.” (Chatterjee, 2014, 48). This reasoning asserts that beauty is deeply linked with our desire to survive. Instead of viewing beauty as a superfluous life enhancement, it links it to our ability to continue to exist. However, as Chatterjee indicates, “As changes in our cultural environment accelerate, the link between our adapted predispositions and our present-day actions becomes increasingly attenuated.” (Chatterjee, 2014,111) Evolutionary factors play a role but they are not solely determinative.

There is no region of the brain that centers exclusively upon perceptions of the beautiful.

“Aesthetic experience relies on a distributed neural architecture, a set of brain areas involved in emotion, perception, imagery, memory, and language. But more than this, aesthetic experience emerges from *networked* interactions, the workings of intricately connected and coordinated brain systems that, together, form a flexible architecture enabling us to develop new arts and to see the world around us differently. “ (Starr, 2015, xv)

This highly nuanced system allows the human to have the aesthetic experience and then offers the possibility of fostering new possibilities. “Powerful aesthetic experience makes us return to that state of watchful waiting characteristic of core consciousness, but carry an awareness of the pleasure of looking at an object and contemplating its worth: perhaps powerful aesthetic experience unites what we didn’t predict with what we are always waiting for.” (Starr, 2015, 67) The aesthetic experience is not only formational it fosters a way forward, a creative response that extends beyond the self. “Aesthetics is all about newly created and reconfigured value, about something that wasn’t there in quite the same way before, something that was in part created in the brain and that leaves traces in how we go forward. “ (Starr, 2015, 149) Neuroaesthetics provides a means to understand the powerful role the aesthetic experience has upon the brain and its implications for transformational action. Its implications for the practice of Christian pedagogy are formidable.

### *The Role of Beauty in Christian Pedagogy*

Beauty in the context of a Christian pedagogical framework provides the foundation for the experience of awe and wonder. Beauty is not to be confused with ornament or decoration but a deep sense of the divinity inherent in all things. Although beauty is most closely associated with artistic expression or the sublime in nature, it can be found in the realm of mathematics and science as well. Consider the Fibonacci sequence of numbers that is found throughout art and nature. “Nature is full of hidden geometry-harmony, as is the human mind; and the creations of the mind that awaken or recreate this sense of pattern and order tend to awaken or unveil beauty.” (O’ Donahue, 2004, 14) Beauty offers a way forward out of chaos.

In a world where violence is increasingly prevalent, where uncertainty is the norm and where experiences of the beautiful and the divine are rare commodities, Christian education is called to provide a return to the recognition and experience of the sacred. Embodied faith is not an exclusively intellectual exercise. It comes through experience that invites reflection.

While I do not pretend any affinity towards the study of mathematics I was drawn to the film, *The Man Who Knew Infinity*. It explores the life of Srinivasa Ramanujan, a brilliant Indian mathematician of the early twentieth century. He was able to devise mathematical theorems of unquestioned brilliance having almost no formal training in pure mathematics. During his brief life which ended shortly after the First World War, he was able to make mathematical discoveries that have contributed to the understanding of black holes among other notable achievements. His considerable body of work is still being explored. A deeply religious Hindu, Ramanujan spent five years developing his work at Cambridge University. His mentor, G.H. Hardy, an avowed atheist was confounded by the intuitive style that governed Ramanujan’s work. Ramanujan would often declare, “An equation means nothing to me unless it expresses a thought of God.” He considered his work to be divinely inspired and experienced the beauty of the divine through mathematics. Ramanujan was formed by his faith and lived a life that reflected his beliefs.

The intersection between beauty and the divine is found in an infinite variety of aesthetic experiences. In Christian pedagogy, it is imperative that an avenue for providing access to experiences of beauty is built. “Knowledge in its traditional sense begins in wonder and in fact ends in wonder, since one is penetrating more deeply into the mystery of reality.” (Turley, 2014, 88) Inspiring awe and wonder in the context of Christian education restores the relationship between the human and God.

Encountering the sacred in our world is a rare occurrence. Those “burning bush” moments where you must remove your sandals because the ground you are to walk on is holy, are almost non-existent if you do not approach life as sacred. Incorporating a reverence toward the holiness that is found in creation is the foundation of discovering beauty within the context of human existence.

### *A Way Forward*

Many expressions of Christian education reflect the process of modernity and the imparting of information, rather than a holistic vision of forming the human person. “In particular, Christian education has absorbed a philosophical anthropology that sees human persons as primarily thinking things.” (Smith, 2009, 31.) This does not serve to make the process of Christian education equipped to respond to formative aspects of the pedagogical process which fully recognize that each person is a reflection of the image of God. In Christian pedagogy and practice, providing opportunities to engage in aesthetic experience in the quest of beauty is of the utmost importance.

Christian education should reflect a teaching process that incorporates worship, ritual, service and spiritual disciplines. The core identity of each person should be formed through aesthetic experiences that engage the awe and wonder of God. The aesthetic experience can be drawn from the creative arts but certainly is not limited to it. As has been demonstrated, mathematics and science hold great potential for experience with awe and wonder. Encounters with nature are certainly a forum for engaging beauty. “Education is not something that traffics primarily in abstract, disembodied ideas; rather, education is a holistic endeavor that involves the whole person, including our bodies, in a process of formation that aims our desires, primes our imagination, and orients us to the world—all before we ever start *thinking* about it.” (Smith, 2009, 39-40) It is not possible to teach beauty or to quantify awe and wonder. The Christian educator cannot determine the outcome or the scope of an aesthetic experience. However, the opportunity to enter into the possibility of an encounter with beauty can be designed and implemented. It requires intentionality and the desire to move beyond the inclination to impart knowledge as a means to an end. Providing an atmosphere where beauty can flourish requires engaging the whole person through the senses as well as cognitively. The aesthetic experience is the pathway to an encounter with Beauty and the possibility for transformation.

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## Whole Person Theological Education for Ministry: Five Building Blocks

### Abstract

The whole person needs to be formed in theological programs geared to ministry. (USCCB, Co-Workers) The goal of integrating the academic, spiritual, human and pastoral is key to the hope that theological education is transformative of the individual and the community.

I propose five building blocks for theological education based on community learning theory (Sergiovanni): the community of integrative formation, the community of discernment, the community of accompaniment, the community of realism for the long haul, and the community in fidelity to mission.

### Introduction

Leaders in theological education have sought to move beyond teaching informational material in order to seek transformative learning when preparing students for ministry including attention to the spiritual, human and pastoral aspects. I propose five building blocks that integrate the academic, spiritual, human and pastoral in ministry formation based on learning community theory. A well-integrated education generates hope for our faith communities, our local society and global world. I turn to three educational theorists to ground this discussion. Insights from adult educational theory supplement this reflection.

Jack Mezirow, a specialist in adult education, introduced the concept of Transformative Learning in the late 70s and the theory has continued to evolve with application to ministry formation.<sup>1</sup> Mezirow distinguishes between learning that is informational and that which is transformative. The latter refers to learning that changes the viewpoint of the learner enough that unfounded assumptions are tested and lead to a shift in thinking and action. Transformative learning results in the learner perceiving and responding to his or her self and environment in a new way. The role of the educator is to promote reflective thinking in a safe environment. The educator is the role model of transformative learning and is called to be authentically reflective.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

Nel Noddings, a distinguished educator and curriculum developer, is known for her work on the role of the educator in promoting caring in the classroom.<sup>2</sup> She has also revived the discussion on aims in education. She argues the importance of assessing ultimate goals and for a focus on educating happy and well-rounded children. She urges teachers and educational administrators to step back from the specifics and ask the bigger questions. What type of children do we hope to graduate and what educational experiences foster these goals? She argues that happiness, tempered by empathy, should be a fundamental goal.<sup>3</sup> Curriculum planning and community life are central to this discussion and have implications for ministry formation.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Sergiovanni informs our discussion of integrative learning by looking at the social content of the educational process and at human nature, human interactions, and societal institutions.<sup>5</sup> He refers to this social content as the “lifeworld” as defined by Jurgen Habermas.<sup>6</sup> Sergiovanni argues for the importance of the lifeworld in effective learning, a central concept of learning communities.

Characteristics of the learning community as presented by Sergiovanni include awareness of developmental differences, reflection on the strengths and weakness of individual learning, and adaptation of curriculum to the interest and talents of the students. The learning community promotes ongoing active discourse as well as respect and care for others including students and teachers. The learning community sees itself as part of a greater whole with responsibilities for those in their group as well as responsibilities to society at large. He presents five building blocks: the community of relationship, the community of place, the community of mind, the community of memory and the community of practice.<sup>7</sup>

Learning communities have been shown to be effective among various social, racial, age and gender groups.<sup>8</sup> Adult educational research has confirmed the effectiveness of cooperative learning, process curriculum, attention to the learners

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<sup>2</sup> Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Nel Noddings, *Happiness and Education* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Nel Noddings, *Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Sergiovanni, *The Lifeworld of Leadership: Creating Culture, Community, and Personal Meaning in Our Schools* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functional Reason*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Sergiovanni, “The Story of Community,” in *Learning Communities in Education*, eds. John Retallick, Barry Cocklin and Kennece Coombe (New York: Routledge Publishing, 1999) 9- 25.

<sup>8</sup> Oscar T. Lenning, Denise M. Hill, Kevin P. Saunders, Alisha Solan, and Andria Stokes, *Powerful Learning Communities: A Guide to Developing Student, Faculty, and Professional Learning Communities to Improve Student Success and Organizational Effectiveness*, (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013).

experience and emotions, as well as the need for healthy community life in the educational environment.<sup>9</sup>

Based on these insights, I propose five building blocks for theological education geared to ministry preparation: the community of discernment, the community of accompaniment, the community of realism for the long haul, the community of fidelity to mission.

Building block #1 addresses the goal of integrating academic, spiritual, human and pastoral goals in the educational experience. Building block #2 looks at best structures and practices for ongoing discernment in the education program and growth in the new ‘ministerial’ role and identity that is being formed. Building block #3 reflects on best practices for ongoing accompaniment in the educational program through the learning community model. Building block #4 discusses issues that arise in the current societal context that raise challenges for long-term commitments. The final building block presents suggestions for fostering fidelity to mission.

These building blocks integrate the human, spiritual, academic, and pastoral formation in programs preparing students for ministry and reflect best practices from educational research, especially insights from learning community theory. Good ministerial preparation through our institutions of higher learning generates hope.

### Context

Faith-based institutions of higher education and in this case specifically ministry degree programs have great strengths along with challenges. Most excel at academics, and have well developed field education/pastoral internships as well as social justice programs. They offer a strong spiritual experience and multiple programs for personal growth in key human qualities. All strive to improve and excel in all of these fields. It is the integration of these aspects that is discussed here.

Students benefit the most when our educational programs successfully integrate and affirm all of these aspects, rather than have parallel programs each focused on one aspect separate from the others. Depending on our specific circumstances integration will look uniquely different in each educational institution. I share insights and resources from the context of over 17 years in a Roman Catholic ministry formation community of practice in addition to literature-based review and analysis. This discussion hopes to foster a collegial reflection on these issues in solidarity with our conference theme “Generating Hope: The Future of the Teaching Profession in a Globalized World.”

Nel Noddings reminds us that in any educational venture we need to reflect critically on the outcomes that matter. In seeking the outcomes that matter for ministry preparation programs for laity in Roman Catholic Higher Education, that is for those who

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<sup>9</sup> Derek V. Price, “Learning Communities and Student Success in Postsecondary Education: A Background Paper” MDRC publications, December 2005. DVP-Praxis LTD. ERIC Ed 489439. Available from: [http://www.eric.ed.gov.proxy.bc.edu/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content\\_storage\\_01/0000000b/8-/31/3f/e0.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov.proxy.bc.edu/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/8-/31/3f/e0.pdf). Accessed 10 March 2007. See also: Karl A. Smith and Alisha Waller, “Afterword” *New Paradigms for College Teaching*, eds. William E. Campbell and Karl A. Smith (Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company, 1997), 269-281.

are preparing for professional positions in formal roles in the faith community but will not be ordained, I turn to two foundational documents, *Christifideles Laici*, (CL)<sup>10</sup> a Vatican document and *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, (CVL)<sup>11</sup> a US Bishops document.

*Christifideles Laici* lists as goals of the education of laity as: the call to holiness, to encounter with Christ, to mission and witness, and to a struggle for the dignity of all humans. (CL 2, 5, 7, 16, 34,)

In the US Bishops' document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* the ultimate goals are presented as four pillars of formation the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral:

- *Human qualities* critical to form wholesome relationships and necessary to be apt instruments of God's love and compassion
- *A spirituality* and practice of prayer that root them in God's Trinitarian life, grounding and animating all they do in ministry
- Adequate *knowledge* in theological and pastoral studies, along with the *intellectual skill* to use it among the people and cultures of our country
- The practical *pastoral abilities* called for in their particular ministry (CVL 34)

We are also reminded by Noddings that the educational methods must be geared to these outcomes. Using Noddings' suggested pedagogy, the ministry formation program should integrate into all relationships: the modeling, practice, dialogue, and confirmation of these goals.<sup>12</sup>

### **Building Block #1 – A Community of Integrated Formation**

One of the challenges in integration in higher education is finding a balance between the highly respected place of the intellectual endeavor, which is built into the fabric of our institutions of higher learning, and the other three pillars. In my specific context in the tradition of Catholic Higher Education, the intellectual can easily overshadow the others. Yet, academic learning when integrated with the human, spiritual and apostolic formation impacts and affirms holistic growth.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to present a comprehensive case for integrative learning or whole person formation. Numerous studies have affirmed integrative learning. Parker Palmer and physics professor Arthur Zajonc, advocate

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<sup>10</sup> Pope John Paul II. *The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Christifideles Laici*, (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*. (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Noddings, *Philosophy of Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bolder, CO: Westview Press, 2007), 226.

teaching that honors the mind, heart and spirit.<sup>13</sup> Their extensive discussion of the divided academic life and transformative conversations on campus supports integrative or whole person learning. They refer to numerous studies that affirm integrative education. The intent of this paper is to reflect on practices from the learning community model that help move in this direction.

The hope for the educational process and learning space in a learning community is that it becomes a holding environment for dialogue, modeling, practice and confirmation of ministerial giftedness, identity and skills. The goal is that each person experiences the hospitality and respect to which Christian living strives along with growth in empathy and service to the greater society.

Adult educational research notes that the learning community model allows for this process in ongoing dialogue between and among faculty and students. An important characteristic of learning communities is collaborative and cooperative methods where the student is engaged in critical reflection.<sup>14</sup>

Adult educational research also urges the integration of the experience of a student in the learning process, as well as the establishment of clear goals and outcomes.<sup>15</sup> Suggested methods include process curriculum, defined as one in which the student has a voice in the method and content of the curriculum. In a process curriculum the teacher approaches the educational interaction seeking what would best fit the unique encounter of the students through dialogue and experimentation.<sup>16</sup>

Evaluation and testing when informed by the best adult education theory helps the student integrate the material. Methods of testing affirmed by adult education theory accentuate the practical application that will be needed and the interests of the students. This allows for interaction and questions, take-home testing, group work or projects. Evaluation thus promotes review and improvement. Evaluation tools that foster collaboration skills, spiritual grounding, interpersonal effectiveness, emotional stability, ethical discernment, and integration of learning into outlook and behavior are most appropriate.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal, Transforming the Academy through Collegial Conversations* (San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Karl Smith & Alisha A. Waller, "Cooperative Learning for New College Teachers" *New Paradigms For College Teaching*, eds. Wm E. Campbell and Karl A. Smith (Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co., 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Derek V. Price, "Learning Communities and Student Success in Postsecondary Education: A Background Paper" MDRC publications, December 2005. DVP-Praxis LTD. ERIC Ed 489439. See also Lenning, "Conceptual Framework For Creating Powerful LCs," 89-109.

<sup>16</sup> Lenning, "Achieving Optimal Student Success Through Powerful SLCs, PLCs, and LCs," 111-169.

<sup>17</sup> Price, "Learning Communities," 6. See also: Stephen Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986). See also: Brookfield, *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1997).

Most students in ministry programs are highly motivated and deeply committed. Failure in academic assignments is often seen as a failure in their response to God's call. Faculty sensitivity to student emotional challenges is important as noted in the work of Stephen Brookfield.<sup>18</sup> Students are gifted in varying ways. All of these gifts are needed in the mission of the church. In a learning community model, students struggling academically find support and encouragement as they discern their gifts in response to God's call. As Noddings argues, education and happiness should not be contradictions.<sup>19</sup>

Faculty preparation enhances the learning community. Caroline Simon in *Mentoring for Mission* advocates for mentoring of new faculty.<sup>20</sup> Her insights for a "theology of imperfection" give permission to all teachers to grow through experimentation and experience. Sharing of best practices would involve the affirmation and encouragement of the flourishing not only of students but also of faculty and staff. Simon reminds us of the need to 'give permission' to experimentation in learning in which failure is a natural part of growth.<sup>21</sup> A community that shares best practices would allow for space and time to speak truth in love and to foster reflection and growth. The faculty community of practice would encourage the flourishing of all colleagues and especially new faculty.

The learning community model is similar to the biblical image of pilgrims together on a journey and would best describe the respectful Christian witness of all members of the learning community in carefully striving to respond to a call to holiness, to encounter with Christ, to mission and witness, and a struggle for the dignity of all humans.

## **Building Block #2 - A Community of Discernment**

Discernment of call, affirmation of call, and gradual growth into a new identity and role is important during the educational/formation process. Discernment for any ministry, and lay ecclesial ministry in particular, is a process that is not only personal but also communal. Discernment occurs most often within the life of the parish/congregation, school or university, and youth or young adult ministry. I maintain that the ministry education program should share in this mission of the faith community and participate in an appropriate way in the discernment process of potential students for ministry, ordained or non-ordained. This will vary depending on the practice of the faith community and the relationship of the educational institution to the faith community. The point that I make is that the ministry education program should take seriously its role in the process of discernment. Something is stirring in their hearts and needs to be

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 75-95.

<sup>19</sup> Nel Noddings, *Happiness and Education*.

<sup>20</sup> Caroline Simon, Laura Bloxham, Denise Doyle, Mel Hailey, Jane Hokanson Hawks, Kathleen Light, Dominic Scibilia, and Ernest Simmons, *Mentoring for Mission: Nurturing New Faculty at Church-Related Colleges* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Simon, 57.

examined and discussed. The educational institution has a role, though the extent can vary.

Admissions into a program brings the student into a web of relationships that hopefully help support the ongoing discernment and growth that takes place in a community of learning. This approach makes a commitment to the flourishing of the student. Discernment continues during the educational process as students face academic, human, spiritual or pastoral challenges. A discernment of personal gifts and weaknesses as well as the choice of a specific ministry will also need attention. The learning community can be helpful in providing honest feedback regarding these issues either formally, as in an integrative seminar, and/or informally, as in conversation with faculty, staff or fellow students.

Dr. Reinhard Hutter of Duke University notes that honoring truth is a necessity in Christian hospitality.<sup>22</sup> Hutter reflects on the relationship between hospitality and truth in reference to worship and doctrine. These insights are also applicable to the discernment process in a learning community. Hutter contends that “both hospitality and truth are inherently connected to the practice of forgiveness.”<sup>23</sup> It involves accepting “the truth about oneself and one’s need to receive and grant forgiveness.”<sup>24</sup> Hutter refers to obstacles to honoring the truth such as self-deception as well as the desire to be liked by others, leading to a need to please. He discusses other impediments such as dishonesty with self, using truth only in a functional way, and not integrating truth into our lives but keeping it “isolated.” Hutter notes the need to honor and acknowledge the truth and then to invite others “into the same acknowledgement.”<sup>25</sup>

In a community of Christian hospitality, faculty, staff and other students can become strong influences fostering healthy discernment. The time spent in prayer and liturgical gatherings, at community gatherings, or informal interactions assist with discernment by practicing honesty.

After initial discernment of call, the forming of ministerial identity is an important task. Regular, scheduled opportunities that allow students to reflect on their ministerial identity such as core seminars, skill building workshops, contextual education assessments are key to allowing a student to reflect in an ongoing manner with feedback from appropriate professionals. A community of discernment supports and models this ongoing process in the learning community with Christian hospitality and honesty.

### **Building Block #3– A Community of Accompaniment**

While discernment looks specifically at ministry identity and suitability, the community of accompaniment takes this further and looks at the broader needs of the whole person over time. The community of accompaniment continually works to support

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<sup>22</sup> Reinhard Hutter, “Hospitality and Truth: The Disclosure of Practices in Worship and Doctrine” in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), 206-227.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-215.

the needs of the community members. The practice of pastoral care in and beyond the educational environment is the basis of this building block.

A community of accompaniment can be characterized as a place that not only allows for ongoing discernment but actively supports, models, and practices ‘ministry.’ This discussion of accompaniment looks at the specific ways a learning community can be intentional about support and accompaniment. And most importantly, a community of accompaniment also looks outside its own membership circle to offer accompaniment to others as needed.

Accompaniment can be structured into the program first through supportive relationships of faculty to student, as well as among the faculty and staff. These interactions may range from formal events such as: liturgies, faith sharing sessions, spiritual direction, and faculty advising, to informal interaction at meals, gatherings or celebrations.

Time and schedule can be structured so that there are plenty of informal opportunities for sustained conversation. Even the programming of class schedules could bring people together both in time and in location allowing time for meetings or group sessions before or after classes. Cohorts of students based on either graduation or admissions standings could have structured requirements that allow for consistent interaction: community worship, formation meetings, faith sharing, workshops, service projects, retreats or meals together. Some combination of consistent healthy and sustained interaction that allows for bonds to form not only between faculty and student, but also among the diverse members of the student body is needed.

Administrative practices should reflect the larger vision of the learning community. This would include supportive hospitality and a safe “holding area.” It would also mean attention to fairness in allotment of resources. Knowing the stories of the students helps administration to support them when needed. Good communication between administration and students is crucial, not only for building up the life of the community but also for helping locate resources and support.

Many schools have multiple areas for students and faculty to gather. These ‘commons’ allow for hospitality to be practiced and encouraged. The marginalized need to be invited into the ‘center’ both in the physical space and in the social web. There are multiple levels of marginality that should be looked into and reflected upon by the community.

The interaction in a learning community can be a wonderful arena for modeling ministerial presence, caring relationships, and Christian virtues. The question of how to balance family responsibilities with the commitments to ministerial formation is important and needs reflection. The skills of balancing the demands of the unique circumstances of each person with the demands of the program are skills similar to those needed when dealing with multiple demands in ministry. Sharing the stories and experiences of dealing with family and work issues and responding to these demands in Christian fidelity is an important witness.

Celebrations that allow interactions among students, staff and faculty as well as a ‘passing on’ of the history, mission, and memories of both the programs and the bigger picture, the body of Christ, are important. Births of children or grandchildren, weddings and baptisms are important transitions or events in the life of the individuals in a learning community. The beginning or end of an academic semester, the publishing achievement

of a faculty colleague, or the completion of a service project can all be moments of pause for celebration in a community of accompaniment.

The hope is to avoid students simply coming for class and then just leaving with no significant community interaction. Intergenerational and diverse student populations allow for each of the groups to teach and challenge the other. Diversity also challenges us to grow and mature through the sharing of varied life experiences and life lessons.

The same would apply to the academic community reaching out in support of the greater community around them, reflecting and identifying their responsibilities to others. Modeling healthy ministerial interactions in the learning community and beyond helps students gain the ability to look beyond individual needs of local faith community needs to the greater issues in society and the world.

#### **Building Block #4 –A Community of Realism for the Long Haul**

A healthy realism regarding the demands of ministry is an important gift that faculty and staff and the learning community can bring to each other. Insights about tensions and challenges that impact various congregations and those in leadership can help form realistic expectations, survival skills and insights for a healthy response. These tensions are found on multiple levels, international, national, local and within communities of worship.

As faith communities we face grave international issues to which we need to respond in appropriate ways.<sup>26</sup> Issues arise in the current societal context and local communities. We have political differences, election/media tensions, economic tensions, racial tensions, inner city neighborhood changes, tensions between police and communities.

Many of our communities of worship are challenged with declining numbers, aging congregations, and consolidation of parishes. In the Catholic community there is reported increased stress on clergy and staff as they are assigned to cover multiple parishes, work within tighter budgets, and face instability in employment. Attention to how to prepare students to face these challenges while striving to enhance the dignity of every person is needed.

Tensions exist between differing ecclesiological visions within faith communities. These may be difficult to discuss unless there is trust and honesty in the learning community. Programs of study often stand firmly in one or another ecclesiology sometimes expressing criticism of other understandings of the church or viewpoints in the church. Students are well served when they are exposed to the viewpoints and emotional issues that are central to various positions. The ability to be respectful and empathic to those who have differing attitudes is an important skill. The ability to move a community toward the enhancement of every person and the work of social justice is built on these skills.

A mature attitude and the ability to speak appropriately regarding the tensions in the church and in society are needed. Diverse experiences during ministry training can

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<sup>26</sup> Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 187-215.

be most helpful. Insight into what leads to embattled ideologies and what helps move towards common ground is valuable.

Knowledge of the public perception of the church is also needed. The Catholic Church still faces fall-out from the sexual abuse scandal. Some dioceses have embittered groups due to closings of parishes. Public attitudes and misunderstandings about the Catholic Church's positions on issues of morality add to these tensions. These and numerous other issues are heavily laden with emotion. The ministry students need preparation to be firmly grounded, deeply rooted and well supported. The hope is that the formation program allows for experience of and exposure to the varying attitudes and tensions in order to be able to understand, respond and minister with pastoral sensitivity in this environment. It would be unfair for our students to be unprepared.

Good self-care, professional consultation and guidance are essential for long-term effectiveness and health. It is also vitally important for the student to be aware that secondary trauma can occur as a result of ministering in acutely painful situations. This will be further discussed in the next section.

Good role models and mentors are also important in a ministry program. The long-term experience and commitment of those already successful in ministry is an important resource. These role models need to be integrated at various opportunities. Engaging alumni in this role would be an important step. Graduates who model healthy ministerial relationships and can support students in weathering various storms are valuable assets.

Salaries for Catholic laity in professional ministerial roles tend to be low. Job security is often precarious. Educational loans become a financial struggle. The ministerial program has a responsibility in presenting an honest picture. From the time of discernment and the application process honest feedback about salaries and employment realities would be helpful. The experience of alumni in finding jobs and in living on the current parish or school salaries needs to be shared. Ministerial programs that develop funds for helping defray the educational costs of lay ecclesial ministry programs provide a great gift.

When working in the church one also encounters the challenge with 'turf' or little kingdoms of personal power within the parish, school, hospital, or other program. Flexibility and conflict resolution skills are crucial to successful pastoral ministry. Ability to communicate clearly and pastorally to all sides in a conflict is important. There are also community-building skills that are beneficial when a faith community is torn by division. Workshops on conflict management and on the topic of difficult conversations are helpful. The ability to move from being embedded in a specific conflict to looking together at the larger picture or a greater issue is needed.

Alumni can provide regular reality checks for the students. Stories of success and challenge can be shared. Discussions, reflections, projects both in classrooms or in the life of the learning community can highlight the challenges of ministerial leadership over the long haul and assist in having a better picture of the reality.

## **Building Block #5 – A Community of Fidelity to Mission**

The ability to see beyond our individual situation to the larger picture is a great gift. Fidelity to mission can be strengthened in a solid grounding in a communal identity. We are called as a community. The images of ‘people of God’ and ‘body of Christ’ were revived at the Second Vatican Council.

The mission is a communal one with the goal of being as leaven in the world and forming a ‘family of God.’<sup>27</sup> These images indicate that no minister is alone in their ministerial commitment. Each is unique but part of a larger picture. The learning community is a place to learn that success or failure are not measured by a specific event, especially a personal or institutional failing, but rather it is about being a steady presence in humble faithfulness.

Just as educational challenges raise doubts about one’s call to ministry or giftedness for ministry, so too the many problems that come up in the faith community, in life of the parish staff or the personal life of the ministerial leader can take a toll on confidence and commitment. The confusion and discouragement when these problems are experienced needs to be processed. In ministry education programs these issues can be addressed in the classroom, in contextual education (field education), internships, in the prayer life of the community, as well as in skill building seminars or workshops. Students would benefit greatly learning these skills and being aware that ongoing support is needed to persevere.

There is also a need for the students to reflect on their commitment to a new relationship in the church. This requires a mature love for the Body of Christ, the Church. It requires the ability to acknowledge the sinful human beings that make up the church and yet also notice the holiness of so many. The ability to know that the “Church is God’s love at work in the world, God’s offer of salvation uniquely through Christ” requires a deep awareness and recognition of participation in the body of Christ (CVL 40). The tension between knowing the “dark side of the Church’s history” and rejoicing in the goodness of the Church, and gratefulness for “the gift of God who upholds and renews her” needs a certain level of maturity (CVL 40).

As the ministry student enters into a new relationship with the Church this ministerial identity needs to be firmly in place for this public role. It is a great gift to ministry students for the educational programs to affirm the collaborative nature of ministry, the need to encourage the flourishing of all, and the importance of building up all members of the body.

Ministry students will also benefit greatly in learning how to process personal experiences of misunderstanding or human failings and help others to do so. Our educational programs can assist the future minister by reflecting on how to handle issues of injustice, unfairness, job insecurity, etc. Monika Hellwig reminds us of the bigger picture when she notes that there is the ongoing work of redemption that is taking place

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<sup>27</sup> Paul VI, Pope. *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), 7 December 1965, Vatican document available from: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html). (Accessed 14 September 2016.)

and it will continue. She urges the minister not to waste their energy on bitterness or resentment.<sup>28</sup>

All of our students in ministry programs would benefit by reflecting on these issues. Understanding their ministry and roles as servants in the life of the whole church allows for a broader vision. It is a great service to the ministry students to have some experience with dealing with misunderstanding or human failings and being able to see the bigger picture.

The issue of forgiveness and reconciliation is a key aspect of fidelity to mission. In classes, contextual education/internships, in service projects, retreats and prayer this important topic should be modeled, discussed and affirmed.<sup>29</sup>

The educational learning community that practices habits of forgiveness and reconciliation builds an important foundation for ministry. These same skills can be brought to the parishes and congregations, to those marginalized, to those encountering brokenness in their families and relationships, to ethnic and racial tensions and other divisions.

A growing personal indifference in one's ministry is a sign of concern. Signs of unhealthy balance have been researched by those studying secondary trauma in psychologists or compassion fatigue in first responders. In ministry we encounter in our congregations unexpected death, suicide and illness, those hurt or killed by violence, families dealing with the opioid crisis, military service related traumas, etc. While ministry generally does not encounter the levels of crisis that first responders and medical personnel or the secondary trauma that psychologists will experience, the insights from compassion fatigue studies are helpful when facing difficult situations.<sup>30</sup>

A healthy look beyond our personal and local issues to a bigger picture is helpful. A balance between commitment to these important issues and taking time for self care through non-work related activities is important. Studies on compassion fatigue in first responders and psychologists reveal that self-care is crucial. Included in this is having other interests to balance out the stress. Self care and an honest sense of self is crucial to good boundaries that will avoid compassion fatigue.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Monika Hellwig, " 'The Reign of God is Among You': Biblical and Theological Themes for Lay Leadership," *Called and Chosen: Toward a Spirituality for Lay Leaders*, Zeni Fox and Regina Bechtel, S.C. eds., (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2005), 49.

<sup>29</sup> L. Gregory Jones & Celestin Musekura. *Forgiving as We've Been Forgiven: Community Practices for Making Peace* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010). Also: Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu. *The Book of Forgiving* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Martha Teater, John Ludgate, *Overcoming Compassion Fatigue*, (Eau Claire, WI: Pesi Publishing and Media, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Skovholt, Michelle Trotter-Mathiason, *The Resilient Practitioner: Burnout and Compassion Fatigue Prevention and Self-Care Strategies for the Helping Professions*, 3rd Edition, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

Having a clear understanding of the ultimate goals for ministry education encourages the integration of the human, spiritual, academic and pastoral aspects of preparation. Dialogue, modeling, practice and confirmation are most effective in supporting the discernment and affirmation of call, the ongoing building of ministerial role identity, and gaining skills for long term commitment and fidelity to mission. The learning community model is well suited to these integrative goals.

Faculty, staff and students can take comfort in knowing that they are part of a people of God seeking to be as leaven in the world. Through the Trinitarian encounter with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit all of the faithful are drawn into relationship as a body. A healthy, balanced and humble stance of service can be modeled and practiced in the learning community.

In reflection and discussion together as faculty, staff and students let us continue to strive to generate great hope.

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**Beyond Moral Damage:**  
*“Imagining Future Possibilities” as a Pedagogical Practice of Hope*

**Abstract**

Philosophers and theologians alike recognize the strong connection between imagination and the ability to flourish. However, circumstances of oppression and degradation are forms of moral damage that can defile this potential. Using the US carceral climate as a contextual starting point, this paper argues that religious education needs to consider the implications of moral damage for pedagogy. Religious education offers the type of divinely-inspired vision needed to counter the demoralizing effects of moral damage and generate a sense of radical and responsible hope that avoids despair and increases the potential for flourishing.

“A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning.”<sup>1</sup> This quote can be found on university websites, in faculty training guides, and enhancing speeches about the power and hopefulness of education. It speaks to an enduring desire — for education to awaken hope, arouse the imagination, and lead to a life of flourishing. However, such optimistic statements risk perpetuating an idea of education that may only be effective on paper and in speeches. The reality is that even good teachers face obstacles when trying to achieve the “educational dream.” What would happen if our same training guides and speeches acknowledged circumstances where persistent despair and perceived hopelessness make hope hard to inspire and the imagination difficult to ignite? I came to this question working as a theological educator in a US women’s prison where the physical and psychological context constrains possibilities for hoping, imagining, and flourishing. As a religious educator, I came to understand this constraint to hopefulness as a moral impediment, a form of moral damage, and recognize its challenge to pedagogical goals and practices. I contend that if religious educators want to generate hope in the world, we must consider the implications and assaults of moral damage.

What follows is the beginning of a much needed exploration into the implications moral damage poses for pedagogy. My experience teaching in prison acts as a conceptual case study to contextualize the difficulty moral damage poses on liberative goals of education. Bringing together the work of moral philosophy and critical pedagogy, I name moral damage as a pedagogical concern that hinders a eudaimonistic vision of education. Turning to an unexpected source, I find help in the philosophical and ethical account of the indigenous Crow Nation. The lessons deduced from the Crow people’s ability to orient themselves in the face of hopelessness

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<sup>1</sup> A 2013 quote by US politician Brad Henry frequently referenced on teacher’s guides, University literature, and in teaching philosophies.

resonates with the Christian story in ways I find to be both encouraging and energizing for the future of religious education.

### *Moral Damage as a Pedagogical Concern*

Moral damage is a concept advanced by Claudia Card that describes damage among oppressed or subordinated peoples to the development of the virtues necessary for flourishing. While moral philosophy identifies several virtues constitutive of flourishing, one with significant pedagogical relevance is the virtue of imagining. In his work *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that humans cannot flourish without learning to be effective practical reasoners; knowing what is best to do in various circumstances. This requires multiple capabilities. The one relevant to our discussion is the ability to imagine alternative possibilities for the future. Simply stated, in order to flourish we must have the capacity to imagine. The capacity to imagine is a conditional quality enhanced or diminished by environment and experience. While the human imagination is a resilient, creative ability, there are persons, events, and institutions that can “inhibit, frustrate, or damage” our imaginative capability and threaten our flourishing.<sup>2</sup>

MacIntyre identifies two distinct threats to the development of imagination. The first threat is an impoverished or constrained view of the future. For example, think about young adults in Chicago who when asked where they see themselves in ten years, are unable to answer because they do not have a life expectancy for themselves past the age of twenty-five. This is because many of these young people’s views of the future have been constrained and impoverished by generational poverty, rampant violence, intimate encounters with death, prison, and abuse. Moreover, a prison sentence for one of these young people may very well be what they anticipate for their future. Systemic and structural circumstances can impoverish one’s capacity to imagine.

A second threat to flourishing is a lack of *education* in imagining alternative possibilities.<sup>3</sup> Educational failure can manifest in two contrasting ways. On one hand, “it can produce a constriction of the sense of possibility through the inculcation of false beliefs about how far our lives are determined by uncontrollable circumstances.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, however, education can conversely “encourage a giving away to self-indulgent phantasy (sic) which blurs the difference between realistic expectation and wishful thinking.”<sup>5</sup> In this sense, education becomes a practice in optimism because it fails to take concrete reality seriously. Education can play a vital role in developing the capacity to imagine alternative futures but it must balance the injustice of promising too little and the irresponsibility of promising too much too easily.

This tension haunts me educating in a prison context. I constantly struggle with balancing the need to encourage the students to imagine a life beyond the present and the prison. However, I am painfully aware of the structural and systemic difficulties facing incarcerated people. I am

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<sup>2</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1999), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 75-6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 76.

also ashamedly aware of the unjust treatment formerly incarcerated people will face when they “return” to society. Cultural norms around prisons and inmates serve to cultivate impoverished and constrained views of the future for incarcerated peoples. Aversion to hiring and forgiving formerly incarcerated persons are concrete examples of the realities of constrained future possibilities for inmates. It is not an ideal world. But I still contend that in order to strive for a good life in prison and beyond, a person needs the ability to imagine something richer and more beneficent than an impoverished future might suggest. The reality of moral damage keeps this contention from becoming another pollyanna statement and keeps me on my pedagogical toes.

Moral damage is often conceptualized in relation to systemic oppression. However, I am drawn to its conceptual power for understanding incarceration. I am careful not to collapse incarceration with the oppression of marginalized peoples, they are related but distinct experiences. Nevertheless, there is an undeniable overlap between marginalized groups and who gets incarcerated in the US. As such, moral damage is a doubly useful conceptual framework for thinking about the impact of incarceration on the people I teach. Philosopher Lisa Tessman investigates the implications of oppression as a morally damaging reality. She critiques the psychological and cultural impact that systemic racism has on black bodies in America. She theorizes about moral damage done to black psyches’ that are consistently confronted with the socially-constructed image of black person as “criminal,” “welfare recipient,” and “moral degenerate.”<sup>6</sup> She maintains that frequent psychological assault can lead to “feelings of hopelessness and an internalized belief in one’s own inferiority.”<sup>7</sup> Moral damage, in this conception, is related to the psychological damage imposed by persistent hopelessness.<sup>8</sup> It is what occurs when a person internalizes feelings of hopelessness and develops an impoverished view of the future, limiting the scope of acceptable options for a good life. Moral damage is the character wound of oppressive structures that hinder one’s ability to flourishing.

A prison sentence can be morally damaging and reveal a person’s ontological vulnerability toward the loss of a coherent conceptual framework for living. A prison sentence alters one’s telos no matter how insufficient it once was for flourishing. The reality is that such an abrupt rupture in living conditions can alter any imagination of a good life at all. When a young woman of 19, preparing to go off to college, is convicted to serve 25 years for vehicular manslaughter, the life she imagined is shattered. When a middle aged entrepreneur is imprisoned for mishandling funds to attempt to pay her bills, her previous life picture is rendered invalid. What do I do when these women end up my class? What might it mean to consider their shattered life pictures and constrained imaginations as I plan to teach?

Many of us, myself included, have a *eudaimonistic* vision of education. We link the pursuit of education to flourishing and declare that it is morally praiseworthy, redemptive, salvific even. But if we seek for our pedagogies to generate hope, we need strategies to resist the effects of moral damage and cultivate an imagination for an alternative future better than the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>8</sup> Lisa Tessman, “Critical Virtue Ethics: Understanding Oppression as Morally Damaging,” in *Feminists Doing Ethics*, edited by Peggy DesAutels and Joanne Waugh (Langham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001): 84.

present. For help, I turn to another scholar searching for answers, Jonathan Lear. Lear like myself is concerned with the way people make meaning amidst major devastation and how we deal with the breakdown of the sense of possibilities for life.

### *Lessons in Responding to Moral Damage*

Jonathan Lear, in his work *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* provides an example of cultivating imagination in the face of despair. Writing about the indigenous Crow tribe, Lear chronicles the way the leader Plenty Coups re-orient his life and subsequently the life of his people amidst the loss of cultural meaning. Every event in the life of the Crow people gained significance within a larger framework of Crow meaning: hunting and fighting. However, when the confinement of native tribes to reservations crushed this possibility, all actions lost intelligibility. Plenty Coups was able to avoid utter despair and imagine a different way of living by grounding his sense of future possibility in a divinely-inspired dream given to him in his childhood. This dream fueled the imagination of the Crow people and served to re-orient them in the face of cultural devastation.

Plenty Coups received a vision from a divine source that told him that the traditional way of life would come to an end. The dream advised Plenty Coups that he must shift from virtues associated with the War Eagle (i.e. hunting and fighting) to virtues associated with the Chickadee (listening and wisdom). These Chickadee virtues would provide the Crow people with resources to survive cultural devastation. Plenty Coups' divine vision called for a teleological suspension of the ethical — a suspension of what formally constituted a good life. Instead, Plenty Coups was able to imagine new alternative possibilities for flourishing because he had faith in the goodness of the divine vision. The Crow people were thereby educated in imagining alternative possibilities for their future based on this divine story. Consequently, instead of persistent hopelessness, the Crow people were imbued with what Lear calls a “radical form of hopefulness” that avoided despair.<sup>9</sup>

Through the wisdom of the Crow people, Lear offers us pedagogically and theologically rich lessons on how to respond to moral damage. First, Lear emphasizes that in order to avoid despair, imagination needs a source beyond itself. The reason the Crow people were able to reimagine life after devastation was because of the divinely inspired vision. The Crow people exhibited faith in a goodness that transcended understanding because they believed that the source of the vision was God and Good:

God—*Ah-badt-dadt-deah*—is good. [Our] commitment to the genuine transcendence of God is manifest in [our] commitment to the goodness of the world transcending our necessarily limited attempt to understand it. [Our] commitment to God's transcendence and goodness is manifested in [our] commitment to the idea that something good will emerge even if it outstrips [our] present limited capacity for understanding what good is.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 99.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

Second, Lear accentuates that in order to avoid despair and generate hope, imagination needs to be accompanied by a type of visionary pragmatism. It needs a set of ethics by which to govern life. Plenty Coups' divine vision offered a different set of ethical guidance for the Crow people — to become like a Chickadee. The Chickadee provided a new set of virtues by which to order life; a new set of virtues crafted for a new context.

Finally, Lear insinuates that proper education in imagination should generate *radical* hope. Radical hope is that which is “directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is ... [It] anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it.”<sup>11</sup> Radical hope for the Crow people was a hope for revival, for “coming back to life in a form that is not yet intelligible.”<sup>12</sup> Radical hope avoids despair but it is not wishful thinking or mere optimism. It does not short-circuit reality, failing to take realistic, practical steps to bring about change. It encompasses what Ellen Ott Marshall calls *responsible* hope:

If hope is to generate and sustain moral agency, it must forever be cognizant of the obstacles and threats to its object. In places and times of security and health, we must work harder to remain connected to these perils and to those people who struggle under their weight ... In our desperate moments, a sense of possibility may be hard to come by, but it may also be all we have. In times of comfort, therefore, it is imperative that we 'call into presence' those who continue to suffer, grieve, rage, resist, and survive. They keep us accountable to the vulnerability of life and to the imperative of hope. If we fall to optimism, we trivialize their suffering. If we fall to despair, we disrespect their memory.<sup>13</sup>

Hope that is both radical and responsible is focused on the future but is firmly grounded in the present. Lear's concept of radical hope challenges me to equip inmates with a story that can guide their life toward a vision of something beyond the here and now, something beyond the constraints of the prison. Though the prison environment may be morally damaging and contribute to the impoverishment of imagination, education in hope can offer a counter-response by providing opportunities for people to imagine alternative possibilities for their lives.

### *A Pedagogy of Hope*

Educational theory, specifically critical and transformative pedagogies, stress the importance of imagination in the educational process. Educational theorist Paulo Freire calls this “developing a capacity to dream” and argues that it is constitutive of humanization. Humanization is one's ontological vocation to regain a sense of humanity in the face of dehumanizing systems, structures, and forces. It is the hopeful act of recovering one's lost humanity, of strengthening one's resolve in the face of ontological vulnerability. For Freire, the job of an educator is to unveil opportunities for hope. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire defines hope as an epistemological and ontological need which is related to humanization. Furthermore, he concretizes hope by anchoring it in practice. Hope must be more than wishful thinking for Freire

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 103.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen Ott Marshall, *Though the Fig Tree does not Blossom, toward a Responsible Theology of Christian Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), xvii.

and grounding it in practice makes it become “historical concreteness.”<sup>14</sup> Freire advocates for an education in hope, for pedagogies that guide learners to desire something beyond what is present. It is an education in the imaginative work of envisioning alternative futures.

Educational theorist Henry Giroux offers a similar defense of education as a practice of hope in his essay “When Hope is Subversive.” For Giroux, educated hope is what is needed to craft new language and a new vision for a more just society — it is the belief that “different futures are possible.”<sup>15</sup> However, it is more than just a belief. Giroux acquires his theory of hope from philosopher Ernst Bloch who argues that hope must be concrete. It is not “something like nonsense or absolute fancy; rather it is *not yet* in the sense of a possibility; that it could be there if we could only do something for it” ... “hope is anticipatory rather than messianic, mobilizing rather than therapeutic.”<sup>16</sup> As such, hope is both discursive and concrete. It is the language of possibility and the discourse of critique and social transformation that concretizes such possibility. In this sense, Bloch and Giroux’s understanding of hope is implicitly theological. It is eschatological in nature concerned with the hope of things yet to come and it is deeply ethical concerned with right action informed by an imagined future.

As religious educators, we are uniquely equipped to provide the Christian story of forgiveness, redemption, and transformation as a divinely inspired vision and source of ethic in the face of moral damage. Thomas Groome names this vision the reign of God, an eschatological hope in the in-breaking of the kingdom. Groome defines education as: “a political activity with pilgrims in time that deliberately and intentionally attends with them to the activity of God in our present, to the *Story* of the Christian faith community, and to the *Vision* of God's Kingdom, the seeds of which are already among us” (italics mine).<sup>17</sup> The story of the Christian faith and the vision of God’s Kingdom are for Christians what the divine-vision of the Chickadee was for the Crow people, that which empowers hope and provides us with an ethic for how to live when life seems unintelligible.

So how might I educate with the goal of enhancing an inmate’s ability to imagine alternative futures in the midst of a prison? I contend that through literature, the arts, history, and personal stories, the classroom can become an access point for possibilities beyond current circumstances. These practices can introduce different ways of thinking, processing, and feeling that unveil new opportunities for living in the world. In this way, even in a prison, acknowledgment of a future beyond what is known is made possible via educational practices. As a religious educator, I commit to nurture radical and responsible hope in the prison classroom — hope that different futures may not be easy but are indeed possible. Education in general and religious education in specific can offer the type of divinely-inspired vision needed to counter the demoralizing effects of prison culture. As such, the cultivation of radical hope and imagination becomes a necessary pedagogical response to moral damage.

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<sup>14</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1992), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Giroux, “When Hope is Subversive,” *Tikkun Vol 19, No 6* (2004):39.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1980), 25.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

A pedagogy that takes moral damage seriously is not just a concern for the prison educator. The reality is that we are raising a generation for whom news stories of unarmed black bodies being gunned down by police are common place. Fear-inducing speech has become the lingua franca of politics. Immigrants are shunned as walls are proverbially constructed. Gender and sexuality are policed in increasingly more subtle and subversive ways. Hatred masquerades as free speech. We must consider moral damage as a pedagogical concern when we teach black students after the shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castille, when we teach Latinx students in the midst of persistent immigrant-phobic rhetoric, when we teach Muslim students in an increasingly Islamophobic culture, and a trans-student after the HB2 bathroom law passes. We are constantly bombarded with images and narratives of terrorism and bigotry. Such frequent devastation, disappointment, and despair can damage us all.

Lisa Tessman warns us that “something grim emerges when one tries to work with a eudaimonistic moral theory while examining oppression, for one centers the importance of flourishing and then confronts the terrible fact of its distortions or absence under conditions of oppression.”<sup>18</sup> The same is true when we rely on eudaimonistic educational theories that fail to consider the reality of moral damage. The fact is that we teach in environments where people are assaulted by hopelessness, where future possibilities seem impoverished because of social and structural challenges that seem too big to confront alone. This is the world we live in. And critical attention to moral damage is imperative.

We must take the impact of despair on the lives of the people we teach and of ourselves seriously. It is our responsibility as educators to continue to trust the Christian story to provide a relevant vision for today, one that ignites our imagination and generates a hope that is radical and responsible enough to move us forward toward alternative possibilities for our students, for ourselves and for the world.

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<sup>18</sup> Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

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## **Restorative Hope: Exploring Pedagogy through the Lens of Incarceration**

### **Abstract:**

Restorative hope contends against society's propensity to place strict boundaries on what it means to be human. This paper responds to the question: "What are educational practices that educators can employ to address the urgent needs of incarcerated women who have to navigate the difficult terrain of hopelessness within and after incarceration?" I propose restorative hope as an alternative way to do pedagogy in confining spaces. In order to construct a restorative hope pedagogy, I take seriously the insights of women on the incarceration continuum while also drawing on the rich body of pedagogical literature. First, I identify why "lockdown pedagogies" can disrupt hope and ultimately authenticity. To counter these confining spaces, I argue that restorative hope creates a space of authenticity that bolsters a sense of humanity.<sup>1</sup> I highlight self-authorship as critical to the process of developing a more authentic self. Finally, I offer some generative practices that religious educators can employ to help create spaces where people feel comfortable becoming more fully human, and being more fully themselves.

### ***Introduction***

Restorative hope contends against society's propensity to place strict boundaries on what it means to be human. When people fall outside of these social norms, they are often placed in exile. Not only do they have to earn their way back into society, they have to re-earn their way back into the status of "human." Those who do not reside within the category of "human" unfortunately become a target for inferior treatment. This maltreatment is justified by one's non-humanness. Criminality applied to one's humanity creates a human confinement that prevents incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons from moving beyond the criminal act(s) they committed. Human confinement places a person's humanity under lock and key. In this frame of reference, a person's being is static and unchanging. A person is the same today, yesterday, and forever. The partial glimpse into a person's past becomes the truth by which human confinement identifies incarcerated and formerly incarcerated persons. It locks people in their mistakes by emphasizing a fragment of someone's life, namely their criminal acts, and applying it as if this is the "truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." They are not their name, but their department

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<sup>1</sup> \*Please note: In order to emphasize the voice of women through direct quotes, I decided to limit my paper to cover the quest for authenticity within restorative hope pedagogy. However, this research reveals that restorative hope pedagogy equally creates space for connection and resiliency. Further, this research points to particular epistemological approaches that undergird women coming to know hope in order to face the existential challenges they encounter within prison. As a result, I hope to extend the conversation in my session to also integrate the quest for connection and resiliency that are central to restorative hope pedagogy. Stay tuned!

of corrections number. They are not their transformation, but their murder or drug use or kidnapping charges.

In order to construct a restorative hope pedagogy, I take seriously the insights of women on the incarceration continuum while also drawing on the rich body of pedagogical literature. Feminist, womanist, and critical approaches to pedagogy inform my proposal of restorative hope pedagogy. These pedagogies rely on the wisdom of multiple articulations of pedagogies that seek to transform the self, community, and world. Restorative hope pedagogy, as both holistic and broad-based, embraces teaching and learning as a constant re-vision and bolstering of ways of seeing, ways of knowing, ways of being, and ways of doing within the world; this dynamic inner and outer praxis is always acting upon the self, others, God, and the world to transform self and society. I assume that pedagogy helps re-orient someone's being so they can see, know, do, and be differently in the world.

Ultimately, this paper responds to the question: "What are educational practices that educators can employ to address the urgent needs of incarcerated women who have to navigate the difficult terrain of hopelessness within and after incarceration?" I propose restorative hope as an alternative way to do pedagogy in confining spaces. First, I identify why "lockdown pedagogies" can disrupt hope and ultimately authenticity. To counter these confining spaces, I argue that restorative hope creates a space of authenticity that bolsters a sense of humanity. I highlight self-authorship as critical to the process of developing a more authentic self. Finally, I offer some generative practices that religious educators can employ to help create spaces where people feel comfortable becoming more fully human, and being more fully themselves.

### ***A Note on Study Population and Methodology***

This paper is aimed at educators and people of faith—chiefly those who see restoring hope as one of their primary vocational aims. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and my personal experiences teaching in the prison, this paper examines the narratives of formerly incarcerated women in order to better understand the ways of sustaining hope and contribute to the knowledge base on effective educational practices for marginalized populations. The qualitative research consists of discussions with a total of 10 formerly incarcerated women in the state of Georgia. Nine of the participants are African American while 1 is Caucasian. While this study can be expanded to invite participants across the nation, I delimit this research by selecting research participants within the state of Georgia.<sup>2</sup> The difficulty of identifying formerly incarcerated women would create significant challenges otherwise.

This paper is grounded in my experience teaching within and co-directing a Certificate of Theological Studies Program (CTS Program) in a prison in Georgia. In this program, students are expected to complete two foundational courses in theological and biblical studies, three electives, and a leadership project. They must also maintain a record free of disciplinary reports. I draw on the CTS Program because, as a whole, it seemed to be one space within the prison that illuminates restorative hope pedagogy. While I've taught a couple courses in the program, for the purpose of this paper, I will draw mostly from the 12 week *Exploring Spirituality and Identity through the Arts* course I taught in 2012. This course invited women to explore Erikson's stages of psychosocial identity formation through the use of art. For each of Erikson's eight stages, the class used art to reflect on psychosocial concepts while also reflecting on their own identity formation. Every other week, guest artists came to lead the class in different artistic crafts that enabled them to experiment with different modes of art.

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<sup>2</sup> To create preserve anonymity, I use pseudonyms throughout this paper.

### ***Restorative Hope Pedagogy as a Counter to Lockdown Pedagogy***

Hope is the primary aim in restorative hope pedagogies. Restorative hope pedagogy's quest to overcome internal and external chains that limit transformation feeds into a re-articulation of ways of seeing, knowing, being, and doing that restores hope even in the midst of confinement. Responding to the deep hopelessness that emerges from contexts of complex trauma and social death sets the agenda for how religious educators approach their ministry in communities, churches, prisons and the public square. The motivation for learning in restorative hope pedagogy is the desire to live a meaningful life that contributes to the healing and wholeness of society. For pedagogies of restorative hope, raising consciousness is not just about becoming more aware of one's own ability to enact social change; it's about seeing, knowing, and believing that there is a Divine presence that also interacts and partners with humanity to transform the self and the broken structures within society.<sup>3</sup>

My description of a pedagogy of restorative hope simultaneously juxtaposes and problematizes lockdown pedagogies.<sup>4</sup> Whereas restorative hope grapples for a transformational paradigm, lockdown pedagogies prefer a tacit acceptance of the status quo. This tacit acceptance allows various forms of social death and complex trauma to thrive since there is no reassessment and re-envisioning of the ways in which things are done in learning (specifically) and in society (in general). I propose a pedagogy that contributes to humanizing and hope-building spaces. In doing so, I am also intent on identifying places that may shut down hope. Restorative hope pedagogy counters pedagogies that promote unhealthy competition, division, stratification, commoditization, othering, fragmentation, and low self-esteem; it names those pedagogies as pedagogies on lockdown. For women on the incarceration continuum, lockdown pedagogy functions in very specific ways. One such way is through the panopticon gaze, which makes women hyperaware of their self in ways that can easily disrupt any sense of authenticity.

The criminal justice system creates mechanisms that help control knowledge about the confined as well as maintain order and control over bodies of women on the incarceration continuum. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault refers to these mechanisms of control as the panopticon, a building that was built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for the sole purpose of watching incarcerated people. The panopticon gaze signifies a non-critical form of seeing that seeks to control, define, and disempower the watched. How and what one comes to know is directly connected to what one sees and/or perceives. The internal and external consequences of panopticism create a new politics of containment that centers on the ways in which people are seen and subsequently the ways in which people see. Distorted forms of visibility develop that create distance rather than connection. The panopticon gaze seeks to interrupt empowerment strategies that may be direct (such as physical and verbal acts of defiance) or indirect (an empowered sense

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<sup>3</sup> There is one primary distinction between restorative hope pedagogies and critical pedagogies. The God-consciousness in pedagogies of restorative hope set this form of conscientization apart from other forms of critical pedagogies. Critical pedagogies intend to raise the consciousness of those who have been marginalized so they can become active subjects of change within history. Restorative hope pedagogies build upon these principles while at the same time embracing a theological dimension that acknowledges the presence of a Divine being that is actively engaged in the world.

<sup>4</sup> Pedagogies on lockdown are an uncritical approach to teaching and learning that focuses solely on one-dimensional learning (that is usually cognitive-based learning) in exchange for learning that impacts transformation. In favor of competitive, hierarchal, individualistic, and rational forms of learning, lockdown pedagogies devalue imagination, exclude the incarnational, limit the improvisational, and dismiss the intuitive. Those who do not conform to the given standards often sit on the margins seeking legitimacy.

of self). In other words, as a containment strategy, it intends to squash any form of resistance. With mechanisms that create noncritical ways of seeing, how we come to see individuals can easily be distorted. Similar to a microscope, instead of seeing individuals as whole, the panopticon reduces and fragments individuals. This fractured gaze makes those in power all-seeing but only with partial knowledge.

The panopticon is based on Bentham's principle that "power should be visible and unverifiable."<sup>5</sup> What will be visible to those without power is the tower that houses those who will look upon him or her. What will be unverifiable is the incarcerated person's knowledge of when he or she is being watched. A stark dichotomy exists between the seeing that takes place and the person who is seen.<sup>6</sup> In the words of Foucault, "in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen."<sup>7</sup> The one who watches is ever-seeing but never seen. In other words, all the power is in the hands of the one who gazes rather than the one who is gazed upon. The overarching insidious sense of being watched and observed by the powerful creates fear, doubt, and insecurity. The feeling of being watched becomes a pervading sensation that influences how one engages the world. This controlled gaze feeds into a sense of inauthenticity, making it difficult to ever be comfortable in one's own skin. One may even say women in the prison context can be "cut dead but still alive" because of their experiences of hypervisibility, mis-visibility, or invisibility, which feed the public imagination<sup>8</sup> Further, it facilitates a process by which women are hyperaware of their actions and more susceptible to identity management in order to survive the prison context.

The practices used to sustain law and order usher one into a process of losing oneself so that one can even become unfamiliar to one's self. Within prison, women are isolated from the things, people, and practices that made them who they were prior to incarceration. In this sense, hope has to be related to the existential reality of what people face and how that presses against their perception of self. One has to embrace a carceral identity—an identity that seeks to conform to prison culture in order to survive incarceration. In the prison, one is constantly asked to perform, to wear multiple identities in order to appeal to various participants within the prison. Most women even say wearing the mask is necessary to get one through the challenges of prison life. The role-playing becomes a tactic of survival. To be seen as weak or soft makes one an easy target for others. A carceral identity, however, forces people to become something other than themselves. In some circumstances that means playing tough while in other circumstances that means playing perfect. Wearing these roles becomes a way to gain privileges, maintain safety, or simply fit in.

As Toya named, "I had to transform into different people at times to fit in." She talked about playing roles "like being on top of the world, being the one that had it altogether, and then

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<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 1st American ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 201

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>8</sup> Hyper-visibility is the overrepresentation of seeing particular types of bodies that begins to frame how individuals marked in that group are seen. Invisibility is no representation or the "complicit acceptance of a limiting identity and the failure to risk the required self-scrutiny to know one's humanity."<sup>8</sup> This concept reveals that invisibility is more than how one is seen or not seen externally, but how one allows that to impact their agency to see or not see themselves. Furthermore, a mis-visibility is sometimes worse than not being seen. Mis-visibility is the misrepresentation of individuals; it is when only parts of a person's self appears before the gaze, making it difficult to see the complexity of that person. The concept of invisibility is taken from the work of Gregory Ellison. Gregory Ellison, *Cut Dead but Still Alive: Caring for African American Young Men in Today's Culture* (Nashville: Abigndon Press, 2013), 1-3.

one that was bad and just being mean, hateful towards people that didn't even deserve it.”<sup>9</sup> While she was fully aware that this was not her real identity, she also understood the prison as a place that could not handle her true self. Safety required concealing her true self so that the prison environment could not steal it. Only parts of herself could be offered in the space, creating a situation where the human longing to be known is co-opted by the human longing to survive. I asked Toya what happens when people do not change in order to survive in prison. She shared:

*If you don't, I feel that you'll be taken captive, seriously. I feel that if you don't have some form of changing to, well, adapting, if you don't change or perform in a certain type of way, you will feel lost...Feeling alone, not fitting in and stuff and you don't fit in, because you're not like everybody else. So you start having second thoughts about yourself and who you are as a person, and you seep into a depression.*<sup>10</sup>

This constant identity-shifting is a form of captivity, in which one can easily lose the self. The incongruence between the public persona that women wear and the personal identity that constitutes who women are can be easily blurred in the constant image negotiations in the prison. Those who are able to navigate a sense of inner continuity and authenticity in prison actually experience a greater sense of security.<sup>11</sup> Thus, to carve out space where one can be their best self in the present in route to their best possible self in the future is critical. Put another way, finding space in the prison to actually be one's self is necessary in order to get through prison life with a healthy sense of self.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Restorative Hope as a Pedagogical Lens for Authenticity***

*I was born dead. I was turned the wrong way, breached... I was just blue... and they were getting ready to prepare me a death certificate. But an old doctor happened to walk by and he looked. He heard the layman talking, and he said well, this child is not dead. He picked me up...hit me about four or five real hard times, you see? And they said I leapt up. That was hope. That's an unusual thing of hope, but that was hope. That was hope in one of its greatest forms.*<sup>13</sup>

This quote exemplifies my understanding of restorative hope. In the quote above, Eden connects her birthing process with hope and second chances. She underscores the fact that when one sees possibilities for what others can become, new possibilities are birthed and pathways opened. It is through this pedagogical lens of restorative hope that I emphasize the assumption that as humans we are always evolving and becoming. Human hope is the belief that a person is always more than what you can see with your natural eyes. This optimistic posture towards humanity undergirds the vision of restorative hope. The declaration that *beings* that some may have declared dead but are actually alive represents the importance of second chances. Whereas the facts may communicate death (i.e. the lack of oxygen), the truth may actually be another reality not yet realized. In this case, the truth was she perhaps should have been dead but wasn't. She goes on further to say:

*And hope, to me, also looks like this. I know the people that I lived with and the ones that I left in prison, there are some good people that could be definitely attributes and they would be good in society, so even though it wasn't my plan to*

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<sup>9</sup> Toya. Interview. 15 September 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Yvonne Jewekes, "Men Behind Bars: "Doing" Masculinity as an Adaptation to Imprisonment." *Men and Masculinities* 8, no. 1 (2005): 55-59.

<sup>12</sup> Yvonne Jewekes, "Men Behind Bars," 53.

<sup>13</sup> Eden, Interview, 17 April 2014.

*do re-entry, it wasn't, it has become my passion. Hope that we as human beings can see the larger picture is asking a lot, because there's so many things that's going on out here, but if -- and all I want them to see, my hope comes in, see giving someone an honest second chance, so -- That's not easy. That's not easy at all.*<sup>14</sup>

Even in the face of the most preposterous criminal actions, human hope leaves room for restoration in the very essence of a person's humanity. It embraces a human-in-process perspective that counters human confinement. To counter a humanity that has been stripped, degraded, and fragmented, restorative hope recognizes humanity as resilient, authentic, and relational.<sup>15</sup>

Women on the incarceration continuum recognize the multilevel ways human confinement manifests. Even when women get released from prison, they face the collateral consequences of their incarceration. These consequences make it difficult to obtain employment and housing, some of the most basic social needs of humans. There is also an internal decarceration process that takes place, where returning citizens have to learn how to be physically free. The myriad of complications of this decarceration process manifests in the intangible bars that still exist. For example, one woman described her release by saying, "You are still incarcerated in certain types of ways. You need to learn how to separate yourself from the bars. It's very hard doing that. Because right now, I feel like I'm still behind bars. Mentally I'm still behind bars." Some have identified this as "complicated freedom." For example, while one may be technically free, one may still be on parole, which creates unique circumstances of confinement and possible reincarceration.

At the heart of a human-in-process perspective is the understanding that we are not today who we were yesterday nor will we be tomorrow who we are today. This perspective ultimately leaves room for a person's identity, both personal and communal, to change in a world that is in constant flux. Rather than simplifying how one understands human nature, human hope embraces a more complex and nuanced perspective of human nature. It does not discount sin, crime, or the capacity for someone to do evil. Instead, it recognizes that all humanity, whether incarcerated or not, participates in individual and systemic acts that can be deemed sinful, criminal, or evil, thus requiring a greater need for redemption for all of humanity. All must see themselves as criminals in order to receive the beautiful act of redemption. Human hope tends away solely from discourses of personal responsibility and tends toward a discourse of second chances.<sup>16</sup> Human hope embraces the perspective that people are valuable for who they are and are still in the process of becoming who they will be.

### ***Self-Authorship in the Process of Becoming Authentic***

Critical to human hope is providing spaces where women are invited to be their authentic selves, be in relationship to others in a life-giving way, and be challenged to grow. These sites actually create a context for resiliency and sustaining hope. Sites of appearing, becoming, and

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<sup>14</sup> Eden, Interview, 17 April 2014.

<sup>15</sup> The categories of resilient, authentic, and relational emerged from coding the manuscripts from the interviews conducted with research participants. During the coding process, I compared the manuscripts to search for consistent patterns or reoccurring themes that surfaced among them. When I noticed phrases or narratives that relied heavily on depending on and connecting with others, I coded as relational. For phrases, repetitive words, and narratives that centered on being one's self or being able to realize one's full personhood, I coded for authenticity. Lastly, I coded narratives and themes that centered on traversing through great difficulty as resiliency. Because all three of these themes repeated throughout all of the interviews, I concluded that these themes were critical in building hope with women on the incarceration continuum.

<sup>16</sup> Maisha Winn, *Girl Time: Literacy, Justice, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, The Teaching for Social Justice Series (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011), 136.

connection become critical especially when women on the incarceration continuum find themselves in circumstances of intense existential questioning and meaning-making. These spaces invite introspection, dialogue, and resources to help one reframe their story. Even within the prison system, these spaces function as non-carceral spaces where women can simply be themselves. The concept of human hope serves as a robust pedagogical lens to elucidate how we be and how we become in restorative hope pedagogy. It is the process of moving from one state of being to another that produces integrity through the articulation of a more authentic self. The underlying question in restoring human hope in pedagogy is: In what ways can we invite the essence of persons into a learning environment that both affirms who they are but challenges them to become who they are to become? Within restorative hope pedagogy, I propose that human hope manifests through processes of self-authorship as students actively engage in creating themselves. The question of authorship becomes particularly important in carceral settings that reinforce human confinement. Carceral settings tend to operate on an “obey what I tell you to do, believe what I tell you to think, be who I say you are, and imagine only what I say is possible” basis. To be immersed in a setting where primacy is placed on external authorities to be the guiding voice in how one organizes experiences and shapes identity has severe consequences for one’s ontological formation. Learners immersed in carceral learning environments engage in a process of becoming when they begin to differentiate what they believe about themselves, others, and God from what others have told them to believe about themselves, others, and God. Self-authorship emerges from a human hope that refuses to remain content and constrained by the boxes of others.

To illustrate human hope in the midst of threats to confine one’s being, I draw on Marcia B. Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship. Self-authorship, a term coined by Robert Kegan and expanded by Baxter Magolda, is a constructive-developmental approach to meaning-making and the development of self.<sup>17</sup> Baxter Magolda’s theoretical framing of self-authorship moves beyond the cognitive developmental approaches to self-authorship and takes seriously the relational and circumstantial impact of external influences in the making of self. Self-authorship is “characterized by internally generating and coordinating one’s beliefs, values, and internal loyalties, rather than depending on external values, beliefs, and interpersonal loyalties.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, self-authoring people assume responsibility for their thoughts, emotions, and actions.<sup>19</sup> Baxter Magolda’s theory, like my own, understands the interlocking influences that contribute to the development of an inner self. Epistemology (How do I know?), intrapersonal (Who am I?), and interpersonal (How do we construct relationships?) are key questions that learners respond to on their journey to self-authorship.<sup>20</sup> Learners move from following external formulas given to them by others to a transitional space (known as the crossroads) where learners seek to integrate their sense of self influenced by the expectations of others with their sense of self influenced by their own values. During the crossroads, learners see a need to develop their own values but are not quite ready to do so. From this transitional space, learners move toward self-authorship. Self-authorship represents the phase where learners choose their own beliefs, values, and identity despite external influences.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 185.

<sup>18</sup> Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, Elizabeth G. Creamer, and Peggy S. Meszaros, *Development and Assessment of Self-Authorship Exploring the Concept across Cultures* (Sterling, Va.: Stylus Pub., 2010), Kindle location 137.

<sup>19</sup> Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, Kindle location 137.

<sup>20</sup> Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, *Making Their Own Way: Narratives for Transforming Higher Education to Promote Self-Development* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2001), 3-8.

<sup>21</sup> Magolda, *Making Their Own Way*, 71-105.

Because self-authorship is grounded in the work of a being coming to voice, self-authorship is a manifestation of human hope. Self-authorship represents the process by which one becomes. To be an author of one's life refers to a person's ability to make decisions about one's own life based on their internal voice rather than seeking to accommodate the demands of others. Educators have a unique challenge in working with learners who have been socialized to believe that only external authority figures have voices worth following. To assist learners to come to voice, to know one's self, and to understand and value one's internal self are key tasks that restorative hope pedagogy seeks to fulfill. In the context of the self-in-contemplation, the self-in communion with God, and the self-in-community with others, restorative hope pedagogy intends to offer sites of becoming, where learners engage in the process of meaning-making and self-authorship in order to create a more authentic self.

Meaning-making is the work of the interior self; thus, it is important for educators to acknowledge inner formation as critical to restorative hope pedagogy. Meaning-making possesses great ontological significance in the movement of selves. The act of meaning-making contributes to a person's process of becoming. It is a stark protest against human confinement. It renounces the self that has been in a perpetual state of stagnation and non-formation and announces a self that is open to formation and more developed meaning-making capacities. In the words of constructive-developmental psychologist Robert Kegan, "The activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making. There is thus no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-making context in which it *becomes* a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception because we *are* the meaning-making context."<sup>22</sup> In other words, meaning-making cannot be separated from the self who is becoming; meaning-making drives how a person experiences and makes sense of the world. At the same time, meaning-making becomes more complex as one can identify his or her socialized self and enact agency even while the self is being co-constructed with the world and relationships around them.<sup>23</sup>

Restorative pedagogy resists the tendency of learners to simply submit in the context of authority; instead, restorative hope pedagogy encourages learners to develop a sense of personal integrity that enables them to exercise agency and authority over their own self, thoughts, and decisions. Educators invite learners into the process of meaning-making within the learning environment. Educators do not ask, "what did you learn from what others have said?" Educators ask, "how are you coming to understand and make meaning out of what you have heard? How does this new understanding fit into your world?" Educators approach learning with the understanding that learners are not only coming to know the content; learners are coming to know themselves in relation to the content. Educators then reinforce a self that is able to handle, reflect upon, and apply the knowledge rather than just consume it. A major task of restorative hope pedagogy is to help provide a context where students can share how they interpret their experience and actively seek out and consider new perspectives about their experience.

Sometimes the process of coming to know oneself can be messy. One comes to know the good, bad, and ugly that marks the condition of being human. For example, in a focus group conversation, we were talking about this process of authenticity and becoming when Linda began to share about her process of authenticity. She says,

*"Once you've begun to realize things about yourself. You have to figure out how to maneuver with that information things that you've accepted about yourself... Like*

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 32.

*with my family...I'm a people pleaser and I wanted everyone to be good. That's just my personality. And I was always falling short, not because of me but because of their expectations, not my expectations...So I had to release myself from their expectations, and I know the consequences of that is that when they call, I might not be able to run to their assistance. So I know they may feel X,Y, and Z. But I have to allow them to be who they are so I can be who the f—k I am.”<sup>24</sup>*

Critical to this act of becoming more authentic and developing a sense of voice is this process of differentiating herself and her own standards from those of others. To become authentic is not to become perfect but to be on a quest to become more whole, honest, and transparent with one's self. Education that invites beings that are not perfect in the class reinforces the understanding that humans are always engaging in a process of becoming. In other words, the story of one's life is not complete but continues to written.

### ***Restorative Hope Pedagogy in Praxis Within the Prison Classroom***

One of the benefits of prison is that it provides a setting where reflection can take place. This is especially so in classrooms that expect students to engage in introspection and reflection around course material. As Kaia Stern notes in her research with on prison education with men, introspection can be a faith act that reminds incarcerated persons of their dignity and provides a sense of freedom.<sup>25</sup> Contemplation with self often represents a context where people can develop and clarify their sense of self and emergent voice. Authoring the self-in-contemplation represents the process of the self *knowing* the self more genuinely. Contemplation may be characterized as a “theology by heart,” wherein the self gives primacy to the interior life in its quest for a solid internal foundation.<sup>26</sup> Amidst the competing voices that contend for one's loyalty, contemplation attends to the often muted voice that yearns to become comprehensible to the self. The emphasis on self-authorship is really an invitation to become intimately acquainted with one's self so that one can truly be authentic. While people continuously make meaning throughout the day, contemplation provides an opportunity for the internal voice to rise above the alternate voices that seek to make meaning for one. Contemplation provides space where one can listen to his or her inner self and discern the things that matter most in life. Self-authorship is not solely cognitive-based or focused on one's consciousness; it focuses on building a solid internal foundation so that learners learn to listen to and trust their internal voice amidst external influences.<sup>27</sup> Contemplation builds an interpersonal intelligence that enables one to understand the self so that the self can function effectively in the world.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the contemplative self-in-reflection model is not a disembodied experience. To have a strong internal foundation means embracing one's whole self—body, soul, and spirit. To this end, one's ethnic and cultural identity becomes a critical framing lens for restoring hope. Within self-authorship, learners begin to name their selves, their beliefs, and their contexts. They become more conscious of their ethnic identity and their bodies, in turn using both as resources to know the self more intimately. Subsequently, the practices of self-definition, self-determination, and self-awareness are aroused, providing the internal resources to differentiate between the

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<sup>24</sup> Lisa, Interview, 25 February 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Kai Stern, *Voices from American Prisons: Faith, Education and Healing*, (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 146.

<sup>26</sup> Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (Long Lane, London: SCM Press, 2005), 18.

<sup>27</sup> Magolda, *Making Their Own Way*, 155-191.

<sup>28</sup> Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons*. Rev. and updated ed. (New York: BasicBooks, 2006), 9.

multiple selves that one has created to obtain approval. The contemplative self has the capacity to reposition one's consciousness so that the body is seen as an embodiment of hope. The fact that Black bodies and Black consciousness still exist in a world that has attempted to exterminate all forms of Blackness is something to reflect on. The resiliency of Black existence transcends confinement. Contemplation creates opportunities for fragmented selves to gain a sense of coherency and integration. The end of self-awareness is not an elevated sense of self but a more grounded self.

For women who have constantly been placed under a non-critical yet highly judgmental gaze, the Certificate in Theology classroom seemed to represent one of the few places where they felt a sense of freedom to be themselves. One reason is because women are actually seen; they are not just physically visible but humanly visible. One concrete example of how critical visibility functioned within the classroom is by inviting students to participate in artistic activities that encouraged them to express their true identity. Women did not have to embrace a carceral identity in order to survive; these spaces provided opportunity for them to be themselves. Having spaces within the prison that gave them something to "look forward to" or put their hope in actually helped create a sense of resilience and optimism for women while incarcerated.

Within the Certificate Program, the courses provide an opportunity for women to explore their faith. In prison, faith can quickly become a weapon against the carceral system.<sup>29</sup> Several of the women talk about how the classrooms within the Program help them explore their image of God and challenge some of the religious doctrines and traditions that confined them in the past. One compelling story came from Sherry who spoke directly about the impact of the Certificate Program on her faith. She says, "The theology program was wonderful and happened at the perfect time. It really put me back into studying and understanding the Word for myself. It put me back into self-reflection, and it was wonderful. It put me back on track in my prayer life and study of the word."<sup>30</sup> She goes on further to talk about how she feels like she incarcerated her family, and that part of her battle was for her family. What was particularly significant was the practice of drawing, which was re-awakened through her participation in the Certificate Program and continued to sustain her throughout her time of incarceration. For her, drawing was actually a weapon to fight. In particular, she talked about how the *Exploring Identity through the Arts* course enabled her to open up. She would draw scriptures in order to visualize them. She described one image where she drew a woman with armor on. She communicated that looking at the completed art helped her gain insights. She says, "You don't actually see God, but the winner. It helped me remember my place and where God is in the picture." She says further, "it doesn't take a large person to win the battle."<sup>31</sup> Overall, she says, "The theology program helped a lot because I never really knew I was standing on faith." The Certificate Program became a space where people could expand their imaginations and faith; they saw themselves as resilient warriors that were able to win this fight called "incarceration." Connection to God ultimately helped provide a resiliency against the difficulties of incarceration and separation from her family.

Further, several activities were built into the Arts course that encouraged women to explore their inner self. One assignment, for example, invited students to walk down memory lane. They had to bring to the class something to illustrate their most formative memory. People shared about grandma's biscuits and bedtime prayers. They also shared about divorce, death, love, and loved ones. These were the memories that shaped and made these women who they are. Another

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<sup>29</sup> Stern, *Voices from American Prisons*, 148.

<sup>30</sup> Sherry, Interview, 3 January 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Sherry, Interview, 3 January 2015.

assignment I asked them to complete is to write a eulogy. I asked them to write what they want others to remember about them. They shared these in front of the class. The objective of the assignment was for them to explore the things that matter most in their lives. Both of these activities created space for women to reflect on and share their authentic selves with the learning community.

Comments from the course evaluation reflected the course's ability to create a site of authenticity. I asked students in the class, "What have you learned about your identity that you did not know before entering this class?" Some of these comments included: "I learned not to be shy, but to open up more and go after my goal to help teenagers;" "I learned about my parents (after reading *Becoming Abigail*) and the struggle with grief she experienced after her Mother's death. I have struggled with my identity for the last 35 to 40 years;" "Before this class, I never really did any soul searching. Lately, I've been trying to figure out what events in my life have made me, me;" "I learned that there are parts of my identity that I was covering up. I knew about my gifts and talents, but tapping into the experiences and circumstances that make me...me." Overall, the course invited women into introspection so they could develop and hear their inner voice amidst the competing voices in the prison.

## Conclusion

Self-authorship is ultimately a process of coming to see, know, and be in a way that creates inner peace. Restorative hope pedagogy encourages self-authorship by creating spaces of theological reflection and contemplation. Critical to the development of self-authorship are periods of reflection so that students can integrate their experiences with what they are coming to know about themselves and the world. Concrete practices of contemplation include journal writing, spiritual autobiographies, and letter writing. These "turn-life-into-text" forms of writing become a "living human document" in which the self can reflect.<sup>32</sup> A self that is more grounded can be critical of competing voices while also discerning of one's internal voice. This moves ontological valuation from the hands of others to one's own hands. One no longer measures one's being from other people's standards and values but against their own internal standards, which finds ultimate value in communion with God. Particularly, within a Christian restorative hope framework, one may attempt to locate themselves apart from God, but may find even more value and meaning when locating themselves with God as a primary reference for and with the self. Overall, restorative hope pedagogy counters lockdown pedagogy by creating space for authenticity. In this paper, I've argues that self-authorship is a process in which one becomes more authentic through engaging in contemplation and meaning-making processes that enrich one's sense of being as well as the being they are becoming. Thus, religious educators can create sites of becoming by embracing human hope as a lens to see their students as beings on a journey. Engaging students in contemplative processes that encourage self-authorship and authenticity ultimately becomes a way to enact restorative hope within pedagogy, even those spaces that are confining.

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<sup>32</sup> Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection*, 18.

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### Religious Literacy in the English as a Second Language University Classroom

*Abstract: My proposed research will extend philosophical analysis and research on the aims of democratic citizenship and religious literacy by examining their application to English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. ESL university classrooms are typically rich sites of both linguistic and religious diversity, and the legitimate role of ESL classrooms and teachers in promoting values of democratic citizenship is widely accepted<sup>1</sup>. Despite this fact, the role of religious literacy as a framework for supporting this crucially important educational task has been seriously neglected in both professional and scholarly ESL communities. This project will provide a philosophical analysis of existing literature on religious literacy, centering on the idea that values of democratic citizenship – values that underpin efforts to teach us to treat one another as ‘civic equals’<sup>2</sup> – converge at the intersection of second language education and teaching for religious literacy. In short, I will argue that education for religious literacy represents an important and largely untapped resource for ESL education, especially in its role as a vehicle for promoting aims of democratic citizenship.*

*Keywords: Religious literacy, citizenship, higher education, second language education, teacher training*

My doctoral research investigates the question, ‘What is the appropriate place of religious literacy (RL) as an educational aim in the Canadian English as a Second Language (ESL) university classroom?’ My answer is that religious literacy deserves a central role in ESL education. Ultimately, my goal is to explore the implications of this answer for both ESL classroom practice (curriculum, pedagogy, classroom ethos) and for ESL teacher education. The argument I develop centers on the idea that values of democratic citizenship – values that underpin efforts to teach us to treat one another as ‘civic equals’<sup>3</sup> – converge at the intersection of second language education and teaching for religious literacy. In short, education for religious literacy represents an important and largely untapped resource for ESL education, especially in its role as a vehicle for promoting aims of democratic citizenship.

Located at the intersection of language education and citizenship education, intensive ESL classrooms in Canadian universities are often the first points of sustained contact ESL students have with Canadian liberal-democratic values<sup>4</sup>. As such, ESL teachers play an especially significant role in promoting the civic integration of immigrant students. ESL classrooms are typically rich sites of both linguistic and religious diversity, and the legitimate role of ESL classrooms and teachers in promoting values of democratic citizenship is widely accepted<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, religious literacy has received positive attention among scholars as a broad curricular framework for promoting values of democratic citizenship<sup>6</sup>. Despite this fact, the role of religious literacy as a framework for supporting ESL educators in their crucially important educational task of promoting civic integration has been neglected. There is a tendency for scholars to assume that, aside from the articulation of

<sup>1</sup> Osler and Starkey, 2005; Byram and Guilherme, 2000

<sup>2</sup> Gutmann, 2009

<sup>3</sup> Guttman 2014

<sup>4</sup> Illiva, 2001; Nieto, 2010

<sup>5</sup> Byram and Guilherme, 2000; Kramersch, 1993

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, Mathys, and Cook, 2014; Beaman and Lefebvre, 2014; Dalton and Crosby, 2001; Hill, 2009; Jacobsen and Jacobsen, 2012; McDonough, 2011; Moore, 2007; Morris, 2011; Subedi, 2007

broad but inevitably vague ‘cross-curricular’ aims and ‘competencies’, the explicit and systematic teaching of religious literacy should be confined to curricular ‘silos’ in civics classes, history education or moral education<sup>7</sup>. In this light, the failure to consider the potentially vital role of religious literacy in supporting citizenship education through ESL teaching represents a serious omission and a missed opportunity. My doctoral research seeks to rectify this.

### **Context and Background**

A variety of increasingly complex societal factors, including growing cultural and religious diversity, shifting boundaries between our public and private lives, as well as transnationalism, have led to a rise in public and scholarly discussion surrounding the intersection of religion and our public lives<sup>8</sup>. As global societies become more religiously diverse, the tension between this diversity and our secular liberal-democratic states creates an urgent need for religious literacy in university classrooms, and, even more urgently, in ESL university programs.

While there are those who continue to argue fiercely for the privileging of all that is secular, it has become increasingly difficult to equate modernity with secularism<sup>9</sup>. It is true that, for most of the second half of the last century, public discourse centered on how to mitigate the dominant Christian influence in Western societies, and secularism seemed the inevitable result of a modern democracy<sup>10</sup>. However, as noted by Peter Beyer, recently our conversations have shifted to intensifying debates around “accommodation,” “dealing with diversity,” and the overlapping grey areas between religion and the public sphere<sup>11</sup>. In Canada, religion came to the forefront of public discussion not only with the Quebec Bouchard-Taylor commission into religious accommodation, prompting vigorous academic debate and dialogue<sup>12</sup>, but also with the recent public debate over the *Partie Québécois*’ proposed Québec Charter of 2013, which sought to limit the wearing of ‘conspicuous’ religious symbols by public sector employees.

Lori Beaman and Solange Lefebvre investigate the impact of religion in public institutions in depth<sup>13</sup> and conclude that there is an urgent need for more scholarly inquiry into how education and religion impact each other (p. 316). North American institutions of higher learning have experienced a massive shift from their religious beginnings to the largely secular institutions we see today<sup>14</sup>. However, another shift is occurring, and religion in higher education is “no longer invisible,” given its great importance to increasing numbers of our students<sup>15</sup>. These facts have given importance to the term “religiously literate person,” defined by the American Academy of Religion as someone who possesses “a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world’s religious traditions and religious expressions as they arose out of and continue to shape and be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts”<sup>16</sup>. Religious literacy then, is not a simple awareness that people are ‘different,’ but rather a nuanced understanding of the role religion may have in a person’s life.

Although there has been scholarship in the past decade highlighting the importance of addressing religious literacy among students<sup>17</sup>, few studies have examined the religious literacy of teachers. There are a few examples of scholars who have broached this subject, but their work has been focused mainly on those instructors teaching in primary or secondary public school systems<sup>18</sup>. One such study addressed the

<sup>7</sup> Morris, 2011; Boudreau, 2012

<sup>8</sup> Beaman and Lefebvre, 2014; Bramadat and Koeing, 2009; Bramadat and Seljak, 2013; Casanova, 2006, 2008; McDonough, 2011

<sup>9</sup> Berman, 2013

<sup>10</sup> Jacobsen and Jacobsen, 2012

<sup>11</sup> Beyer, 2013

<sup>12</sup> Morris, 2011

<sup>13</sup> Beaman and Lefebvre, 2014

<sup>14</sup> Berman et al., 2013

<sup>15</sup> Jacobsen and Jacobsen 2012

<sup>16</sup> American Academy of Religion, 2010

<sup>17</sup> Dalton and Crosby, 2001; Hill, 2009

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, Mathys, and Cook, 2014; Subedi, 2006; White, 2010

implementation of Québec's controversial Ethics and Religious Culture Program (ERC) in the public school system in 2007. Scholars analyzed the various impacts this program had on key players, namely, students, parents and teachers<sup>19</sup>. The aforementioned studies focused on religious literacy among instructors who are responsible for teaching religious content in the public school systems; however, educational research has neglected to address two related but distinct research gaps.

First, research into the intersection of religion and religious literacy among instructors in post K-12 institutions and its pedagogical significance, is limited. While notable exceptions such as Jacobsen and Jacobsen's work highlight the relevance of religion in higher education, scholarship investigating this religious literacy at this level has not been developed nearly as thoroughly as it has been for K-12 institutions. Second, there is almost no discussion of the religious literacy of those who teach content other than religion at the university level. Typically, religion is lumped in as one of multiple sites of diversity. In fact, in an informal review of ESL training program course calendars, even in courses clearly designed to address diversity in the classroom, religion is rarely listed as a category. This is unsettling. Intensive ESL classrooms in our universities hold a unique position that underscores the need for religiously literate teachers. As the milieu in which international students come to perfect their language skills before entering a university degree program, instructors of ESL programs are often the first point of sustained contact these students have with both the university and, in many cases, with Canadian culture and liberal democratic social values. In light of this, it is surprising that there is a complete gap in research into the religious literacy of ESL university instructors and the associated ethical and pedagogical implications of that literacy (or lack thereof).

### **Potential Contribution**

My proposed research will advance research in citizenship education, ESL in higher education and ESL teacher preparation. First, I will extend philosophical analysis and research on the aims of democratic citizenship and religious literacy by examining their application to ESL contexts. Second, I will advance existing research in TESL scholarship by identifying specific practical implications of my philosophical analysis for determining ESL curricula, pedagogy and classroom/school ethos. Third, I will advance research in teacher education by demonstrating the need for preparing religiously literate ESL teachers in intensive ESL programs, and by outlining principles for developing an religious literacy-based component in TESL training programs.

### **Research Questions**

The main objective of my research is to analyze the following question: What is the appropriate place of religious literacy (RL) as an educational aim in the Canadian English as a Second Language (ESL) university classroom?

The following ancillary questions must also be investigated:

- a) What is the philosophical basis for the claim that religious literacy should be included as an educational aim of education that promotes citizenship?
- b) Using standard, widely accepted criteria of religious literacy drawn from the work of Diane Moore, how religiously literate are university level ESL instructors?
- c) To what extent does an instructor's level of religious literacy academically impact ESL students in higher education?
- d) What strategies do teachers use to either avoid or engage with manifestations of religious diversity (either in discussions, assignments or visible religious clothing/jewelry/symbols) in their classrooms?
- e) What obstacles prevent teachers from engaging in religious dialogues in the classroom?
- f) What supports would help teachers feel more at ease with religious diversity in their classrooms?

### **Conceptual Framework** **Religious Literacy**

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<sup>19</sup> Morris, 2011

The term religious literacy is currently gaining ground in different fields and regions<sup>20</sup>, but it was Stephen Prothero who first introduced the term ‘religious literacy’ to the general public in his 2007 book *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn’t*, sparking ensuing public discourse on the subject. His book is a passionate call to all Americans to educate themselves in the both the religion of the founders of the nation, Christianity, and also in the world’s religions, arguing that informed conversations about religion are impossible without these two components. Though the book received some negative attention, with critics pointing out the Christian bias<sup>21</sup>, Prothero maintains that a stronger focus on Christianity is essential given its great historical importance in the West.

### **Religious Literacy and Religious Diversity in Education**

In *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy*, Diane Moore takes Prothero’s work from theory into practice by investigating religious literacy in the American public education system. Drawing on Gutmann’s theory of democratic education, Moore argues that the purpose of a public education in a liberal-democratic society is to allow children to become active citizens, act as moral agents, and lead fulfilling lives<sup>22</sup>. These aims underpin her argument for the promotion of religious literacy and as such deserve further comment. Educating for citizenship must include an education that is truly democratic and deliberative – that is to say, it must encourage genuine discussion, including – and perhaps especially – those discussions that are difficult<sup>23</sup>. In our increasingly culturally and religiously diverse democratic societies, this goal of dialogue is urgent. For, as many have pointed out, being able to engage in discussions about religion requires not simply the will to do so, but also the ability<sup>24</sup>. This is where educating for religious literacy comes in. We cannot discuss not only religion itself, but also many current and historical events without having at least a solid grounding in the basic tenets and practices of the world’s major traditions. Likewise, to promote genuine moral agency, a democratic education must not simply have good intentions; it must actively ensure that students’ deeply entrenched unconscious assumptions are revealed, reflected upon, and challenged. Moore’s cultural studies model insists that educators understand that all knowledge claims are situated.<sup>25</sup> And finally, religious literacy could be argued to be an essential part of enabling children to live a fulfilling life. To live a fulfilling life, political and educational philosophers argue that exposure to diversity is key<sup>26</sup>. Without being exposed to various conceptions of the ‘good life,’ how can we know that the life we are living is truly good?

However, while her study contributes to the discussion of how and why religion should be included in the public school system, she advocates teaching about religion, rather than investigating how one’s own religious literacy or illiteracy may impact students in general. This is in contrast to Robert Jackson’s conception of religious literacy<sup>27</sup>. Jackson also calls for greater attention to teacher training for religious literacy, although he does not use the term. Rooted in the British cultural context, where there is a long history of religious education in public schools, Jackson distinguishes himself from Moore through his promotion of an interpretive approach to religious education, one in which the teacher and student are encouraged to engage in a process of critical self-reflection. Unlike Moore who is primarily interested in religion for its cultural and societal manifestations, Jackson emphasizes the individual/personal relationship to religion, along with its wider cultural contexts.

### **Religious Literacy in Higher Education**

The year 2012 saw the release of one of the only books published to date on the subject of religion in higher education: *No Longer Invisible* by Jacobsen and Jacobsen. The premise of their book, that it is crucial for those

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<sup>20</sup> Dinham and Francis, 2015

<sup>21</sup> Oppenheimer, 2007

<sup>22</sup> Moore, 2007

<sup>23</sup> Gutmann, 1999

<sup>24</sup> Dinham and Francis, 2015

<sup>25</sup> Moore, 2007

<sup>26</sup> Brighouse, 2006

<sup>27</sup> Jackson, 2004, 2012

working in higher education to develop a greater religious literacy considering the degree of religiosity that currently exists within the university milieu, greatly informs my own proposed project. The authors' research into religion in higher education led them to coin the term "pluriformity" to describe the current diversity in such institutions. In so doing, they wish to highlight the "expansiveness" of religious options on today's campuses. The authors point out that not only do we find representatives from all the major world religions in higher education, but we are also confronted with great diversity in terms of how religion itself is understood. They state that "the boundary line between what is and what is not religion has become thoroughly blurred. If secularity is like freshwater and religion is like saltwater, life in America is now thoroughly brackish". 'Brackish' seems the perfect term to describe the Canadian context as well, given our societal commitment to multiculturalism. And despite the commonly held belief by the general public that our public realm is a firmly non-religious one, any even cursory glance at any media outlet will clearly show that religion is very much present in the public discourse. Finally, this study shines light on the dangers of religious illiteracy, and insist that leaving religious perspectives out of academic discussions cannot allow for a truly open dialogue. As teachers, if we fail to understand or acknowledge that religion is as important a framing factor as any other (such as values, class background, ethnicity, gender and so on), we may be missing crucial information that could allow us to better understand and help our students.

### **Teachers' Religious Literacy**

Recent years have also seen the furthering of discussion around teachers' religious literacy or competency<sup>28</sup> although it is limited to those teachers responsible for teaching religious content. Quebec's ground-breaking, and controversial, Ethics and Religious Culture program (ERC) brought discussions around religion and education back to the forefront in both the public and academic realms. The religion teaching competency in a Québec Ministry of Education, Leisure, and Sport (MELS) 2007 report describes 'competency of religion' as an area in which teachers either desire more support or feel ambivalent. This insight resonates strongly with my experiences as an instructor in higher education. Indeed, part of my motivation to investigate this topic stems from numerous conversations with my colleagues in which they express a great reluctance, or even resistance, to address any aspect of religion in the classroom as they don't wish to "open a can of worms." Many of these ESL teachers seem to be afraid of the kinds of difficult conversations and ensuing tensions that an overt acknowledgment of religion may introduce to their classrooms.

### **Methodology and Framework**

My methodology will be both philosophical and qualitative. I will first undertake a philosophical analysis of contemporary research on religious literacy and democratic citizenship in educational contexts. This analysis will help me to identify and defend normative (including ethical and epistemic) arguments for incorporating religious literacy into TESL classrooms and teacher education programs. Accordingly, I will also clarify key concepts such as "religion," "beliefs," "citizenship," and "religious literacy," and related ethical and educational 'values'. Competing interpretations of such terms necessitate a thoughtful and thorough examination that will provide a solid theoretical base for the study.

As indicated above, my research also requires an empirically grounded understanding of the extent to which religious literacy is currently incorporated (or, more likely, not incorporated) into TESL preparation programs at the university level. This will be achieved in subsequent chapters using a qualitative approach with the goal of shedding light on ESL university teachers' views on and responses to religiosity in the classroom. The aim here is not to end up with quantifiable data which can serve as the basis for empirically-grounded proposals for change, as in a positivist approach, but rather "to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them"<sup>29</sup>. Given that qualitative methods tend to be holistic, they are appropriate for this project, which ultimately seeks to investigate the many varied

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<sup>28</sup> White, 2012; Morris, Bouchard, and De Silva, 2011

<sup>29</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, 2005

ways in which religiosity is understood—that is, the highly contextualized manner in which teachers perceive religion in the classroom. Specially, in order to facilitate analysis of the fluid context of teacher values, fears and beliefs, I will use a case study approach. With its comprehensive “palette of methods”<sup>30</sup> the flexibility of this method will allow me to use a wide variety of research procedures as the study unfolds.

In light of the fact that my dissertation will be grounded in an intensive philosophical analysis, considerations of time and space will impose practical limitations on the empirical dimension of the dissertation. To this end, I propose to develop a case study of teachers in intensive ESL university programs. This relatively small scale, focused approach will permit an understanding of the complexities of teachers’ religious literacy in the classroom without requiring a large-scale study. The flexibility of qualitative research will allow me to use mixed methods to acquire data collected over a period of six months to a year. The sample groups of 10-15 ESL teachers will be drawn from three Canadian English language universities. These instructors will be actively engaged in teaching ESL to international students in intensive ESL programs, and they must represent a range of career points and cultural backgrounds. Initially, anonymous quantitative surveys will be administered to determine teachers’ levels of religious literacy. Preliminary interviews with three teachers will determine key issues for instructors and shape questions for later interviews. I will conduct 30-minute video-recorded focus group interviews in groups of five to assess what teachers see as the main obstacles to religious literacy in the classroom. The last stage will use twenty-minute semi-structured individual interviews recorded by audio to gain deeper insight into these issues. Finally, TESL teacher education program documents will be compiled and analyzed to determine to what extent religious literacy is taught, either explicitly or implicitly. Insights from this analysis will be used to propose a training program to improve ESL instructors’ religious literacy using a normative case study approach. Given time limitations, it is hoped that the conclusions that are drawn from this study will lead to further studies, ideally resulting in implementing a training program to improve instructors’ knowledge of, and sensitivity to, their students’ religious backgrounds.

### **Knowledge Mobilization**

My project has the end goal of generating awareness about the importance of religious literacy as an educational aim in ESL teacher training. Through disseminating my research via a series of publications in open access journals and conferences, I hope to generate sufficient interest among other educational researchers in the fields of religious studies, education, higher education and applied linguistics in order to deepen and broaden interdisciplinary academic discussion on issues related to religious literacy in education. Moreover, I aim to inform TESL curriculum designers and program administrators from education departments to impart changes to teacher education courses that will bring religious literacy a more central role in those courses designed to teach diversity. Ideally, this would come about in collaboration with religious studies departments in targeted universities. Finally, I hope to design and facilitate a series of in-service ESL teacher training workshops for promoting religious literacy among those educators.

### **Conclusion**

In conducting this research, I aim to further the discussion about religious literacy in higher education, by focusing on instructor religious literacy in intensive ESL programs in a representative institution. Given the reluctance of most scholars outside Religious Studies to address religion as anything other than one point of diversity among many, I seek to demonstrate that religion is not simply a ‘can of worms’ to be avoided in the classroom at all costs. Religion matters. It matters to many of our students, and it should matter to their teachers, and to the institutions that train them.

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<sup>30</sup> Stake, 1995

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**REA Annual Meeting—November 2016**

## **The Urgent Need for Teacher Preparation in Religious and Secular Worldview Education**

### **Abstract:**

In a world that is becoming increasingly globalized, it is ironic—as well as unfortunate and sometimes tragic—that secular and religious worldview education is decreasing, in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. This paper argues for the immediate need for programs that intentionally prepare teachers for all aspects of the educational workforce to reverse this trend. Teachers who are well-prepared to help students understand, respect, appreciate and learn from others with differing worldviews will help produce a generation of citizens who will promote greater respect, tolerance, harmony, and peace on school campuses (at all levels), in the workplace, in neighborhoods, within nations domestically, and in the global community.

## **Introduction: The Importance of Religious and Secular Worldview Literacy**

Europe has of late experienced a refugee crisis, much of it brought on by the recent Syrian calamity. Some of that has spilled over to North America. Much of the crisis rises from differences in culture, which importantly includes differences in religious and secular views of life. The burkini debacle in France is but one example of clashes rising from differing views of life.

To what extent do tensions arise because of misunderstandings, or worse no understandings, of the other? Since the public schools of the nations are the greater educators of the children, from one generation to the next, have they been negligent in preparing children for a global participation that requires knowledge and understanding of differences? Furthermore, how knowledgeable are educators themselves in preparing students for global participation? In other words, are teachers themselves prepared to prepare students to engage with those who are different; those whose outlook on life is not the same as their own?

In a democratic, multicultural society with a global outlook, awareness of the religious and secular *other* is crucial, as is awareness of the *self*. That awareness must go beyond “foods, fashions and flags,” for it touches on issues that address central beliefs and values – in essence, worldviews. As such, it is imperative that we understand something about the worldviews we embrace, individually and collectively. Worldviews are *visions of life* and *ways of life*, and everyone has a worldview of some kind, whether religious or secular.<sup>1</sup> They constitute the beliefs we have about life -- our perspective on life. They are also the way we live life -- our actions and behaviors. Worldviews, whether religious or secular, impact our individual lives, our communities, and our societies, including our educational systems.<sup>2</sup>

We support the freedom of conscience for all people and the right to hold and embrace their own perspectives about life in the public sphere, of which public education is a microcosm. The integration of diverse, and occasionally conflicting, worldviews in the public square is an ongoing negotiation that requires a great deal of understanding and dialogue within and across differences and similarities.<sup>3</sup> In a globalized and interconnected age, however, understanding and knowledge of religious and secular worldviews, sometimes referred to only as religious literacy, frequently falls short, in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The consequences of these

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<sup>1</sup> Sunshine, G. 2009. *Why you think the way you do: The story of western worldviews from Rome to home*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan.

<sup>2</sup> Valk, J. 2007. A plural public school: Religion, worldviews & moral education.” *British Journal of Religious Education* 29 (September) 3: 273-285.

<sup>3</sup> Valk, J. 2009. Religion or worldview: Enhancing dialogue in the public square. *Marburg Journal of Religion* 14 (May) 1:1-16.

<sup>4</sup> Prothero, S. 2007. *Religious illiteracy: What every American needs to know – and doesn't*. New York: HarperOne; Nord, W. 1995. *Religion in American education: Rethinking a national dilemma*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. Religious literacy is a commonly used term with many possible definitions. The term is used here broadly to include knowledge of the basic tenets and practices of the world's religions, an understanding of the internal diversity of religions, and recognition that religion change across time and space. Secular worldview literacy is not commonly used but encompasses the same elements, and refers to an understanding of and knowledge about the many different secular worldviews that guide and shape people's lives.

illiteracies can be seen locally in classrooms where students are bullied because they are a religious minority, and globally in the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, growing tensions in Europe, and many other regions of the world.<sup>5</sup> The prevention of these conflicts, large and small, however, is only one argument for devoting more attention to religious and secular worldview literacy (RSWL). Increased RSWL also has the ability to promote greater respect, tolerance, harmony, and peace on school campuses (at all levels), in the workplace, in neighborhoods, within nations domestically, and in the global community.<sup>6</sup>

One approach to building this reality is to focus on improving education about religious and secular worldviews in primary and secondary education. In the United States, 90 percent of students attend public school so an examination of public school climates and curricula is a good place to start. Our schools need to be more than places that prepare students for “college and career readiness.” They should serve the greater purpose of preparing citizens and future leaders to become critical thinkers, and to create a more open and inclusive society. In this view, a broad curriculum of civic understanding and engagement should include a robust understanding of religious and secular worldviews.<sup>7</sup>

Much of the focus to date has centered on teaching about religion as an academic subject, and there is ample literature that addresses this.<sup>8</sup> Feinberg and Layton have made a respectable case for teaching about religion in public schools as necessary for preparing students for civic engagement in the public square beyond the school campus.<sup>9</sup> Linda Wertheimer has mentioned the many legitimate challenges to teaching about religion in public schools recently in her book *Faith Ed: Teaching about religion in an age of intolerance*.<sup>10</sup> We will set aside for now sorting

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<sup>5</sup> Chan, A. 2014. Religious literacy and religious bullying in California and Canada: A Teacher-Researcher's Perspective. *The California Three Rs Project Bulletin* 11, no. 4:1–3; Albright, M., and W. Woodward. 2006. *The mighty and the almighty: Reflections on America, God, and world affairs*. New York: HarperCollins.

<sup>6</sup> Valk, J. 2010. Worldviews of today: Teaching for dialogue and mutual understanding”, in eds. K. Sporre and J. Mannberg. *Values, religions and education in changing societies*. Dordrecht, NL: Springer. 103-120.

<sup>7</sup> Medefind, J. 2013. Tolerance is not enough: Why only a commitment to robust pluralism can rescue America's civic life. In *Civility, religious pluralism and education*, eds. V. Biondo, and A. Fiala, Routledge Research in Religion and Education New York: Routledge. Patel, E. 2016. Colleges should be nurturing interfaith leaders. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 13, 2016, [http://chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Should-Be-Nurturing/236752?cid=cr&utm\\_source=cr&utm\\_medium=en&elqTrackId=1ff916968e8e4a679787931bb2fa7522&elq=66234d7a73d849bb80e095363227f5f6&elqaid=9520&elqat=1&elqCampaignId=3376](http://chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Should-Be-Nurturing/236752?cid=cr&utm_source=cr&utm_medium=en&elqTrackId=1ff916968e8e4a679787931bb2fa7522&elq=66234d7a73d849bb80e095363227f5f6&elqaid=9520&elqat=1&elqCampaignId=3376) (accessed August 31, 2016);

<sup>8</sup> Lester, E. 2011 *Teaching About Religions: A Democratic Approach for Public Schools*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Alexander, H and A.K. Agbaria, eds. 2012 *Commitment, Character, and Citizenship: Religious Education in Liberal Democracy*. New York: Routledge; Nord, W. 2010. *Does God Make a Difference?: Taking Religion Seriously in Our Schools and Universities*. New York: Oxford University Press; Feinberg, W. 2006. *For Goodness Sake: Religious Schools and Education for Democratic Citizenry*. New York: Routledge; Feinberg, W. 2014. An Assessment of Arguments for Teaching Religion in Public Schools in the United States. *Religious Education* 109, no. 4): 394–405.

<sup>9</sup> Feinberg, W., and R. Layton. 2014. For the civic good: The liberal case for teaching religion in the public schools. Ann Arbor: MI: University of Michigan Press.

<sup>10</sup> Wertheimer, L. 2015. *Faith Ed: Teaching About Religion in an Age of Intolerance*. Boston: Beacon Press.

out all the benefits and challenges of teaching about religion in public schools and simply affirm that it has positive impacts. We also recognize that it could be done better. We also affirm that the pioneering work of improving education about religious and secular worldviews can only be accomplished as this pioneering road is being travelled. Bumps in that road can be navigated in a spirit of goodwill and understanding as we all learn together.

Having said this, however, there are still major issues that require considerable attention, and the one on which we will focus is that of training teachers. Our current cultural circumstances make the need for training teachers urgent. National professional associations have worked to develop guidelines for schools and teachers, with attention to both constitutional and pedagogical concerns.<sup>11</sup> There has been a clear focus on the role of K-12 education as an essential site for this work, but a site in need of a great deal of guidance in order to get it right. We have now reached the point where the conversation needs to move from the realm of religious studies and curriculum theory to the concrete task of working directly with teachers themselves and ensuring that they have the tools and the knowledge necessary to approach topics of religion with their students. In today's teacher education systems there is little attention given to religion perhaps because all too many feel it is unimportant, too controversial or simply should not be taught in public schools. As a result, teachers are currently not being adequately prepared to discuss and teach about religion in the context of K-12 education.

As we consider ways to increase teacher preparation and attention to religion in public schools more generally, we also want to ensure that we are moving beyond a focus simply on religion as it has traditionally been understood.. The curriculum and climate of K-12 schools, and perhaps even more so in teacher education, needs to be more attentive to not just religious perspectives but also to secular perspectives. In other words, to prepare students for global engagement requires knowledge not only about the religious self and other, but also about the secular self and other. Not everyone is religious or defines their spiritual beliefs or worldviews as religious. Secular perspectives or worldviews are increasingly embraced individually or collectively, and these perspectives in some contexts come to dominate the public square. While France has a national policy of secularism, *laïcité*, Canada and the US do not officially codify secularism although secular worldviews shape and influence the hearts and minds of many individuals and groups. To what degree are teachers aware of the influence of secular worldviews in society, or even in the public schools themselves?<sup>12</sup> To what degree are they sufficiently prepared to teach in ways that include an awareness of religious *and* secular worldviews? As we discuss teaching and education about religion, we also advocate for a more

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<sup>11</sup> "Guidelines for Teaching about Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States." Atlanta: American Academy of Religion, 2010. [http://www.aarweb.org/Publications/Online\\_Publications/Curriculum\\_Guidelines/AARK-12CurriculumGuidelines.pdf](http://www.aarweb.org/Publications/Online_Publications/Curriculum_Guidelines/AARK-12CurriculumGuidelines.pdf); Religion in the Schools Committee. "Study About Religions in the Social Studies Curriculum." *National Council for the Social Studies*, 1998. <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/religion>. The National Council for the Social Studies is currently working on new standards for teaching about religion, to be published in Spring 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Valk, J. 2007. A plural public school: Religion, worldviews & moral education." *British Journal of Religious Education* 29 (September) 3: 273-285.

expansive understanding of a broad range of worldviews and experiences, including religious, spiritual, and secular.

We now turn to a deeper exploration of teacher education in order to better understand the challenges involved in this work. We will then address a few of the important issues that will need to be considered as we move forward, including a more inclusive view of religious and secular worldviews. We will conclude with some promising initiatives that have already begun as well as our recommendations for ongoing work.

### **Defining the Problem in Teacher Education: Teachers are not prepared to discuss religion in the context of K-12 education**

It is impossible to improve education about religion if teachers, the very people responsible for that education, are not educated themselves about religion or are not comfortable talking about it. However, improving teacher education is a complicated task and it is helpful to understand the structures of teacher education if we want to advocate for making additions or changes. We start with a brief overview of the systems and structures of teacher education in order to provide context for the work we are proposing. We then look at the content of teacher education--what teachers need to know in order to be effective educators. By taking the time to understand the structure and content of teacher education, we are able to be mindful of the complexity of what we ask teachers and teacher educators to do. Being grounded in the basics of teacher education can help us to better understand how our work around religious literacy fits into the larger picture of K-12 education.

#### *Structures of Teacher Education*

The formal process of teacher education is one of the significant barriers to making changes in how teachers are prepared regarding religious worldviews. The majority of K-12 teachers enter the profession through academic programs at the undergraduate or graduate level. These programs typically require a sequence of coursework, structured practical experiences observing and teaching in classrooms, a series of standardized exams, and a portfolio of evidence that they meet a set of professional competencies. In the United States, these requirements vary by state, levels of teaching and subject, and many of these requirements are regularly changed and revised. These rigorous requirements demand a lot of the students, and teacher education programs are expected to cover a vast range of skills and knowledge domains in a relatively short period of time. There is not a lot of room to add additional requirements for aspiring teachers to master, such as religious literacy, and especially if religion is not part of the general curriculum or not deemed a “teachable subject”, as is the case in the Canadian province of New Brunswick.

Beyond traditional teacher education programs, increasing numbers of teachers are entering the profession through alternative routes (such as Teach for America), teacher residency programs (such as The New Teachers Project) or online programs (such as the American Board

for the Certification of Teacher Excellence).<sup>13</sup> These teachers receive abbreviated training and learn much of the craft on the job. Residency programs place an emphasis on gaining experience in the field over time spent taking formal courses.<sup>14</sup> While these programs have the potential to bring individuals into the profession who might not otherwise become teachers, they lack the systematic training of traditional programs and tend to focus on the skills and knowledge that are essential for getting into the classroom rather than on theory around the cultural and social aspects of education.

The systems and structures for teacher education are in flux, often connected to the political climate around education.<sup>15</sup> It is within this context that we are seeking to introduce additional material for teachers to master. And this goes beyond simply asking that teachers take an extra world religions course.

### *Processes of Teacher Education*

Teacher education begins long before an individual even formally begins the process of training to become a teacher and it continues over the entire professional life span. Teaching is one of the few professions which almost every person has had the opportunity to observe directly and extensively prior to beginning formal training.<sup>16</sup> During this “apprenticeship of observation,” people see examples of teaching and form ideas about teaching that can impact their professional practice when they become teachers themselves. Many teachers teach in ways similar to how they were taught when they were in school themselves. Unfortunately, because public schools rarely teach about religion or include robust understandings of religious and secular worldviews in the curriculum, current and future teachers have likely not had the experience of observing teaching that appropriately includes religion. This means that we need to find or develop exemplars for teachers to learn from.

There has been extensive research on how teachers learn to teach and what types of knowledge are associated with the most effective teachers. Teachers need knowledge of the education systems and communities in which they are working; they need knowledge about how students learn, classroom management, and pedagogical tools; they must develop a “wisdom of practice” to guide their work; and of course, teachers need knowledge about the content and subject matter that they are teaching.<sup>17</sup> All of these types of knowledge are continually developed over the professional lifespan. We are particularly interested in teachers’ content knowledge, especially since the content knowledge about religion is known to be relatively low throughout

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<sup>13</sup> Darling-Hammond, L. 2010. Teacher Education and the American Future. *Journal of Teacher Education* 61, no. 1–2: 35–47.

<sup>14</sup> Mader, J. 2016. “The promise of teacher-residency programs.” The Atlantic. June 15, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/04/what-happens-when-teachers-spend-more-time-in-a-classroom-before-teaching/478359/> (accessed August 31, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Cochran-Smith, M., P. Piazza, and C. Power. 2013 The Politics of Accountability: Assessing Teacher Education in the United States. *The Educational Forum*, 77, no. 1: 6–27.

<sup>16</sup> Lortie, D. 1975. *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

<sup>17</sup> Shulman, L. 1987. Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review* 51:1–22.

our society.<sup>18</sup> We cannot expect that teachers will have a considerable content knowledge about religion simply because they are teachers. This is another area of knowledge that needs to be developed.

Content knowledge for teaching involves much more than an encyclopedic knowledge of a subject. It is also crucial for effective teachers to have an understanding of the underlying structures and paradigms of their field as well as how new knowledge is produced or validated and the work of practitioners in the field.<sup>19</sup> Along with a strong understanding of the content, teachers must also know how to teach about that content in ways that students will be able to understand. In this way, the knowledge required of teachers is distinct to that profession. Education researcher Lee Shulman argues that “the key to distinguishing the knowledge base of teaching lies at the intersection of content and pedagogy, in the capacity of a teacher to transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful.”<sup>20</sup> Finally, teacher’s beliefs about the subject matter can also have an impact on their teaching, influencing what they choose to teach, materials that they use in the classroom, and how they consciously or unconsciously present content to students.<sup>21</sup>

Each of these elements of teacher knowledge comes into play when considering what teachers know about religion, how they learn about religion, and how they teach about religion to their students. As we begin to take steps to help teachers gain knowledge about religious and secular worldviews in an effort to help them improve how they address religion in the curriculum and how they attend to the identities of their students, it is essential that we support them across all of these elements of content knowledge. We must also be mindful that religion is only one of the many content areas that teachers are expected to be fluent in. Beyond the subject matter of the curriculum they teach, whether that is world history or chemistry, teachers are also expected, among other things, to be attentive to the wide range of learning styles and challenges that students bring to class, to be responsive to cultural experiences, and to develop the appropriate accommodations for students who are English-language learners.

## **Moving Forward**

Approaches for increasing teachers’ knowledge about religion must be sensitive to the contexts in which they are being developed and the population of teachers being targeted. Given the extensive requirements placed on teachers and teacher candidates today, we must be strategic in how we frame the argument that religious literacy is yet another domain in which teachers must become competent. In this framing, we will need to be clear about what it is that we are

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<sup>18</sup> “U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey.” Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2010. <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2010/09/religious-knowledge-full-report.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Grossman, P. L., Wilson, S. M., & Shulman, L. (1989). Teachers of substance: Subject matter knowledge for teaching. In M. C. Reynolds (Ed.). *Knowledge base for the beginning teacher* (pp. 23-36). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

<sup>20</sup> Shulman, L. 1987. Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review* 51:15.

<sup>21</sup> Grossman, P. L., Wilson, S. M., & Shulman, L. (1989). Teachers of substance: Subject matter knowledge for teaching. In M. C. Reynolds (Ed.). *Knowledge base for the beginning teacher* (pp. 23-36). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

expecting teachers to know or be able to do when it comes to religion in their schools and classrooms. There are several domains in K-12 education where religion is relevant and the priority of these domains may vary for different teachers and schools.

### *Essential Domains of Knowledge*

The first domain is what might be considered basic religious literacy--knowing the appropriate terms for religious groups, a general understanding of beliefs and practices and the diversity of these within given traditions, and perhaps some knowledge of the sacred texts, important figures, and historical development. This is knowledge that allows teachers to counter stereotypes or misunderstandings when they arise and to model using appropriate vocabulary for students. This is not an expectation that teachers become experts in all religious traditions or even in a few. But a basic knowledge about religions of the world, and how they shape and influence individuals, communities and nations, past and present, is necessary in order to function knowledgeably in the world.<sup>22</sup> Depending on their contexts and the religious diversity present in their communities, teachers may benefit from gaining a deeper knowledge of some traditions. Teachers of different subjects and levels may also need to have more knowledge of particular traditions if they are represented in the curricula that they teach. In essence, this first domain necessitates a basic awareness of the extent that religious, or religious subject matter, is implicit, explicit, or simply absent from the curriculum of a variety of subject areas for which teachers are responsible. It may come as a surprise to many teachers how often religious matters are excluded, even in subtle ways, from the curriculum, which can convey to students that religion is not important.<sup>23</sup>

The second and third domains are more pedagogical. It is unrealistic to expect that all K-12 educators will become religious studies scholars, but it is perfectly reasonable to expect that they are familiar with how religion legally can and cannot be discussed and taught in U.S. public schools. While expecting a familiarity with the legal relationship between religion and public school classrooms may seem like a fairly low bar, there is actually a great deal of confusion about what public school teachers can and cannot do regarding religion. A 2010 survey of U.S. adults found that while 89 percent knew that public school teachers were not permitted to lead students in prayer, only 36 percent knew that public schools could legally offer comparative religions course.<sup>24</sup> This confusion generates fear. Teachers avoid religion, even when it is directly related to the curriculum, because they are afraid of how parents or administrators might react. If teachers were confident about what they are legally able to teach about, they might be

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<sup>22</sup> Parks, S. D. 2011. *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose and Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Smith, H. 2001. *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco.

<sup>23</sup> Nord W. and C. Haynes. 1998. *Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum*. Alexandria, VA.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; Van Brummelen, H. 1991. "The World Portrayed in Texts: An Analysis of the Context of Elementary School Textbooks" in *Journal of Educational Thought*. Vol. 25 (December): 201-21.

<sup>24</sup> "U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2010. <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2010/09/religious-knowledge-full-report.pdf>.

more willing to take the first steps towards incorporating more about religion into their curriculum. A greater familiarity with the ways in which the First Amendment governs the relationship between religion and public schools can protect teachers, students, parents, and schools from misunderstandings and may help foster a school climate in which religion is not seen as a taboo subject.

The third domain goes beyond knowing what is and is not strictly legal to do or say regarding religion in a public school classroom. There are possible ways to incorporate religion into the curriculum that may technically be legal, but may not be advisable or pedagogically sound. Is it legal to ask a religious leader or a parent to come in and give a talk about the history of a religious holiday or event? Yes. Is this always advisable? It depends greatly on the context: how the visit is framed, if there are other guest speakers, if the students are exposed to a range of voices and experiences.<sup>25</sup> Is it legal for students to try on garments or accessories that are associated with how a particular culture practices their tradition? Yes, for the most part. Is this advisable? Probably not.<sup>26</sup> While these may seem like engaging lessons that gives students first-hand experience with members of religious communities or objects closely associated with them, they run the risk of creating one-sided understanding in which a single person or object stands in for a diverse and nuanced tradition. Knowing about religions and knowing what is legal to teach must also be accompanied by knowledge about how to appropriately include religion and an understanding of different approaches to teaching about religion. The extent to which teachers need to be knowledgeable in this domain depends largely on the teachers' grades and subjects. A middle or high school English or history teacher is much more likely to have lessons directly about religion than a second grade teacher or a geometry teacher.

Finally, teachers must be knowledgeable about how religious worldviews play a role in the lives of their students, in the school community, and beyond the school walls. Many teachers work to make their teaching responsive to the cultural diversity of their students--bringing in a wider range of voices in literature, recognizing the different "funds of knowledge" that students bring from their lives beyond school.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, little of this work in culturally responsive or multicultural education has included sufficient attention to religious worldviews. Being attentive to the religious identities of students could range from simply being aware that a student may be fasting for a religious holiday or helping them find accommodations for religious attire to inviting students to share how they interpret a reading through the lens of their religious

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<sup>25</sup> Some scholars argue that guest speakers, or visits to religious sites or places of worship, are never appropriate. For more on this argument see: Moore, Diane L. 2007. *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education*. New York: Palgrave; Macmillan; and Lester, E. 2011. *Teaching about Religion: A Democratic Approach for Public Schools*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press..

<sup>26</sup> For an example of how a lesson involving trying on religious garments went terribly wrong see Chapter 1 in: Wertheimer, Linda K. Faith Ed: Teaching About Religion in an Age of Intolerance. Boston: Beacon Press, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Gonzalez, N., L. Moll, and C. Amanti, eds. 2005. *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*. Mahwah, N.J: Routledge.

experiences or helping a student navigate tensions between the school curriculum and what they have been taught in their religious community.<sup>28</sup>

### *The Inclusion of Secular Worldviews*

There are significant numbers of individuals, whether teachers, students, law-makers, or ordinary citizens, however, who express no interest in religion. Statistics indicate that the number of “nones”, those who indicate on official forms that they do not identify with or consider themselves religious, are growing. These can range from individuals who want to distance themselves from organized religion while retaining spiritual beliefs and practices to others who are hostile to religion and consider it a negative force in society.<sup>29</sup> Opposition to education about religion sometimes comes from individuals and groups who desire to eliminate religion from the school curriculum. There are indeed ideas and activities promoted by religious individuals and groups that have no place in education. Atheists, secularists and others have long pointed to many of these and legitimately so. But proselytizing, in whatever form whether blatant or otherwise, has no place in the schools, whether done by religious or secular people.

There are also those who simply do not wish to speak about religion, and seek to have it removed from the educational system. But does a dislike for certain subject matter constitute grounds for excluding it from the school curriculum? There are also those who dislike politics, art, history, literature and more, but a dislike for certain subject matter is not legitimate reasons to exclude it from the curriculum. They all form important aspects of life and hence are worthy of study.

There is yet one more reason to include education about religious worldviews, and this now leads to why it is also important to include education about secular worldviews. In the public domain, the words faith and beliefs are readily associated with religious people and sometimes almost exclusively so. Those affiliated with the American Humanist Association, as well as others, all too readily assume that religious beliefs are an “add on,” and often an illogical and irrational “add on,” to an otherwise secular way of life. From a secular perspective this may make sense but not to seriously thinking religious people, who will argue that all people have faith and beliefs—they form a constitutive aspect of human life. Secular individuals and groups have faith and beliefs but they are in faith and beliefs systems that exclude any notion of a “transcendent other” (whatever that might be) and scriptures associated with it. A study of both religious and secular worldviews will reveal that beliefs (of whatever kind) form an important part of human life, which in turn shape and influence thought and action.

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<sup>28</sup> Skerrett, A. 2014 Religious Literacies in a Secular Literacy Classroom. *Reading Research Quarterly* 49, no. 2: 233–50; McBain, D. 2003. Towards a Just Peace: Opening Our Schools to Discussing Worldviews. *Education Canada*. 43 (Winter) 1:26-27.

<sup>29</sup> “Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation.” 2012. Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. [http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious\\_Affiliation/Unaffiliated/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/Unaffiliated/NonesOnTheRise-full.pdf); Hitchens, C. 2007. *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. New York: Twelve.

As such, in a globalized world, an examination of secular perspectives—their philosophical (epistemological, ontological) groundings, their cultural or communal associations, authoritative structures and individuals, and more—are also relevant. Secular worldviews and secular people have contributed vastly to the history of the modern world and in many areas of human life, as have religious worldviews and religious people. Both religious and secular worldviews have the source of great good in the world as well as the source of great harm. Teaching about both helps to paint a fuller picture of human life in which both religious and secular students can see themselves. Teachers can be encouraged more clearly articulate how a range of worldviews play out in history, politics, and social studies curricula. The struggle to eliminate slavery, discrimination, and political oppression was often led by individuals who embraced religious specific worldviews, as in the case of William Wilberforce, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. But no less where these individuals joined by secular people who were not religiously inclined and had a completely different set of beliefs and values, yet who also sought to eliminate the same social scourges. Not to mention this is to unnecessarily withhold, perhaps even distort, important aspects of people's actions and the beliefs that propel them, whether religious or secular.

Religious and secular perspectives also play a role in the school beyond courses that intentionally target religion, either as the main topic of the class or as a significant focus. Students and teachers bring their religious, spiritual, and secular identities with them to school. They pervade school life. Religious and secular groups play, or can play, a large role in the school community. It is also impossible, or even wrong-headed, to insulate schools from tensions created by the religious-secular divide that are often present in many local communities and across the world. Religious and secular tensions can proliferate when they are ignored. As such, a better approach is to include the teaching about both religious and secular views and expand such teaching by speaking of religious and secular worldview teaching. Such teaching will lead to greater awareness and understanding, and hopefully lead to more peaceful co-existence.

## **Promising Initiatives and the Need for More Research**

### *Research to Understand what is Happening in Schools*

To better understand what teachers are currently experiencing and what types of learning they need to better prepare themselves for religious and secular worldview teaching, the Religious Literacy Project at Harvard Divinity School began an ambitious mapping project for all high schools in the United States.<sup>30</sup> Starting in 2015, research interns have been scouring the course catalogues of US high schools to determine which schools offer courses about religion or courses wherein religion is embedded in the curriculum in a significant way. While the research

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<sup>30</sup> To learn more about the “Religious Studies in Public Schools Mapping Project,” see <http://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/initiatives/religious-studies-in-public-schools-mapping-project> (accessed August 31, 2016).

is still in its preliminary stages and no official results have yet been released, we have observed a couple of general trends.

First, and not surprisingly, course offerings in public high schools about religion or that have religion embedded in them are quite sparse. This is the case in both the United States and Canada, but not so in many countries in Europe where teaching about religious is still an important aspect of the school curriculum. Second, and also probably not surprisingly, students in urban or suburban areas are far more likely to attend a high school where such courses are offered than are students who live in rural areas. However, this actual data is incredibly significant in that it confirms what most leaders in this field have known for a long time: students who attend public high schools in the United States and Canada are not being educated about religious worldviews in a way that prepares them for civic life as adults. While later phases of this study will explore who is teaching these courses, it is suspected that teachers who are teaching such courses have not had the formal preparation that would preserve the constitutionality nor ensure the effectiveness of such education. Anecdotal experience also suggests that while current course offerings are relatively sparse, they are also growing. Teachers across the United States are responding to the desires of students and the perceived problems of society and striving to provide what they can, but they have little pre-service training or in-service support to do so in many instances.

This research has the potential to reveal the full extent of current secondary school religious course offerings and this could serve to support the argument that more formal preparation to teach about religious and secular worldviews is necessary in order for these courses to have the intended impacts on the students. Drawing on the findings of this project, the REA and teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities could offer real leadership that would help prepare teachers who can then play a more impactful role in providing an education for students that can actually help them change the world.

### *Professional Development Opportunities*

Sensitive to the pervasive nature of religious and secular worldviews, and the need to address and educate about both, professional development opportunities focused on teaching about religion or increasing teachers' religious and secular worldview literacy are starting to be offered. These types of professional development opportunities are currently very scattered and range from one day in-service workshops to multi-week summer residency programs. The hosting organizations include non-profits associated with particular religious groups, institutes focused on interfaith work, and public school districts. The teachers participating in these programs do not necessarily teach courses directly focused on religion, but rather, they may have seen the importance of having a better understanding of religious and secular worldviews in order to relate to their students in authentic ways and to accurately deliver the curriculum. At present, the teachers who choose to participate are doing so voluntarily, seeking out this particular type of enrichment, but more research is needed to understand what motivates teachers to attend this sort of professional development.

Workshops on religious literacy or teaching about religion can help teachers become more familiar with the various approaches for teaching about religious and secular worldviews. They can also take teachers out of the classroom and engage in experiential learning. Some of these programs focus on the lived experience of religious communities and may include site visits or multi-faith panels. There is also great potential for including secular organizations in this type of workshop. Inviting organizations such as the American Humanist Association to also participate in these workshops and welcome teachers for visits could help teachers see structural parallels between religious and secular organizations and perspectives, although each has considerably different content. When inviting groups in, whether they are teachers or students, to learn more about their beliefs, practices and experiences, organizations, both secular and religion, and the individuals who represent them, must avoid proselytizing. Such organizations should engage in teaching *about* the beliefs of their faith perspective, just as schools are currently required to teach only *about* religion, and not to foist religious belief onto the students.

While the opportunities for in-service teachers to partake in professional development on teaching about religious and secular worldviews are slowly increasing, little is being done in teacher preparation programs to ensure that new teachers are adequately prepared for the diverse religious and secular worldviews they are likely to encounter in the classroom. A review of programs of study of education programs found no courses solely devoted to teaching about religion or religious literacy.<sup>31</sup> While many teacher preparation programs require that students take classes in multicultural education or social contexts of education, these courses rarely devote sufficient, if any, time to religious and secular worldviews. A great deal more research is needed on teacher preparation programs and how they are addressing issues of religious and secular worldviews with their teacher candidates.

## Conclusions

Clearly there is much that needs to be done in the realm of teacher education to prepare teachers to educate students with authenticity and vision for the increasingly globalized and religiously and secularly diverse world that students come from, learn in, and will live in after leaving our schools. There can be no doubt that the need for our students to be prepared with greater awareness of the *other* and the *self* will only become more vital if education is to have any meaningful influence in developing a more just and civil society that nurtures and fosters human development and potential instead of destructive hostility, violence, and oppression. Thus, teachers have a responsibility to teach about various religious and secular worldviews that swirl in their local or national communities, as well as in the larger global community. It is our hope that teacher education programs all over this country will respond to this urgent call and

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<sup>31</sup> Robinson, J. 2015 Unnatural Exclusion: Devaluing Domestic Religious Diversity in Teacher Training for Social Studies in *Religion and Public Schools: International Perspectives Group*, at American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

take seriously the need to provide the necessary training for these teachers in the field of religious and secular worldview literacy. And may the REA remember and fulfill one of its original purposes to “keep before the public the ideal of Religious Education, and the sense of its need and value” by carrying out its current mission to encourage, promote, and publish research and other literature that will strengthen this endeavor and build and support networks of collaboration that will lead out in accomplishing these aims.

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## **Critical Thinking or Cultural Reproduction? Fostering Empathetic Intersectional Awareness in Students Not Like Us**

### **Introduction**

Critical thinking is held as one of the highest goods in education—the ability to foster critical thinking in the classroom dominates teaching statements, university mission statements, and professional cover letters. As it has been defined in the last several decades, critical thinking is often connected to one’s ability to remain unbiased and unemotional, rationally weighing different conjectures and choosing between competing ideas in the most sensible ways possible. It is no surprise, then, that in theological education, critical thinking is at risk of being at odds with religious faith that privileges the experiential or spiritual. When critical thinking is defined through concepts like objectivity and rationality, the belief in that which is subjective and irrational suggests a negation of critical thinking.

I quickly learned in my own theological education that while my hard questions of faith drove a wedge between me and my family, these questions were affirmed and celebrated by my professors as a sign of theological maturity in line with Paul’s description of “putting away childish ways” when he grew up and stopped understanding as a child.<sup>1</sup> It felt as if I was embraced into the club of religious skeptics and the dues of membership included a sacrifice of my previous religious community and all they believed in, including the comfort and support that faith can bring. My new academic membership brought me great pride for awhile, even if it complicated my relationship with my childhood faith tradition. I truly believed I had evolved as a person—that is, until a pastoral care genogram assignment required I interview my elderly grandfather about his life experiences. He described to me moments of deep grief and substantial loss, stories that are well-known in the Appalachian region of the country where he grew up. For the first time, I saw his love for the hymn, “I’ll Fly Away” in a new light. My new skeptical self had criticized longing for another world as socially irresponsible because I believed we were called to focus on making this world better; with my new skeptical perspective I no longer cared if Heaven existed. However, I felt something in my identity shift back into place when I spoke to my working class grandfather who, even without a formal high school diploma, had studied the Bible just as much, if not more, than any scholar I knew. For him, Heaven’s existence was not about a dismissal of responsibility for this world, it was about God’s promise that the death of this world was not the end.

Critical thinking is not the problem. In fact, critical thinking is what allowed my new skeptical self to realize that the faith my grandfather had passed down to his children and then to me was a valid response to the lived experiences of my family and the community in which they were embedded. Critical thinking prepared me to recognize the class-boundedness in privileging

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:11.

certain expressions of faith and religion over others simply because some were considered to be more “critically thoughtful” than others. While I had learned to speak the language of upper middle class mainline Christianity, I did so at the expense of my connection with my working class evangelical family. In this way, the encouragement to “think critically” about the world implicitly called for a type of cultural assimilation that is always the risk of education, one that Bourdieu warns of in his writings on cultural reproduction.<sup>2</sup>

This complication of critical thinking in theological education has been explored before, particularly in *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts*, edited by Mary Hess and Stephen Brookfield, that questions the discourse between teachers, students, and content.<sup>3</sup> In my paper, I am adding a layer of intersectional analysis to the conversation already started by that volume. An increasing understanding of knowledge as socially constructed already challenges an older definition of critical thinking as being unbiased and rational, and this shift invites us to reimagine what we mean when we call for critical thinking in the classroom. What I propose is that modeling and teaching what I call *empathetic intersectional consciousness* is a way to redefine critical thinking that does not force assimilation, but rather, a critical perspective of difference and power. This would require that educators account for what they mean when they privilege “critical thinking” in the classroom so that the mantle of critical thinking does not get confused with cultural reproduction, or rather, student mimicry of positions and ideologies their teachers profess. In other words, theological educators can foster classrooms of critical thinking without unconsciously privileging their own conclusions by continuously interrogating their own intersectional identities and calling on students to do the same in order to examine the roots and limits of socially constructed knowledge.

### **Defining critical thinking in the literature**

In *Critical Thinking and Learning*, Mark Mason sketches out three main schools of thought on the concept of critical thinking: 1) critical thinking as the ability to reason through concepts properly, 2) critical thinking that consists of a deep knowledge in a particular discipline, within which a person can critically think rooted in competence in the field, and 3) a moral orientation that is “motivated by a concern for a more humane and just world.”<sup>4</sup> As is often the case, there seems to be a distance between scholarship and practice of teaching critical thinking, a taking for granted that practitioners naturally know what critical thinking consists of apart from the scholarship on the different forms of critical thinking that any given person could be referring to when they boast of privileging critical thinking. In this way, many teachers are operating under a kind of “I’ll know it when I see it” model of critical thinking—which leaves them as the final judges over if a student has successfully acquired the skill.

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<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Mary E Hess and Stephen Brookfield, *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions* (Malabar, Fla.: Krieger Pub. Co., 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Mark Mason, “Critical Thinking and Learning,” in *Critical Thinking and Learning*, ed. Mason, Mark (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008).

Even as a leading writer in the field of critical pedagogy, and someone our field draws on frequently, bell hooks starts her book on critical thinking by quoting a definition of critical thinking as “seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms young ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, solving problems, and so forth.”<sup>5</sup> Her own description calls the “longing to know—to understand how life works” the “heartbeat of critical thinking.”<sup>6</sup> She references many definitions of critical thinking, but all of them imply an ability to be emotionally removed and intellectually distant from the material proposed, so that one can reason through concepts and evaluate them accordingly. In this way, she seems to be operating under Mason’s first definition of critical thinking, even while he includes a third definition that refers to a moral disposition rather than cultivated skills.

It is not that critical thinking cannot refer to multiple concepts at once; Mason himself says that one of the three definitions is usually emphasized, though two might be functioning together.<sup>7</sup> One might say that in theological education, critical thinking refers both to a skill set and a disposition, rooted in a conviction that what we teach and study is sacred and demands reverence, not just dispassionate objectivism. In *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts*, Brookfield and Hess describe a model of public engagement, or a transparency of the teacher in how she/he is making decisions on behalf of the class to show critical thought processes and how they are engaged in.<sup>8</sup> This vulnerability is similar to bell hooks’ admonition that teachers ought not demand more vulnerability from their students than they are willing to express themselves.<sup>9</sup> So at the very same time that critical thinking and the teaching of critical thinking as practice is often described as a process that requires emotional distance, it is also described as a vulnerable act. This vulnerability may be even more pronounced when a person’s religious experiences and theological commitments that they have been taught to hold as sacred are up for public negotiation in the classroom for the sake of critical thinking.

The problem with defining critical thinking as an objective practice of weighing different concepts and evaluating them properly and skillfully, particularly in theological education, is that this definition overlooks the social construction of knowledge and formal schooling’s propensity and history for reproducing social power through the reinforcement of dominant ideas and concepts. In short, the concept of critical thinking as a set of skills to evaluate concepts lacks a proper acknowledgement of how power works in discourse. First, if critical thinking is really unbiased, the outcomes of critical thinking ought to be more similar than different. If there is truly a way to dispassionately examine ideas and choose the most rational and sensible

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel T. Willingham, “Critical Thinking: Why Is It So Hard to Teach?,” *Arts Education Policy Review* 109, no. 4 (March 1, 2008): 21–32, doi:10.3200/AEPR.109.4.21-32, cited in bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> hooks, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Mason, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Hess and Brookfield, 13.

<sup>9</sup> hooks, 21.

assertions, then our students would be led to align their views with our own—the goal being to show how our own convictions were reasonable ascertained and worth embracing as one’s own, even if we do not mean to teach conformity. However, there is little room for subjectivity in an understanding of critical thinking that is driven by objectivism.

Accordingly, postmodernism has described knowledge as socially constructed, and one way this can be described is through the concept intersectionality. Intersectional analysis acknowledges that one is shaped by their intersecting social identities, formed by race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other ways of being and moving in the world. An admission that who we are and what we know being influenced by these forces of identity and experience precludes the idea that critical thinking could be unbiased and objective, as if truth is a matter of simply determining between two or more competing concepts. Pastoral theologian Nancy Ramsay names intersectionality “an epistemological resource that helps surface subjugated knowledge and creates new knowledge,” explaining that it is thusly “a strategic resource for transformational change.”<sup>10</sup> Intersectionality is not just a source of explanatory value, but epistemological value, influencing the very way people think as we explain in postmodern terms. Whereas traditionally knowledge has been defined in objected truth-driven terms, a postmodern approach recognizes the very ways what we convey as truth are bound by our social locations, not as an extra bonus after the evaluation of truth claims, but as the substantive building blocks to how we understand truth. In this way, an intersectional consciousness of epistemology is essential to the understanding and teaching of critical thinking.

### **Critical thinking as empathetic intersectional consciousness**

The danger of describing the social construction of knowledge is the inevitable panic over extreme relativism—particularly when many of us as theological educators have deeper values and convictions to which we are also accountable. In other words, how could we teach critical thinking as subjective if it means each person gets to think what they want without critique because their social locations should not be attacked? Here is where I would like to propose an alternative description of critical thinking: critical thinking as the ability to hold empathetic intersectional consciousness in the face of differing worldviews, concepts, and perspectives. My proposal includes two adjectives, empathetic and intersectional, and each of them should be taken in turn. First, I am calling for a teaching of empathy in the strictest sense by definition rather than the more colloquial confluence of empathy as sympathy. Empathy refers to the ability to understand a person’s perspective and feelings without collapsing one’s own self into the other. When we teach empathy in intercultural spiritual care, we teach the dual ability to be strong in one’s own identity while showing an authentic reverence and curiosity for the spiritual world of another. Empathy empowers us to not only respect another perspective as distant and other, but it also challenges our own perspective when we consider how another might interpret our views and words, and how another perspective might serve more people than our own.

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<sup>10</sup> Nancy J Ramsay, “Intersectionality: A Model for Addressing the Complexity of Oppression and Privilege,” *Pastoral Psychology* 63, no. 4 (August 2014): 453–69, doi:10.1007/s11089-013-0570-4.

For example, on a recent drive, I heard a radio commercial for the cancer center of a local hospital. The fundraising advertisement included the story of a cancer survivor that spoke of the need to know she could beat cancer; she said her doctors at this hospital gave her the confidence to beat cancer even when she thought she would lose. While I honor her and her perspective, particularly in its context of being a survival narrative that carried her through unthinkable pain, I could not help but cringe when I imagined how a person whose loved one did not beat cancer might hear the same message. While some would hear the commercial as a testament of faith and strength in the face of cancer, others might hear an accusation that their loved ones did not have the confidence they needed to “win” against what may have been a terminable diagnosis. Since I was working on this essay at the time, I wondered how empathetic critical thinking may have resulted in a different type of messaging from the cancer center. Perhaps in that marketing meeting, someone would have suggested what this proposed message might sound like to someone who had lost a loved one to cancer—pointing out that the implication is that their loved one lacked the confidence to “beat cancer.” The result might have been either the change of message or the complication of this simplistic message by including a counter-narrative, both of which would reflect the concept of critical thinking as a moral disposition in as much as it would embody an intentional compassionate concern for those who have been hurt by cancer. This ability to imagine the thought process of another person, particularly as it is shaped by their experience, is one of the benefits of imagining an empathetic critical thinking, and this particular example demonstrates a value beyond theological education to other fields and disciplines, like students of healthcare or business.

When applied to critical thinking, empathetic intellect would seek to understand the reasons behind difference, trusting that there are respectable reasons a person might come to a different conclusion than another, beyond simplistic definitions of right and wrong. A postmodern understanding of the social construction of knowledge theoretically should result in more intellectual empathy afforded one another, but instead, it seems to have closed people off to needing to understand difference out of conviction of one’s own truth. This type of empathy, then, needs to be taught as a skill worth fostering and modeled as a moral commitment to the other. Fostering empathy as part of critical thinking also safeguards against the accusation of relativism by encouraging a commitment to dismantling systems of injustice and oppression through its acknowledgement of the lived experience of the other, so that critical thinking is not just self-serving, but held within a web of life that is complicated and messy. There is still an evaluative aspect of this sort of critical thinking, just rather than an objective evaluation of multiple perspectives, it is a subjective understanding of why multiple perspectives exist that demands an evaluation that is mindful of the social realities surrounding any single issue. In moral and theological education, this allows for a taught privileging of marginalized voices in opposition to a long history of “objectivism” that privileged dominant race and class values. Including empathy as part of critical thinking fits into the model of critical thinking as moral disposition because it requires students to consider not only the validity of another’s perspective, but the power imbalances between different perspectives that might perpetuate oppression.

The second descriptor used in my proposal is intersectional, and this is closely connected to empathy. Empathy flows out of a recognition that we ourselves hold values and beliefs for very particular reasons, and intersectionality gives us a framework to examine how and why

these views are formed. In her critical article, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” Kimberle Crenshaw explained that sexism was rarely described or analyzed from a particular racial perspective, proposing that the different parts of a person’s identity, like race and class, intersected and that the intersection demanded particular analysis.<sup>11</sup> Carrie Doehring and Nancy Ramsay represent efforts out of my own fields of practical and pastoral theology to recognize intersectionality, which is demonstrated in their descriptions of the way a person’s values have been shaped by their ethnicity, social class, race, gender, sexuality, and so forth.<sup>12</sup> This recognition is done at the scholarly level for integrity’s sake and at the caregiving level for the sake of not imposing the caregiver’s own worldview on those with whom they work, but I am suggesting that this disposition should be taught more universally as part of critical thinking, rather than constrained to the fields of pastoral care and counseling. Once I understand that my experience in the world is shaped by my whiteness, my femaleness, my working class childhood that gave way to a more middle class adulthood, then perhaps I can grant that someone who has a different conviction than me is also shaped by their social location in logical and valid ways. It removes the hastiness of my evaluation between myself as right and the other as wrong, but it also prevents me from being able to objectively evaluate both positions side by side and choose the most “critical thinking approved” route.

An empathetic intersectional consciousness, then, would consist of an awareness of the forces of one’s own identity that shaped the way they view the world, an understanding that other person’s have their own intersectional identities that influence how they view the world, and a commitment to evaluating differences as they relate to power, privilege, and oppression in the world.

### **Practicing critical thinking in the classroom**

While it is common in pastoral care classrooms to teach this sort of empathetic intersectional consciousness through the creation of genograms,<sup>13</sup> it is not practical to expect that every classroom setting in any field of study can dig into family history and context to explain how one’s lived experiences in the world has shaped their worldview and their construction of knowledge and truth. However, there are classroom activities that can initiate this sort of reflection that would hopefully continue long past the course of the term.

First, teachers can encourage intersectional consciousness through mapping exercises that are not as extensive as the genogram. I and other teachers have experienced success in having

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<sup>11</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991 1990): 1241.

<sup>12</sup> Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015); Ramsay, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Genograms include a mapping of family history that goes beyond birth and death dates, but include attention to relationships, mental health, physical health, and connection. However, one of my colleagues who read an early draft of this paper pointed out that genograms do not require one to analyze power difference and societal location unless this sort of analysis is intentionally assigned and encouraged by the instructor. So while this is one way pastoral care course *might* teach empathetic intersectional consciousness, the simple assignment of genograms does not guarantee it.

students map their conceptions of identity, even for their own reference, throughout the course. In a class on identity, power, and difference I have co-taught with another, we provided the paper and a model diagram of how a student might take continuous self-reflective notes about their own intersectionality throughout the course, culminating in a section of their final paper in which they reported a self-analysis of intersectional influence in their lives and how it impacts their experiences and interpretation of the world. Other teachers have no doubt included similar activities in their courses through journaling assignments and even assessments that gauge values, privilege, and identity.

In *Teaching for Critical Thinking*, Stephen D. Brookfield offers up the idea of “hunting assumptions” as an important practice in critical thinking, and this language is useful in the everyday moments of teaching critical thinking in the classroom as it is easy enough to understand, even if it is more difficult in practice. “Trying to discover what our assumptions are, and then trying to judge when, and how far, these are accurate,” Brookfield explains, “is something that happens every time critical thinking occurs.”<sup>14</sup> The importance Brookfield places on hunting assumptions fits in naturally with my proposal of critical thinking as empathetic intersectional consciousness because it requires an acknowledgement of our underlying beliefs and how we form them, and the natural extension is an awareness that others have similar processes in how they interpret their worlds as well. It is not simply a subjective awareness that each of us have assumptions we make that seem natural to us, but a demand that we analyze how our assumptions are made and how these assumptions function in a society that privileges some people and their assumptions over others. One exercise Brookfield proposes for teaching students how to identify assumptions is through case studies in which they are asked to identify someone else’s assumptions.<sup>15</sup> This could be used in theological education both in practical ministry courses that already use case studies and in more theory-driven courses by asking students to examine the construction of an argument by identifying one a scholar might be taking for granted about the audience of the text.

There is a strategy used by Industrial Areas Foundation, a nationwide community organizing group, that is also a helpful concept for certain contexts of teaching critical thinking, particularly in congregational settings. Rather than organizing around issues first, they teach and encourage *relational meetings*, one-on-one meetings in which two people get to know not only the simple biographic facts about another person, but the deeper stories and experiences that shaped the other person—their passions, commitments, and beliefs. This strategy pushes people to ask questions that elicit thoughtful answers, such as “What keeps you up at night?” or “What gets you up in the morning?” In community organizing, the hope is that people find shared passions in these stories and that community action initiatives arises out of these relational meetings rather than being imposed upon strangers. This model for connection could influence the teaching of critical thinking by training one to look beyond another’s different stated beliefs

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<sup>14</sup> Brookfield, *Teaching for Critical Thinking: Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question Their Assumptions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Brookfield, 90.

to how their intersectional identities have brought them to that point and how those experiences might impact one's own belief system.

Lastly, a teacher's own identity matters in the classroom and in the mission of teaching critical thinking. In *Teaching Reflectively*, Hess and Brookfield describe how reflective practice models critical thinking in the classroom by sharing with the students why the teacher makes the decisions in the classroom that they do. Teachers can demonstrate that they themselves are in processes of struggling through content, continually being changed and formed by what they read and learn so that students understand firsthand that these are valuable dynamics. One way to do this, they write, is through the inclusion of Critical Incident Questionnaires (CIQ) at the end of each class session that would ask students to describe a moment of the class in which they felt engaged, a moment in which they felt distanced, an action someone took that was helpful, an action someone took that was confusing, and a moment in class in which they were surprised.<sup>16</sup> These questionnaires would then give the teacher insight into how students felt the class was going and allow for teachers to engage with the students about the reasons for certain pedagogical decisions, as well as the potential for pedagogical changes in the future. This is a useful strategy for teaching empathetic intersectional consciousness because students and teachers must both acknowledge the different contexts from which each other are operating and navigate the inherent power differential that divides them, making these analyses more in line with intersectional perspectives that gauge who is being privileged at any given time with more power and/or control in a situation.

Furthermore, it is a teacher's own empathetic intersectional consciousness that prevents her from imposing the views she has arrived at through her own experience onto that of her students. When a teacher loses sight of his own intersectionality, he risks taking on the kind of hubris that so privileges one worldview that he cannot help but privilege the students that affirm his own biases. It is not rare for any of us to fall into this trap—I can remember in my first classroom getting caught up in the excitement of a student whose questions raised in class reminded me of myself when I was first introduced to the content. This excitement was obvious to my students, and though reacting affirmatively to students can be a way to empower them, our actions can also suggest a different kind of interpretation for other students that do not elicit such a reaction. Looking back, I recognize that my excitement for the input of one student who affirmed my own bias was contrasted to a flatter reaction that same day to a student with a different interpretation of the material. My commitment to empathetically reflect on the experience allows me to see with fresh understanding the disappointment another student may have felt in comparison to the student who felt empowered, and I lament that I may have implicitly discouraged further engagement with the material that day from that student or other students that noticed the unequal treatment. My commitment to reflect on the intersectional dynamics reveals my accidental complicity in classroom racism that day too, as the student I felt connection to was a student of a lower class white background like myself, and so, it was easier to collapse our experiences into synchronicity than it would have been with one of her classmates of color. In that moment, I demonstrated a familiarity with a white student that I did not with her black classmate. While my flatter reaction was rooted in a need to think about the

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<sup>16</sup> Hess and Brookfield, 6-7.

newness of what I had heard in comparison to assuming a recognition what I had heard from the other student, it was only obvious to my students that I reacted differently to one than the other. It is not that an empathetic intersectional consciousness would prevent all the ways in which we might unintentionally harm our students in complex ways, but had I thought this way back then, I would have been able to acknowledge what had happened as a model of vulnerability and critical thinking by discussing the classroom moment with the class itself—acknowledging and repenting for the hurt I may have caused and demonstrating the transformative power of empathetic intersectional consciousness.

## Conclusion

An insistence that critical thinking demands the ability to objectively evaluate facts, figures, and ideas risks ignoring the issues of power and privilege that are inherent in what people know and believe to be true. Teaching empathetic intersectional consciousness provides us a way to affirm the social construction of knowledge that is often described in postmodern thought without collapsing the world into radical relativism. We can do this by teaching students to recognize how their intersectional identities influence the assumptions they make about the world and how their assumptions bump up against others who are also shaped by their social locations. It is in this interchange that questions about power and injustice arrive, as we imagine what it must like to view the world in a different way, choosing to lift up those who have been traditionally marginalized by the illusion of unbiased objectivity that privileged those with more social power. This is how we can teach critical thinking without imposing cultural reproduction: by insisting upon and modeling an awareness of the intersectional limitations of our own perspectives and the need for empathy in every moment of life and learning.

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## Generating Hope By Teaching The Millennial Generation Synchronously In Church And Academy

### **Abstract**

As one who teaches concurrently and consistently in the congregational setting and the academic context I am extremely engaged in generating hope for future generations. It is my contention that meeting the needs of a globalized community begins by recognizing the imperative to understand teaching and specifically theological education as critical to generating hope in the world today and into the future. I further contend that this teaching imperative is best seen when viewed from the lenses of congregations and the academy simultaneously and is guided by theology.

My question is how is the millennial generation reshaping both the academy and the church? I think more research is needed in combining the questions that arise from the impact of the millennial generation in the church and the academy. The Apostle Paul proclaims in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians that there is faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love. I join in with Diana Butler Bass by suggesting that hope is the primary virtue of vital Christian community. In my mind hope is vital to any community. I find hope in teaching in both the church and the academy that reaches across generations and cultures. I see teaching the millennial generation as a place of many challenges, but is where hope lies for the future of education.

### **The Paper**

Initially, in this paper I will argue that the future of teaching is strongly connected to an analysis of the millennial generation in a postmodern culture. Secondly, this paper argues that the millennial generation challenges teachers to pay close attention to critical pedagogies. This is true for both the church and the academy. I further argue in this paper the need for critical pedagogy in our schools and in our congregations. Finally, I make my argument by analyzing some insights about teaching in a postmodern culture that has impact on and implications for the approaches of teaching in the future both in the congregation and in the academy.

My question is how is the millennial generation reshaping both the academy and the church? I think more research is needed in combining the questions that arise from the impact of the millennial generation in the church and the academy. This paper analyzes literature written by a variety of authors with various experiences. My literature review pays special attention to authors who bring a business and/or educational perspective to understanding the millennial generation. I am also interested in hearing the comments of social scientists and I am particularly driven to delve more into brain research. I will continue literature research of postmodernity, critical pedagogy, and brain research as I seek to argue the need for addressing various methodological factors of teaching and as I look at the future of teaching in a global community based on a postmodern culture.

In this paper I address historical research and give great attention to the community of

practice. As chief executive officer of Educational ministry in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, I have numerous opportunities to teach as a part of a community of faith and because I serve the seminary I have a plethora of times to engage that practice of teaching in the academy. It is a unique advantage to virtually have one foot in the church and one foot in the academy synchronously. It is out of this experience that I pay close attention to four millennials. One of the individuals I have taught in the church and the academy. I will refer to him as John. The others are three females that I have taught in the church. I will refer them as Sally, Jane, and Sue.

Simultaneously, I have had opportunities to research and teach in an academy and use this research to teach in a faith community. My observation in both contexts of church and academy is the absence of the millennial generation. It is because of this experience I am motivated to prepare this paper.

I want to be quick to point out in this paper that I am not interested or motivated in exploring why the millennial generation is missing, but through research about how to reach the millennial generation, one becomes informed about teaching and learning issues regarding the millennial generation. However, it is important to acknowledge and to have some insight into why this generation is missing in order to recognize the need for discontinuity. I will address the absenteeism of millennials later in the paper.

Furthermore, I intend to identify some worldviews, preferences, and expectations of the millennial generation and then relate those findings to teaching and learning issues. I think my research will enable me to gain insight into traits, values and needs of the millennial generation. It will also help me identify cultural trends and interpersonal dynamics that shape the needs and expectations of the millennial generation.

Why is this research important? Lovett Weems in his book *Leading Ideas To Reach Young Adults* writes, “the future of every denomination and virtually every congregation in the United States depends on their ability to reach more people, younger people, and more diverse people.”<sup>1</sup> I think this statement is true for the academy as well.

Furthermore, this research is important because experts estimate that by the year 2030 millennials will outnumber the previous generation called Boomers by twenty-two million people. This generation is defined by some, and it seems the majority of experts, as those born between 1980 and 1995. However, many people agree the age period should be extended to 2000. Joel Stein and Josh Sanburn write in Time magazine, “They are the most threatening and exciting generation since the baby boomers brought about social revolution, not because they’re trying take over the Establishment but because they’re growing up without one.”<sup>2</sup> They compete against huge organizations: hackers vs. corporations, bloggers vs. newspapers, terrorists vs. nation-states, YouTube directors vs. studios, app-makers vs. entire industries.

In my mind reaching is key to teaching for hope. By reaching millennials mean we must deliberately gain greater knowledge of their context. So I begin by relating some of the findings doing my observation of the four millennials I mentioned earlier.

Sally is a 26-year-old who lives with her mother and has an estranged relationship with her father. She has attended church most of her life. In her home is her 18 year old sister who

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<sup>1</sup> Weems, L. (2015) *Leading Ideas To Reach Young Adults*. Washington, D.C.: Wesley Theological Seminary.

<sup>2</sup> Stein, J and Sanburn, J. *How Millennials Will Save Our Lives*. (5/20/2013), Vol. 181 Issue 19, p.26.8p

has recently started college in a city far away from home. Sally works and goes to school at a local community college. What I have observed is that she is concerned about her future. It seems she is in college mainly to find ways to assure herself of a very comfortable way of life. She speaks of the many majors she has considered with money in the future being her motivation. She is very excited about purchasing her first car and she relates about the responsibility associated with owning a car. It seems her greatest focus is on a relationship she has with a young man. Her parents and grandparents do not approve of the young man and Sally seems to have her own reservations. However, she wants to give the relationship a chance. She continually questions the sincerity of the young man. I have found that only after I have given Sally an opportunity to talk can I begin to approach teaching the Sunday school lesson that I have prepared. I have concluded that understanding her context is key to helping to guide her into a nurturing relationship at the church.

Sue is a 30-year old who has a five-year-old son. She is divorced. She has told me her marriage lasted for five years and ended in large part due to the abuse from her husband after the loss of an infant. Sue attended college for about two years via an online program. She stopped because of the needs of her birth family. In addition to having the responsibility of her son, she provides support in various ways to her mother who has health challenges and has a major responsibility of taking care of grandchildren who have come to her from another child. Sue has been a member of various churches and proclaims, "I have done some bad things." She is very faithful in attendance at the church and shares openly with me about her life. As in the case with Sally, I have concluded that understanding Sue's context is vital for a nurturing relationship to develop.

Jane is 32 years of age and married with children. She has been a member of the church all her life. She has a Masters degree and works in a professional field. Her world revolves around her church and family. She and her husband are hearing the call to ministry. I find teaching her Sunday school lessons is fairly easy because of her interest. We rarely talk about personal concerns because she is content to learn about God.

John is a 35-year old who is married with no children. The church has been a part of his life from the day he was born. He has had many struggles, ups, and downs in his lifetime, but seems to be rather steady because of his faith in God. He has accepted the call to ministry, is in seminary, and in process of becoming a pastor, although he is not certain this is the route he will take in ministry.

Sue and Sally have had very little Christian education or nurturing in the church as part of their history. They are very content with not bringing the Bible and/or other book resources. They seem to be more at ease talking about their context. Whereas, when John and Jane speak of their present situations, they seem to want to see how the Bible speaks to those situations. It has been said that the real tragedy for today's church is not the dwindling numbers of people that have left the church or those that are considered "unchurched." The real tragedy is with the "minimally churched." These are the church-goers that have little to no awareness of what is going on, how anything works, or why. However, they have a firm grasp on "doing" church as it has become an ingrained habit.<sup>3</sup> This relates to Search Institute's findings in the 1990's that basically said a key to mature faith is the involvement of people in Christian education throughout their lifetime.

At the core of our hope is that we will reach more and more generations with our

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<sup>3</sup> Jones, 177-178

teaching. This has led me to ask myself, “why do I teach?” Furthermore, “why do I teach synchronously in the church and in the academy?” The simple answer to both these questions is that I believe in what I am teaching and I believe what I teach makes a formative and/or transformative difference in the lives of those I teach and the ones they will teach.

It becomes urgent then to reach each generation and often reaching “the next generation” is gaining insight into that generation’s world. Karen B. Tye reminds us that one of the basic building blocks of Christian education is “Participants.” In order to teach the millennial generation, we must have a strong understanding of the question ‘whom do we teach?’<sup>4</sup>

This paper seeks to combine insights into teaching the millennial generation while at the same time asking how do we teach the millennial generation and what hope do we generate in doing so? Next I explore some traits and characteristics of millennials as I say more about how teaching and learning is challenged by millennials and possibly approached by teachers.

Stereotypes about Millennials depict them as self-centered, unmotivated, disrespectful, and disloyal, contributing to widespread concern about how communication with Millennials will affect organizations and how they will develop relationships with other organizational members. Positive qualities are that they work well in teams, are motivated to have an impact on organization and favor open and frequent communication with their supervisors. They are at ease with communication technologies. The Pew Research Center in 2007 called millennials the “Look at Me” generation, implying they were overly self-confident and self-absorbed.<sup>5</sup>

My experience as a Christian educator who practices in the church does not support or agree with these stereotypes as a whole, however, in part I find it to be true in the academy and the church as I encounter millennials. The four individuals that I have observed do not possess any of these traits that are noticeable, however, a closer examination tells me Sally, the 26-year old can be labeled as self-centered. She genuinely is concerned about what her parents are saying about her friend, but she is also very much absorbed in her looks, her new car, and the possibility of making “big” money someday.

However, one of the most positive observations about all four of my subjects is that of their favoring of open and frequent communication with their supervisors and or teachers. I have often observed this with millennial students in the academy and the church. This speaks volumes to the need for small groups so that these frequent and open conversations are more available to millennials. It seems to me that in order to reach more millennials we will need more teachers or small group leaders who can be conversation partners with students. This leads me to say we need more critical pedagogy in classrooms with millennials. This is a way to use the self-esteem that is associated with millennials. This along with their ability to work well in teams makes critical pedagogy ideal for millennials.

Millennials are prime candidates for critical pedagogy where teaching/learning groups are established, decision making is being taught in real time, sharing of information, coordination among teachers and learners all seems to lead to an excellent teaching/learning environment. Use of critical pedagogy with millennials may negate conversations about the lack of self-motivation which actually may be associated with antiquated and ineffective pedagogy which is a result of not paying attention to context.

The four individuals that I observed all had self-esteem which is one of the characteristics

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<sup>4</sup> Tye, Karen. (2000). *Basics of Christian Education*. Danvers, Ma: Chalice Press.

<sup>5</sup> Myers, K.K. & Sadaghiani, K Bus Psychol (2010) 25: 225. Doi:10.1007/s10869-010-9172-7

often given to millennials. However, they were not fame obsessed. Reflecting upon my conversations with all four individuals, none of them had been star athletes or beauty pageant participants during their younger years. I say that because millennials have been exposed to the numbers game all of their lives. They have had to compete for aptitude tests and many are thrust into beauty contests and athletics at an early age where the name of the game is winning. This leads me to say a word about narcissism.

Although all four my subjects use facebook on a regular basis, only two say they regularly post pictures of themselves or “selfies.” Many people say that millennials are narcissists as evidence by the use of “selfies” and other actions that seem to be self-promoting.

Studies have noted the following:<sup>6</sup>

- Increasing narcissism has occurred alongside increasing usage of social networking sites such as Facebook.
- When asked “what makes your generation unique”, 24% of millennials said “use of technology.
- Three quarters of American Millennials have a social networking site.
- More than 90% of US college students have Facebook profiles.
- Studies also indicate that people with high levels of narcissism engage more frequently in Facebook.
- Emphasis on the individual has been growing for decades.

An underlying, but very pervasive question surfaces as I explore teaching millennials synchronously in church and academy. Why are so many millennials absent from the church, but also from the religious academy? Most see evidence of this absence in church, denominations/communions, and theological institutions of higher education.

I argue that in large part it is a result of many factors, including pedagogical ineffectiveness and continuity without discontinuity. I will return to this thought, but for now I will address the why Millennials are absent. At the top of the list is choices. This generation has always had choices of what to eat, where to eat, and when to eat. They always have had the choice of what to watch, what to listen to, and where to go. Not only have they have had many channels, but many channels devoted to one thing.

When one has many options, decisions can be deferred. The 30-year old that I observed is an example. Although she lives in a small town, she has almost as many options as a person living in a large city when it comes to going back to school. The Internet, distance learning, and online classes with degrees has made it easy to defer the decision of returning to school. In addition, there is an option to go only to night classes, go to accelerated programs, and of course just stay at home and go to school.

Added to this is the fact millennials value individual choices. My now deceased wife and I saw evidence of this when our son called home from college and informed us he was going to the Peace Corp. There was no discussion even with our practice of open communication.

Another strong implication for the need to constantly assess and evaluate our teaching and learning strategies is that millennials bring a source of accountability. They are seeking authentic teachers, that is, those who practice and teach the same. They are looking for answers to the whys of their lives.

Attracting millennials requires allowing them to put things together with their skills,

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<sup>6</sup> (Layton, Rob. “Socratic Teaching & The Millennials: Has Socrates’ Care of the Self Become the Care of the Selfie?” (2015), Posters, Book 10

ideas, and resources. This is another reason critical pedagogy is appealing. Along that line it is important to allow millennials time to create networks, conversations, seek new ways of doing things.

Connections and relationships are central. Structure has its place, but millennials need room for creativity and expression.

Teaching and learning is akin to worship in the church. We must do it well and with clarity. It need not be watered down, but well explained. Teaching and learning must be experiential. Millennials are doers not spectators. We must take advantage of their good team player abilities.

As we teach in the church and the academy formation has to be at the front of our teaching goals. Information is still important, but formation is equally or more than important. Our teaching must be creative/innovative and authentic.

I now return to the idea I first heard from Walter Brueggemann, continuity and discontinuity. I see it as essential as we approach teaching millennials. As he points out the necessity of education for communities to survive, he explains that continuity is maintaining ones' self-identity, but at the same time in order to be relevant in new times and situations it becomes necessary to have discontinuity. It is teaching in a way that brings new life to a people.<sup>7</sup>

As I continue to research I will expound on critical pedagogy and its value to teaching and learning for millennials. I will also give attention to how teaching millennials in a postmodern culture has to be considered. And finally I will look at brain research as I raise the concern that some millennials are youth, some are emerging adults, and others are young adults.

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<sup>7</sup> Brueggemann, W. (1982) *The Creative Word*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

## Redemptive Reading and/as Theological Education in the Academy Today

**Abstract:** The spiritual pedagogy of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* demonstrates that the Christian hermeneutical *habitus* is to make the best of one's interlocutor as "redemptive reading," which far exceeds tolerance and surpasses even sympathetic reading. Aquinas graciously welcomes his objectors in genuine conversation because he appreciates how they help him understand his position more clearly. Redemptive reading initiates "text-based friendships" through the practice of well-wishing, empathy, and critical judgment. It engages theological educators in a prophetic act of resistance to the Weberian mode of "academic reading" dominant in higher education. Redemptive reading may therefore be a source of hope and/as theological education in the academy today.

Reading is the most commonplace task of universities. Universities are communities defined by reading. It is remarkable that this most basic skill remains largely unexamined. Granted, professors regularly consider *what* to read each time they construct a syllabus in advance of the new semester. The often contentious and protracted debates surrounding core curriculum reviews and "the canon" comprising foundational courses reveal deep-seated concern for reading content. Yet the question of *how* to read is often taken for granted. Reading is a stunningly overlooked pedagogical event. The assumption among the professionally literate that we are, is that we both know what reading is and how to do it. Paul Griffiths observes that "most of us have little or no idea what reading is, have never given its history much thought, and do not teach in institutions where instruction in it has a place."<sup>1</sup> This neglect is all the more problematic given social media's increasing influence on communicative habits within the academy.

This essay proposes "redemptive reading" as a spiritual discipline animating theological education for our time. I begin by describing redemptive reading as a Christian hermeneutical *habitus* practicing "text-based friendship."<sup>2</sup> It is characterized by well-wishing, empathy, and critical judgment. Redemptive reading highlights the central role of the theologian's spiritual life as conditioning one's speaking about God. I then argue that redemptive reading engages theological education in a practice of prophetic resistance to "academic reading" dominating the academy today. Redemptive reading may therefore be a source of hope for/as theological education in the academy today.

### Aristotle on Well-Wishing

Aristotle's provides an enduring treatment of friendship in books VIII and IX of *The Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>3</sup> Friendship, for Aristotle, is an indispensable good. "Nobody would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other good things."<sup>4</sup> Friends enhance our ability to

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<sup>1</sup> Paul J. Griffiths, "Reading as a Spiritual Discipline" in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, ed. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing

<sup>2</sup> The phrase "text-based friendship" originates in Randall S. Rosenberg, "Text-Based Friendships and the Quest for Transcendence in a Global-Consumerist Age" in *Grace and Friendship: Theological Essays in Honor of Fred Lawrence*, ed. M. Shawn Copeland and Jeremy D. Wilkins (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016) 213-236.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (New York: Penguin Classics, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.1 1155a1-5.

think and act. Aristotle offers a friendship typology of pleasure, utility and virtue. Within this schema, perfect friendship, grounded in virtue, entails desiring the good of the friend for the friend's sake. "But in the case of a friend they say that one ought to wish him good for his own sake."<sup>5</sup> Friendships of utility and pleasure are not friendships essentially but incidentally, because a person is not loved for what she is but for utility and pleasure.

Friendship's affective union accounts for the friend as "another self" (*alter ipse*). However, this identification with the other is not conflation or self-abnegation. Friendship of the good justifies self-love, "for we have said before that all friendly feelings for others are extensions of a man's feelings for himself."<sup>6</sup> Well-wishing alone does not constitute friendship. "Good will resembles friendship but it is not identical with it, because goodwill can be felt towards people that one does not know, and without their knowledge, but friendship cannot."<sup>7</sup> The sharing of concrete goods and deeds demonstrates the reciprocity of friendship loving. Friends naturally desire to live together, because they delight in being conscious of one another's existence as their mutual activity expands in conversation. In sum, Aristotle identifies friendship as mutual relations of benevolence motivated by concern for the other's good.<sup>8</sup>

### **Text-Based Friendship**

Literary critic Wayne Booth extends the Aristotelian notion of well-wishing to include a reader's relationship with the author of a text.<sup>9</sup> Booth contends that books offer different kinds of friendship, and the "company we keep" significantly informs who we are and who we become as readers. He laments the "modern neglect of friendship as a serious subject of inquiry" and the "decline of talking about books as friends."<sup>10</sup> He calls texts "friendship offerings."<sup>11</sup> Booth echoes Aristotle: "The fullest friendship arises when two people offer each other not only pleasures or utilities but shared aspirations and loves of a kind that make life together worth having as an end in itself. These full friends love to be with each other because of the quality of the life they live during their time together."<sup>12</sup>

As is the case in "real life," discerning true textual friends can be difficult.<sup>13</sup> "We reject these offers, of course, whether made by people or by fictions, unless we think we will get something worth having." We choose as our authentic friends only "those who persuade us that their offerings are genuine goods."<sup>14</sup> Booth's vision of textual friendship entails both an ethical criticism and self-criticism. We discern among the "values of the moments" offered in a textual friendship while we simultaneously "judge ourselves as we judge the offer."<sup>15</sup> We ask the text: "Do you my would-be friend, wish me well, or will you be the only one to profit if I join you?"<sup>16</sup>

Booth applies the golden rule to literary hermeneutics: "Read as you would have others read you; listen as you would have other listen to you."<sup>17</sup> He avoids the extremes of Don Quixote's uncritical acceptance or an "anesthetic" reading that deflects the transformative power

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 8.2 1156a32.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 9.8 1168b1-8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 9.5 1166b30-2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8.2 1156a4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 172.

of fiction. Booth proposes “two-stage kind of reading, surrendering as fully as possible on every occasion, but then deliberately supplementing, correcting, or refining our experience with the most powerful ethical or ideological criticism we can imagine.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Redemptive Reading in Aquinas and Augustine**

Given Booth’s vision, we may view Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* as exemplifying text-based friendship in a Christian light. The spiritual pedagogy of the *Summa* demonstrates that the Christian hermeneutical *habitus* is to presume the best in one’s interlocutor – as a kind of “redemptive reading.” The *modus operandi* in our day is to write and read in monologue. In contrast, the *Summa* incarnates the scholastic medieval culture of disputation (*quaestio disputata*), which draws divergent voices into conversation in a spirit of well-wishing. This preferred pedagogy of university curriculum was modeled on Socratic and Aristotelian methods of argumentation. Thus, Aquinas begins each question in each article by stating the position of his objectors. He graciously welcomes his objectors in genuine conversation, because he is grateful for the way that they help him understand his position more clearly. He doesn’t use the objectors as straw men. That he takes great care to address the concern of each objector in turn following his *respondio* demonstrates genuine well-wishing for his conversation partners. The friendly disposition animating the ongoing conversation in search of deeper understanding is grounded in the theological conviction that all existence is in some sense holy to the extent that it shares in a likeness with its Creator. Text-based friendship or redemptive reading may be understood as a Christian habit of reading in as much as the scholar is willing the good by trying to make the best out of the author’s work. The “Presupposition” to the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola* captures redemptive reading.

In order that both he who is giving the Spiritual Exercises, and he who is receiving them, may more help and benefit themselves, let it be presupposed that every good Christian is to be more ready to save his neighbor's proposition than to condemn it. If he cannot save it, let him inquire how he means it; and if he means it badly, let him correct him with charity. If that is not enough, let him seek all the suitable means to bring him to mean it well, and save himself.<sup>19</sup>

Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana (On Christian Teaching)* proposes the Matthean form of the twofold love commandment in the Synoptic Gospels – love of God and neighbor – as the metacriterion for proper interpretation. This transcritical approach to biblical interpretation as “no entrance to truth except through love” has been called a hermeneutics of love. We may view it as another proposal for redemptive reading. Augustine’s approach stands in sharp relief to the unchecked hermeneutics of suspicion dominating the academy today. He remarks on the interpretation of Scripture for the purpose of edifying the faithful:

Whoever, therefore, thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them in such a way that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand at [the Scriptures] at all. Whoever finds a lesson there useful to the building of charity, even though he has not said what the author may be shown to have intended in that place, has not been deceived, nor is he lying in any way.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>19</sup> David J. Fleming, S.J., *Draw Me Into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises* (Institute of Jesuit Scholars, 1996), 18.

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, [De Doctrina Christiana] trans. D.W. Robertson Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 30.

The chief insight is that God's grace enables an interpreter to profit from reading a text even if that interpreter mistakes the author's "literal" which is to say intended meaning. The Christian problematic today is to welcome the most rigorous analytical and critical contemporary methods of biblical scholarship, exegesis and interpretation while simultaneously refusing the domination, abuse, or reductionism of biblical texts by sources themselves so that confessional or Christian approaches to scholarship remain credible.<sup>21</sup>

Redemptive reading includes critical judgment, as is the case in our friendships with one another. However, critical judgment is based in well-wishing following patient attentiveness and empathetic understanding. It is empirically verifiable by examining the contents of our own friendships that beginning with John Henry Newman's consent rather than Cartesian doubt leads to richer and deeper understandings of our interlocutors. This is not an abnegation of criticism or suspicion. On the contrary, we know from reflecting upon our interpersonal encounters that criticism is all the more powerful and cogent when it occurs following generosity based in attentiveness and understanding rather than when suspicion is the native stance of the encounter. Aquinas describes "fraternal correction" as an effect of charity, the consequence of living in friendship with God. Critical judgment is exercised after a prayerful examination intended to purify the rebuker's motives. Aquinas is acutely aware that rebuke is an event ripe for spiritual pride. The depth of Aquinas's counsel is summarized as he cites Augustine's words:

When we have to find fault with anyone, we should think whether we were never guilty of his sin; and then we must remember that we are men, and might have been guilty of it; or that we once had it on our conscience, but have it no longer: and then we should think ourselves that we are all weak, in order that our reproof may be the outcome, not of hatred, but of pity. But if we find that we are guilty of the same sin we must not rebuke him, but groan with him, and invite him to repent with us.<sup>22</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine how the ethos of our political, religious, and academic discourse might be radically transformed if this counsel was interiorized in prayer or mindfulness prior to conversation with texts as with one another. Genuine friendship provides the humility, vulnerability, and trust necessary for giving and receiving fraternal correction as an act of charity. Redemptive reading is an alternative to tolerance, which is often non-engagement as peace keeping, when navigating various truth claims in a sea of pluralism. Healthy, robust dialogue and even conflict is vital to the development of a living tradition. However, social media displays a proclivity for denigration and dismissal that rules out empathetic disagreement. In contrast, redemptive reading offers critique as an expression of well-wishing when carried out in humility born from the self-awareness of one's own shortcomings and biases.

### **The Mutual Mediation of Empathy and Critique**

Paul Lakeland identifies the twin intellectual virtues of critique and empathy as fundamental to the pursuit of academic excellence in church-related universities.<sup>23</sup> While critique abounds in the university, empathy is equally significant but often missing. For Lakeland, empathy is the first moment in a broadly phenomenological approach to academic inquiry. "The inquirer as *bricoleur* must let the object of inquiry show itself as it is."<sup>24</sup> The context-dependency

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<sup>21</sup> Jeff B. Pool, "No Entrance into Truth Except Through Love: Contributions from Augustine of Hippo to a Contemporary Christian Hermeneutics of Love," *Review and Expositor*, 101 (Fall 2004): 629-66.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 33, a. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Lakeland, "The Habit of Empathy: Postmodernity and the Future of the Church-Related College," in *Professing in the Postmodern Academy: Faculty and the Future of Church-Related Colleges*, ed. Stephen R. Haynes, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 33-48.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

and historical awareness of knowledge in postmodernity has overruled the Kantian transcendental subject as neutral and omnipotent, but ever situated and limited. The habit of empathy precludes premature judgment that places the object of inquiry in a preapproved taxonomy, system, or metanarrative. Lakeland explains:

While eschewing sentimentality, the inquirer must in a real way *love* the object of inquiry; what is to be studied must be respected, allowed, as it were, to be itself. Only when this happens is there at least a fighting chance that critique or analysis will in fact reach the object of inquiry and not remain within the labyrinth of the inquirer's mental pathways. Empathy, in other words, is profoundly practical.<sup>25</sup>

The essential precondition for genuine encounter is a willingness to listen while resisting the temptation to immediately locate what is said within one's own frame of reference or worldview. Lakeland adds that a habit of empathy is well suited for negotiating the mandate of religious ecumenism while remaining a witness to commitment of a particular religious perspective in the face of a postmodern tendency towards relativism and indifference. In friendship we imagine the other's good as our own; this exercise of empathy helps set the conditions for the possibility of authentic conversations. The etymology of empathy indicates a "feeling with" that crosses over to "be with" the other as the other simply "is." The mutual mediation of critique and empathy in Lakeland's account of faith-based higher education further enriches a description of redemptive reading.

### **Redemptive Reading as Witness in the Academy**

Redemptive reading is a hermeneutical habit practicing well-wishing, empathy, and critical judgment. It draws upon the monastic ideal integrating knowledge and love. The social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* states: "Charity does not exclude knowledge, but rather requires, promotes, and animates it from within. Knowledge is never purely the work of the intellect... Intelligence and love are not in separate compartments: love is rich in intelligence and intelligence is full of love."<sup>26</sup> Theological educators engaged in redemptive reading provide hopeful witness to an alternative to "academic reading" dominating North Atlantic higher education today.<sup>27</sup>

The standard mode of reading takes its cue from Max Weber's famous address "*Wissenschaft als Beruf*" (Academics as Vocation) delivered in 1918 at Munich University.<sup>28</sup> This lecture remains the *locus classicus* for understanding the academic vocation in our day. Weber spoke of "the fate of our time" which "is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and above all, by the *disenchantment of the world*."<sup>29</sup> The process of rationalization advanced by academic life meant that we could "in principle master all things by calculation."<sup>30</sup> In this light, ideal academic readers are technicians who have mastered the necessary linguistic skills to read what is before them. They prefer to work with the bounded and fixed text before them as an authoritative object to be mastered. "The printed text, designed as it is for easy and repeated reference, lies passively on the desk as a permanent possibility of rereading. The reader-technician flicks the pages back and forth to find in it what will serve her

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>26</sup> *Caritas in Veritate* 30, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html)

<sup>27</sup> I am employing Paul Griffith's description of "academic reading" in "Reading as a Spiritual Discipline," 36-40.

<sup>28</sup> Max Weber, "Science as Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 129-56.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 139.

purposes as she reads and refers, using her technical tools to find what she needs.”<sup>31</sup> The academic reader values speed and clarity above all.

The relation established in this mode of reading is the reader as the agent and the text as the patient. “The text lies supine before the reader, awaiting the exercise of intention and desire that only the reader can bring.”<sup>32</sup> The book as an object becomes irrelevant once the act of reading is exhausted. At that point, the book is returned to the shelf. Moreover, the work read bears no implications on the life of the reader. Academic readers are solely focused on what can be mastered and understood by technical means. For Weber, the academic specialist renounces friendship-informed collaboration in the name of the academic’s solitary vocation. The academic reader, therefore, reads alone with the text in solitude.

Weber linked the notion of formal rationality to the doctrine of moral and religious relativism. He barred the academy from examining ultimate questions, because there is no academic justification for an answer to such questioning. Academic reading does not lead to God, beauty, happiness, or moral transformation. Academic readers must not adopt a position on value. In fact, to do so is to abandon their craft. The end of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* depicts the personality of the worldly ascetic: “For the last state of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: ‘Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart.’”

It should be clear by now that redemptive reading presents a prophetic alternative to the dominant Weberian model of academic reading. As hermeneutical, redemptive reading adverts to the educator’s basic existential stance when encountering the text. Fred Lawrence remarks: “What I *do* as a matter of fact when I read, understand, interpret, translate, etc. is intimately bound up with what I *am*.”<sup>33</sup> The central issue of theological education, then, is the theologian’s authenticity – which is not a theological skill to be mastered, but the product of ongoing intellectual, moral and religious conversion.<sup>34</sup> “In the end, knowing, like loving, is a kind of self-surrender, where the quality of the surrender cannot be disengaged from the quality of the self.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, theological education is a way of life – even while reading texts.

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<sup>31</sup> Griffiths, “Reading as a Spiritual Discipline,” 38.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Frederick Lawrence, “Method and Theology as Hermeneutical,” in *Creativity and Method: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Matthew Lamb (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1981), 79-104, at 101.

<sup>34</sup> Walter E. Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Press, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy D. Wilkins, ‘Our Conversation is in Heaven’: Conversation and/as Conversion in the Thought of Frederick Lawrence” in *Grace and Friendship*, 319-353, at 321.

## **When Critical Pedagogy and Engaged Spirituality Meet: Generating and Sustaining Hope for Social Change**

### **Abstract**

Hope as hopping in expectation involves both external and internal actions of those who hope for a better world. Changing hopeless conditions can generate hope, but staying hopeful in hopeless situations requires more than external changes. It calls for a pedagogy that nurtures both spiritual strength and social change. This paper explores a pedagogy of hope by intersecting critical pedagogy, philosophy and praxis of education that seeks deployment of emancipatory knowledge, and engaged spirituality that nurtures people in their deepest sense to enable them to engage in social justice actions.

### **I. Introduction**

How one can stay in anti-oppression work while one is being discriminated against due to one's race, religion, sex, economic status, gender identity, and other forms of oppression? How one can sustain hope for oneself and generate it for others at the same time? These are the questions that many of my students and I have wrestled together in my Spiritual Formation for Leadership class and the Changemaker Fellowship Program, a year-long tuition free program for social change agents that I direct at my own institution. Particularly the changemaker fellows, who come from various NGOs, healthcare services, legal communities, higher education, high-tech industries, and other social justice sectors and plan to go back to their work with hopefully deepened spiritual and theological foundations for their work, challenge traditional seminary students in the class how they as spiritual leaders will not only generate hope but also sustain hope in many hopeless situations. These questions and challenges from my fellows when juxtaposed with grim statistics that 35-40% of ministers leave the ministry within the first five years due to burn-out and the feeling of hopelessness (Helopoulos 2015, 201) command religious education scholars and practitioners to be more explicit and intentional about the formational and transformational dimension of our work and the discipline. Sustaining hope when life and the world seem hopeless requires spiritual depth and strength of those who engage in generating hope for others. In other words, a pedagogy that generates and sustains hope invites religious educators to think deeply about spiritual formation as a core nature of our discipline and practice.

This paper explores a pedagogy of hope that nurtures both spiritual strength and social change actions by intersecting critical pedagogy and engaged spirituality. Specifically, using my own teaching context/class as a case in which we try to foster spiritually rooted leadership for social change, I will present the contents and the format of the class based on engaged spirituality framed in critical pedagogy, and my learnings from teaching this class that may offer insights for other contexts.

### **II. Engaged Spirituality for Generating and Sustaining Hope**

#### *A Teaching Context for Engaged Spirituality*

Every fall I teach a class called Spiritual Formation for Leadership, a required class for entering students in M.Div., CMF (Changemaker Fellowship), CSSC (Certificate in Spiritual and Social Change) and MAST (MA in Social Transformation) programs at Pacific School of

Religion in Berkeley, CA. I have about forty-five students in the class every year who come from over twenty different religious backgrounds including various Christian denominations, Judaism, Muslim, Buddhism, various New Thoughts, diverse Pagan traditions, Native/Indigenous spiritual traditions, as well as students without any religious affiliations. About sixty percent of the class identify themselves as members of LGBTQ communities, and racial/ethnic minority students make up about forty percent of the enrolled students. The ratio of M.Div. and other degree students (CSSC and MAST) are almost equal. About fifty percent of the enrolled students come from various NGOs, healthcare services, legal communities, higher education, high-tech industries, and others, and the majority of them plan to go back to the same work place with hopefully deepened theological and spiritual foundations. Despite their widely different religious and work backgrounds, all of these students express their deep commitments to social justice, and want to pursue it from spiritual/theological perspectives in their various contexts.

The purpose of the class is to help students to critically reflect on the meaning and nature of spiritually and theologically rooted social transformation and to develop their own leadership through rigorous academic studies and spiritual practices to sustain them as a person and a leader, i.e. a generator and sustainer of hope. However, the challenge is that as the student body represents such diverse backgrounds, their views of spirituality and social justice are as various as the students themselves. These diverse views make this class very exciting and generative as it opens new and constructive ways for each student to think about their spiritual leadership for social change. At the same time, I have learned that the diversity of the class sometimes causes tensions and conflicts that resemble many of their ministry and social justice work contexts. One of the tensions is their different understandings of spirituality. Some students, who come with psychological, physical and spiritual burn-outs from their social justice activism and ministries, expect to have silent meditation/retreat types of classes, and thus sometimes expressing their complaints about rigorous readings and lectures that lead to anti-oppression conversations and actions. They often say that they know how to do anti-oppression work, and thus they are at PSR for spiritual renewal through meditations and self-care. Other students, who associate spiritual practices with retreating from urgent justice work, resist to engage with certain practices that are not explicitly related to their view of anti-oppression work. These contradictory expectations and needs at times hinder them from engaging in courageous and authentic engagements with one another. To challenge and meet these different needs of my students at the same time, I frame the course according to two primary approaches: engaged spirituality and critical pedagogy.

### *Engaged Spirituality: A Root of Hope*

Engaged Spirituality, a concept borrowed from Thich Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism, is spirituality that nurtures people in their deepest sense and enables them to engage in social justice activities to move the world toward peace, justice, compassion and wholeness. It is a spirituality that deepens individual's well-being, and connects personal with social/structural issues for the greater good. It does not see spirituality and liberation as either-or, but both-and as "it involves living a dual engagement: engaging with those resources that provide spiritual nurture *and* engaging with the world through acts of compassion and justice" (Parachin 1999, 2). Although the concept was popularized by Thich Nhat Hanh, it has also long root in Christian spirituality.

Despite their commitment to different social justice causes, to some of my students, who equate spirituality or contemplation with silent meditation, this is a new and at times challenging concept, especially when the class presents race conversation as a spiritual practice. In most of the Western world, presuming silence and solitude as a necessary condition for contemplative spirituality comes from the long-lived history of Western Christianity and its practices. For example, Cynthia Bourgeault (2004), a popular leader of centering prayer defines contemplative prayer as “a wordless, trusting opening of self to the divine presence” (5), and declares that “silence is the normal context in which contemplative prayer takes place” (7). Standing in the long line of Western Christian contemplation tradition, Bourgeault presents that contemplation is kith and kin to silence and quiet meditation. That is, by extinguishing external noises through retreating from the necessity of mundane living, she along with other contemplative prayer leaders guide that we can return to life and work with renewed body and spirit.

This silence based approach to spiritual practices is a necessary condition for most Western Christian spiritual practices such as Prayer of Examen, Lectio Divina, Four-Stranded Garland Prayer, Contemplative Listening, Christian Guided Meditation and Imagination, and etc. Practical guide books for these prayer practices exclusively suggest practitioners to prepare themselves with silence to quiet their minds before moving on with a particular practice they are about to engage. By finding a physically quiet place, closing one’s eyes, engaging in a breathing exercise, and/or imagining oneself to be in a serene nature, practitioners are asked to calm themselves before doing a contemplative spiritual practice through which they hope to encounter the Divine.

In regard to silence being the prerequisite for contemplation, Barbara Holmes, a womanist theologian observes that it is a very Eurocentric understanding of Christian spirituality. She argues that in African American churches contemplation includes, but does not require silence. “Instead contemplative practices can be identified in public prayers, meditative dance movements, and musical cues that move the entire congregation toward a communal listening and entry into communion with a living God” (42). But in Eurocentric contexts contemplation and silence are believed to be synonymous. Contemplation as silence is a much narrower view than the original meaning of the Christian contemplation of the Early Church, particularly the desert spirituality (Holmes, 32-38). Defining contemplation as “an attentiveness of spirit that shifts the seeker from an ordinary reality to the *basileia* of God” (43), Holmes broadens the scope of contemplation beyond silent meditative practices that often require practitioners to carve out time from life’s multiple demands.

Encountered by God’s spirit through interactive spiritual practices, the community then is called to engage in God’s reign building work on earth through contemplative witness: standing for justice, creating a beloved community, acts of mercy, fighting against unjust power, and prophetic proclamation and action, etc. Holmes argues that what Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and many other justice movement activists practiced were contemplative witnesses (Holmes, 138). In other words, contemplation charges people to be in the world to create God’s reign where justice and peace for all people flourish. Regarding this, James Noel, a scholar of African American Christianity says that there is no contradiction between contemplation and social action in African American spirituality (Noel 1988, 25).

Contemplation as a companion of social justice in and for the world is in line with the meaning of spirituality defined by liberation theologians - Dorothee Soelle (2001), Robert McAfee Brown (1988), and Gustavo Gutiérrez (2011). Brown asserts that spirituality and liberation are “two ways of talking about the same thing, so that there is no necessity, or even a

possibility, of making a choice between them” (Brown 1988, 18). Janet Parachin (1999) and Joseph Nangle (2008) respectively call contemplation that does social justice action Engaged Spirituality. Nangle sums up the meaning of contemplation as “to see all reality through the eyes of the Creator and to love the world as God loves it” (45) or looking “at reality, especially the great – and small-struggles for human liberation, from God’s perspective, seeing possibilities where others might not” (47).

Holmes also argues that contemplation as engaged spirituality is much closer to the original meaning of contemplation credited to the desert elders of North Africa than the one exclusively associated with silent solitude (Holmes, 27; Battle 2011, 523). The desert elders retreated to the wilderness to live ascetically, fighting against the devil that was believed to rule over the dead buried there. However, it did not take a long for them to realize the necessity of communal living to keep their psychological and spiritual sanity, and thus formed monasteries and spiritual communities. To these communities pilgrims from the city came for prayers and spiritual advice, and then returned to their life in the city. This rhythm of retreat and return was a critical part of the desert spirituality, and its nature was communal, anti-imperial against Roman Empire, and not necessarily silent but expressed through diverse communal contemplative practices (Holmes, 34; Battle, 522-526; Stewart 2011, 86-87). Their contemplative prayers happened in all arenas of their lives where God also acts – intrapersonal, interpersonal, natural/cosmos/environmental, and systematic/structural arenas of human living (Driskill 2006, 82-83; Libert 2005, 125-146) and in various forms.

Holmes observes that the above communal spirituality of the desert elders started changing in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the presumption that “the contemplative life was reserved for professional clerics or solitary individuals gifted by God in intensely mystical ways” (36). As the Western European Christianity became the dominant power along with colonialism, its view of contemplation as silent meditation became the norm as well. Eurocentric Christianity’s equation of contemplation with silence, Holmes further asserts, has been a reason for many African American Christians’ refusal to embrace silent forms of contemplative practices. As a survival mechanism from colonialism, racism and other forms of systematic oppressions the oppressed intentionally disengage with meditative and reflective practices that can evoke traumatic memories and consciousness they have stowed away (Holmes, 30). Rather, they find coping mechanisms in interactive and out-spoken contemplative practices such as shouting, singing, clapping, or dancing that give them a voice and outlet.

All of these suggest two main things: 1) nurturing one’s spiritual well-being can include but does not have to be in solitude and silence. Pedagogically, it means that offering diverse contemplative spiritual practices – both quiet and not quiet ones is important for students with different needs and ways of spiritual engagement; 2) separating spirituality from social justice actions are partial and false; Supporting my students’ needs, namely, healing from burn-outs and renewal for continuous social justice ministries and activism, requires a curriculum that is well-balanced between personal and structural pursuit for compassion and justice. Engaged spirituality invites my students to look contemplatively at the reality of our world and their own life and leadership in it the way God would look at.

### **III. Critical Pedagogy for Teaching Engaged Spirituality**

How my teaching can help my students to nurture and deepen their personal spirituality on which their vision, commitments to social justice, communal connections, and compassion for human beings and the world are generated and sustained? How can spirituality, which helps

people connect with their deepest self and God, can be taught so that they become leaders for social justice, be taught? I find critical pedagogy, particularly Freirean critical pedagogy to be a kith and kin to engaged spirituality.

Critical pedagogy which developed out of critical theory (Kincheloe and Steinburg 1997, 24) seeks to humanize and liberate learners through emancipatory educational process and knowledge deployment. As critical theory is concerned with a just society where the oppressed are liberated, and thus have full political, economic, and cultural freedom, critical pedagogy tries to empower learners to be agents to create such a society. It sees that education is not a value-free activity in which learners are passive recipients of information presented as objective knowledge and truth, but is a political and moral activity whose goal is freedom, equality and emancipation of the oppressed. In other words, it has a twofold goal: 1) to analyze and illuminate how traditional education embodies values of the powerful of the society and the social ordering to serve their interests (Giroux 2011, 6); 2) to help learners “develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action” (Giroux, 2010).

The best way to achieve these goals is an emancipatory teaching-learning praxis. In critical pedagogy learners are no longer objects of education, but subjects of their own emancipation whose life contexts and experiences become critical starting point of their learning. Through critically reflecting on and analyzing their own realities, learners learn to think critically and systematically to improve their life conditions so that they can take necessary actions to build a more just and equitable life conditions for themselves and others. For this kind of education, Paulo Freire, a leading voice in critical pedagogy, emphasizes consciousness raising or conscientization as a fundamental basis of education (Freire and Macedo, 2000). He defines conscientization as:

the process in which men[sic], not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives, and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it" (1970b, 27)

For this, he proposes problem-posing education that questions problematic issues in learners' lives, especially oppressive social phenomena through dialogical inquiry between the teacher and learners, and among learners who would systematically analyze identified problems, and find constructive action plans for change as a learning community (1970a, 71-86). Critical consciousness, in other words, is raised through a continuous dialectical and praxis-oriented process in a communal learning context: unlearning, learning, and relearning. This dialectical process aims to disrupt unequal and oppressive power dynamics in class, race, gender, sexuality, gender identity, and other hegemonic curricula hidden in scholarship, in schools, and in the larger society beyond the classroom (Leonard 2009, 19; Apple 2004, 77-98).

#### *Freirean Pedagogical Methods*

Although Henry Giroux emphasize that critical pedagogy is not a teaching method, but a way of thinking and a mode of intervention (2010), in the following section I will briefly describe Paulo Freire's literacy teaching methods for two reasons: 1) to explore further the actual pedagogical dimension of critical pedagogy; 2) to gain insights for teaching engaged spirituality in my own teaching context.

In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970a) Freire documents his own failure and transformative experiences of teaching: from teaching Portuguese using traditional teaching methods to employing methods relevant to the peasants' desires to improve their lives; from telling them what to memorize to helping small groups to struggle together for mastery; from teaching in a culture of unquestioning assumptions to empowering the peasants to generate for hope and action for their own lives. He presents specific teaching methods he developed and used for literacy training in *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974). His literacy training methods have four phases:

1. The first phase is the study of the context of his learners by spending an extended period of time in their communities, participating in informal conversations with residents, observing their culture, and listening to their life stories, and identifying community's key and recurring words and themes to be used in teaching.
2. In the second phase, the teaching team chose "generative words" from their collected vocabulary lists that would later be used to help students develop elementary skills in decoding and encoding print. Freire believed that generative words should have emotional attachments to learners that evoke their unjust social, cultural, and political living condition.
3. In the third phase, generative words with emotional provocation were presented in the form of drawings of familiar scenes in the life of the community. Each scene depicted conflicts found within the community for students to recognize, analyze, and attempt to resolve as a group. In the course of problem solving depicted in the picture, learners would "name" the embedded generative words, giving teachers the raw material for developing reading and writing exercises.
4. At the final phase learners worked with a discovery card contained a generative word separated into its component syllables, giving learners the opportunity to recombine syllables to form other words in their vocabulary.

These four phased process clearly show critical pedagogy's educational philosophy, particularly the process of conscientization. It starts with getting to know learners' life circumstances, and the learning process and materials are closely related to learners' reality. It is also a communal. Through a communal learning process learners are encouraged to be co-teachers and learners to one another, and find a solution for their community while implicitly learning how to read. This learning process is also very political. It challenges learners to ask whys behind their reality, and to imagine and find ways to build a more just world.

I am particularly drawn to the Freirean pedagogy for teaching engaged spirituality in my current contexts due to following reasons. First, as it emphasizes students' own experiences and current contexts as the starting point of education, it can help my students to bring forth their spiritual needs, and find ways to nurture their spiritual leadership for social change in conversation with rigorous studies and healing practices of engaged spirituality.

Second, Freirean pedagogy also highlights the purpose of education is helping students critically assess the world they live in, paying attention to power dynamics and dominant ideological assumptions, and find their role for creating an alternative world. Many of my students come from various social justice activism and ministries often with wounded and burn-out experiences. They tend to be suspicious of anything appear to be mainstream ideologies. For them, starting with their own experiences will help them to ease into the course which will

lead them to critically analyze their own assumptions as well as their experiences with the dominant society. Freirean pedagogy will be also helpful for students relatively new to critical thinking as the starting point is their own life world.

Third, Freirean pedagogy is highly communal. Learners are challenged to identify and solve problems together as a learning community. A new and emancipatory knowledge is generated through a communal process. This is a critical element for my students to learn. Those students who come from dominant cultural contexts, despite their lived experiences of discrimination, tend to be very individualistic in their pursuit of spiritual nurture. They are most likely to focus on their own wounds and healing from them alone, ignoring their privileges that can harm others. Other students, who have worked at small non-profits as a solo program developer and executer, at times implicitly and explicitly bypass the communal problem solving process.

With these and other compelling reasons, I have designed a class on spiritual formation for leadership in a critical pedagogy framework, and below is a description of the class. As a format to embody the Freirean method in my particular class, I utilize a participatory observation method.

#### **IV. Putting Engaged Spirituality and Critical Pedagogy Together: A Praxis of Generating and Sustaining Hope at a Theological Classroom**

With students with diverse backgrounds in every possible sense as described earlier in the paper, it is important for me and my students to co-create a culture of collaborative learning. For this purpose, I start the class with an invitation to students to briefly share “what nurtures their spirit?” as a part of their self-introduction on the first day of the class. Building on what they share, I introduce a broad definition of engaged spirituality, one that I integrated from the work of Sandra Schneiders (1998), Joseph Driskill (1999), and Barbara Holmes (2004): The study of spirituality is concerned with the lived experience of faith, the communities which nurture it, the practices which sustain it, and the moral life which embodies it. In other words, spirituality is concerned with all of life as it is lived and experienced by believers- their beliefs, ethical stands, actions, motivations, historical context, social location and all other salient influences on the lived experiences of one’s faith in a community. This operating definition helps me to introduce the reasons for studying spirituality for social change through a layered participant observation method that the class is engaging throughout the semester. The following reasons are provided in the first two class sessions:

- 1) To understand the tradition(s) that have shaped us;
- 2) To explore spirituality of others in a way to be fair and just to them;
- 3) To understand issues of our world more deeply as most of injustices in our world are intersected with oppressive theologies and spiritualities of dominant groups;
- 4) To provide leadership for spiritual communities;
- 5) To nurture/ deepen our own spirituality.

As a way to study-practice engaged spirituality through a Freirean critical pedagogy, the following class assignments are required of the students in addition to engaging with lectures, reading discussions (first hour of the class), learning/practicing a Christian contemplative practice (second hour of the class) and being in a covenant group with a leader (third hour of the class):

- Reflection Paper on the Spirituality of One’s Own (Faith) Community;
- Learning About a Social Justice Site as a Covenant Group through literature and available written/online materials – the sites are selected by the instructor and the director of Contextual Learning Office (DCLO) after reviewing each student’s application profile during the summer before semester begins;
- Research Paper on the engaged spirituality of a leader(s) related to the student’s field of ministry to explore how the leader’s spirituality is forming and informing his/her/their leadership, and developing student’s own definition of engaged spirituality for his/her/their social justice ministries;
- Site visit for three hours as a group, and spending extra nine hours as a group or an individual for follow-up observations, interviews and/or engagements;
- Observation Paper on the Engaged Spirituality of the Observed Site;
- Teaching Project on Engaged Spirituality utilizing a particular spiritual practice to enhance social justice awareness/commitment to a chosen audience of each student. The teaching should be executed before submitting the paper, and thus include their post-teaching reflections that incorporate their participants’ feedback on the program, their learning experience and the instructor’s teaching leadership.

***Engaged Spirituality Through Freirean Critical Pedagogy***

**Step 1**

Through above assignments students gradually learn about the participant observation method that is similar to the phase 1 of Freire’s literacy training method. Before they write their first paper, Reflection Paper on the Spirituality of One’s Own Community, I introduce them to the basic method of participatory observation as a way to frame their paper: Description-Analysis-Evaluation-Response (4-Step Guideline). This paper has a dual purpose: 1) to provide an opportunity for students to do a critical assessment on how their own faith community has shaped their view of spirituality so that they can see their own theological/spiritual assumptions and biases; 2) to help them learn and practice “objective”, unbiased and ethical observation methods. In their first paper in seminary most students tend to write very passionate, evaluative and judgmental paper on their own community, and thus I find myself spending a substantive amount of time on commenting on their papers with further explanations about the above 4-step paper guideline, and also repeat the guidelines in the class. The table below is taken from the syllabus where I explain each component of their paper (i.e. observation method).

<b>Description</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>	<b>Response</b>
The student provides a <u>thick description</u> of what s/he/they observed: you clearly and respectfully describe what you observed without making judgmental statements, and let	The student provides careful analysis of the observed community’s distinctive spirituality <u>in its own context</u> to understand why and how that community does what it does: you support your	The student provides thoughtful and thorough theological-socio-cultural evaluations (theology, race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc.) of the observed community’s	The student offers an emerging nature, distinction, or pattern of the observed community’s spirituality, and make constructive suggestions and comments to the observed community

the observed community speak for itself. During your visit, try to take field notes describing what you see, hear, feel, notice including physical environments, and feel free to quote your notes in the paper.	analysis with the community's available resources such as the webpage, historical document, etc.	distinctive spirituality with supportive literature. Here you bring your previous training from different disciplines and experiences to make some evaluations on what you have observed.	whether/how the community is observing engaged spirituality or not. The student also makes critical reflections on her/his/their learnings from this observation for her/his/their own current and future ministry contexts and spiritual leadership for social change.
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**Analysis vs. Evaluation**

**Analysis** – understanding a community's distinctive features in its own context: Why they do certain things the way they do. What are some of its historical and cultural backgrounds? A Historical moment in their history for that?

**Evaluation** – Reviewing a community's features in a broader context as you analyze their life together through a macro lens using supportive literature.

**For example**, you can Analyze a community's worship by saying that because of certain experiences in the past, they do not seem to have visible women's leadership in the worship.

**VS.**

Evaluation – you can say that although the community says that they welcome and affirm everyone's gifts, the invisibility of women's leadership is problematic given their...

According to feminist theologian Boyung Lee, such behavior is shown in...

Obviously these components are a very condensed version of the participatory observation method without being in the field, but the idea is to help students to learn the importance of paying attention/listening, and thick description, starting with their own community that they think they know well. This exercise also surprises some students as they start noticing things they have never noticed before, which also have positively and negatively shaped their own spirituality.

**Step 2**

This initial introduction to participatory observation is expanded further through two others ways. First, a social justice ministry/activism site is assigned to each covenant group that has about eight students, and as a group they need to research about the site through available literature and online materials first, and visit later as a group for observation and interviews to understand how spirituality for social transformation is at work in the assigned site. Last fall four sites were chosen by the instructor and the Director of Contextual Learning Office (DCLO) of PSR after reviewing each student's application files. The sites are ones that PSR has either long-term relationships or ones that PSR is cultivating new partnerships:

- The Health Reform Forum of the Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland in partnership with Alameda County Health Department;

- Urban Adamah, a Berkeley based educational farm and community center that integrates Jewish tradition, sustainable agriculture, mindfulness and social action;
- CultureStrike, an arts-based social justice strategy hub particularly for migrant artists, women artists and artists of color to create alternative narratives and culture change;
- Berkeley or Oakland City Council, the legislative body that governs the city with a reputation of being a most progressive legislative body in the country;
- First Congregational Church of Berkeley, a typical mainline congregation with the majority white members and progressive theology.

In each covenant group students with their group leader are expected to help one another to gain as much information as possible about their site, and its mission, history, work and spirituality.

While they are learning about the site, they are introduced to some of the markers of Engaged Spirituality embodied in the life of social justice leaders through one of the text books, *Engaged Spirituality: Ten Lives of Contemplation and Action* by Janet Parachin (Howard Thurman, Simon Weil, Elie Wiesel, Marian Wright Edelman, Thich Nhat Hanh, Rigoberta Menchú, Vine Deloria, Jr., Joanna Macy, Rabindranath Tagore, and Dorothy Day). The class also offers sessions on African American Spirituality focusing on race, diverse spiritual practices from the global south focusing on communal and liberation spirituality, Kingian Nonviolence Principles, Courageous Conversations on Race as a spiritual practice, as well as traditional Protestant spirituality and contemplative practices. These topics, designed to invite my students to reflect on what it means to be a spiritually and theologically rooted leader for social change, also provide opportunities for them to communally and individually generate markers and natures of engaged spirituality, ones they may or may not utilize for interpretation of their observation at their site.

For the mid-term project each student is required to write a research paper about a social justice leader in the field of their ministry interests – a public figure or an individual whom they know. In this paper students explore how the chosen leader’s spirituality is forming and informing his/her/their leadership, and then identify the characteristics of this leader’s engaged spirituality as well as students’ own learnings from the identified engaged spirituality for their own leadership. Their own definitions of engaged spirituality would later serve as another lens for analysis and interpretation of their site observation. Like the first reflection paper, students are asked to follow the Description-Analysis-Evaluation-Response framework, but this time their description and analysis should have more depth. As a preparation for this paper and the coming site visit, I give more explicit instructions on the 4-step framework, particularly differentiating observation and interpretation. I also lecture on methods of interviews, how to generate open-ended interview questions from observations, and ways to conduct focus groups (in this introductory class, students seldom move to this stage though). These are introduced not only as methods for site visit, but also ways to conduct needs assessments for their final teaching project, and in their ministry and social justice work contexts where many of them develop curricula for diverse groups and for leadership training from theological/spiritual perspectives.

### Step 3

In early November a regular class session is canceled. Instead each covenant group is on their assigned site for a minimum of three hours initially, and each student is required to spend nine additional hours after the visit for further observations, interviews and other activities before they turn in their observation paper in early December. All the logistics for each group’s visit

including the time of visit and invited activities they can participate while on the site are handled by each group via their group leader after the initial contacts that instructor and the DOCL make. Before their visit each group is required to create their ethical behavior covenant on the site, and review ways for participatory observation provided by my lecture and handouts. Usually when my students are on their site, a host(s) gives them an introduction, invites them to participate in certain routine activities (negotiated with me and the DCLO in advance), and allow them to spend some unstructured time for observations and interactions with other regular participants. Typically, the site visit ends with a community gathering time when my students can ask questions from their visit to the host and/or regular participants. After the site visit each group is required to meet to debrief, to compare their field notes, and to generate follow-up questions and action plans – whether they want to organize another group visit or individual visit for further observations and interviews.

After wrapping up the total of twelve hours of site visits, students submit their observation paper (expected to be) fully utilizing their pre-visit research, initial and follow-up visits/interviews as well as their field notes. Again they are asked to frame their paper with the Description, Analysis, Evaluation and Response format. In terms of content, the students are first required to describe what they have observed in detail, and then analyze how engaged spirituality is at work in that site by interpreting its characteristics, patterns, and embodiment utilizing what they have studied in the class about engaged spirituality. The students are also expected to provide their in-depth reflections on what it means to create a community of engaged spirituality based on their participant observations, and what new insights they have gained about their own spirituality and leadership.

#### **Step 4**

As a final project where the students bring everything they have learned in the class, they create a teaching project for a group of people of their choice (non-class members) to help increase their awareness of social justice grounded in spirituality. For this they have to incorporate a spiritual practice they have experienced either in the class or in their covenant group. This project is an exercise for the students to think further about how to bring both participant observation and engaged spirituality into their ministry and activism because the paper assignment requires the students to provide the assessed needs of their participants through listening, research, observation, and other methods. In other words, the students should show why the chosen topic (what) and process of teaching (how) of their teaching project are meeting the needs of their participants, beyond what they feel passionate and comfortable to teach. The critical importance of listening to people and contexts in pastoral and social justice ministries is reiterated in this final project.

#### **V. For Further Learning...**

While designing and teaching this class for over a decade I realize again and again the importance of the format and contents of our teaching needing to be in sync. Engaged spirituality that nurtures one's spirituality for social justice actions cannot be taught by books and lectures alone. Students need to be able to reflect on their own spiritual and intellectual needs, find ways to nurture them in a community, and explore ways to bring their nurtured soul into the leadership to create a more just world. In other words, they cannot generate hope for the hopeless world without having and sustaining hope within themselves. As our world experiences more serious violence every day, the role of religious education that brings information,

formation and transformation of people and community together is even more critical. Although teaching through engaged spirituality and critical pedagogy requires so much more work of the instructor to identify students' contexts and needs where teaching and learning begins, I find it very fulfilling teaching experience that lets me to practice my own engaged spirituality and pedagogy. Above all, religious education is both a spiritual and pedagogical activity as we lead people out (*e-ducere*), anchoring (*religare*) in God.

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## **How We Get Somewhere Religiously: Deconstruction, Deconversion and Religious Education Today**

### Abstract

Engaging the work of Robert Kegan, Mary C. Boys, and John Caputo, this essay explores the demands of postmodernity and asks whether disaffiliation, or more accurately deconversion, is becoming one possible outcome of successful religious education forming a more mature religious consciousness. Kegan's constructive-developmental theory provides a frame for developing contemporary maturity. Boys presents a pedagogy built on the presence of religious difference that triggers deconstruction of religious teachings on behalf of that encounter. Caputo argues this type of critical questioning of what has become fixed religiously represents a truer religious effort. The constellation of these developmental, philosophical and religious educational theories suggests deconversion studies might offer significant theological and practical material for reflection on how we get somewhere religiously.

*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good. ~ 1 Thess 5:19-21*

The words of the first epistle to the Thessalonians articulate a deconstructive process integral to religious life and learning, and suggest a more fluid and contested notion of tradition. The early Christian letter admonishes resistance to the implied movement due to its Spiritual origin. Christian tradition is not a static deposit reproduced again and again. It is, and has been, a responsive historical process inspired, we believe, by God's activity in the world. From the mendicants and the Reformation to liberation theology and the 12-Step Movement, persons and groups drive the traditioning process by choosing what is essential and nonessential in religious practice and identity, often in contradiction to authoritative teaching. Tradition develops as its members respond to the world they live in. The thesis of this brief paper is that the teaching-learning relationship in the present dynamic context of increasing religious disaffiliation in the United States presents an interesting window into how we might be getting somewhere religiously.

This study is, by and large, a reflection on this normatively problematic movement in the hope of prompting more than a narrative of loss in religious education discourse. Could there be something good happening here? Engaging the work of Robert Kegan, Mary C. Boys, and John Caputo, this essay explores the developmental demands of postmodernity and asks whether disaffiliation, or more accurately deconversion,<sup>1</sup> is

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<sup>1</sup> Deconversion theory employs the more affirming lens of conversion to disaffiliation and argues it can be a similar reflective process of learning and changing of one's practices and beliefs. See John Barbour,

becoming one possible outcome of successful religious education due to the responsive practices of effective teachers that attempt to form a more mature religious consciousness for the present day.

Kegan's constructive-developmental framework provides new understanding of contemporary maturity (1994). Boys provides pedagogy built on the presence of religious difference that alters Christian self-understanding by triggering a deconstruction of religious teachings on behalf of that encounter (Boys, 2000; Boys and Lee, 2006). Caputo suggests this type of critical questioning of what has become fixed religiously represents a truer religious effort (2007). The intersection of these theories begs the question, might educators who encourage critical thinking and engage religious difference be loosening the expectation of affiliation?

## Leaving Religion

According to a number of recent studies, "the nones" represent 23% of the adult population in the United States. This number has more than doubled since the 1980's.<sup>2</sup> The majority of these agnostics, atheists and "nothing in particulars" (78%) were raised within a specific religion before discerning to leave it (Pew, 2016). While there are understandably increasing numbers of studies investigating the rise of the nones, many focus on why they have rejected religion and characterize the choice negatively. Notable exceptions explore what disaffiliates have come to believe and practice.<sup>3</sup> What these studies indicate is that the lives of many contemporary adults call into question the assumption that it is "bad" to leave religion. Rather than characterizing disaffiliation from religious communities as a negative, secularizing, and shallow trend,<sup>4</sup> careful examination of the lives of contemporary adults shows that their religious lives are more complicated than these assessments suggest.

Robert Kegan characterizes these shifts in the once provincial religious landscape and other new cultural demands as educational curriculum that teaches toward more appropriate maturity. The systems within which people live, move and construct their meaning develop and change over time, just as individuals ideally do. The evolving self develops more complex and integrative orders of consciousness required in each new age by contending with evolving cultural circumstances. According to Kegan, the greatest

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*Versions of Deconversion: Autobiography and the Loss of Faith*, (University Press of Virginia, 1994). Janet Jacobs first picked up the term "deconversion" from an unpublished 1981 doctoral dissertation by L. Norman Skonovd. See Janet Liebman Jacobs, *Divine Disenchantment: Deconverting from New Religions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). See also Jacobs, "Deconversion from Religious Movements," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (1987): 294–307; L. Norman Skonovd, "Apostasy: The Process of Defection from Religious Totalism" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 1981), 182.

<sup>2</sup> From 1980 to 2000 to the 2000's the percentage jumped from 7.1% unaffiliated to 15.3% This 8.2 percentage point leap represents 25 million people. (A.B. Downey 2014, March 21)

<sup>3</sup> Frank Pasquale's study, *A Portrait of Secular Group Affiliates*, Phil Zuckerman's *Faith No More* and the ongoing study by Tom Beaudoin and Patrick Hornbeck on *Deconversion and Catholic Multiplicity* represent three such exceptions (Pasquale, 2010; Zuckerman, 2011; Beaudoin & Hornbeck, 2014)

<sup>4</sup> Christian Smith's work with the National Study of Youth and Religion is a significant example of this perspective (Smith and Denton, 2005). Tom Beaudoin thoroughly critiques Smith and Denton's analysis for its affiliation bias (2008).

catalyst of this growth is the experience of difference (1994, 210). Mary C. Boys agrees that learning in the presence of difference represents a significant religious gift of late or post-modernity to both individuals and traditions.

Boys' work deals primarily with Jewish-Christian relationships but her views on inter-religious learning and a more capacious theology are transferable to the group in question here. Boys suggests religious education, done in the reality of religious difference, ought to engender an embarrassment at any attempts at absolutism and provide learners tools for responding to this wider world (2000, 27). She goes as far as to argue the conventional rendering of religion fails to foster healthy human or Christian development by creating and sustaining partisan identities (2000, 9). If Boys is correct, effective religious educators are already suspicious of the way Christians tell our story to ourselves concerning others who do not share that story, and are likely fostering dialogue and developmentally appropriate deconstruction of exclusive religious teachings (2000, 30).

Initial interviews with religious educators indicate many hope to introduce wider perspectives and more complex appreciations of different worldviews, and accompany their learners as they reimagine who they are in the world. These conversations raised an interesting question about what it means to be a "good student" in a religious education setting. Many of my pilot research participants spoke of their "good students" as those who shifted the locus of religious authority from an external sources to their own experience. Kegan theorizes this movement as an epistemic change in subject-object relations (1994, 34).

What a learner is "subject to" has been "written on them" by an external authority. Despite its external source, early in development a person identifies completely with these conventions (1994, 34). Education, however, moves more and more knowledge to an "object" relation – where a person can hold it at arm's length, look at, investigate, take responsibility for, deconstruct and integrate it with other ways of knowing (Kegan 1994, 34). Similarly, Gabriel Moran argues religious education, even when teaching how to be religious in a particular way, develops a learner's capacity to deal critically and imaginatively with reality. Like Boys and Kegan, Moran argues this includes allowing experimentation and participatory learning in today's irreducibly pluralistic world (1989, 21). Maria Harris further emphasizes the prophetic quality of such critical thinking that offers what Bernard Lonergran calls "freedom from the book" (1967, 185). Questioning is the "center of the teaching act." (Harris 1991, 65,72-73). One might say that the teaching-learning relationship is a sacred space of collaborative and deconstructive inquiry. (Brookefield 2008, 44).

### **Deconvstruction & Deconversion**

L. Norman Skonovd first used the term deconversion in 1981 when he proposed a stage model for when members exit new religious movements. To Skonovd, "de-conversion consisted of an acceptance of life's ambiguity and of the non-exclusiveness of

any so-called truth" (1981, 182).<sup>5</sup> John Barbour, in his book *Versions of Deconversion*, further develops the understanding and use of the term to suggest conversion *from* and conversion *toward* are alternative perspectives on the same process (1994). The term draws from a more positive connotation of "conversion" to describe a process of transformative learning and changing of one's practices and beliefs from an inherited religious tradition, as it is articulated by that tradition's authorities (Beaudoin and Hornbeck, 2014). The process can lead to migrations within a tradition or a distinctive, self-authored and integrative form of faith and identity beyond the boundaries of tradition.

Deconversion research suggests the process begins when a religious learner, often in response to the encounter with pluralism, and for the sake of personal authenticity or a renewed sense of Divine presence, deconstructs what has been provided and searches for more salient notions than what ecclesial authorities emphasize (Beaudoin and Hornbeck, 2014). According to Heinz Streib's comprehensive quantitative and qualitative cross-cultural study that explores disaffiliation through this more affirmative lens, leaving religion does not mean relinquishing concern with religion and religious praxis. At least half of deconverts maintain a religious or spiritual identity. (Streib et al, 2009, 39,98). Moreover, Streib and others suggest the majority of deconverts demonstrate measurable gains in many generally accepted virtues – including faith development.<sup>6</sup>

Deconverts demonstrate significantly higher openness to new experiences, demonstrate a higher sense of personal growth and express a greater desire for inter-religious dialogue and xenosophia compared to religiously affiliated adults (Streib et al 2009, 232). Very similar to Boys' conviction that religious difference ought to be a mustard seed sown in the church (Boys 2000, 22), Streib's notion of xenosophia describes openness to the challenge presented by religious pluralism. Deconverts are receptive to the coming of the unexpected and resist ready-made answers. These theorists and my own initial interviews of educators suggest "good" religious education students, and apparently deconverts, value the creative potential presented by religious differences and believe wisdom may emerge from these encounters and a shared search for meaning.

## Religious Education Today

John Caputo argues the deconstruction of both religious teachings and institutions on behalf of lived experience represents a posture and activity inspired by the Divine, that can even be a form of prayer. "God," he says, "is the possibility of the impossible, the wholly other, the unforeseeable, the one who breaks down our ego-logical and monological preoccupation and exposes us to the coming of the other, the incoming of what we did not see coming" (Caputo 2007, 55). Kieran Scott similarly argues that sometimes the only way to ensure religious life in the future is to call it all into question (1982, 207).

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<sup>5</sup> See also Janet Liebman Jacobs, *Divine Disenchantment: Deconverting from New Religions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). See also Jacobs, "Deconversion from Religious Movements," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (1987): 294–307

<sup>6</sup> Streib's quantitative and qualitative cross cultural data indicate deconverts demonstrate a higher occurrence of individuative-reflective faith than synthetic-conventional according to James Fowler's model. (Streib et al 2009, 218)

Like Boys and Harris, Jacques Derrida argues this meticulous activity of critical questioning represents an action-oriented affirmative hope that embodies more truly being “religious” (Caputo 2007, 55-56). Developmentally, critical questioning compels learners to reach from lower stages of consciousness toward more complex ways of knowing that respond to the evolving cultural curriculum and what Rahner calls the “perhaps possibility of revelation” in their own lives (1968, 22).

In light of the changing religious landscape represented in their classrooms, congregations or other teaching contexts, my hunch is that some effective educators are inviting students to explore the diversity they live and witness, and to test what is good. These religious educators are less interested in reproducing an adherence model of religious education or handing on a theology of affiliation<sup>7</sup> but hope to support learners’ ability to form and practice their own values, feelings and meaning. As Maria Harris suggests, these educators create situations where human subjects are handed over to themselves (1991, 33). An inevitable result of encouraging this level of consciousness is that learners relativize their understanding of authority to make this developmental and religious step – especially when conventional religious communities impose a perceived limit to that growth. Kenda Creasy Dean notes that conventional religious ministry will have a problem when young adults, who are “uniquely wired for theological reflection,” do not find corresponding critical thinking in their churches (2001, 30-31).

### Questions for Further Study

Tom Beaudoin and Patrick Hornbeck suggest that the deconstructive and critical thought often initiating versions of deconversion are not only occurring outside the boundaries of faith communities but are quietly creating multiplicity within their walls.<sup>8</sup> Beaudoin provocatively suggests that the number of deconverts performing ministry in churches might be staggering – if we could measure it (2013). In this same vein, research has not yet explored how these elements of deconversion might be influencing the theological and educational goals of those charged with passing tradition on.

The goals reviewed above by all three theorists extend beyond the academic or developmental, but derive from a larger goal of improving people’s lives and improving the our lives together. Embedded in all three theories is a sense of the human person as intrinsically interdependent with social and cultural others in an ongoing process of becoming. There is an appreciation of the human person and where human beings are going, together. Both persons and the systems within which people live, move and

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<sup>7</sup> By this I mean a logic of consensus rooted theologically in an exclusive and fixed relationship with an institution. The position and pedagogy often resists multiplicity and reform.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Beaudoin and Patrick Hornbeck suggest the ordinary theology of disaffiliated believers presents an important lens to understand the whole. See Beaudoin, Tom, and Patrick Hornbeck. "Deconversion and Ordinary Theology: A Catholic Study." Edited by Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis. In *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*. Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2013; Beaudoin, Tom, and Patrick Hornbeck. *Deconversion and Catholic Multiplicity*. American Academy of Religion. 2014.

construct their meaning should grow and evolve. Seen through this lens, the increasing rates of deconversion represent significant material for reflection for religious educators.

Life-giving and effective religious education encourages a certain style of religiousness that arises from the interplay of multiple ideas, perspectives and human experiences. Religious life and learning today must contend with and afford significant and permanent religious difference – maybe even more than one right account. This conversation historically has sustained the church, albeit not without resistance. Caputo suggests the Christian religion's most aggressive example of this deconstructive critique and movement that opens tradition to necessary growth again and again comes from Jesus of Nazareth himself (Caputo 2007, 19). This Christ-like and reforming notion of deconstruction suggests that by letting go of old constructions, the church might embody a more prophetic authenticity and get somewhere new.<sup>9</sup>

To conclude, the work of Kegan, Boys, Caputo and deconversion researchers together complicate conventional views that increasing rates of disaffiliation is a crisis. In light of these theories, it is possible some educators have found conserving tradition and allowing it to release onto new situations is not mutually exclusive. According to the theorists engaged here, the encounter with religious difference, occurring more and more frequently in the lives of both educators and learners today, forms an openness to a genuine learning process and growth that moves beyond preconceived images and old assumptions, and may uncover something new about ones own religious tradition (Schmidt-Leukel 2009, 40) – and it may invite one to leave it. As educators shift pedagogical and theological goals to respond to this world they and their learners live in, they are forming the capacity to give expression to their tradition in a new time and place. However, until the boundaries associated with that tradition reflect the same development and growth, these educators, whether they know it or not, may be loosening the expectation of affiliation.

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<sup>9</sup> John Sivalon, makes a similar argument for a paradigm shift in understanding mission – from a self-preserving, homogenizing ecclesial or personal project to a journey searching for, proclaiming, and witnessing the Trinitarian mystery of life – in response to God's revelation in postmodern culture (2012, 91-92).

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### **Playing our way into complex adaptive action in religious education**

[Drescher's research suggests that the so-called "nones" and those who claim the label "spiritual but not religious" are showing us a complex future where religious institutions will have to participate in shaping religious education around "believing and becoming" rather than around "believing, belonging and behaving." Writing from the very specific space of a Catholic educator who has been using the tools of dialogical organizational development to support local communities I argue that religious educators have much to learn from the scholars of adult development, of complex adaptive action, and of gameful learning. Their work offers us significant hope and opportunity for generative creativity in our diverse contexts.]

Elizabeth Drescher, in her compelling and substantial new study of people who claim the label "spiritual but not religious," writes:

In the new media age, difference is less a distinguishing barrier between groups of individuals than it is an invitation to engage and explore the lives of diverse others. ... new media practices of seeing others, seeing difference, expressing difference, and being in variously distributed relationships with religiously diverse others have an effect on how people regard religious difference in increasingly overlapping zones of private and public life. (2016, 61)

There is a conundrum in the midst of this observation: on the one hand her research suggests that there are a growing number of people who embrace relationality across difference, who are deliberately shaping communities of great and deep diversity without perceiving such practices as being in any way connected to religion. On the other hand, from within my specific space as a Roman Catholic Christian, I believe that it is precisely my religion which calls me into relationship across difference, that my very identity as a Catholic person requires me to embrace diverse relationality and offers me rich resources for doing so. Yet it is not just Drescher who notes that people who claim this label find religious institutions problematic – Pew, PRI, CARA and others do as well. So where does the disconnect lay?

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 – in all the rich senses of that word – 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.

In the short essay that follows I will consider these questions, and some possible pedagogical responses, by tracing a particular thread through literatures as disparate as adult development theory (Kegan), dialogical organizational development (Royce and Holladay), and finally, scholarship on games and learning (Schrier, McGonigal). Perceiving a pattern in these literatures offers new hope for pedagogical designs that can be generative.

## *Personal adult development*

Robert Kegan's research is very clear about the challenges human beings face as we develop our sense of selves, and then of ourselves in relationship with other people (1982, 1994, 2016). Rather than an image of a staircase, with individual autonomy as the goal at the top of the stairs, Kegan argues that human development is a process best envisioned as an ongoing spiral that draws us ever more fully into creating an understanding of self, and through that creation into deeper relationship with others. Kegan has posited five "orders of meaning-making" which correspond to what we can see in front and around us, versus what we are oblivious to because it "holds" us.

Asking the question, for instance, of whether a fish knows what water is, helps to explain what it means to be "held" by a specific idea or meaning-frame. The fish doesn't know the water is there, because that environment is all encompassing, it surrounds and immerses and "holds" the fish, without that water the fish dies. A fish is "held" by the water, rather than "holding" it. Similarly, an infant does not know herself as apart from her primary caregiver. She is wholly dependent upon them and does not begin to see herself as "separate" until the very real agony of "separation anxiety" sets in. Her primary caregiver "holds" her -- both literally and figuratively -- at this early stage of life.

Unlike many earlier developmental descriptions, Kegan's research demonstrates that adults can continue to develop throughout the lifespan, growing ever more complex and inter-related forms of knowing. He notes that most adults achieve what he labels a "third order" form of meaning-making, although he also argues that our current cultural landscapes require at least a "fourth order" form of meaning-making by which to thrive. (His book *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* is particularly eloquent on that subject.)

In Kegan's theorizing "third order" meaning-making is structured around

cross-categorical thinking—the ability to relate one durable category to another... As a result, thinking is more abstract, individuals are aware of their feelings and the internal processes associated with them, and they can make commitments to communities of people and ideas (Kegan, 1994). Kegan and his colleagues (2001) noted that in this order of consciousness, "other people are experienced ... as sources of internal validation, orientation, or authority" (p. 5). How the individual is perceived by others is of critical importance since acceptance by others is crucial in this order. Support is found in mutually rewarding relationships and shared experiences, while challenge takes the form of resisting codependence and encouraging individuals to make their own decisions and establish independent lives.<sup>i</sup>

While "fourth order" meaning-making requires

cross-categorical constructing—the ability to generalize across abstractions, which could also be labeled systems thinking—is evident in the fourth order of consciousness (Kegan, 1994). In this order, self-authorship is the focus. Individuals "have the capacity to take responsibility for and ownership of their internal authority" (Kegan & others, 2001, p. 5) and establish their own sets of values and ideologies (Kegan, 1994). Relationships become a part of one's world rather than the reason for one's existence. Support at this stage is evident in acknowledgment of the individual's independence and self-regulation. Individuals are encouraged to develop further when significant others refuse to accept relationships that are not intimate and mutually rewarding.<sup>ii</sup>

And “fifth order” meaning-making requires that:

...individuals see beyond themselves, others, and systems of which they are a part to form an understanding of how all people and systems interconnect (Kegan, 2000). They recognize their "commonalities and interdependence with others" (Kegan, 1982, p. 239). Relationships can be truly intimate in this order, with nurturance and affiliation as the key characteristics. Kegan (1982) noted that only rarely do work environments provide these conditions and that long-lasting adult love relationships do not necessarily do so either.<sup>iii</sup>

Supporting movement from one form to another proceeds along a spiral path which Kegan identifies as being one of “confirmation, contradiction and continuity,” with “confirmation” having to do with seeking deep understanding of the internal logic of a particular way of making sense in a specific social location. He believes that you cannot support transformation in constructive and generative ways without first entering into a form of deep empathy with a person. The next step – contradiction – arises either organically in the course of a person’s journey, or might be introduced through the intervention of a teacher/coach, who draws attention to the contradictions that exist in a particular meaning frame.

Kegan points out, however, that simply encountering contradiction is not enough for true transformation. The rupture of meaning that emerges is so unsettling that people can find themselves fleeing into either relativism or fundamentalism, both of which are essentially refusals to transform meaning-making, to move from cross-categorical thinking to cross-categorical construction. The final element necessary for a transformation to a new order of meaning-making is a process Kegan terms “continuity,” by which he means a form of holding space which allows for the new structures of meaning-making to consolidate. Such continuity can often be described as a larger community into which someone is invited, in which their previous form of making meaning is acknowledged and valued, while at the same time the new form is cherished.

So, now, consider how people experience religious institutions. In the broader “implicit curriculum” of popular culture, religious institutions are often represented as being narrow, constricting, even oppressive. Polls – particularly of younger people – suggest that hypocrisy is one of the complaints often voiced about religious institutions. Yet any human institution, let alone personal relationships, will fall prey to hypocrisy at various points. Why is this the label so problematic for religious institutions?

Kegan helps us to see that when religious institutions develop “holding spaces” for people, they create a difficult paradox: on the one hand, a space which is clearly demarcated, enforcing sharp boundaries for who is “in” and who is “out” can feel very comfortable for people making third order meaning. On the other hand, the very element which makes it comforting – sharp boundaries – also becomes an obstacle for people who are in relationships with people who don’t “fit” within those boundaries.

This tension – between belonging to a community that excludes some of your friends, or choosing your friends over the community – is at the heart of much of the polling concerning why young people don’t find religious institutions a place of belonging. How might we provide

both sufficient “confirmation” of the pain of this “contradiction,” while offering sufficient “continuity” to grow past it? The pedagogical key lies in understanding how these communities embody and communicate their core beliefs.

Are they “bounded sets”? That is, do they communicate who they are by requiring belief in particular notions prior to belonging? Or are they “centered sets” where one can enter through permeable boundaries, and experience the community before choosing to make a deeper commitment – becoming as part of belonging? Hear the resonances from Drescher: “Rather than traditional modes of “believing, belonging and behaving that have fueled much recent discussion” .... “narratives that emphasized experiences of being and becoming” (14) are at the heart of her interviewees’ responses.

A community which defines itself in such a way that one can enter it to explore, rather than having first to make a specific belief commitment prior to entrance, is a community whose social patterns resonate with contemporary forms of informal learning. In addition, for people who are evolving from third to fourth (even to fifth) order forms of meaning-making, a “centered set” community offers more room for movement. One can go deep into the heart of the community, and also explore its emergent edges. A “bounded set” community, on the other hand, allows for exploration within its borders, but if one crosses over the border one has left the community.

Many communities can function in both of these ways. Which kind of “set” will be encouraged? Religious communities who can draw on the former dynamic, who are comfortable with adapting in such cultural spaces, are growing and thriving. Communities who rely on the latter, bounded set, find it very difficult to do so in our contemporary contexts.

In my own Roman Catholic community the former process – inquiry, loose association, centered belief -- is the embodiment of the best of “RCIA” educational practice (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults). But the very same learning process, RCIA, can embody the opposite “bounded set” mentality, with poorly trained educators enforcing strict interpretations of specific teachings and ignoring the communal apprenticeship that forms the heart of shared inquiry.

### *Adaptive change*

Turning from an examination that is more focused on the person – that is, on adult development – to one which focuses on the organizational, offers similar conclusions through the lens of complex adaptive theory. A “complex adaptive system” is:

a system consisting of many interacting agents, where their interactions are not rigidly fixed, preprogrammed or controlled, but continuously adapt to changes in the system and in its environment. Examples are ecosystems, communities and markets. The bonds between such agents are relatively weak and flexible, so that there is still a lot of freedom for the system to adapt. On the other hand, the agents do depend on each other, and therefore their individual freedom is limited. (Heylighen)

In complex adaptive systems, perceiving change – let alone intentionally offering catalysts for it – is not easy, particularly given that such change is more likely to be “dynamical,” than static or even dynamic. Dynamical change is “complex change that results from unknown forces acting

unpredictably to bring about surprising outcomes” (Eoyang and Holladay, 62). Given this description, how are leaders to function? Are there any pragmatic steps to be taken?

Several promising avenues have arisen from multiple research projects. Three in particular are pertinent here: standing in inquiry, spotting patterns, and creating exchanges. To “stand in inquiry” is to seek to be as non-judgmentally descriptive as possible. Eoyang and Holladay put it this way:

- know your “stuff,” but remain open to and actively engaged in learning more
- be comfortable with ambiguity and vulnerability of holding questions
- ask questions more than you give answers
- turn judgment into curiosity
- turn disagreement into mutual exploration
- turn defensiveness into self-reflection (39)

These steps echo similar commitments at the heart of a variety of recent practices for fostering engaging public conversation that is “respectful” “civil” “whole” and so on.<sup>iv</sup> Drescher’s interview process embodies this kind of stance.

Spotting patterns requires inhabiting this stance while being open to learning from and with a very wide group of knowers -- precisely the advice being offered by those scholars focusing on “dialogical organizational development,” or to use Kegan’s terms, an “everyone culture.” Or to use my own favorite phrase, “the more diverse the knowers, the more robust the knowing.” Patterns often require enough distance – whether in meta-reflective terms, or in geophysical terms – to begin to perceive a pattern in what otherwise might appear to be discontinuous or disconnected.

From Drescher’s work we have evidence of a growing movement of people across the US context at least who embrace diversity as a rich source of engagement and growth. I believe the #BlackLivesMatter movement offers similar evidence, as does the NIOT (Not In Our Town) movement.<sup>v</sup> Is there a pattern emerging here? And if so, how might we nourish and encourage it?

Complex adaptive theory suggests that we need to find ways to support “exchanges across containers” as one way of doing so. “Containers” is a word that harkens back to Kegan’s description of “holding environments.”

Three different types of bounding conditions exist in human systems. Each can function as a container for the system's self-organizing. 1) A system may be enclosed by a defining external boundary, like a **fence**. Membership and physical spaces are examples of fence-like containers. 2) Agents in a system may be drawn toward a central attractive person or issue, like a **magnet**. A visionary leader or a motivating goal are examples of magnet-like containers. 3) Agents in a system may be attracted to each other by mutual **affinity**. Gender and cultural identity are examples of such affinity containers. (Eoyang, vii)

A “fence” is similar to the bounded set space I described earlier, which creates identity by defining who is “in” and who is “out.” In complex adaptive theory, this kind of external boundary can be described with various degrees of permeability – some offer health and living breath, others end up killing the organism.

A “central attractive” node, or “magnet,” is analogous to the “centered set” description I offered. Here, too, the dynamic can be healthy, offering a “heart” that keeps the rest of the system or organism alive, or unhealthy, drawing all of the resources into the center and not allowing the organism to grow and change.

The third category which Eoyang identifies here – “mutual affinity” – has resonance with Kegan’s description of “orders of meaning-making.” It is here that I believe religious educators need to be as thoughtful, self-reflective and engaged as possible, because mutual affinity can be a space of growth and support, or a dangerous form of self-enclosure.

Returning to the example I used with Kegan, the RCIA can embody a pedagogical process in which it offers a “central attractive” force, supporting it with a permeable “fence” which can nourish a new kind of “mutual affinity” – think “continuity” from Kegan’s ideas – or it can strive to build sharp walls and mutual affinity that is very narrowly defined. Complex adaptive change theory helps push educators in the former direction by emphasizing the creation of “exchanges” across containers. One example of such a practice within religious education would be to note that there is strong evidence that engaging in multi-faith relationship building can strengthen particular religious identity while at the same time also strengthening respect for other faith traditions (Hess, 2013).

I believe that the pattern made visible in #BlackLivesMatter and the NIOT organizing may be an example of creating “exchanges” across containers in ways that offer *both* contradiction and continuity in Kegan’s terms. “Contradiction” because these exchanges often confront long-held biases (white privilege, for instance, or Christian privilege) but hold out the possibility of entering a larger community by learning to move beyond them, to come to a new “narrative” about one’s identity amidst diversity.<sup>vi</sup>

Drescher’s work could be engaged as a direct “exchange” across the containers of “institutional religious practice” and “spiritual but not religious” practice. Her book uses categories and descriptions that arise from theories and theologies that occur within institutional religious practice, to make sense of practices outside of those contexts. She is offering an “exchange” that invites those within religious communities to value the practices to be found in, and the people who inhabit, a “none” or “SBNR” space.

But is the exchange mutual? That is, in what ways is Drescher making institutional religious practice accessible to those who define themselves as “spiritual but not religious”? Her book is brand new, so perhaps she has an answer to my question from her research that will appear in later work. For the purposes of this paper I want to lift up one such mechanism for supporting mutual exchange which is not a part of her book.

### *Gameful learning*

I have written elsewhere about the affordances offered by digital storytelling for faith formation (Hess, 2014, 2015). Here I want to explore briefly the specific affordances offered by what Walz and Deterdine label “gameful learning.” Scholars who are studying the pedagogical implications

of games, particularly video games, have begun to identify what Thomas and SeelyBrown (2011) have called a “new culture of learning,” in which several dynamics are shifting. Just as Drescher calls attention to a shift from “believing, belonging and behaving” to “believing and becoming” in the groups she studied, scholars observing the “new culture of learning” describe a distinction between “community” and “collective,” where “In communities people learn in order to belong, but in collectives people participate in order to learn” (Thomas and SeelyBrown, 56). I believe there is clear resonance here.

Whether this is a “new” dynamic, or a return to quite ancient patterns of practice, more and more people are being socialized into forms of learning that are deeply participatory and improvisational. Consider a video game like “World of Warcraft (WoW),” for instance. Played by more than 5 million people all over the world, WoW is a multi-user online role playing game which has demonstrably multi-generational participation, and which invites people to learn it by playing it.<sup>vii</sup> Like any form of improvisation, that play takes place within a specific set of rules – in this example, within the software code which shapes the environment and governs how people “level up” in various ways – but that set of rules exists to structure the space and the possible actions, without specifying which action must take place at a given time, or within a strict sequence.

I am convinced that gameful forms of learning have much resonance and congruence with the pedagogical ideals that are embedded in the RCIA. This process, which can take at least a year to move through, and often much longer, gathers people in small groups (both inquirers and long time members) for periods of inquiry, of catechesis, and finally of mystagogy. The process is structured, an environment is “shaped” – a deeply liturgical one, marked by specific blessings and practices – but within that shape it is widely receptive to the questions and movements of the people engaged with it. It is at once participatory and improvisational.

Of course, as with any human endeavor – and certainly, any pedagogical frame – human beings can distort the process, and turn it into an instrumental mechanism rather than a communicative practice of the sort envisioned by Scharer and Hilberath (2008). Still, the “play” which marks the first phase of RCIA has the potential, at least, to embody dynamics similar to the “food, faith, friends and Fido” of which Drescher writes. It offers a space and shape for mutual exploration of a kind that Kegan’s research, Eoyang and Holladay’s research, suggest would be fruitful.

To take this idea one step further, McGonigal (2011), a key scholar at the intersection of games and futurist exploration, suggests that people who play a lot of video games are “virtuosos” at urgent optimism, weaving a tight social fabric, optimizing relationships to do hard meaningful work, and building epic meaning. I am convinced that these are dynamics at the heart of Christian meaning-making (cf. Hess, 2015), but how often do we make those claims explicitly in language that is accessible to those outside of our communities? How often do we deliberately emphasize porous boundaries, rather than sharply demarcated ones?

Spaces of “play,” of structured human interaction understood as a “game,” can be particularly helpful as we seek to do this in a world marked by extensive polarization. Schrier, whose exhaustive literature review of “knowledge games” is instructive, notes that more generally, games:

can help people tap into their intrinsic interests and desires... Providing choices in games has been found to increase motivation and perceived control. ... People like to solve problems and overcome challenges in games. ... People want to connect with other people, whether directly or indirectly, and participate in the community or affinity space around or within a game. ... People are curious. ... People want to contribute and help. ... People want to experience a story, narrative and/or emotional experience. (88 and ff)

Her research documents that games both support and situate communal learning, and that “games can encourage argumentation and the consideration of multiple perspectives.” Such game play can “support reflection on its emergent preconceptions, as well as consideration of players’ own identities.” (103)

Over the centuries there have been a few theologians who have considered Christian practice from the standpoint of play, but rather than seeing the serious implications of play, contemporary theologians have been more apt to decry their potential to trivialize religious meaning-making, or to situate it in a negative light. Given the vast growth of the video game industry I fear that theologians may make a mistake in this arena similar to the one made earlier last century when rather than offering a balanced approach to engaging televisual media, theologians rejected most of it out of hand and sought to turn people “off” of that medium, rather than helping them to create in it themselves.

Drescher calls attention in her work to the place of “food,” “family,” “friends, and “Fido” in the meaning-making processes of the people whom she interviewed. I would add “fun” to that list, keeping the alliteration, and noting that games are one way in which we can build “exchanges” across the containers of those “within” religious institutions, and those who define themselves as “outside” of such institutions.

The *Remnants* game is one example.<sup>viii</sup> An alternate reality game built on a series of live-play scenarios, the focal point of the game is to imagine a world in which religious institutions have disappeared, and to play with what emerges from that absence. What would people miss? What kinds of rituals would need to be invented or perhaps reclaimed? In what ways might artifacts be discovered, remnants of past meaning-making, that could be a catalyst for such imagination? Games such as *Remnants* serve a crucial research purpose as well, supporting the kind of sustained inquiry of which the dialogical organizational consultants write.

I do not have the space here to explore this at length, but my final point has to do with what scholars of games – as well as digital storytelling – are telling us about the potential of these spaces of creative play to support learning across difference that is attentive to systemic power dynamics. I began this paper by noting Drescher’s observation that:

In the new media age, difference is less a distinguishing barrier between groups of individuals than it is an invitation to engage and explore the lives of diverse others. ... new media practices of seeing others, seeing difference, expressing difference, and being in variously distributed relationships with religiously diverse others have an effect on how people regard religious difference in increasingly overlapping zones of private and public life. (61)

She made this observation in the context of her work with people who claim the label “none” or “spiritual but not religious,” but the wider literature of digital games, and the even wider literature of “digital literacies” supports this assertion. Further,

...the new ethic of digital literacies is “cosmopolitan” practice ... [which fosters] reflexive and hospitable dispositions and habits of mind necessary for ethically motivated rhetorical and semiotic decision making in relation to wide, interactive, and potentially global audiences.

... cosmopolitanism is the idea that one can become, indeed should aspire to be, a citizen of the world, able to embrace local ties and commitments, but also to extend well beyond them, engaging a wider human community, even across divides of seemingly irreconcilable differences. (Ávila and Pandya, 64-65)

The literature – as well as my own personal experience – convinces me that approaching religious education in playful ways, using game design and game structures as catalysts for creating exchanges across the “containers” of our meaning-making, can offer profound nourishment and hope for reweaving relationship amongst people both within and outside of religious institutions.

The opportunity – and the goal? – here, however, is not about “making religious education fun,” but rather about building this kind of “cosmopolitan” consciousness, and fostering religious identity that is centered *and* open. It is about paying attention to the “confirmation, contradiction, and continuity” necessary for real transformation. It is about developing the ability to “stand in inquiry” in ways that foster perceiving patterns of engagement that support “exchanges” across the containers of religious identity. In a world as polarized as the US finds itself to be, there is real hope to be found in this kind of religious education.

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<sup>i</sup> This lovely and concise description comes from Chapter 10, “Development of Self-Authorship” in the book *Student Development in College, Theory, Research, and Practice* by Nancy J. Evans, Deanna S. Forney, Florence M. Guido, Lori D. Patton and Kristen A. Renn. Published by Jossey-Bass, as found in the Tomorrow’s Professor #1110 (<http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/tomprof/posting.php?ID=1110>). Accessed on 29 August 2016.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> See Public Conversations Project (<http://www.publicconversations.org>), Liberating Structures (<http://www.liberatingstructures.com>), the Art of Hosting (<http://www.artofhosting.org>), the Respectful Conversations project (<http://www.mnchurches.org/respectfulcommunities/respectfulconversations.html>), and so on.

<sup>v</sup> “Not in our town” is a multi-faith public organizing effort fighting hate (<https://www.niot.org>).

<sup>vi</sup> Two recent example of public intellectuals offering “attractional” invitations to larger community narratives would be Serene Jones (<http://time.com/4477582/heal-the-spiritual-pain-of-america/>) in the US and Gord Downie in Canada (<https://www.facebook.com/GordDownie/photos/a.10150194211650508.446699.439350080507/10157713670470508/?type=3&theater>).

<sup>vii</sup> This number is of subscribers in 2015: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/276601/number-of-world-of-warcraft-subscribers-by-quarter/>

<sup>viii</sup> More information about *Remnants: A World Without Churches*, is available online: <http://www.storyingfaith.org/remnant>.



## **Pilgrimage: Sacred and Transformative Movement of Hope**

### **Abstract**

*The practice of pilgrimage can serve as a medium of transformative teaching/learning towards a deeper spiritual understanding of a person's identity and vocation within the world. Pilgrimage can be revelatory and transformative to both students and educators encountering the social and cultural challenges of this post-industrial era. As a religiously educative endeavor, it invites participants into the dialogue between the interior, contemplative life and the outer, active life. This fosters and develops connecting threads of awareness, strengthening an understanding of issues of social justice, and providing hope towards healing and integration. By mining the rich religious tradition of the pilgrimage journey, past experiences can be reappropriated, offering a reshaping of the understanding of a desire to draw closer and deeper into relationship with others, the environment, and the Divine.*

### **Introduction**

Pilgrimage, a journey to sacred places, is an ancient practice within a variety of religious traditions. It is a living and lived experience of relationship, connection, intent, and meaning. The sacred act of pilgrimage is one that is ritualistically meaningful and is a form of self-conscious awareness of the individual towards a quest for the Divine.

As an innovative and creative process for the teaching and learning of religious education, pilgrimage focuses on the lived experience of the human person and can be reimagined as an opportunity to educate seekers within the realm of the religious by bringing into focus one's relationships with other and the environment, moving beyond the self. Through this inward reflection, the pilgrim is drawn outwardly along the journey as she or he seeks to retreat, reflect, and respond to a desire for understanding, healing, and deeper and richer meaning.

This paper proposes a brief analysis of the practice of and reflection upon a historic meaning of pilgrimage as a religious ritual and a journey of hope. Beginning with this conventional consideration, and drawing from my academic experience with students on pilgrimage, I advocate for a postmodern practice of pilgrimage that invites educators and students to reflect on, and engage with, pilgrimage as an opportunity to bring deeper awareness to issues of social justice with the potential for healing and hope.

The traditional understanding of pilgrimage as journeys that strengthen religious faith and belief, pilgrimages can be reshaped with a focus on issues of social injustice and healing, offering a profound framework for integrating personal, and societal values of a particular religious tradition as educationally and religiously transformative. From this perspective pilgrimage serves to potentially strengthen the individual's spiritual life,

while also providing an awareness of responsibility and commitment towards others within the context of community. A centering of pilgrimage education that offers the possibility of healing or recognition of issues of social justice, such as immigration, climate, fair wages, gun violence, or PTSD allow the educator an imaginative and creative opportunity to engage with her students beyond the traditional classroom and plant seeds of hope that go deeper than a naïve understanding of this desire. Rather, as Paulo Freire would offer, “hope needs practice in order to become historical concreteness.”<sup>1</sup> This type of educational and religious methodology, while deepening awareness and sensitivity to particular issues offers a setting through which student and teacher walk and learn about and from one another and the particular political, social, and/or ecological climate in which they find themselves immersed.

### **Historical Pilgrimage**

The word ‘pilgrimage’ is rooted in the Latin *peregrinus* or ‘foreign’, and *per ager* ‘going through the fields.’ This denotes the image of journey, leaving home, and being a stranger as one travels.

The historical and customary reasons for embarking on pilgrimage were to atone for one’s sins, petition God or the saints for miracles, healing, forgiveness, offer thanksgiving for answered prayers, or to gain spiritual grace or merit whether in this life or the next. Pilgrims were also stirred to walk or travel to sacred sites that were designated as such because of the connection to particular saints, miraculous or holy events and figures. These journeys allowed the devotees to place themselves in the presence of the relics or where the figures may have lived, so as to receive blessings and grace.

Through atonement, pilgrims were focused on the goal of casting off that which had burdened them, or brought shame to their families and communities with the hopes of a restored heart and a renewal of grace. By participating in the unknown physical challenges and religious rituals of emptying themselves emotionally, suffering, and becoming vulnerable “strangers,” pilgrims sought to be healed, renewed, and restored with God and the Church. The inner desires, disquiet, and/or personal burdens of pilgrims were made outwardly visible to all as they walked to sacred destinations such as Rome, Jerusalem, or Santiago de Compostela.

In expanding the traditional understanding and purpose of pilgrimage, there are journeys that invite seekers into deeper awareness of the self, others and the Divine through participatory movements that involve study, consideration, and responsiveness to social, political, justice, and humanitarian issues that are of concern in our world. By sharing in these pilgrimages, we not only broaden our personal horizons through the observation, consideration, and knowledge of other communities and cultures, but we also open ourselves up to refashioning our perceptions about other people, the natural world, and our selves. These particular pilgrimages can transform our existence and cultivate a broader consciousness that recognizes the sacramentality of the ordinariness of

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<sup>1</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1992): 2.

life, reminding us that God's loving presence is ubiquitous. On pilgrimage we have the opportunity to work towards solidarity, healing, and harmony with others when we devote ourselves to working towards mutual understanding, reparation, and peace. This engagement compels a reframing of our understanding of pilgrimage, making it a profoundly richer experience. As with traditional pilgrimage, this involves risk taking, boundary crossings, and following the road. By participating in pilgrimages of social justice, we open ourselves to other cultures, communities, with the aim of understanding the cause of the injustice, suffering, and pain while working towards a greater respect for human rights and reconciliation.

Pilgrimage that are journeyed with compassionate and humble intent hold the potential for social and personal transformation. By visiting places where violence, natural disaster, or human displacement have occurred, we can work towards understanding, improving, and encouraging, healing and repair. In this way, the vocation of being a pilgrim in this world is one that is a certain and sustainable experience of the meaning of sacramental life. The investment of one's personal time and energy offers opportunity for engagement and fellowship that transforms all involved. When we make pilgrimage with the resolve of meeting and supporting others, we move, listen, and make ourselves vulnerable without exploitation or aggression. The desire is not to jeopardize or dominate, but rather to respect and revere. We journey to further our awareness as well as restore balance in our communities and environments, while at the same time deepening our inner lives of spirituality. Pilgrimages made with the intent to repair and reconcile open our hearts and minds to realities that become more than a passing photo in the newspaper or video clip of a tragedy features on the evening news. By making pilgrimage to communities where adversity and heartbreak has transpired we gain the insight, courage, and tenacity to deepen harmonious and sustaining bonds with the environment, others, and the Divine.

### **Educational Symbols and Practices**

The pilgrimage journey commences long before the physical arrival in Santiago de Compostela, Mecca, Jerusalem, or Fatima. It occurs before one steps onto the road, or boards a plane or train. A pilgrimage begins internally, as inner movement, a stirring from within the soul. This could manifest as a desire for healing and or prayer, or as a response to personal trauma. Even when embarking on a pilgrimage alone, one is guided and supported by a community of family, friends and colleagues. Preparation may include physical training, familiarizing oneself with a new language, maps of the terrain, as well as embracing the badges or outward indicators of being a pilgrim. It also often involves the participant (s) making themselves vulnerable to the unknown that lies ahead. With this comes fear, trepidation, and excitement, all of which serves to remind pilgrims that the journey is never one that is made entirely alone or in isolation. These elements of the pilgrimage experience connect the pilgrim, as Nancy Louise Frey states "to the past, to the road, and to a community of pilgrims."<sup>2</sup>

One of the outward signs that connect pilgrims who walk to Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, and along many other pilgrimage routes, are the

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy Louise Frey, *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off The Road to Santiago* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 56.

scallop shell (worn around the neck, pinned to a hat or dangling from a backpack), the walking stick, and the backpack. These symbols of pilgrimage not only reflect one's status as a pilgrim but also are instrumental in teaching people, as Brett Webb-Mitchell points out, "to be pilgrims."<sup>3</sup>

The journey of a pilgrim is one that is made in relationship to those who have journeyed the route through history, but also those who we have left at home and those who will follow in our footsteps in the future. It also includes those individuals who have no voice, or whose voices have been oppressed or snuffed. The wearing of a scallop shell on pilgrimage is the assuming of a responsibility to act with kindness, sympathy, understanding, and mercy. It is an expression of courage, uncertainty, and a desire for healing, not only for the self, but for others, and the earth. This meaning of the scallop shell can serve as a powerful symbol for those who undergo pilgrimage in search of reconciliation or hope. Individuals who have experienced traumatic loss from the death of a loved one, a veteran of war, a survivor of domestic violence or conflict can experience the healing presence of God through being with others as well as allowing others into one's life without judgment or expectation. Pilgrimage offers the embrace of unconditional love, forgiveness, and reconciliation for the person which can then be extended outwardly to others along and after the journey. This embrace also recognizes that to be in relationship with others, the environment, creation, and the Divine is to love fully, totally and entirely without condition or limits.

The pilgrim's road is as much a symbolic and metaphorical journey as it is an experiential one. In essence, the pilgrim walks or rides out of a deep desire for wholeness. It is an experience that one learns from, is taught, and in turn, through which one teaches. Essential to pilgrimage is the openness to learning through experience. What better way to learn what we are capable of accomplishing than setting out to walk eight hundred kilometers across France and Spain? How else to embrace and impart mercy than to receive it with humility when young men insist on carrying the pack of their middle aged professor struggling with an injury along the last twelve kilometers into Santiago? On the Camino, charity and hospitality are reflected in the tender care that dissolve the barriers of culture and language as people attend to blisters and offer massages for sore muscles with no shared language save love, compassion, and concern for fellow travelers along the way. We educate and transform through the lives we lead. Pilgrimage provides the context for the practice of this form of religious education with the understanding and desire that it will be carried back home and blossom, infusing and igniting a desire for balance, love, and peace that resides within all who yearn for deeper and more significant relationship with the earth, other humans, the non-human animal, and God.

### **Healing Journeys**

While motivations for making a pilgrimage, as discussed, have been vast, from the desire to strengthen one's faith or gain deeper wisdom, pilgrimages of healing, have resonated across the centuries and religious traditions and have powerful implications in the curriculum and pedagogy of pilgrimage studies.

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<sup>3</sup> Brett Webb-Mitchell, *School of Pilgrim: An Alternative Path to Christian Growth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 89.

Pilgrimages of healing, journeys that seek spiritual or physical renewal or wellness are part of most of the world's religious traditions. In some of the world's religious traditions there are pilgrimage destinations which are visited for reasons of spiritual restoration or strength. There are countless ancient shrines with healing properties across the globe that serve to provide comfort, awareness, and solace to believers of all religions. The energy and drawing power of these sites have eased burdens, soothed pain, and settled the wounds (both physical and spiritual), of suffering sojourners. Within this particular pilgrimage quest lies the potential for these journeys of healing to offer broader elements or forms of transformation. Pilgrimage has the potential to bestow meaningful and life changing opportunities for forgiveness and healing for individuals, families, communities, as well as race and class relations, political discord, civic disturbances, and environmental damage. This is accomplished by providing rituals, symbols, practices, and techniques that might join people who are in conflict, suffering from misunderstanding or differences that move towards repair, reconciliation, mercy, tolerance, and goodwill.

The world and its inhabitants are beings of beauty, wonder, and delight, yet around us we experience rising fractures and schisms, as well as widening chasms. Veterans return from battle, wounded physically and spiritually. Children grow in settlement camps with fear and hatred. Migrants flee poverty or armed conflict in despair only to be met with barricades and contempt. Pilgrimage may provide and come to be an essential ingredient to reimagining religious practices that serve to bridge differences and offer peace to those who many have ignored, overlooked or been indifferent to the suffering and pain. The ancient rituals and traditions of many of the worlds' pilgrimages have the elasticity and suppleness to be reshaped and reformed so as to embrace the spectrum and scale of the customs and ideologies of those in need of attention, care and healing.

### **Pedagogy and Practice**

I have led student pilgrimages along the Camino de Santiago across northwestern Spain. After a semester of academic, spiritual and practical preparation, none of which ever fully prepares anyone for pilgrimage (including myself), our group meets in León, Spain in eager anticipation of the seventeen-day walk to Santiago. Walking in small groups, giving site presentations, meeting other pilgrims along the route, sampling and sharing communal meals and the local cuisine, or tending to one another's blisters or muscle pain, students quickly form deeper friendships with one another and with other pilgrims they meet. The long hours of walking invite conversations about life, as well as introspective meditation and an appreciation for the tranquility and simplicity of a pilgrim's life. Almost immediately, the protective layers that students and faculty arm themselves with in order to guard their vulnerability, disintegrate, yielding to ease and familiarity which develops and grows stronger with each day of the journey. Without a great deal of deliberate or pointed discussion or lessons, the spirituality of the Camino, and what it means to be a pilgrim, manifests itself within the group. Students find that they begin to tap into the wisdom of the religious foundation of the pilgrimage, even with its flaws and shortcomings.

Our daily walks provide the members of our community a chance to live in the present, as opposed to the moment. Walking the Camino, going on pilgrimage, is experiencing the past as a living, vital essence of being and shaping, contributing to, and forever altering the future. This attitude and understanding creates a deeper awareness of the body, a quieter and more intent observation of the natural surroundings, an openness to pilgrims of different countries and cultures. The Camino course exposes students to the cuisine and customs of Spain, teaching them language and survival skills. It informs a deeper appreciation of what the students are physically and mentally capable of accomplishing, as well as the diversity and riches of the landscapes and peoples of the world.

No matter how well we are prepared as pilgrims, there are always unforeseen encounters or situations that occur on pilgrimage, that in truth, are most often the most revealing and transformative. Whether it is a continuing conversation with other pilgrims from town to town or serendipitous encounters along the road, the educational opportunities that take place leave lasting impressions that connect the pilgrim to the sacramentality of the present. Faith and the tradition of religious beliefs become relevant and offer a lasting impression of the connectivity between history and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Students gain valuable lessons about themselves, others, and their terrain as they problem solve through dilemmas such as language barriers, directions, physical ailments and other quandaries and challenges. They also experience the very important lesson of pilgrimage: giving to others what is needed rather than deciding what they think is wanted or should be had. This lesson can take the form of something as simple as a bandage or the offer of a coveted bottom bunk, to the more or the more intricate request of conversation with a stranger, an offer of the use of a cellphone or bottle of water. It may also be the recognition that on a particular day assistance will be needed to ease the day's journey. This offers consideration of what it means to walk a pilgrimage as an individual yet as part of a broader community. Along the Camino de Santiago there is a saying that is oft repeated by pilgrims along the Way: "The Camino will provide." Yet it is important to have the grace to recognize what is being provided may not necessarily be what a pilgrim believes he or she desires. The wisdom is discovering and accepting the difference.

What the Camino provides and the lessons that are learned are really the compelling and quiet lessons of life. Kindness, patience, charity, understanding, justice, and love are cultivated, sometimes unexpectedly while making pilgrimage. The teaching and learning became more than an academic endeavor, bringing to light the many ways we are shaped and challenged as pilgrim people on our life journeys.

### **Transformation**

The pilgrimage to Santiago can be a sobering and tempering journey for those who are seeking answers, especially in attempting to read and interpret the signs of one's body's reaction to the days walk as a message from God. In their enthusiasm for a spiritual encounter, I have had to sometimes caution students that sometimes a blister is just a blister, an empty water bottle is just that, or an arrow pointing in the wrong direction is just an error or someone up to mischief. Everything that happens on the Camino is not always a direct or apparent sign from God. Yet, it is an opportunity to

expand one's understanding who or what God is in our lives. Utilizing some techniques of Ignatian spirituality, students are invited to examine the quiet, almost inconsequential or subtle occurrences, observations, or encounters that they experienced throughout the day. "Where do you need or hope to find God today?" "Where did you find God today?" are questions that we consider as we begin and end our day. Students begin to discern that God is vividly apparent in the details of landscape, the minutia of our concerns/attention, and in the quiet recesses of our hearts. The conversations yield a rich harvest, as the students learn that the Divine can be ambiguous, elusive, subtle, and incomprehensible as well as humorous, inspiring, and filled with joy, in the world of growing and transforming people into lifelong pilgrims. These pilgrimages encourage the cultivation of both the inner and outer person, drawing students and faculty alike into a deeper realization that learning and living as beings in the universe is the essence, crux and core articulation of human development, goodness, and movement in relationship and towards the Divine.

### **Pilgrimages of Hope and Healing**

Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs facilitate pilgrimages to Assisi, Italy that minister to pilgrims who wish to learn more about the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare as they spend time in prayer and reflection at the sanctuaries significant to the lives of these saints. One of the pilgrimages that the organization offers is for veterans of the military. Francis of Assisi was a wounded military veteran and experienced reentry into his city and society after combat and as a prisoner of war in Perugia. While not diagnosed, it is probable that he suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) upon his return home to Assisi. Francis was never able to experience life as he had prior to his military service. Francis, his family, and his relationships suffered tremendously as a result. Greg Masiello, is a Franciscan pilgrimage leader, and psychologist who works with soldiers and veterans returning from combat. He observes that PTSD is a disorder that is fracturing and is a disconnect. Those suffering from PTSD find themselves disconnected from self, others and God.<sup>4</sup> Masiello notes that making this pilgrimage to Assisi is not a cure all, the effects often stay with the person for years or a lifetime. Yet it provides an opportunity to explore the guilt and pain and offers a safe haven to reflect on one's relationship with God and others in the places where Francis walked and healed. Masiello sees that the experience of this pilgrimage can serve as a buffer towards the pain veterans carry. The pilgrimages for military veterans provide pilgrims with relief, an easing of some of the burdens of the experiences they had while serving in places like Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan. Many veterans are unable to discuss what they saw and what they did with those they love, instead keeping thoughts and emotions suppressed. The opportunity to relive and learn about Francis' life, as well as that of Clare's, to pray in the sanctuary of San Damiano, the chapel where God spoke to Francis (asking him to rebuild the church) and where Clare offered healing (to those who came broken and in pain) provides veterans with a tremendous sense of forgiveness and peace that they had never experienced. These pilgrimages ease the burden of guilt and the guilt of leaving comrades behind, being forced to make decisions that bear endless shame and reoccurring pain. Many combat veterans carry these stigmas with no hope for repairing the wounds. These

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<sup>4</sup> Greg Masiello, Ph.D. "Veterans Pilgrimage and PTSD," Franciscan *Pilgrimage Programs*, Accessed February 14, 2016, [http://www.franciscanpilgrimages.com/Pil\\_Military.html](http://www.franciscanpilgrimages.com/Pil_Military.html).

pilgrimages, made while walking in the footsteps of Francis and learning how his life and charism were formed, in no small measure because of his military service, provide mercy and release to veterans.

In October of 2015, the Episcopal Church sponsored a pilgrimage to Ferguson Missouri to visit the place where Michael Brown, an eighteen year old, unarmed African American teenager was shot to death on August 9, 2014 by a white police officer after a confrontation and physical struggle.<sup>5</sup> In the wake of this fatal tragedy members of Michael Brown's family and community of Ferguson, Missouri took to the streets demonstrating against the injustice. Protests, rioting and confrontations with the police followed not only in Ferguson but also in many other cities across the United States. On the anniversary of Mr. Brown's death, there were renewed protests in Ferguson and a civil state of emergency was declared. The killing of Michael Brown at the hands of law enforcement was one of many deaths of unarmed African American men and young boys in recent history.

The pilgrims to Ferguson were young adults between the ages of nineteen and thirty-four, of African American, Hispanic, white, Native American, and mixed race backgrounds, who came together to study racial justice and pray for reconciliation and healing. The pilgrimage included conversations and presentations with local clergy, community leaders, and worship. This journey offered these young people a chance to learn what happened that fatal night and return to their families, schools, jobs, houses of worship, and communities with lessons for understanding, tolerance, and healing. Through visiting the place and speaking with witnesses and community members of Ferguson, the pilgrims were afforded the opportunity to reflect on the tragedy and ensuing violence and discord and consider how to incorporate their experience into best practices of promoting conversations of mercy and forgiveness in order to repair fractures within their own communities. Pilgrimages of justice such as the one to Ferguson, Missouri and others are initiatives that engage with national and global issues in an effort to bring about reconciliation and peace to communities in conflict.

In September 2015, one hundred women walked one hundred miles from Pennsylvania to Washington, D.C. in order to greet Pope Francis during his visit to the United States and draw attention to issues of justice for immigrants, women, families, and communities<sup>6</sup> in solidarity with Pope Francis' message of dignity for immigrants and refugees. The women made the journey to show solidarity with the Holy Father's message of global charity and cooperation migrants, in response to Pope Francis' message that our nations and churches should not have borders and should welcome the stranger,

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<sup>5</sup> Leah Thorsen and Steve Giegerich, "FERGUSON DAY ONE WRAPUP: Officer Kills Ferguson Teen," *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, Accessed February 14, 2016. [http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/ferguson-day-one-wrapup-officer-kills-ferguson-teen/article\\_04e3885b-4131-5e49-b784-33cd3acbe7f1.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/ferguson-day-one-wrapup-officer-kills-ferguson-teen/article_04e3885b-4131-5e49-b784-33cd3acbe7f1.html).

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth A. Elliot, "100 Women to Walk 100 Miles for Migrant Justice," *National Catholic Reporter*, February 15, 2016, <http://americasvoice.org/blog/womens-pilgrimage-for-migrant-justice-100-immigrant-women-to-walk-100-miles-to-dc-for-popes-historic-us-visit/>, "100 Women Begin 100 Mile Pilgrimage September 15," <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/100-women-begin-100-mile-pilgrimage-september-15>, *National Catholic Reporter*, Accessed, February 15, 2016, "100 Mile pilgrimage for migrant justice nearly complete," <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/100-mile-pilgrimage-migrant-justice-nearly-complete>, *National Catholic Reporter*, Accessed, February 15, 2016. See also: <http://www.webelongogether.org/100women/>, <http://www.notonemoredeportation.com/>, and <http://www.piconetwork.org/>.

recognizing that no one is useless, out of place, or disposable. The pilgrims walked for justice for those they love, some of the women were themselves undocumented immigrants who had not seen their children or their families in over ten years. Other women work on behalf of domestic workers and survivors of domestic violence. Each woman had her story and a personal reason for walking. The pilgrimage was not a form of protest, but a walk of compassion and awareness, a practice of peace, putting faith into action, reminding those along the way to have open arms, open hearts and open minds towards all people. As the pilgrims drew close to Washington, D.C., one of the women remarked: “We will all leave the pilgrimage transformed. A lot of us are healing through this walk. It’s been very cathartic and uplifting.”<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these pilgrimages that focus on healing personal and communal tragedy, conflict, and issues of human dignity and justice, the pilgrimage experience includes walks across Europe that draw attention to climate justice<sup>8</sup> highlighting and educating the world as to the urgency for attention to our environment and the devastating effects that will result for the environment, ecosystem and the human community if we continue to neglect our responsibility as stewards of our common home and protect it from greater devastation.

There are pilgrimages that take place which are far from the historical and oft romantic idea of pilgrimage, that of the journeys of refugees... pilgrims or “strangers” walk in fear and away with little hope or assurances for their futures. In giving serious consideration to pilgrimage as an educationally transformative experience, it is important to recognize and examine the situations of those who are pilgrims not by choice, or are not in search of spiritual lessons, but rather walk or flee out of necessity for survival. What are the implications for these pilgrimages and how might the journeys of political and social refugees and migrants serve to transform our global communities?

As religiously revelatory and educationally transformative journeys, pilgrimages can serve to draw attention to political, social, economic and environmental issues that affect local, national and global communities and diverse religious traditions. Pilgrimages can offer reconciliation, healing and hope to those who are broken and in need of mercy. In all forms, they serve to strengthen and affirm our religious beliefs and remind us of the depth and richness of our relationships and capacity for charity and love.

Often, during the last days or two hundred kilometers while walking the Camino de Santiago, I have overheard or engaged in conversations with my students or other pilgrims along the way about “what next?” Questions about how do we bring the positive experiences, emotions, and values that we have learned on the Camino back home? Many pilgrims fear that the simplified lifestyle that they have adopted, the deeper insights and awareness that they have developed with regard to the environment, the gestures of hospitality and kindness both offered and received will be abandoned and forgotten once they depart from Santiago for the many places called home. There is fear that the return home will bring a return of the patterns of behavior and attitudes that were in place before walking the Camino. The lessons learned from the Camino, the lessons learned from any pilgrimage journey, are lessons that can be embraced, embodied, and expressed upon returning home.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Accessed, February 15, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> The following web resource provides insight into pilgrimage work in the area of climate change: <http://peoplespilgrimage.org/>.

The lessons learned on pilgrimage are lessons that shape our spirits and our lives. On pilgrimage, through perseverance, gestures of kindness, understanding and justice, we are reminded that we do not journey alone as we make the pilgrimage of our lives. Our travels serve as metaphors for our lives, recognizing that when we set out we walk in faith into the unknowing, risking that our essence and our characters will be permanently altered and not without discomfort, disruption and dis-ease. Yet, the risk also brings with it the potential for joy, compassion, understanding, and love in depths that were unpredictable and unimaginable before we set foot our doors. As pilgrims, we immerse ourselves in the experience of walking and discovery, attuned and open to the confusion and turmoil of creation, seeking peace within ourselves and peace within our world.

Through pilgrimage we are compelled to respond in manners that are not necessarily comfortable or how we desire, but rather, in ways that are right, just, and loving. The pilgrimage experience, both particularly and broadly seizes our understanding and recognition of our personal physical and spiritual suffering as well as the suffering of those who despair and are lost. Making pilgrimage to distant shrines or relics of saints exposes our vulnerability and challenges our faith, faith in our religious beliefs as well as our bodies and minds. This stripping away of our comforts invites reflection and meditation on the values we hold, the choices we make, and the impact that these values and choices have on our young people, our environment and societies at large. The pilgrim's journey of discovery and awareness is an opportunity for examination and a realignment of how we can envision and live each day of life. A pilgrim's journey does not end at the tomb of St. James in Santiago de Compostela or after dipping into the healing waters in the grotto in Lourdes. It is an invitation to renew one's commitment to living in understanding, tolerance, and peace as a loving community reflecting God's unconditional love. It is an invitation to open oneself up to the very real possibility of altering one's perspective on what it means to be engaged with others unconditionally and lovingly. It is a bidding to step out and take a sacred adventure that will forever redesign one's life, as illustrated by a conversation of the wizard Gandalf the Grey and the Hobbit, Mr. Bilbo Baggins in the film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's classic tale, *The Hobbit*:

Gandalf: "I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it's very difficult to find anyone." Bilbo: "I should think so, in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can't think what anybody sees in them," Gandalf: "You'll have a tale or two to tell when you come back..." Bilbo: "You can promise that I'll come back?" Gandalf: "No. And if you do, you will not be the same."<sup>9</sup>

Pilgrimages that attend to social issues and healing are journeys that have potential to offer educators and students freedom to examine, test, learn, and flourish in the hope of a renewed world, altering the manner in which they engage with the world. These are essentials for growing in loving, religious, relationships. Pilgrimage, provides seekers the occasion to experience opportunities of grace that deepen, accentuate, reveal,

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<sup>9</sup> *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, DVD, Directed by Peter Jackson, (Burbank: Warner Bros., 2012).

and offer hope in the lessons of life. Participating in a pilgrimage draws participants into a deeper understanding of or empathy for issues of social justice. The unexpected movement of the Spirit draws participants into experiences that provide insight into areas of concerns, or the self in unforeseen or fortuitous ways. Pilgrimages offer hope and healing in the traditional understanding, but may also cultivate a recognition of the power of love, patience, forgiveness, understanding, faith, and joy within the individual.

### **Conclusion**

The spirituality of pilgrimage has developed, continued, and been sustained throughout history and across the world. The journeys, rituals, symbols, and sacred places of ancestors have left indelible marks on the landscape of the earth, and on the psyches of communities. Pilgrimages offer seekers inspiration and hope along the road and the possibility to return with experiences that can be reshaped and refitted into everyday lives. As educational and spiritually transformative experiences, they remain with the person long after the journey is a distant memory. It is the responsibility of all who have made pilgrimage to create communities of hope and healing that are embedded in the values and practices of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is both an outward and inner practice that forms the person in relation to wholeness. This practice is made manifest in a variety of forms that assist the pilgrim in their personal development and relationships. This growth and movement of life is one that is religiously and educationally revelatory, transforming the pilgrim into an understanding that life is not just about getting from beginning to end. Pilgrimage offers each of us the chance to walk on the road towards the Divine and discover that the Divine is present within the depths of the journey.

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**'From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces':  
Working through Microaggressions in Religious Education<sup>1</sup>**

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Educating for critical consciousness and liberation from oppressive structures and practices in any field requires a commitment to disrupt established patterns and ways of being. This type of education and formation requires a truthful naming of realities and an honest search for constructive responses. One might say this type of work is especially acute in *religious* education because of the spiritual values out of which this work draws strength and to which it strives. Welcoming the stranger, offering generosity amidst a fear of scarcity, identifying and responding to injustice are a few of these values that are potentially polarizing and conflict-inducing. This is the prophetic and pastoral work my institutional colleagues and I aim to shape among the students we teach and spiritually form in a context of growing diversity and difference. Yet even with this shared purpose, there remains a pressing and growing question: How do we achieve this liberation and transformation within an increasing awareness of microaggressions? Furthermore, does our current context of heightened sensitivities hinder the possibility of intrapersonal and collective transformation? Take as an example the need to speak with political correctness. Does the need to be politically correct discourage persons from even entering a transformational process for fear they might speak out of line? Is it not better to be safe than sorry?

This paper will probe in the first part two concepts, microaggressions and brave space, in order to address the issue of religious education for justice and transformational praxis. The paper then offers a reflection of the transition from safe to brave space with the intent of helping educators embrace transformative learning as uncomfortable as it may be. The final part introduces some initial suggestions in creating brave space. The hope of this paper is for theological and religious educators to step into braver spaces in order to integrate religious faith and formation with critical issues. The paper aims to provide a conceptual piece that utilizes the author's own teaching experiences in dialogue with an interdisciplinary collection of authors and texts.

**Microaggression: What Is It?**

The word *microaggression* is not a new, but older, concept as Chester Pierce and colleagues initially introduced the term back in 1978. Through a critical examination of television commercials and media construction, Pierce et al. argue that racism against blacks is subtly learned and inherited through media consumption. They name this reality, microaggressions, which are:

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<sup>1</sup> The title is adapted from Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens' chapter, "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice," in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*, ed. Lisa M. Landreman (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013), 135-50.

subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ of blacks by offenders. The offensive mechanisms used against blacks often are innocuous. The cumulative weight of their never-ending burden is the major ingredient in black-white interactions. This accounts for a near inevitable perceptual clash between blacks and whites in regard to how a matter is described as well as the emotional charge involved.<sup>2</sup>

Several of the words and phrases from this introductory definition are worthy of pause and brief reflection. A microaggression is a “mechanism” that is “innocuous” in intent and yet, nevertheless, “stunning” in impact because it is “subtle” and “cumulative.” A microaggression is not meant to be hurtful but over the long haul, has a swelling effect that slowly breaks down the one who receives microaggressions over time. Derald Wing Sue, an educator at the Teacher’s College at Columbia University and a chief researcher to reintroduce microaggressions in contemporary literature and scholarship, offers that microaggressions “are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group memberships.”<sup>3</sup> Sue also expands Pierce et al.’s scope of microaggressions from race to include gender, sexual orientation, and other potential discriminatory *isms*. Within religious and theological contexts, Cody Sanders and Angela Yarber, both speaking from within the Church, argue that the Church, through microaggressions, unknowingly commits harm to those of traditionally marginalized and oppressed groups.<sup>4</sup> To Sanders and Yarber, microaggressions are the small, consistent, under-the-radar ways that demean and malign persons due to their group membership on account of their multiple identities.<sup>5</sup> Microaggressions manifest in three delineations: *microinsults*, *microinvalidation*, and *microassaults*.

### **Microaggression Forms: Microinsults, Microinvalidation, Microassaults<sup>6</sup>**

Microinsults are the small offences that occur in the form of blatant offensiveness to subtle, but no-less-potent, ignorance. The insult transpires when the offender communicates to the receiving person they are not aware of the contextual realities nor the identities that marginalize the victim in the first place (or worse, that they are aware but do not care about the impact) nor are they aware of the power discrepancy upon which this microinsult is established. A presenting female transgender is often addressed as “he” or “him” by her work colleagues, a hiring committee scrutinizes a candidate more than others because of their age, and a person who is pulled aside at airport security for a pat down whenever they fly are three

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<sup>2</sup> Chester Pierce, Jean V. Carew, Diane Pierce-Gonzalez, and Deborah Willis, “An Experiment in Racism TV Commercials” in *Television and Education*, ed. Chester M. Pierce (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1978) 66.

<sup>3</sup> Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.), xvi.

<sup>4</sup> Cody J. Sanders and Angela Yarber, *Microaggressions in Ministry: Confronting the Hidden Violence of Everyday Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Sue, 28-41; Sanders and Yarber, 13-5.

common microinsults built upon stereotypes and ignorance. Additionally, and perhaps more dangerously, the insult might occur through a veiled form of praise. A woman who is complimented on her driving by a man may feel uncomfortable with the praise and upon further reflection, understand this as a subtle put down due to the belief that women do not drive well.

Microinvalidations are the violations that happen when the feelings and expressions of marginalized persons are disregarded or altered to soften the power and legitimacy behind those feelings and expressions. A person who expresses she has experienced racism only to have it invalidated by another (“They didn’t intend it to be hurtful” “They were just joking; lighten up a little”) experiences the reality of being unseen or unheard when it should be an opportunity to see and understand more clearly. The statement cannot be taken at face value but rather must be proven because it has now been “disproved” or disregarded by the offender. The onus is now placed upon the receiver of the microaggression to convince the offender that there is something of significance occurring.

Finally, microassaults are those injuries that occur through blatant attack. These are conscious and executed with intent. They are mistakenly conflated with flagrant forms of racism as one might witness through segregation, Black lynchings, the Holocaust, etc. These explicit forms of racism differ however from *microassaults* in that the latter, in a contemporary pluralistic context that values diversity and honors (fears?) political correctness, influences these expressions to take on an “underground” dynamic. Explicit racism is now witnessed through graffiti; anti-immigration sentiment is empowered through group demonstrations at political conventions; and true intrapersonal sentiments lash out when pushed to the limit and a loss of control results. Sue offers that microassaults more readily exist when at least one of the three dynamics are present: (1) anonymity of expressed action will safely protect the offender (e.g., graffiti), (2) there is group social power and thus mob mentality (e.g., political conventions), and (3) one is pushed to the brink, loses control, and their biased attitudes are revealed (e.g., Michael Richards – better known as Kramer – at a Los Angeles comedy night club).<sup>7</sup>

### **“Are We All A Little Too Sensitive?” Why Sensitivity to Microaggressions Is Potentially Problematic**

Before critically reflecting upon the notion of microaggressions in transformative religious education, I offer that diversity and justice education, and intercultural competency lie at the heart of who I am as an educator both in the academy and in the church. The expression of my faith values and beliefs are intricately bound in the teaching and formational expressions of these commitments. Furthermore, my scholarship and writing also take on critical dimensions with regards to race, gender construction, theology, and cultural studies. As a second-generation Korean American from a pastor’s family with immigrant parents, I am fully

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<sup>7</sup> Sue, 28-31.

committed to this work because my faith does not allow me to live otherwise. I am, as the blind man at Bethsaida once was, on the journey of seeing people more clearly as people, and less as trees (Mark 8:22-26) and in order for this to occur, diversity, justice, and interculturalism are key pieces to my growth.

Perhaps it is for this very reason that I am uncomfortable with leaving the act of teaching microaggressions as the last, or one of the last, actions or words to be had. That is, as religious educators who aim to transform reality towards our highest images of life, creation, and the sacred, it is not enough to provide students with the theory of microaggressions and then to let them be. At its best, an understanding of microaggressions causes persons to pause and self-reflect before speaking or acting. At its worst, an awareness of microaggressions paralyzes and even prevents persons from engaging transformative and life-changing encounters.

The question in the subheading, “Aren’t we all a little too sensitive?” was asked in a class I taught from a person who is historically marginalized in society on account of race and contextually marginalized at an ecumenical and interreligious school as ours on account of the student’s more “conservative” theological commitments.<sup>8</sup> The student posed this question as we worked through Sanders and Yarber’s book and the theory of microaggressions in a course entitled “Ministry in a Multicultural Context,” a course that specifically addresses issues of diversity, justice, power, and interculturalism. Initially, I found it a tad ironic that a student who experiences marginalization, othering, and other oppressions in society and at our school, was the one to offer this question. However, as I further reflected upon the question and the person who asked it, I was drawn to where it left us and where it left me. My immediate class response was to say that the social violence and harm present in society is cause enough for us to err on the side of being too aware and sensitive to the realities of others than to err in indifference and apathy. This still holds true and yet, as a religious educator committed to transformation, I have wrestled with the thought that to be sensitive and to create safe space is a beginning, and not a culminating, step in our educating.

### **From Safe to Brave Space**

Creating safe space in one’s teaching fosters power and security for it affords both the educator and learner the opportunity to explore oneself amidst other exploring selves in a relatively controlled and predictable setting. For some, a safe space is a place to be accepted as one is; it is refuge. This is especially powerful for those whose identities are marginalized. The created safe space is a place to hear one’s own voice and to strengthen it in an environment potentially less rife with fear or threat. This type of space reflects a “separatist” approach and

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<sup>8</sup> “Conservative” “liberal/progressive” are paltry words when understood or expressed only in a binary sense. I struggle to find better words that are not polarizing and yet express the difference that this student experiences with others who are more “progressive” in their theological and spiritual commitments. “Traditional” “Orthodox” “Non-traditional” “Non-orthodox” also do disservice to the reality that most of us have some traditional, progressive, orthodox, conservative, etc. pieces to who we are. These concepts are fluid within most, if not all, of us.

serves as a site of resistance to the harmful daily encounters a person usually experiences in society.<sup>9</sup> A black fraternity, an Indian-specific church, a women's only gym, a senior community center, and Japanese basketball leagues are a few examples of separatist safe spaces.<sup>10</sup> For others, a safe space is an "inclusive" space that aims to include all diversities and viewpoints. These are often the goal of teachers in a classroom or a religious institution in welcoming newcomers. Their hope is to create an inclusive space that feels safe because all are important and all are welcome to join and participate. A common commitment of inclusive safe spaces is the promise to invite all to speak and contribute and to hear all who do without judgement. Finally, a third type of safe space is the "paradoxical" safe space where a commitment to differences and diversity results in a simultaneously safe and unsafe, and inside and outside, reality.<sup>11</sup> Here, the space is safe because those who enter this space acknowledge that these spaces are never politically or value free and yet, the acknowledgement of these seemingly contrasting dynamics inherent within any one space, allows for more genuine encounters.

In an ecumenical and interreligious setting such as ours, creating a safe space in class is a necessary move.<sup>12</sup> Students who have some prior exposure to religious difference are challenged in their ability to coexist in mutual respect, even more so for the student who comes with limited encounters. In this context, there is great need to foster safe space so students feel like they will not get run over or be dismissed in their learning amidst such difference. Questions of identity are abundant and it is within safe and secure spaces that we navigate through these questions.

Transformational learning for a more just and humane world are two other key commitments of our school and university which then lead us to a potential conflict of differing pedagogies and teaching philosophies in light of the previous commitment to create safe spaces for learning. Do we, as religious and theological educators, do a disservice to our students and our mission when we create only "inclusive" safe spaces? Do we fear unintentionally enacting microaggressions towards our peers and thus would rather be preemptive and abstain than engage in messy discussions and complex practices?

So that our religious and theological education is transformative, we must commit to transitioning from creating safe spaces to creating brave spaces. Some theorists propose that safe space in social justice education *is* brave space when rightly understood because safe spaces acknowledge that classrooms are neither politically nor conflict free while calling

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<sup>9</sup> Heather Rosenfeld and Elsa Noterman, "Safe Space: Towards a Reconceptualization," *Antipode* 46, no.5 (2014): 1352-6.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that the use of the term "separatist" does not necessarily convey a negative connotation. While there are separatist compounds that may do harm, there are also separatist groups that serve as refuge.

<sup>11</sup> Rosenfeld and Noterman, 1355-6.

<sup>12</sup> Though some religious and theological institutions may not have the interreligious and ecumenical diversity that other institutions or regions might have, I contend that if we probe closely enough, there are many diversities inherent within a group, even in a separatist group as noted above. This is not an ecumenical and interreligious issue only but one that asks religious educators how far we will and need to go in engaging the distances these differences bring.

persons to enter in and engage others with a risk-taking posture.<sup>13</sup> While a strong argument exists for this understanding of safe space, I follow the lead of Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens who make explicit a move from that which is safe to that which is brave.<sup>14</sup> By explicitly naming a space as brave, the educator communicates that transformation through bold contributions in discussions and other actions is the hope and aim for which education exists. Feminist pedagogy offers that there is greater opportunity for transformation when education includes the whole self: one's physical body, cognition, social relations, and emotions. This does not imply that safe spaces are not sites of transformative learning. Rather that the aim of brave space (i.e., facilitating experiences and learning that are transformative) is clear for all who participate.

In another class I taught on community, a mainline Protestant student asked if we could pray for a fellow Catholic student (with this student's permission) concerning a family matter. As a United Methodist with Evangelical spiritual roots teaching during my first year at a progressive ecumenical and interreligious school, I, as the professor, felt uncomfortable with this request mostly because I was unsure of how to proceed and what language to use wondering whether it would be offensive to those who knew of my Evangelical roots. *Am I to invoke the name of Jesus? Am I to ask for God's providence and intervention and pray for a miracle or am I to pray a prayer of empathy and peace along the journey? Am I to petition a personal God or to pray to 'Holy Mystery'?* What ensued was an entry into brave space for both the class and myself. I shared with the class the request and then asked the students if they are ever afraid to pray at the school in front of others. There was a resounding chorus of affirmations and a number of head nods taking place. The students continued sharing that in wanting to be respectful of the myriad religious and spiritual expressions among the constituents in the school, they did not want to offend others with their own religious identity and practices. That is, they did not want to enact any microaggressions on others and ended up abstaining from practicing forms at school they regularly do in their "safe spaces" at home and in their houses of worship.

I shared with the class that I too hold these same fears and inhibitions. And yet, if we are to move to places where the education we offer is forming students to act and live, not out of a place of fear, but of transformation, our class (me included) would need to work through these potential microaggressions and hold enough respect in this community of learning to live with our mistakes, which is a natural part of transformative learning. If religious education does not provide spaces where people encounter both their securities and insecurities, we may fall short of that which we aim to do in transformative and social justice education, helping people's meaning-making frames and ensuing actions change.

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<sup>13</sup> Lynn C. Holley and Sue Steiner, "Safe Space: Student Perspectives on Classroom Environment," *Journal of Social Work Education* 41, no. 1 (2005): 49-64; Melissa Redmond, "Safe Space Oddity: Revisiting Critical Pedagogy," *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 30, (2010): 1-14

<sup>14</sup> "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue around Diversity and Social Justice" in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*, ed. Lisa M. Landreman (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013), 135-50.

## Working Through Microaggressions: Some Considerations

### Classroom Environment

When I sense that a class is on the brink and at a threshold of new learning, as an educator, I utilize the white board to foster a space of mutual learning and to appropriately destabilize my own power in the class.<sup>15</sup> In this move, I have students, when ready, come to the board and write down a word or phrase to answer a given prompt. The hope is for students to feel ownership in this space and to enter into braver space because they feel more a part of it. In the previously mentioned class scenario, I tweaked this process a little. After sharing my own vulnerabilities of praying at the school, I asked students to offer any requests for prayer which I wrote up on the board. Approximately after ten minutes of fielding requests, the whole board was filled and we were ready to pray. I encouraged students to offer out loud, as one was led, a prayer that was true to their own religious identity and that we, as a class, would honor that person and prayer, by respecting their language, theology, and genuine intent. We prayed; it was awkward; theologies clashed. At the same time, there was something beautiful occurring. We were taken to a different place of exposure, growth, and learning on account of the brave space this community of learners was willing to enter.<sup>16</sup>

### Education as Spiritual Formation: The Person as Educator

Parker Palmer's writings are invaluable resources in considering who it is that teaches.<sup>17</sup> His challenge to those who teach is for us to become aware of our inner landscape so we minimize the harm we might cause others in our teaching while also nurturing our gifts in order to connect more deeply with our students. Giving attention to our own inner landscape positions us to see more clearly the fear our students bring into education in addition to the fears we ourselves bring. "We cannot see the fears in our students until we see the fear in ourselves" is a simple and yet, profound statement religious educators would do well to consider for it expresses the truth that education is not a disentangled and objective science to be mastered but a complex and fluid art to be reflected upon because it involves a web of relationships with persons who are intricate beings.<sup>18</sup> We see the fear (and joy) in others as we are in touch with our own fear and joy. This is a prophetic and spiritual act because this kind of teaching is dedicated to transforming the whole self and social systems. It takes a deep

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<sup>15</sup> To "destabilize" my power as the professor is to first acknowledge that my authority in the classroom can never be fully relinquished, nor should it be. However, it is to also acknowledge that there are models of teaching that are established upon the sole authority and expertise of the educator and educator alone. I take a constructivist approach to teaching and learning and in this sense, try to make my classrooms as mutual as possible so students feel like they can own the class.

<sup>16</sup> Students offered during our break that they were thankful for the discussion and opportunity to pray together. Expectantly, there may have been those who felt the time a waste or offensive to their own spiritual commitments.

<sup>17</sup> One resource I find especially helpful is *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of A Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Palmer, 47.

awareness of self, the other, and the created relationship between self and the other. The least we can do is to teach our students to be politically correct and aware of their microaggressive acts. Yet being politically correct is not enough if we are to make substantial changes throughout society.<sup>19</sup> We can speak well of others and yet, be persons who fall short, very short, of justice, generosity, respect, and love.

### **When Does Creating Brave Space Make A Difference?**

Admittedly, this is a difficult question to answer for in a context of increasing learning assessments, how can one really gauge a spiritual endeavor until long after the class has occurred and time allows one to see the fruit of these efforts? Classroom evaluations are helpful but the sustenance of such transformation is usually not afforded in a matter of a few weeks or class sessions. In the Multicultural Ministry course previously mentioned, at one point in the class, I encouraged the students to be brave and to speak from their own religious identities. I had sensed students were hesitating to speak from their hearts and were speaking logically, rationally, and with caution trying not to offend others. They were not willing to risk being called out which in my estimation, provided a safe, but not as transformative, space. As I offered this encouragement, and the class worked through the microaggressions book in addition to other diversity and justice learnings, I could sense a boldness arising within our students. Instead of me encouraging students to be bold, it was students who were either encouraging their peers to “be brave” or who were stepping into their own voice. “I’m just going to say it but for me, I believe in the miracles of the Bible and the Bible is a source of power and strength for me,” “At the risk of being microaggressive, I need to point out that when you say ‘Catholic or Christian’ this is offensive because Catholics are Christian” are two examples of what I witnessed in that course. Students felt safe and brave because we were committed to our growth as a community of learners. When I asked students to bring a symbol of power, there was a white male student who, unaware of the historical significance of his symbol, brought a rope in to show something that is strong. I found out later, that some of the students, including one of the African American students, began to feel uncomfortable. I did not address it, in part, because I thought it would have been so blatant a gesture of mimicking the lynchings that I was willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the student. A fellow non-African American student eventually discussed this with the student at which point the student, in realizing his error and regret, offered a written apology to the rest of the class. Perhaps we know creating brave space works when our students are willing to self-monitor and spur one another on to further growth. When they are willing to step out of their fear and into unknown space maybe we are working through our fear of microaggressions, through our political correctness, and into transformed lives.

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<sup>19</sup> Kathleen T. Talvacchia, *Critical Minds and Discerning Hearts: A Spirituality of Multicultural Teaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), 4-7.

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## **Cultivating the Virtue of Teacher Presence in Transformative Education: Inspirations from the Spiritual Writings of John Baptist De La Salle**

### **Abstract:**

This paper highlights the importance of teacher presence in transformative learning, particularly in the context of schooling for young people. Specifically, it retrieves the prophetic mysticism in the spiritual writings of John Baptist De La Salle in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and considers its contemporary relevance as a spiritual foundation for teacher presence, nurturing an ethical vision of teaching in light of Christian faith. Through the lens of Lasallian spirituality, I discuss how Robert Starratt's triple articulation of presence as affirming, enabling, and critical may be spiritually deepened through cultivating an awareness of God as (a) present in the young, as (b) providential presence for the young, and as (c) just presence with the poor accordingly.

### **Introduction**

“Let us remember we are in the Holy Presence of God” - this was a maxim that we began with every morning at assembly prayer in the Lasallian secondary school in Singapore where I was educated. Another maxim that the school adopted as a theme during my junior year, and it has since then become a popular philosophy that informs my educational practice, was “Learning how to learn.” As I reflect on the possible connections between these two maxims, an aspect of Lasallian schooling that strikes me as memorable has been my experience of teachers who embodied a certain presence as they carried out their professional commitments. How might this sense of teacher presence be characterized, and in what ways is this connected to the Lasallian tradition of Catholic schooling? This paper as such considers how Lasallian spirituality attends to the cultivation of teacher presence in companioning young people today to ‘learn how to learn,’ which, to me, serves as a shorthand for transformative learning.

This paper will do two things. First, it explains the core dynamics of transformative learning (TL) but with a focus to situate the importance of teacher presence, particularly in the context of schooling for young people, where the role of teachers is perhaps more pronounced as companioning adolescents to grow into a habit of reflecting critically and acting responsibly. It is in light of teachers' accompaniment with young people that I highlight the importance of what Robert Starratt (2012: 121) calls “the virtue of presence.”<sup>1</sup> Second, this paper re-frames this “virtue of presence” through the lens of Lasallian spirituality, drawing on John Baptist De La Salle's *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* and the *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts*.<sup>2</sup> Though

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Starratt, *Cultivating an Ethical School* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 121.

<sup>2</sup> These sources are published in a single anthology as John Baptist De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, trans. Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC, ed. Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC (Landover, Md.: Lasallian Publications, 1994). Specific references to De La Salle's are hereafter cited in text as *M*, followed by the meditation number and section standardized in the anthology.

written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, his spiritual writings, I argue, continue to be relevant to teachers today because of their emphasis on a critical contemplative stance toward education, which in turn cultivates the prophetic dimension of teacher presence.

### **“Learning how to learn”: Dynamics of Transformative Learning (TL) and the Importance of Teacher Presence**

Through the theoretical lens of transformative learning, learning how to learn is first recognizing the educational process as engaging a complex dynamic of meaning making. Jack Mezirow, who introduced the concept of transformative learning in adult education, speaks of meaning making in terms of a re-visioning and enlargement of one’s “frame of reference, ” which is “the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions.”<sup>3</sup> The presumption here is that “how we see the world is a result of our perceptions of our experiences,”<sup>4</sup> and so the process of transformative learning aims to make explicit for ourselves the multiple lens with which we interpret and order the meaning of our lives. Learning is value-laden. A central element in transformative learning, then, is critical reflection that challenges learners to name and assess the validity of those values, beliefs, and assumptions that are taken-for-granted in their frames of reference, “mak[ing] them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective ... to guide action.”<sup>5</sup> According to Mezirow, critical reflection in transformative learning is facilitated by discourse, which is “the process in which we have an active dialogue with others to better understand the meaning of an experience.”<sup>6</sup> Seen in this light, learning how to learn calls for a sense of community and demands a dialogical spirit of collaboration between teachers and students as learners on a journey.

This journey is a movement toward self-actualization, which presumes the freedom and autonomy of human beings to make personal choices.<sup>7</sup> “Transformation Theory’s focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others – to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers.”<sup>8</sup> The accent is placed here on recognizing and growing into “a sense of responsible agency” in the context of relationships that are always situated within wider patterns of power shaped by culture, socioeconomic structures and ideologies.<sup>9</sup> Theorists and practitioners after Mezirow have taken up this social dimension of transformative learning and highlighted its emancipatory potential. Stephen Brookfield goes as far to argue that reflection is distinctively critical in fostering transformative learning only when

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<sup>3</sup> Jack Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow & Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Cranton and Edward W. Taylor, “Transformative Learning Theory: Seeking a More Unified Theory,” in *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward W. Taylor, Patricia Cranton & Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Cranton and Taylor, “Transformative Learning Theory: Seeking a More Unified Theory,” 6.

<sup>8</sup> Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult,” 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

it engages in “ideology critique.”<sup>10</sup> By this, he means challenging hegemonic practices in order to uncover and imagine alternative ways of being that are otherwise silenced and marginalized.<sup>11</sup> Laurent A. Parks Daloz emphasizes the connection between transformative learning and social responsibility that builds on a “capacity to identify one’s own sense of self with the well-being of all life.”<sup>12</sup> In particular, he calls for “a constructive engagement with otherness.”<sup>13</sup> What he means by this is that we learn to perceive our encounters with difference not as threat, but as opportunities for ongoing dialogue to seek understanding and build bridges for the “common good.”<sup>14</sup> From this emancipatory dimension of transformative learning, learning how to learn is developing a critical awareness of our mutual responsibility towards one another, fostering a raised consciousness that informs our convictions to work toward social change.

The literature on TL underscores the ethical nature of learning. That is, the good of learning is not simply the transmission of knowledge from somewhere ‘out there.’ Rather, the good is found in the critical ‘sorting-out’ and interiorization of what is known so as to know and enact one’s situated position as agent within the social world s/he inhabits with others. The realization of agency paradoxically stems from our recognition as vulnerable inter-dependent social beings bound in responsive relations of co-creative responsibility. This ethical nature of learning necessarily implicates teaching as an intrinsically ethical practice.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the role of educators (and school teachers in particular) seems to be sidelined in the literature on TL following Mezirow, perhaps because Mezirow first developed his theory on transformative learning for adult education.<sup>16</sup> Contrary to Mezirow, I see TL as an ongoing process throughout life. Given my interest in this paper on teaching young people in schools, a more significant issue would be the distinctive place of adolescence in relation to the process of transformative learning. The question, then, is how we ought to begin to introduce the process of transformative learning for adolescents. What would help young people learn *about* learning how to learn in the context of schooling?

In light of this question, I suggest that teachers play a more pronounced role in schools as companioning adults who support and challenge young people to recognize and navigate the social and cultural world of values in which they find themselves, encouraging them to ask questions and to be attentive to the impact of their actions on others. The quality of teacher presence is integral to their work of accompaniment such that the school is not only an agent of socialization, but also a social ethical force that positions young people to see that their lives do in fact matter for the transformation of their everyday realities. Starratt speaks about presence as

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen D. Brookfield, “Transformative Learning as Ideology Critique,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow & Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 128.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>12</sup> Laurent A. Parks Daloz, “Transformative Learning for the Common Good,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow & Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 105.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-112.

<sup>15</sup> Starratt, *Cultivating an Ethical School*, 108.

<sup>16</sup> Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult,” 26. Mezirow writes, “Although adolescents may learn to become critically reflective of the assumptions of others, becoming critically reflective of one’s own assumptions appears to be much more likely to occur in adults.” It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate critically his methodological move to delimit critical self-reflection as a distinctively adult capacity. For a view that broadens TL to include the whole life span, see Robert Kegan, “What ‘Form’ Transforms? – A Constructivist-Developmental Approach to Transformative Learning,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow & Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

a virtue that facilitates teaching as an ethical practice.<sup>17</sup> According to him, there are three senses to this “virtue of presence”<sup>18</sup> – *affirming presence, enabling presence, and critical presence*:

Affirming presence accepts the person or the event as it is, in its ambiguity, its particularity, its multidimensionality. Enabling presence is open to the possibilities of the person or event to contain or reveal something special, something of deep value and significance. Critical presence expects to find both negative and positive features in persons and events. People and events and circumstances reveal unequal relationships of power and reciprocity. Critical presence brings to light what is tacit, assumed, or presumed in situations that reflect human constructions and beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

Starratt’s discussion on presence, however, is narrowly framed as the learner’s dialogical engagement with study material.<sup>20</sup> To the extent that teaching is “virtuous practice,”<sup>21</sup> his notion of presence can and ought to be extended to include the teacher’s way of being with students in the learning process. In the next section, I reframe Starratt’s three senses of presence – affirming, enabling, and critical – through the lens of Lasallian spirituality, which serves to nourish an ethical vision of teaching in light of faith.

### **“Let us remember we are in the Holy Presence of God”: Lasallian Spirituality and the Cultivation of Teacher Presence**

A French priest and theologian, John Baptist De La Salle founded the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 1680. In 1950, fifty years after his canonization, he was declared the patron saint of all teachers of youth. De La Salle’s writings articulated an educational mission that demonstrated a preferential option not only for the poor, but *also* for children (more specifically boys) through gratuitous schools in France.<sup>22</sup> In this section, I offer a reading of De La Salle’s spiritual writings with a focus on how they contribute to a contemporary Christian spirituality for educators in cultivating what Starratt has described as the “virtue of presence” that inspires not only the process of transformative learning, but also creates an environment that facilitates a habit of learning how to learn.

My analysis will draw on two sources: *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* and the *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts*. Written sometime after 1707 and before De La Salle’s death in 1719, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is a centerpiece in Lasallian spirituality in that its sixteen pieces encapsulate De La Salle’s faith journey with an intent to have the Brothers and, by extension, lay Christian educators, reflect and “discover their spiritual, charismatic identity in the

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<sup>17</sup> Starratt, *Cultivating an Ethical School*, 121. Starratt identifies three virtues integral to the ethical work of teaching and learning: “the virtue of presence, the virtue of authenticity, and the virtue of responsibility.” This paper focuses on presence.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>22</sup> For a historical biography of De La Salle’s faith journey in establishing the work of the Christian Brothers in France, see Luke Salm, FSC, *The Work is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* (Romeoville, Illinois: Christian Brothers Publications, 1989). Salm writes, “For De La Salle and the Brothers gratuity of instruction was a fundamental principle. This not only provided a quality education for the poor, but also guaranteed that no distinction would be made in the school between those who could afford to pay and those who could not.” (p. 57)

roots of their calling.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts*, though originally published and distributed among the Brothers after De La Salle’s death, offer for us today a spiritual vision that integrates practical directives for educators, highlighting in particular their ethical commitments to the poor and the young.<sup>24</sup>

What I want to highlight is the critical contemplative stance toward pedagogy in Lasallian spirituality. For De La Salle, spirituality is not an add-on or mere enhancer to the art of education. Rather, teaching *is* spiritual; it is “divine work,” according to Lasallian scholar George Van Grieken.<sup>25</sup> This does not mean that teachers are to lord over their students as demi-gods. Rather, as “cooperators with Jesus Christ” (M.195), they are to be mindful of the power they have been given not to hurt but to heal, as well as to be attentive to the activity of God’s Spirit in the educational process. Theologian and Lasallian scholar Michel Sauvage has described this critical contemplative stance in De La Salle’s writings as “mystical realism.”<sup>26</sup> As he explains, De La Salle’s source of spirituality is in “the lived experience of God, but an experience that is reinterpreted, reconstructed and relocated in the context of the history of salvation.”<sup>27</sup> Sauvage outlines a four-fold rhythm to this mystical realism:

1. Consider the concrete teaching situation.
2. Contemplate the element of mystery involved within it.
3. Make a renewed commitment to transform the present reality.
4. Be open to the transcendent and freely given Ultimate.<sup>28</sup>

In practice, this four-fold rhythm is more iterative and cyclical rather than linear. What is worth retrieving here in De La Salle’s writings is a prophetic mysticism that spiritually grounds the virtuous practice of teacher presence for transformative educational praxis. Lasallian spirituality calls teachers to remember that God is relationally encountered as Presence in the everyday of educational activity as co-creatorship with God’s Spirit, walking with the young on the journey of discipleship.<sup>29</sup>

At the heart of Lasallian spirituality, then is an awareness of the connected-ness between God, teachers, and students in the school as a faith community wherein the process of transformative learning happens. It is in being mindful of and living into this connectedness that teachers cultivate an educational presence, which in turn reflects God’s presence in schooling. Starratt’s triple articulation of presence as affirming, enabling, and critical may be spiritually deepened through cultivating an awareness of God as (a) present in the young, as (b) providential presence for the young, and as (c) just presence with the poor and socially marginalized accordingly.

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<sup>23</sup> Miguel Campos, FSC, “Introduction to *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*,” in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, trans. Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC, ed. Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC (Landover, Md.: Lasallian Publications, 1994), 415.

<sup>24</sup> Carl Koch, Jeffrey Calligan, FSC, and Jeffrey Gros, FSC, ed., *John Baptist de la Salle: The Spirituality of Christian Education* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2004), 28.

<sup>25</sup> George Van Grieken, FSC., “Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy,” in *The Vocation of the Child*, ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 379.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Sauvage, FSC, *The Gospel Journey of John Baptist De La Salle (1651-1719)*, trans. Luke Salm, FSC. Lecture at the Center of St. Louis of France in Rome on December 11, 1984: 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> De La Salle frequently refers to children as “disciples” in his *Meditations* (e.g. M 195.1, 196.1, 198.2)

### a) Affirming Presence through an Awareness of God as Present in the Young

Through the lens of Lasallian spirituality, affirming presence is cultivated through an awareness of the human dignity of the young as created in the image and likeness of God. A dominant metaphor in De La Salle's writings is that of "touching hearts," which characterizes the fundamentally relational nature of education. In his meditation on Saint Peter as a model of faith for educators, De La Salle wrote:

Do you have a faith that is such that it is able to touch the hearts of your students and inspire them with the Christian spirit? This is the greatest miracle you could perform and the one that God asks of you, for this is the purpose of your work. (*M* 139.3)

The young, then, are also "a letter which Jesus Christ dictates to you, which you write each day in their hearts, not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God, who acts in you and by you through the power of Jesus Christ" (*M* 195.2). From the standpoint of this relational pedagogy of the heart, transformation takes place from within and between persons who come to see each other in their complex wholeness. As such, affirming presence orients an educator to pay personal attention to each young person as a unique child of God, and in doing so creates the conditions for the classroom to be a trustworthy space for transformative learning. Such a trustworthy space that allows for the vulnerability of learners also demands discipline.

In encouraging teachers to seek out metaphors of "respectful discipline" that allows for an authentic manner of relating with students, Rachel Kessler writes: "Knowing that their vulnerability will be respected and protected, both teachers and students can begin to open their hearts, to connect deeply with themselves and one another, and risk bringing their full humanity to the classroom."<sup>30</sup> Lasallian spirituality is helpful in this regard as it grounds discipline within an ethic of care that recognizes the dignity of the young. While some may find De La Salle's language of reproofs and corrections to be austere and paternalistic, this would be to overlook his insistence on guiding the young with "gentleness," "patience" and "prudence" (*M* 203.2). De La Salle asserts that "[t]he first thing to which we must pay attention is not to undertake reproofs and corrections except under the guidance of the Spirit of God" (*M* 204.1). He further emphasizes, "We must reprove and correct with justice, by helping the children to recognize the wrong they have done, and what correction the fault they have committed deserves, and we must try to have them accept it" (*M* 204.1). As Van Grieken notes of De La Salle's approach to discipline, "Instead of putting the burden on the children, it is the teachers who must look at how they make themselves or their actions unbearable to those entrusted to their care."<sup>31</sup> Underscored, then, are the principles of justice, charity and kindness that affirm young people as being "endowed with reason and must not be corrected like animals, but like reasonable persons" (*M* 204.1). Lasallian spirituality cultivates an affirming presence that holds in tension the vulnerability of young people with their capacity for moral agency.

### b) Enabling Presence through an Awareness of God as Providential Presence for the Young

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<sup>30</sup> Rachel Kessler, "Soul of Students, Soul of Teachers: Welcoming the Inner Life to School," in *Schools with Spirit: Nurturing the Inner Lives of Children and Teachers*, ed. Linda Lantieri (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 121.

<sup>31</sup>Van Grieken, F.S.C., "Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy," 367.

Enabling presence is being open and tending to the surprising possibilities that young people bring. Lasallian spirituality frames the enabling presence of educators within a dual dynamic of faith and zeal in light of God's providence. Now, when we speak about Lasallian spirituality, we cannot separate it from De La Salle's profound experience of God as Providence, not in the abstract but as a life force working concretely within and with him. As De La Salle wrote upon retrospection of his work in Christian education:

It was undoubtedly for this reason that God, Who guides all things with wisdom and serenity, Whose way it is not to force the inclinations of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. He [sic] did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning.<sup>32</sup>

It was this trust in divine providence that sustained De La Salle's educational mission. His experience of a God who guided him gently and with wisdom had also shaped his vision of educators as trustworthy guides and mentors, walking the way of transformation with the young as a gradual process, in faith and zeal. In the Lasallian tradition, then, faith disposes teachers to trust in a God who generously provides. Such is a faith that orients educators to contemplate on the wideness of God's goodness, and to bring it forth in the students they encounter in concrete experience. Zeal is the lived expression of faith that compels educators to embody God's love for all in ways that the young can recognize and practice. As Van Grieken puts it, "Without zeal, faith had no substance, and without faith, zeal had no purpose."<sup>33</sup> The accent here is on role modeling. As De La Salle notes, "Your zeal for the children you instruct would not go very far and would not have much result or success if it limited itself only to words. To make it effective it is necessary that your example support your instructions, and this is one of the main signs of your zeal" (*M* 202.3). What this means for initiating young people into the journey of transformative learning is that educators ought to walk through it themselves by modeling "qualities of intellectual curiosity, tolerance for ambiguity, and intellectual and social humility."<sup>34</sup> Lasallian spirituality thus frames the enabling presence of teachers as witnessing to a spirit of faith and zeal that challenges educators to become simultaneously learners with their students, and model an openness of heart that is essential for critical reflection.

### c) Critical Presence through an Awareness of God's Just Presence with the Poor and Socially Marginalized

Critical presence is engagement with social realities in all their contradictions with a mindfulness of how power shapes relationships. Lasallian spirituality cultivates an educator's critical presence with a social sensitivity that is mission-oriented toward educating the poor.<sup>35</sup> A

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<sup>32</sup> Jean-Baptiste Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, cited in Van Grieken, FSC., *Touching the Hearts of Students*, 23-24. Emphasis mine.

<sup>33</sup> George Van Grieken, FSC., *Touching the Hearts of Students: Characteristics of Lasallian Schools* (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Publications, 1999), 74.

<sup>34</sup> Nadira K. Charaniya, "Cultural-Spiritual Perspective of Transformative Learning," in *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward W. Taylor, Patricia Cranton & Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 240.

<sup>35</sup> Koch et al., ed., *John Baptist de la Salle: The Spirituality of Christian Education*, 32.

recurrent theme in De La Salle's writings is a concern for the social abandonment of the young due to poverty:

Consider that it is a practice only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live on their own, roaming all over like vagabonds as long as they are not able to put them to some work; these parents have no concern to send their children to school because their poverty does not allow them to pay teachers, or else, obliged to look for work outside their homes, they have to abandon their children to themselves [...] God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools. (*M* 194.1)

Underscored here is the prophetic dimension of Lasallian spirituality that works toward educational justice, revealing God's solidarity with the poor and socially marginalized. The Christian Schools, for De La Salle, had been established out of God's Providence for the poor. As he also writes in his meditation on the Feast of the Epiphany:

Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct. Adore him in them. Love poverty and honor the poor after the example of the Magi, for poverty should be dear to you who are responsible for the instruction of the poor. May faith lead you to do this with affection and zeal, because the children are the members of Jesus Christ. In this way this divine Savior will be pleased with you, and you will find him, because he always loved the poor and poverty. (*M* 96.3)

What is expressed here is not only a preferential option for the poor, but also for the young who belong to God through Christ.

The mission-oriented nature of Lasallian spirituality is further embedded in its language of reconciliation to characterize the task of education. De La Salle frequently speaks of teachers as "ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ" (*M* 195.2). The genius of De La Salle lies in his creative adaption of Pauline language to articulate a Christian spirituality for teachers:

Since God according to the expression of the same Apostle [Paul], has made you his ministers in order to reconcile them to him and he has entrusted to you for this purpose the word of reconciliation for them, exhort them, then, as if God were exhorting them through you, for you have been destined to cultivate these young plants by announcing to them the truths of the Gospel, and to procure for them the means of salvation appropriate to their development. (*M* 193.3)

There is a tendency to privatize this language of reconciliation to an individual's relationship with God. However, in its commitment toward social justice, Lasallian spirituality opens up a space for the meaning of reconciliation to be imagined socially, such that care for the young is also paying critical attention to communal structures that oppress or liberate them.

Seen through the lens of Lasallian spirituality, the educator is being critically present when s/he engages in the work of social transformation by tending to the wounds of young people inflicted socially at the intersection of exclusionary structures such as classism, racism, sexism, homo- and trans-phobia. If transformative learning aims to cultivate the agency of young people, critical presence demands that educators be vigilant of how they might be complicit in perpetuating institutional structures in their curriculum and pedagogical practices that unjustly obscure and diminish the humanity of the young. Lasallian spirituality therefore cultivates an

ethical vision of schooling that is concerned with the well-being of young people not only as individuals, but also as creative beings whose human flourishing as agents is situated and communally negotiated within a configuration of structural relations that involves power. Critical presence, then, obliges teachers to reflect on how they are using power responsibly to engage youth participation in resisting and transforming structures that keep communities in dehumanizing situations of impoverishment. From the perspective of faith, this mandate is rooted in and sustained by a spiritual awareness of God's just and creative presence with the poor and socially marginalized.

## **Conclusion**

In reviewing the dynamics of transformative learning, I have highlighted the importance of teacher presence, particularly in relation to young people in schools. Teacher presence, as Kessler understands it, is a “way of being in the world of the classroom ... [which] will ultimately determine how safe and open students will feel when we invite them to explore deep matters.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, with regard to transformative learning, the quality of teacher presence plays an important part in creating a trustworthy environment conducive for young people to begin to grow in a habit of critical reflection. Starratt reframes presence as a virtue integral to teaching as an ethical practice that shapes individuals as relational beings who belong in communities. Where this paper hopes to make a contribution is to interpret this virtue of teacher presence through the lens of Lasallian spirituality. The spiritual writings of John Baptist De La Salle offer a critical contemplative stance to education, which, I suggest, is productive for nourishing and deepening an ethical vision of teaching. What is particularly evocative in De La Salle's works that ought to be reclaimed for contemporary educators is his practice of prophetic mysticism in education. He writes:

You must, then, devote yourself very much to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you have experienced in guiding them. Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything in your work and yourself as an instrument that ought to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask of him.  
(M.196.1)

De La Salle's point here is not only highlighting the importance of prayer as sustenance in the ministry of teaching. In my view, he is articulating a more radical view of teaching *as* prayer; that is, the teacher embodies a contemplative presence that incarnates the life of God's Spirit.

So let us remember we are in the Holy Presence of God. Being present to the young is also calls us to be present before a generous God who invites, inspires, and transforms us from within. It is to remember there is nothing outside of God's being-in-relation with us through Christ and in the power of the Spirit. Ultimately, Lasallian spirituality frames the virtue of teacher presence as witness to the Gospel that celebrates the radical outreach of God's inclusive love through the incarnation of Christ, who first came to us as a child. This Gospel is announced to all, and its privileged hearers the poor and the young.

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<sup>36</sup> Kessler, “Soul of Students, Soul of Teachers,” 118.

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Mission Education as a form of Teaching: examining dynamics in a contemporary context

The decline of religiously-based colleges and universities of diverse faith traditions and institutions led by Catholic religious orders has given birth to new forms of education about the founders of those institutions and their relevance for today's world. Many educational institutions, founded by religious communities/denominations, now sponsor mission offices with varying titles but with similar goals. Mission integration, mission education, mission centers – these departments seem to have several main functions: 1) education about the founders of the institution. 2) celebration of the “high holy days” and charisms unique to the founding of this institution 3) infusion of the ethos and spirit of the founders into the life of the institution. Finally, a fourth function has emerged in the past couple years as higher education has been forced to examine its own conscience: that is, a critical analysis of racist, sexist and discriminatory hegemony present in academia at large and in the heritage of many religiously based institutions. To foster open and honest dialogue and critique while also recovering a lasting understanding of the good and just intentions of the founders' ethos, the mission offices target employees of the institutions – faculty, staff, and administrators – as foundational to the future of the mission.

The literature related to religious education of adults, which explores the very intentions of such education, provides very helpful insights and parameters as mission offices chart their futures and justify their purposes to diverse constituencies. By utilizing selected authors, the pages ahead provide an overview of the terrain of mission education and an analysis of some cautionary concerns as these programs have expanded in the higher education context. Mary Hess and Stephen Brookfield call educators to accountability for the null curriculum – the vestiges of racism, sexism and bigotry, for example, that many institutions of higher education are now forced to confront. Paul Lakeland's scholarship on postmodern sensibilities provides a helpful lens for understanding the complexity of the audiences for mission programs. Gabriel Moran and Kieran Scott offer insight into the teaching languages utilized by such offices and the dangers that arise when these languages are blurred; both raise questions about the moral implications of the use of such languages. Jane Regan's application of the notion of “learning community” to the parish community can be compared to mission education. Also, parallels can be drawn from narrative education literature, as explicated by Sharan Merriam. Finally, Thomas Groome's understanding of “shared praxis” sheds light on potential developments for the future direction of mission education.

## The Signs of the Times for Mission education

Before addressing the particulars of mission education, the signs of the times in higher education require some focused attention because they elicit considerable pause and concern for promoters of mission who approach their mandates with intellectual and moral integrity. Several scenarios serve to embody this reality. First, in the past year Georgetown University<sup>1</sup> has been forced into soul-searching and accountability as its sinful history of selling slaves (272 slaves from Jesuit plantations in 1838 to generate the equivalent of 3 million dollars in today's world) has been revealed and has provoked significant media attention. Second, a national campaign against sexual assault has targeted higher education as among the worst culprits in not pursuing and reporting assault allegations.<sup>2</sup> The sex abuse crisis in the church has heightened awareness and concern especially in religiously-based institutions. Finally the conversation about racism in the United States, intensified by the police shootings of unarmed African Americans in cities throughout the nation (such as Ferguson, Missouri; Minneapolis, Mn; Baton Rouge, LA) is very much on the minds of many at college campuses where students are raising issues ranging from: peer to peer or faculty to student micro-aggressions and bigotry; faculty hiring for diversity; diversity issues in the curriculum; university response to police shootings; and ethically responsible institutional spending and investment.

Institutional racism, rampant sexual assault, and ubiquitous forms of bigotry – these trenchant injustices help to frame the contextual landscape from which mission education operates. Context is critical. For mission centers to ignore the impacts of oppressive injustices on their constituents is tantamount to embracing a “null curriculum,” a term of Elliott Eisner, used by Mary Hess and Stephen Brookfield,<sup>3</sup> to challenge educators to face up to the deleterious effects of racism and white privilege. Commenting on the predicament of educating with awareness of inherent unjust structures, Hess and Brookfield query, “How do we deconstruct these destructive systems, while working within systems of power that grant us the authority we rely upon for teaching and the agency we require for that teaching to function well?”<sup>4</sup>

## Attending to Mission Education Audiences

Attuned to the signs of the times, how might one describe the diverse constituencies of faculty, staff, and administrators who may be the audiences of mission education events? In his important work, *The Liberation of the Laity*, Paul Lakeland paints the picture of three distinct typologies of the postmodern era: counter modern,

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel L. Swarns, “272 Slaves were sold to Georgetown: what does it owe their descendants?” *The New York Times*, 4/16/2016 [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/17/us/georgetown-university-search-for-slave-descendants.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/17/us/georgetown-university-search-for-slave-descendants.html?_r=0)

<sup>2</sup> “Breaking the Silence: Addressing Sexual Assault on Campus,” *Huffington Post*, 9/1/16, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/breaking-the-silence/>

<sup>3</sup> Mary E. Hess and Stephen Brookfield, “How can White Teachers Recognize and Challenge Racism?” Acknowledging Collusion and Learning an Aggressive Humility,” from *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts*, edited by Hess and Brookfield (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 2008), 165

<sup>4</sup> Hess and Brookfield, 167

radically postmodern, or late modern.<sup>5</sup> The counter modern position revels in a sense of nostalgia for the rituals and certainty of the pre-modern period. Anger is a chief emotion directed towards the change agents of the modern era. From my perspective, this counter modern position focuses on pietistic practices, devotion, and arcane societies to preserve the past. Lakeland suggests that a “pneumatology of nostalgia” envelops the institutional church and prevents it from moving forward into the future.<sup>6</sup> In higher education, there is often considerable suspicion –sometimes healthy but more often neuralgic - of anything that smacks of innovation and change. In place of rigorous academic critique the counter modern perspective is content with hagiography to exalt the legends and heroics of institutional founders.

While the counter modern position seems quite evident among some circles in higher education so too a radically postmodern approach seems more a feature of at least some sectors of student bodies and faculty/staff of Catholic institutions, as my experience has revealed. Such an approach may demonstrate scant knowledge of the religious traditions that informed the heroes of the institution. Many are unaffiliated or disaffected with institutional religion but at the same time could very much be much interested in and inspired by the experiences of their institutional heroes. For example, the discernment process of Edmund Rice (1762-1844), a millionaire of his time and also a widower who had suffered the tragic loss of his wife soon after his daughter was born, to give his fortune to the education of poor, marginalized children of Ireland can be of considerable interest to the altruistic millennials I teach at Iona College; Edmund’s fervent devotion to the Eucharist and to daily reading of the Bible is of less interest to most.

A third perspective, late modern, recognizes the excesses of the second position but does not want to sacrifice the freedoms of free thinking and rationality that the modern era has bestowed. Lakeland describes this approach as a hope-filled realism that understands the “church’s mission in the modern world” as “collaborative and challenging,” but not as “fearful and still less as dismissive.”<sup>7</sup> This middle ground position describes those in higher education who see tremendous value in understanding and celebrating Catholic identity and mission but recognize that this activity must forge new directions and not dwell in nostalgia.

In her work, *Towards an Adult Church*, Jane Regan captures well this tension between a fixation on the past versus a future orientation. In gleaning insights from organizational management literature, Regan utilizes Thomas Hawkins’ distinction between two types of “cultures” that can characterize any learning community, whether it be in the corporate sector, higher education, or the faith community. Hawkins speaks of a post-figurative culture and a pre-figurative culture.<sup>8</sup> The former posits a continuity between the past and present; learning from the past provides valuable lessons for the present and future. The latter approach, or pre-figurative, favors a sense of discontinuity with the past. New insights, new skills, new knowledge should be the focus of learning

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<sup>5</sup>Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity* (London: Continuum Int’l Publishing Group, 2004), 236.

<sup>6</sup>Lakeland, 237

<sup>7</sup> Lakeland, 241

<sup>8</sup>Jane Regan, *Toward an Adult Church* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 117.

communities intent on meeting the challenges of the future. Given the previous conversation on the signs of the times, institutions need to be post-figurative in order to undo the grip of racism and sexism that has shaped contemporary higher education. At the same time, this post-figurative approach requires at times critical analysis, accountability for past misdeeds, community lament of injustices and a resolve to be pre-figurative. That is, committed to new insights, perspectives, and skills that are attentive to the current times. Both the typologies of Lakeland and the “cultures” of Hawkins seem to call for a middle ground position for mission education: attuned to and honest about institutional memory; appreciative of, yet critical when necessary, of the past; but ultimately grounded in present needs and concerns as an affirmation of an unfolding future.

It is worthwhile to point out, as Gabriel Moran has, that the dilemma between the past and the future is not a new one in the education spheres. In 1929, George Coe raised the question “whether the primary purpose of Christian education is to hand on a religion or to create a new world?”<sup>9</sup> While Coe may have been overstating his point through the image of “creating a new world,” his fundamental position remains: the work of Christian education can not be a thoughtless, mechanical transmission of the past into the present day. The same can be said with mission education.

But before belaboring this correlation between “mission education” and “religious education,” it is important to pause here and define some terms. Mission originates from the Latin, “to be sent.” Thus, mission education carries with it an implied “place” from which one is sent and suggests a “place” to which one is going. In the very definition of the word, “mission education,” one cannot avoid discussing directly a past, present, and a future. Such a trajectory is not suggested in any direct way by “religious education.” Moran defines the sphere of “religious” as dealing with the whole person, the body, the spirit, and the mind.<sup>10</sup> “Religion” has two definitions: one dealing with the “rituals, beliefs, and moral practices of a community;” and, a second, focusing on classroom learning, the critical inquiry into the academic study. Mission education is not a discipline specific endeavor: there can be a mission dimension to varieties of types of institutions. Yet, there is some overlap between mission education and religious education: both suggest a study that engages one in action or praxis. Likewise, critical study of mission and study of religion on the higher education levels demand the academic freedom and investigation appropriate to a classroom. While related, experiential praxis and classroom learning are distinct endeavors. As Kieran Scott says, religious education is “Janus-faced;”<sup>11</sup> so too is mission education. What, then, are the distinct contexts of mission education on the higher education level? What are the

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<sup>9</sup>Gabriel Moran, *Religious Education as a Second Language* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1989), 143.

<sup>10</sup>Moran, 139

<sup>11</sup>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 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 160.

languages of teaching utilized in these contexts? What challenges are inherent in mission education?

### Teaching Languages of Mission Education

This paper does not pretend to survey a rich diversity of mission education programs at colleges in the United States. I am focusing here on my home institution, Iona College, where a mission office has been in place for 20 years and in recent years has joined forces with the college's campus ministry department. Serving as the director of this combine mission *and* ministry office for three years, I bring an experiential knowledge of its programs to this paper. The adult learning and development literature provides a theoretical vantage point to look again at these programs. In making connections between the scholarship of Scott and Moran to "mission education," I am first struck by the starting point of Scott as he seeks to "reclaim the richest meaning of the verb, 'to teach.'<sup>12</sup> For, in this area of mission education, the question arises: who is the primary teacher? Questions of ownership and expertise come to mind here.

Who "owns" the mission of an institution? It could be answered that everyone from the youngest student to the oldest professor or groundskeeper has some "ownership" of the mission of an institution. A corporate or legal definition might assign this role to the "Board of Trustees." Concerning expertise about mission, there are elements of mission education that require academic expertise and also elements informed more by experiential knowledge. Academically speaking, historical knowledge of the founder, theological understanding of ecclesiology and documents such as *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, background in the Catholic Intellectual tradition – these areas of expertise are appropriate to teachers of history and theology, for example. At the same time, it can be argued that a mission is only effective as to the extent its diverse constituents "live it" in their everyday lives. This perspective expands the role of "teacher" to the entire community that professes that mission.

This insight about the "teachers of the mission" dovetails with Moran's sense of a "moral dilemma in the idea of teaching." Issues of authority, equity, and power foster uneasiness when one suggests, either implicitly or explicitly, that one teacher of mission might be more authentic or credentialed than another. It is helpful then to remember that the etymological roots of the verb, "to teach," means "to show how." As Scott says, every religious community teaches by "showing how" people live that way of life. "Virtue is learned when adults and children grow up in a virtuous community."<sup>13</sup> The same could be said about mission. People learn the mission by working day in and out with people who believe in the mission and are exemplars of the mission. Yet still, some elements of the mission are appropriate to the critical analysis that is the purview of the classroom. For this reason it is important to unpack the various ways mission is taught. A discussion of the three languages of teaching – homiletic, therapeutic, and academic – may provide a more concrete delineation of how mission education might happen at a Catholic college.

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<sup>12</sup>Scott, 148

<sup>13</sup>Scott, 150

First, the homiletic. The basis of homiletic teaching is acknowledgement that a community shares common beliefs.<sup>14</sup> Homilies inspire people to put those beliefs into action in their everyday lives. They can be emotional and persuasive, personal and demonstrative. Good homilists craft stories in careful ways so that listeners can discover themselves to be characters thick in the plot of the narrative. Homilies about mission can persuade people to embrace the mission. At welcome events for new employees of my college, the Office of Mission and Ministry highlights seasoned employees who can offer “witness stories” of their understanding of the mission of the college. They are often quite moving. First year employees participate in a “Living the Mission” day-long retreat where they hear inspiring stories of the founder of the college’s sponsoring order and they participate in creative exercises to envision the future of the institution. The “homily” then becomes a “shared one” as participants offer personal accounts of their hopes for and beliefs in the institution. In both the welcome events and retreat days, the homiletic language is utilized to tell inspiring stories about the “heroes” of the institution, in the case of Iona College, that is Edmund Rice and St. Columba.

Therapeutic teaching language can be a medium for mission education. Praising, thanking, welcoming, mourning, healing, calming – these are all examples of this form of language.<sup>15</sup> Mission offices welcome and orient new employees; they also help the community to mourn the loss of colleagues who have died. Through memorial services, opportunities are afforded to students and faculty to reflect on the impacts of the deceased member of the community. The same office organizes a celebration dinner for employees who have served 20, 30, 40 years at the college. At these events, the service of these employees is often likened to the core values of the institutions. And, during an annual “Heritage Week,” employees who have made a significant impact on others are praised through tributes given at a ceremonial event. Each of these programs are examples of therapeutic language used for the purpose of promoting the spirit of the college’s mission.

Academic language is the medium of the faculty who communicate the mission through lectures sponsored by two sub-committees of the mission office: the Catholic Intellectual Tradition committee, the Week of the Peacemaker and the Catholic Social Teaching Committee. These are academic events that provide opportune times to engage in analysis, self-examination and critique of racist and sexist perspectives in the academy. A discussion of the Black Lives Matter movement, “Black in America: Race, Protest, and Democracy,” will serve as this year’s keynote address to a series examining the notion of faithful citizenship in an election year. A presentation on Edmund Rights International, a Geneva-based NGO, bringing forward the human rights vision of the college’s sponsoring order, will provide faculty and students avenues of social justice analysis and engagement. Outside scholars have addressed topics such as service-learning or the legacy of Vatican II. An astronomer on campus presented on the interplay of scientific knowledge and theological speculation. Each year faculty of diverse disciplines attend a weeklong symposium of Collegium, focused on introducing the breadth of the Catholic Intellectual tradition; their insights, often with parallels to their

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<sup>14</sup>Scott, 152

<sup>15</sup>Scott, 153

own disciples, are presented at an annual luncheon discussion. A summer symposium on the Catholic Social Teaching offered faculty and administrators a thorough overview of the main tenets of the tradition.

Understanding teaching languages, then, is an important dimension to the future promotion of mission education. This topic also relates to another valuable distinction Scott makes about teaching languages. One of the challenges of mission education is an over-emphasis on the past. It has already been discussed how the counter modern typology, as articulated by Lakeland, focuses on nostalgia. This orientation can effectively create distance between the “present” priority of mission and the past “birth” of the mission. Too much attention to the “birth” of the mission can sacrifice the opportunity for a palpable and creative promotion of a newly understood mission in the present time, responsive to the challenges of today. In the pages ahead, I wish to explore how the Catholic institution’s orientation toward mission can give proper respect to the past but capture the energy and potency of the present “praxis of experience.” But first, let me return to Scott’s distinction between “teaching” and “teaching about.”<sup>16</sup> Just as a counter modern preoccupation can forge a distance between the present and the past, so too a similar sense of separation is suggested when one “teaches about” mission. As Scott indicates, there is a break between subjectivity and objectivity when the priority of the topic is framed with the preposition, “about.” He calls this an “artificial notion of objectivity.”<sup>17</sup>

Too much “teaching about mission” can deceive one into thinking that the mission is a “thing” to understand from the past, instead of a common commitment created in relation to the present “signs of the times.” “Teaching about mission” establishes the mission as a noun, “teaching mission” gives this word the action of a verb. Also it can be argued that a culture of “teaching about” can do more to breed fear and (what happened to the good old days? The world is falling apart) than to give birth to hope. This latter emotion, if based in honesty and reality, can certainly be more healthy for institutions than the former.

### A “Present” Approach to Mission

Guided by the scholarship of Moran and Scott on “teaching languages” and cautioned by the postmodern sensibilities described by Lakeland, it is productive to turn to the scholarship of Regan, Merriam, and Groome to help frame a “present orientation” to mission education. Regan’s use of Peter Senge’s organization theory is instructive here. Senge points out that if organizations are to become “learning communities,” they must abandon the notion that one ever “arrives at” this state.<sup>18</sup> To become a “learning community” is a continuous effort that can not be understood as “completed.” Inherent to this process of becoming a “learning community” is the very word, “community,” which is distinct from the word, “organization.” From my own experience with mission education on the college level, it is often the case that the word, “community,” is uttered

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<sup>16</sup>Scott, 163

<sup>17</sup> Scott, 165

<sup>18</sup>Regan, 119

freely without too much attention to the meanings it connotes. Community evokes a shared system of symbols, common memories, and a context where friendships are values.<sup>19</sup> The word, “organization,” has much more of a functional dimension in which people are easily replaced. Communities prioritize relationships and celebrate diversity; organizations favor results.

According to Senge, learning communities are grown through attention to five disciplines: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. Regan applies these five disciplines to the faith community context and suggests that they serve as critical priorities for building a “learning community.” In focusing on personal mastery, one seeks not only to be proficient in one’s job but cognizant of how one’s work is rooted in one’s sense of self and integrity. In attending to one’s operative mental models, one must be open to new learning perspectives that might provide vitality to the organization; as diversity education offerings multiply in higher education, faculty and staff are facing this challenge very acutely. The third discipline, shared vision, relies on a community vision fostered by “sustained conversation.”<sup>20</sup> Such on-going conversation requires continual overtures to the voices that are marginalized. Hess and Brookfield challenge learning communities to accept their own “collusion in racism.” Fostering such honest and vulnerable dialogue requires courage and vulnerability. Team learning, a fourth discipline, is rooted in productive dialogue, as distinguished from idle chit-chat. And finally, systems thinking, involves a grasp of the large picture of inter-locking connections which envelop any organization.

Underlying each of these five disciplines, Regan submits that healthy, learning communities truly must value “sustained critical conversation,” a concept originating from the hermeneutical work of Hans Gadamer. This idea returns us to the goal of identifying a “present orientation” to mission education. If mission education is to avoid the tendency to re-create past into the present, it needs to serve as a catalyst for viable and on-going conversations that are freely motivated. Both Gadamer and Mezirow have well-developed theories on how such conversation can lead to serious questioning of one’s fundamental premises and, for Mezirow, lasting and transformative learning is a result. For Mezirow, sustained conversation discloses three levels of reflection: the content of what is said; the process of how it came to be perceived; and the original premise that shaped one’s perception. Is such sustained conversation possible for mission education in higher education?

Possible, but in reality, obstacles persist. Those accustomed to intellectual discourse are trained to be skeptical. Oftentimes, there can be high level of defensiveness of one’s own ideas. One cannot underestimate the political dimensions that infiltrate academic communities. With tenure and funding issues often pending, there are power dynamics related to many of the gatherings of faculty and administrators. The type of sustained conversation, suggested by Regan, requires a commitment to listening. There is considerable risk taking involved in conversing on a truly honest level, especially if there is any level of mistrust in the atmosphere. One must open oneself up to the

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<sup>19</sup>Regan, 120

<sup>20</sup>Regan, 124

possibility of not being understood. Or, if understood, one's listener could disagree in some fundamental ways. What if the listener has a valid point? Genuine conversation means that one might be willing to change one's opinion. Given these challenges, how might mission education stoke the fires of sustained conversation?

I can not pretend to have any definitive answers to the contextual challenges of sustained conversation in the higher education setting. I am, however, persuaded that mission education needs to cultivate and support the present praxis of people's creative and intellectual resources. The counter modern dwelling in the past needs to be replaced by an intentional philosophy of mission education that respects the past but focuses on the life-giving energy of the present. Also, as Regan has shown, a milieu of genuine listening, respect, and willingness to change one's opinion must exist in mission education settings. These qualities presuppose a community of learning, that truly values its members, not just an institution or organization of learning that has its self-interest as paramount. The mission office needs to carve its identity independent of the institutional advancement office which has as its end goal the promotion of the brand and the generation of revenue to support the institution. As important as this function is, a mission office needs to be inclusive of the voices from the margins that may not be reflected in the brand.

Let me turn to two scholarly approaches to education that might contribute to this orientation: narrative/transformational education and a shared/praxis model.

To illustrate the potential of a narrative/transformational approach let me give an example. At Iona College, faculty and administrators participate in events organized by the global Edmund Rice network. The intention of this organization is to appeal not just to vowed religious but to any employee of an organization affiliated with the Christian Brothers. An Associate Professor of Mass Communications at Iona, Dr. Jack Breslin, was a 2007 participant in a four-week immersion experience in Nairobi, Kenya. Organized for a group of 38 educators from around the world there was a curriculum which emphasized a mixture of classroom learning, shared reflection, and hands-on experience at schools and social outreach in the slums of Nairobi. Academic presentations included topics such as social analysis, Kenyan historical and political issues, assimilation of tribal practices in Catholic liturgical life. This cross-cultural immersion involved visits to shanty towns lacking any type of sanitation or police presence. The reflection groups provided a forum for participants to de-brief and to integrate insights from the various components of this educational experience.

In short this "Karibu" (or "Welcome" in Swahili) experience, as it was called, was truly life-changing for Breslin. As a result, he has given at least two presentations on the college campus and has published reflection pieces in newsletters and in one academic journal. At the present time, Breslin is collaborating with the Mission and Ministry office to sponsor a re-turn trip with a delegation of Iona College alumni. In one of his articles, he describes how as he worked with children at an Edmund Rice school in the Kibera slum of Nairobi, he came to a new insight about the liberating charism of education for justice, so critical to the life of Edmund, but of which he never expected himself to be a

promoter. Sharan Merriam might characterize Breslin's insight as narrative/transformational learning, as described by Mezirow or "re-storying," as Randall says.<sup>21</sup> In one of his articles, Breslin gladly welcomed a new appellation for himself, that is, "a son of Edmund." Such an acknowledgment indicates a perspective change or a "re-storying" of his identity. As his listeners were very captivated by his story, Breslin captures well Merriam's point when she says that "narratives of transformative learning are compelling because of their affective, somatic, and spiritual dimensions."<sup>22</sup>

Clearly, this type of mission education captures both Breslin's present praxis of experience and the heritage story of Edmund Rice, as a hero figure in the life of the college. This conclusion leads us to Groome's shared/praxis model. While these final sentences can not do justice to Groome's comprehensive approach to Christian religious education, several cursory points can suggest a general direction for mission education. First, Groome posits that one's present action in the world must be understood in a holistic sense of time.<sup>23</sup> In one's present praxis of experience, one connects with the consequences of the past and projects forward a direction for the future. Breslin's current and on-going scholarship as a professor now carries with it a redefined sense of the significance of Edmund Rice, a person who has made an indelible impression on him and on the institution to which he belongs. Secondly, Groome emphasizes a "shared" approach to education, echoing Gadamer's emphasis on "sustained conversation." While Groome would not diminish at all the scholarly role of the teacher as a solo researcher, he emphasizes here that the communal dynamic of teaching and learning captures a central element of the Christian tradition. In Breslin's case, his insights were honed and refined through the give and take of a reflection process, in a community of dedicated teachers and scholars who participated in the immersion and back here at his home institution. This context seems appropriate for mission education at a Catholic institution. Thirdly, Groome's approach is based in a "hermeneutics of dialectic." In other words, no part of the tradition, or mission story, is accepted "carte blanche" without questioning, rejecting, refining, re-envisioning. This same hermeneutic is applied to the present "signs of the times." In Groome's words, "as educators make Christian Story/Vision accessible in a pedagogy, they bring hermeneutics of retrieval, suspicion, and creativity to their interpretation and explanation of it."<sup>24</sup> Such an approach avoids an uncritical acceptance of the past and a naïve interpretation of present experience.

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<sup>21</sup>Sharon Merriam, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide* (San Francisco: Wiley and Sons, 2007), 214-15.

<sup>22</sup>Merriam, 215.

<sup>23</sup>Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 137.

<sup>24</sup>Groome, 145

## Conclusion

The mission of the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers is “to do and to teach.” At Iona, the Brothers have founded an institution of higher education primarily committed to being a “teaching college.” There is ample opportunity for discovery of what this word “teaching” means for the present day. A shared/praxis approach to mission education can unlock the vibrancy of this vocation while reaping the creative insight of the Edmund Rice story. A narrative/transformational pedagogy can be a compelling method that will assist this shared/praxis model. Mission education events can serve as catalysts for the “sustained conversation” about the vocation of teaching in the context of a college community – as a dedicated learning community - committed to service, justice and the intellectual life. Self-honest and institutional critique serve to hone and to shape a present focus to mission that is responsive to the “signs of the times.” Mission events will best serve constituents if they respect the distinct “teaching languages” appropriate to the diverse types of venues offered. Such events have the best chance of flourishing if they maintain a present orientation while treating the past with a hermeneutic of critique and analysis, not praise and adulation.

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“Becoming the Sexpert: How to Teach Sex Ed, According to Young Adult Women Who Were Raised Catholic”

Emily S. Kahm

Young adults naturally find themselves in spaces where they can reflect upon what they were taught as children and, especially as romantic relationships become serious and the possibility of parenting looms near, how they think they might raise their own children. Parenting is both an implicit and explicit teaching role, especially in religious formation and education. In these still-theoretical space, when critical thinking skills are well-developed and the day-to-day realities of parenthood are not yet known, young adults are able to share their idealistic views about how they envision their teaching role for children. In so doing, they also naturally reflect upon their own experiences of education and, often, what they wish had been different.

This essay is part of a larger qualitative project that interviewed fifteen young adult women who were raised Catholic about how they learned about sex and sexuality in the Catholic context of their youth and how they think those educational experiences affect their lives today. Interviews followed a pattern of asking each woman what they had been taught and to share formative stories, and then asked them to evaluate that education. One of the most fruitful questions I asked to get at their insights was “If you had a daughter, how would you want her to learn about sex and sexuality as she grows up?” The data shared in this essay is largely pulled from their responses to that question.

Of the fifteen women interviewed, six no longer identified as Catholic. The remaining nine varied widely in their level of interest in and commitment to Catholic culture and practices. Two of the women interviewed identified as something other than heterosexual—one identified as queer, and the other as queer or bisexual. Twelve participants were white or Caucasian, and of

the three women of color, two were Asian and one was Tejano, also referring to herself as Mexican. Participants came from a variety of urban, suburban, and rural contexts and were all attending college at the time of the interview, a mix of Catholic, Protestant, and unaffiliated schools. As is customary and most appropriate in qualitative projects, I privilege the voices of these participants by letting them speak for themselves, which often mean relaying their responses in their own words.

In this brief essay, I will share representative stories of these women's best and worst teacher experiences, then present what they had taken away from these experiences to inform their ideal role as a sexuality educator of their own, still theoretical, children.

### **Best and Worst Teachers**

"This is so sad and so bizarre, but I vividly remember looking up sex in the dictionary. Because no one was going to tell me, it wasn't something I was going to ask." This quote from Nora, a highly traditional Catholic turned agnostic, sums up the way most of these women felt when it came to their teachers in sex and sexuality—they didn't know who they were, or didn't feel safe enough to ask them questions. Of course, these women knew that their parents were supposed to tell them something about the subject, but it was rare that they felt confident enough to ask directly—they sensed the awkwardness and responded accordingly.

Several participants did, however, share stories about non-peer teachers who they felt had done a good job in teaching them about sex and sexuality. Two of those stories are highlighted here.

Rose, a 19-year-old ex-Catholic with progressive Evangelical ties, talked about finding a trustworthy resource in the mother of a friend who wasn't afraid to admit her own history of

mistakes or stereotypically sinful behavior. Rose went to her for advice after breaking off a long-term relationship and trying out a friends-with-benefits arrangement with someone else:

I call her up, we talk about things, we go out and have coffee and I just give it to her point blank. And she goes, "Okay. I've been there too. Let's talk about what you're feeling." And just didn't look at me different, just looked at me and said, "You know what, I'm not judging you for it." She's like, "Who am I to judge you? It's all the same. As long as you don't feel bad about it, don't feel bad about it...If you feel like your relationship with God is sound, it is." ... She's like, "I don't believe in that shaming. Because I was there...I was Catholic for awhile and honestly, when I had [my son] and when I got raped and all this stuff, they weren't there for me...They looked at me like I was wrong, I was diseased, I was tainted. So I totally get where you're coming from." And so it was that helping support...it was like, I didn't want a lecture, I just wanted someone to listen to me.

We see here that this conversation involved mutual vulnerability and that this teacher's ability to listen first while suspending judgment allowed Rose to feel safe enough to ask for honest feedback.

Lily, a 18 year old college student and practicing Catholic, references another non-parent teacher who she regarded as making a positive difference in her and her boyfriend's relationship. Her high school chaplain, who was a monk she describes as open-minded and personable, sat down with her boyfriend for a conversation that he later related to her.

[My boyfriend] was thinking about everything, just like, we were reaching one of those points in our relationship. And the chaplain kind of gave him his view on sexuality and everything. ... He said that he doesn't think that premarital sex is a sin. ... But that's not

saying that like all of it, oh, it's okay, let's all do it. He says that it is an expression of love. But if you're just going around hooking up, or like doing porn or whatever, then that's not what it was made for. Because that's just focusing on the physical pleasure aspect of it. But the thing is is that, when you love someone so much, it's not only a physical connection, but like a spiritual and emotional connection, like you're making yourself totally vulnerable to this one person. And that's why he says that, if it were up to him, it would be waiting for marriage. Because your spouse is supposed to be your lifelong partner. So ideally, it would be really nice if they were the only ones to know you that way. But he was just like, "If you really, truly love the person, then it's an expression of that love."

Even secondhand, Lily highlighted this conversation as the best experience she had in sexuality education. In this chaplain, she and her boyfriend found a trusted adult who was considerate of their feelings within the relationship and who avoided pat answers, talking about better and worse options. While Lily and her boyfriend decided to hold off on sex for the foreseeable future because of the risks involved, her experience with this teacher was such that she felt empowered to make that decision with her boyfriend if the question ever arose.

It is interesting to note here that neither of these positive teacher examples came from parents. A majority of participants had difficulty talking to their parents about sex and sexuality, but not many were able to find other adult resources to fill in the information gap. In both of these examples of excellent teachers, participants highlighted how they felt more so than what they were taught—feeling heard, respected, and empowered made them recall these teachers as good teachers.

Sadly, “worst teacher” examples were more prevalent throughout this research. Again, I will share two of the most indicative stories. Valerie was a 20-year-old not-quite-Catholic at the time of our interview—she originally identified herself as Catholic on her demographics form, but explained in her interview that she had no intention of resuming Catholic practices or being involved in a church and would not want to raise her children Catholic. She was the product of a lifelong Catholic education, out of which emerged this story about a sexuality education moment in elementary school:

They wanted us to ask questions, but wouldn't necessarily answer them.... Yeah, they would have this kind of open forum like, if you didn't want to ask it out loud you could write it down on a piece of paper kind of thing and hand it in so it was anonymous, but like, some of the questions they wouldn't answer.

When pressed for more details, Valerie admits that what she actually remembers is a teacher pulling a piece of paper from the anonymous question box, opening it, stating that they would not answer the question, and then putting it aside. She remarked in her interview, somewhat surprised by her own insight, that she did not know if it contained an actual question, a rude remark, or some overly personal inquiry that the teacher declined to comment upon—the possibility had not occurred to her before. However, the significant detail about this encounter is that Valerie *perceived* that her teachers were hiding information from them, failing to be as open and honest as they had claimed they would be. She experienced the situation as one where adults deliberately withheld information that students requested. This suggests a serious lack of trust between herself and the authority figures that were supposed to be providing her with information and guidance.

The second example of bad teaching is somewhat more personal. Jessica was 22 and a practicing Catholic when I spoke with her, also the product of K-12 Catholic school, and she related some of the most poignant stories of any participant. She described her high school self as very inquisitive, especially about religious matters, and said she would often keep asking questions if the original explanation didn't make sense to her. One such story about her interaction with her high school religion teacher, a newly ordained priest, continued to bother her many years later.

...I would push back to the point where my professor [high school teacher], the priest, wrote me a letter. And in the letter, said that I had the potential to be a saint, but currently I was "maliciously suspicious" towards the church... It has stuck with me. But as a junior, I don't think I was malicious! Or suspicious. I was just very much unsettled with what I was being taught, or like really trying to figure out like why. Like, why does every sexual act have to be unitive and procreative? What is the reasoning behind that?

During Jessica's interview, she was clearly distressed that her high school teacher had so dramatically misunderstood her intentions and did not seem to have entertained the thought that he had called her malicious precisely because he did not know how to answer her questions, or thought she shouldn't be asking them.

From these two examples we see some facets of what makes a "bad" religious educator in the sphere of sexuality. First and foremost is a lack of trust in the relationship, and a lack of reciprocity. In the latter example, whether intended or not, the teacher ended up shaming Jessica by implying that her constant curiosity was in fact evidence that she was a bad Catholic. Both of these are also examples of truncated conversations, where the learner anticipated a chance to gain more and new information and was disappointed by what they received instead. With these

examples in mind, we can turn to the information participants offered about the type of teacher they wanted to be as soon as they got the chance.

### **When I Have a Daughter**

Each participant was asked to reflect on their ideal sexuality education experience not only for themselves, but in a situation where they became the primary educator. “If you had a daughter, how would you want her to go learn about sex and sexuality as she grows up?” Two major themes came up in nearly every interview; the first was the idea of being the first teacher of any daughter they had. Lily expresses this desire, saying:

I would want them to find out from like me and my husband or their father or whatever.

Like, I want them to hear it from us first, rather than anywhere else. Instead of like seeing stupid boys do stupid things, just like, “What are you doing?” Like, “That’s how that works?!”

Lily, as one might guess, is referencing the fact that she learned about oral sex from middle school gossip, and not from a trusted resource. Melanie, a more traditional Catholic 21-year-old, echoes a similar sentiment, though her fear is less about grapevine sex ed and more about her daughter feeling prepared for “the talk” at school:

I think I would talk to her about it when she got more of the middle school age, or whenever I knew that they were going to address it soon at school or whatever. I would probably try to talk to her before that so she doesn’t go to school and come home and be like “What is this that you didn’t tell me?”

In these cases and others, the idea of being the first teacher of their daughters was heavily tied to being the most trustworthy resource and the best place their child come to with questions. In so

doing, they also make strong statements about the honest relationship they want to have with their daughters, which is the second major theme of these responses. Rose speaks at length how important this has been in her relationship with her mother, and why she believes it creates the best scaffold for a young person to make smart sexual decisions:

Ideally, I'd like to be the one to talk about it with her, because I want to start that relationship early and have her be comfortable to talk to me about it, just like I am with my mother. I think honestly it'd be more of that open forum. "Hey, what questions do you have? Let's talk about these things." ... I think more than anything, I don't ever want to be that kind of parent that's like "Hell no, that's not right." I want to talk about things. And I've always kind of said it to my friends that this is my view in it: If you're mature enough to come and talk to me and look me in the eye and have that conversation, I'm going to trust you to make the right decision... Number 1 thing I want you to be safe, I want you to talk to me. I want, I don't want my child to just be out with anyone. I want it to be within the spectrums of a committed relationship, which obviously like, I'll feel comfortable to talk about my own experiences. Because I think that's important. I think that's the foundation of starting that relationship and being like, "Hey, I've been there too. I grew up once."

The mutual vulnerability that Rose espouses in her ideal mother-daughter relationship echoes the type of experience she had with her friend's mother in her earlier teens.

In Jessica's response to the same question, we continue to see how highly many participants value the idea of learning conversationally, to the point that they believe it would be the best way to teach an adolescent.

I would try to like open up that dialogue, and say like “You know, if you have questions, talk to me. If ever you feel pressure, you can come talk to me.” And I think I would put less of an emphasis on kind of that black-and-white like “Don’t do this, don’t do this, don’t do this.”

While there are many more examples that could be shared, when comparing these answers to the content of what the participants were taught about sex and sexuality, it is clear that they intend to make a significant break with earlier methods. As Melanie asserts, “I wouldn’t just hand my daughter a book, I think I would sit down and have a conversation and not, try and be as non-awkward as possible so she felt she could actually talk to me.” Even though some participants such as Jessica, Bridget, and Lily claimed that they would not have wanted any more involvement from their own parents in their sexuality education, their responses to this question indicated that they still did not believe their parents’ hands-off methods were ideal—they just could not imagine having a conversation about sexuality with their parents that would have been comfortable and informative. By and large, these women felt ready to change the course of sexuality education in the next generation.

### **Sex Ed as Religious Ed**

For all that these women lacked the style of sexuality education that they wanted, they were remarkably clear about how it should have looked. Again and again participants described conversational learning spaces where they would feel safe, unjudged, and could forthrightly mull over their complex ideas and experiences around sex and sexuality. Tess summed up this idea beautifully when talking about her tight-knit group of friends from high school: “[I] talk to [them] about everything. And it’s just anything, absolutely anything, they’re always there.” Her use of the phrase “they’re always there” implies the longstanding and trusting relationship that

undergirds this learning space. Several used versions of the phrase “open lines of communication” to elucidate what they wanted from friends or parents or what they wanted to offer to future daughters. Rose, as we saw, repeatedly used the phrase “Let’s talk about things” when describing how she wanted to form a trusting relationship with a daughter. Participants knew, almost instinctively, what they needed in order to learn well.

Both feminist and pastoral theology spheres highlight the importance of practicing safe conversational learning, especially for women. Eunjoo Kim, a scholar on preaching, argues that women are often more holistic learners and want to integrate their rational understandings with their present reality, and that such holistic learning, “requires a learning environment in which students feel a sense of trust and security to be vulnerable” (Kim 171). Creating such environments requires practice, something that these participants had little of.

One can and should still be impressed that, when left to their own devices, these women naturally gravitated towards the kind of learning environment that Thomas Groome strongly encourages—one free of strict knowledge control (Groome 168), one where individuals can openly express what they are doing, how they feel about it, how they think their religion informs their practice, and how they might want to change in the future. One also hears echoes of the process that Anne E. Streaty Wimberly recommends in her story-linking process, particularly in the need for attentive listening followed by affirmation of what is shared (Wimberly 127). The strong inclination of participants to attempt something like “shared Christian praxis” when they came into safer spaces acts as affirmation of Groome and Wimberly’s approaches, signifying how these models are just as applicable to questions about sex and sexuality as any other topic of religious education. In short, there is great potential for supporting a new generation of parents in their role as the first teachers of sexuality education when we regard sexuality education as a

form of religious education and try to use the wisdom and practices that we know have real potential for life-giving religious formation.

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## **The Tragic Aspect of Teaching: Hope in the Face of Uncertainty**

### **Abstract**

Educators throughout the ages have offered metaphors and analogies for teaching and teachers. Prominent among them are: gardener, midwife, facilitator, guru, sacrament. Each of these metaphors shed light, from a different angle, on the act of teaching. This paper proposes the metaphor of tragedy as a way of shedding new light, from a totally different perspective, on what it means to engage in academic teaching. It explores three areas in particular in light of the metaphor: the quest for certainty, the confessional classroom, and learning without teaching. Tragedy holds the possibility of opening up awareness of the uniqueness of teaching the conversation when placed in critical dialogue with these three areas.

### **Introduction**

Teaching is a complex human endeavor. The introduction of creative new methods and technological tools do not reduce the complexity. Etymologically, teaching means showing someone how to do something (Moran 1997). This showing how is rooted in hope. But, almost inevitably, it is mingled with disappointment. This ambivalent character of our work, with its successes and failures, is a tragic dilemma at the heart of the act of teaching.

Throughout the ages, educators have offered metaphors and analogies for teaching. Prominent among them are: gardening, midwifing, facilitating, incardinating, transgressing. Each of these metaphors shed light, from a different angle, on the act of teaching. This essay proposes the metaphor of tragedy as a way of shedding new light, from a totally different perspective, on what it means to engage in academic teaching. It proposes that, in spite of our best efforts (the search for perfection), all our pedagogical actions take place in a context of incompleteness (unrealized vision). The paper explores three areas in particular in light of these circumstances: the lust for certainty, the confessional classroom and learning without teaching. The metaphor of tragedy is employed to critique the prevailing assumptions undergirding each. A tragic sense calls into question the idolatry of the lust for certainty, the excessive turn toward therapy in the classroom, and the near absence of the language of teaching in adult education. The indispensable role of doubt, holding in tension three components in the classroom curriculum, and re-situating teaching at the center of adult education, are offered as constructive educational correctives. These educational responses can affirm our hope as teachers in the face of the tragic source of our endeavors. This hope, however, needs a religious grounding for our pedagogical work.

### **The Lust for Certainty**

“For now we see through a glass darkly...” (1 Cor. 13:12)

Jean Bethke Elshtain asks us to view teaching as an aesthetic construction: teaching as drama (1992:54-62). Her proposal seeks to capture a sensibility of the classroom as an ambiance of anticipation, a democratic drama of dialogue and debate, a civic space, an arena of respect for the views of others, a drama with many voices – keeping multiple perspectives in play and in mind. At its richest, it exudes a morally responsible way of being with others. Elshtain notes, “Teaching as drama. Not a world of special effects but a world of special engagement. Not a theater of self-indulgent first person soliloquies, but a theater of crafted and shaped interventions that tap, at one and the same, that which we are coming to know and that which we are learning to be”(62).

The angle of vision of this essay invites us to view teaching as a tragic drama. I do not have in mind here the deep agony and angst of a classical Greek tragedy. Rather I seek to explore and reveal the ecstasy and agony that is an inherent part of ordinary life, especially the practice of teaching.

The tragic requires interdependent elements that are in conflict with each other: chaos and construction, ideal and actual, success and failure. The tragic sense of teaching requires an acute awareness of and a creative navigating between both perspectives. “The issue of tragedy”, Nicholas Burbules writes, “is not a simple one of optimism verses pessimism... [it] refers to a larger awareness of the impediments to success, the prospect of failure and the limits to our efforts. ...By maintaining the tragic sense, we admit to ourselves and to those engaged with us in an activity the inherent difficulties and uncertainties of our efforts. By maintaining the tragic sense, we seek to avoid the hubris of believing ourselves to be more effective than we actually are” (Burbules 1990, 471). This is not to wallow in our human inadequacies or our pedagogical deficiencies. Rather it is the height of pragmatism and ultimate realism. It leads to a form of wisdom. It enables us to avoid the two major temptations in education, namely, pessimism and utopianism (Burbules 471-474).

The teacher is the protagonist in this moral drama. He or she is an agent of hope in the face of this tragic understanding. Dwayne Huebner writes, “The teacher faces a situation complex as only life can be – filled with doubts, conflicts, humor, pain, frustration, bleakness and beauty, pathos and love, anger and laughter. He (sic) needs to be able to live and work with inconsistencies, opposites, and fluctuations. ...He (sic) has to transform the everything into a valued something before it becomes a wasted nothing” (Huebner 1999, 23). Why is this so? It is because of the very nature of education. And the test of education is teaching. Burbules notes, “Education is a perpetually incomplete and potentially unfulfilled process... [the] teacher and learner embark on an endeavor whose intended outcome is, from the very start, inevitably in doubt. Education that is worth anything involve experiencing uncertainty, confusion, and failure. It is not a straight and narrow path, nor is each step in the process a clear change for the better. Every gain is a loss; every deeper insight won is a cherished, comfortable, and familiar illusion slipping away.. [it] is less like scaling Mt. Everest, and more like the task of Sisyphus” (Burbules 469,471).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Ghiloni provides a historical perspective for the use of finitude as an educational resource in the Prophet Muhammad’s educational leadership. He insightfully points out how the existential realities of finitude are significant experiences from which we can learn religiously (Ghiloni 2016, 288-306).

The culprit in much of education, John Dewey asserts, is “the quest for certainty” (Dewey 1929)...a yearning for knowledge that is unchanging, uncontroversial, uncontaminated. The assumption is uncertainty and doubt are to be eliminated. Rational explanation offer firm control and enlightenment. However, “this quest for certainty” is fundamentally untenable and contrary to the process of teaching. It is a major temptation in the academic teaching of religion.

Mark C. Taylor notes the emergence of the practice of traditional forms of religion among some college students on campuses today (Taylor 2006). However, he notices something else: “Indeed, it seems the more religious students become the less willing they are to engage in critical reflection about faith” (A39). “For years,” Taylor writes, “I have begun my classes by telling students that if they are not more confused and uncertain at the end of the course than they are at the beginning, I will have failed. A growing number of religiously correct students consider this challenge a direct assault on their faith. Yet the task of thinking and teaching, especially in an age of emergent fundamentalism, is to cultivate a faith in doubt that calls into question every certainty” (A39). Taylor concludes, “Indeed, the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be dominated by religion in ways that were inconceivable just a few years ago. Religious conflict will be less a matter of struggle between belief and unbelief than a clash between believers who make room for doubt and those who do not” (A39). Some ten years later these observations have tragically become evident worldwide.

### **The Role of Doubt in Teaching Religion**

Teaching religion is essentially creative and unpredictable in nature. It doesn’t function with predetermined outcomes. It doesn’t operate according to a “functional postulate” ( Martin 1985). The quest is for understanding within one’s own religion and (outside) in the religious life of the other. The teacher teaches the conversation (Moran 1997:124-148). Orthodoxy and heterodoxy are in a different language game. The classroom is not a place for setting such boundaries. The classroom is a place for testing boundaries. Would that process provoke doubt? It may encourage doubts that every intelligent person has. It would also honor the complexities and uncertainties of our existence and our work. This will be challenging to some of the intellectual foundation of our churches, synagogues and mosques. Claims of “revealed truths”, “special/exclusive revelations” or “fixed certainties” may be opposed and critiqued for their idolatrous character. Each may have to avoid the posture of *possessing* the Truth.

Margaret Farley, writing from a Roman Catholic moral theological perspective, asserts, “The truth that the church as a community holds and shares with the generation of believers is not the totality of all truth; it is not a truth that is once and for all fully possessed. The moral insight that believers achieve is always partial, always the object of further search in ever-new human situations” (Farley 2002, 60). Farley advocates the removal of the “albatross of certitude” hanging over the church preventing it from effectively and credibly teaching to the modern (and postmodern) world. Its task is to risk becoming a “community of doubt” in need of the insights of others on the critical moral issues of the day. This “grace of self-doubt” is what allows for epistemic humility. “It allows us”, Farley notes, “to listen to the experience of others, take seriously reasons that are alternative to our own, rethink our own last word. It assumes a shared search for moral insight, and it promotes (although it does not guarantee) a shared conviction in the end” (69).

The litmus test of any educational process, and in particular the teaching of religion, is its ability to affirm and incorporate the healthy function of doubt. This does not mean thoughtless skepticism or the negation of belief, but rather a form of protest which stays within the sphere of faith. It is inherent to the religious drive. Paul Tillich describes this indigenous Protestant principle as the need to question our certainties in the very moment when they become absolutely certain. Tillich saw doubt as the very consequence of the risk of faith, and the two as poles of the same reality. The dynamics of faith, he claimed, always include doubt, not as an unwelcome threat, but as a needed instigation to personal growth (Tillich 1959, 16-22).

Robert Baird, in a concise and lucid essay, lays out a four-fold argument in defense of the creative role of doubt in religion:

1. Creative doubt is a means of constructively acknowledging human limitations. We are not God.
2. Creative doubt plays a role in keeping one's fundamental beliefs from becoming dead dogmas. It keeps them alive: ever ancient, ever new.
3. Creative doubt serves as a check against the idolatrous worship of one's own religion and its symbolic expressions and practices. There is no god but God.
4. Finally, the creative role of doubt refuses to abandon the burden of freedom and responsibility for personal quest. Mature religion requires *ownership* of one's convictions (Baird 1980, 172-179).

The task of the teacher of religion is to "show how" this dynamic flows at the center of the classroom conversation.

Dwayne Huebner wisely observes, "We are required to be comfortable with reasonable doubt, openness, and unsureness if we are to respond afresh to that wish is given to us afresh. This openness and doubt is the source of the insecurity and fallibility of teachers. It is not a consequence of ignorance. It is not a sign of incompetence. It is a manifestation of a life that is still incomplete and open". Huebner continues, "the insecurity of teaching is what makes teaching a vocation, and is inherent in vocations. We cannot take on a calling without risk" ( Huebner 1987, 25).

### **The Confessional Classroom**

Religious education has two major forms, processes and aims. The verb "to teach" captures both sides. The first side is to teach religion as an academic subject. The second aspect is to teach people how to practice a religious way of life. The first aims towards understanding. The latter is directed towards nurture /formation. The classroom of the school is mostly the setting of the first. A religious community is the arena of the second. These are two opposite but complementary forms, with opposite but complementary aims (Harris & Moran 1994, 30-43). When these two teaching forms and aims are confused, for lack of clarity about this distinction, we may end up doing neither task adequately: the academic may not be challenging enough and the formation may not be particular enough. This can be a tragic state of affairs.

During my graduate studies, I enrolled in an intensive inter-session course. It was a deep and rapid immersion into the subject-at-hand. The course topic was titled, Sexuality and the Social Order. The course would change my life and worldview. First, I had the experience of being a minority. I was one of four men in a class of thirty-one. Second, the course was my introduction to feminism and feminists. It was an experience in transformational learning. One element of the course, however, unsettled me. As the course progressed the role of the designated teacher receded and assigned texts tended to be set aside. A personalistic group pedagogy took over. Encouragement was given to self-expression, self-revelation, emotional unloading and confessional declarations. In retrospect, it seems like a forerunner of an Oprah Winfrey or afternoon cable-tv talk show. As the course turned more into a form of therapeutic encounter, I felt more ill-at-ease. The dynamics seems more appropriate in a counseling setting or in a church confessional.

Lucia Perillo relates a similar experience in teaching poetry to her students (1997). She relates how students were eager to be done with her introductory lectures “so that they could get down to what they saw as the real business of the class: writing and discussing their own problems” (A56). Frequently, she notes, student wrote about intimate matters: psychic turmoil, sexual violence, emotional hurts, abortions. Good teacher that she is, Perillo seeks to clarify the difference between poetry’s therapeutic and aesthetic uses. However, she faces in the lives of her students the profound shift in U.S. culture towards the expressive, the confessional and “the Triumph of the Therapeutic” (Rieff 1966). Perillo observes, “This public support for confessional has affected all of the academic disciplines in which self-expression is given value, from sociology to literature to the visual arts. In doing so, it begs the question of what kind of space the classroom is: a courtroom where aesthetic theories are rigorously interrogated, a marketplace where personal grief is traded for consolation, a hospital where the products of imaginative labor are either healed or pronounced dead and autopsied, an analyst’s office where what is under consideration is not so much a text or a painting as a real human being’s life?” (A56).

Ken Homan insightfully lays out some of the “hazards” of personalistic teaching methodologies. While they help students come to a greater sense of participation in and ownership of their knowledge, enabling them to see themselves as “living human documents” with their own narratives, there are risks he notes, that such pedagogies involve. They may involve the student too intensely, too personally, and the course becomes a form of therapy. While affirming to a degree this turn to the human subject and the importance of personal experience as a source of knowledge, Homan cautions against a type of academic intimacy where the teacher is imagined as a type of nurturing mid-wife who labors with the student (Homan 1977:248-64). Therapy should not predominate in the academic classroom. When this distinction becomes blurred or collapses, tragedy prevails.

### **The Interplay of Three Components in Teaching Religion**

The educational corrective to the “hazards of personalistic teaching” (Homan) and “the cult of personal experience” (Elshtain 55) is to re-focus our teaching away from the behavior of the student. What is at stake here is the restoration of balance. Dwayne Huebner writes, “I do not wish to displace the individual from a position of primacy in our thinking. I do wish to claim an equal place for the past and for the community. In thinking about education we cannot effectively start our thinking with the individual and then make the past and community

secondary. Rather our thinking must start with all three: the individual, the past, and the community. Then we can ask how all three are interrelated” (Huebner 1999a,188).

Three forms of content, then, need attending to in the educational setting of the classroom: the past (traditions), the community (social and political structures) and the individual (students). The task of the teacher is to highlight the distinctiveness of each; have each stand out and bring them into creative tension with each other. The teacher directs this drama. He or she orchestrates the interplay between the three components. Each has limitations. But it is the tension within the limits of each that is the basis of creativity. The teacher stimulates awareness of limits so that these limits can be broken through and transcended. Teaching is a constant pushing forward of the horizons of life. The teacher teaches the conversation, imaginatively showing how the play between these three sources of content can disclose possibilities for students in the setting (Huebner 1999b, 198-211).

Teaching is a process of traditioning, an act of passing on the past and the present. It makes accessible to the neophyte cultural wisdom, “the funded capital of civilization” (Dewey). This cultural wisdom is embodied in texts, materials, practices, rituals. These are our knowledge resources. The teacher of religion offer these embodied forms of the tradition, not as a finished product “to be believed”, but as perspectives to be considered. A religious text mediates between a community of the past and a community of the present. The teacher’s task is to see that the text has the chance to fulfill this role. The student is invited into dialogue and dialectic with this printed or visual text with its perspectives for his/her acceptance, rejection or modification.

Jaroslav Pelikan offers an instructive distinction between seeing tradition as a token, an idol, and a true image or icon (Pelikan 1984:55-57). “Tradition becomes an idol”, Pelikan writes, “when it makes the preservation of the past an end in itself; it claims to have the transcendent reality and truth captive and encapsulated in the past, and it requires an idolatrous submission to the authority of tradition, since truth would not dare to appear outside it” (55). Tradition as a token does point beyond itself but it does not embody what it represents. It is merely a means to an end and an arbitrary representation. Tradition, however, as an icon is what it represents. It invites us to look at it, through it and beyond it to the living reality of which it is an embodiment. Pelikan asserts, “tradition qualifies as an icon...when it does not present itself as co-extensive with the truth it teaches, but does present itself as the way that we who are its heirs must follow if we are to go beyond it -- through it, but beyond it – to a universal truth that is available only in a particular embodiment” (56).

The teacher is conservator and trustee of the tradition (Huebner 1987, 20). However, if the tradition is to retain its liberating and life-giving quality, an never-ending hermeneutic is required. Teaching is this critical and creative interpretive process. When it is done imaginatively and skillfully, tradition becomes “the living faith of the dead” rather than “the dead faith of the living” (Pelikan 65).

Teaching is showing students how to live by the best lights of the tradition. However, the student’s past and present experience is a distinctive content in and of itself. A healthy critical and creative tension ought to ensue between the content of the tradition and the content of the student’s life. Good teaching directs this conversation to the mutual benefit of each. A living tradition offers students the promise of new life. The tradition, in turn, can be renewed by the

novelty and challenge of the neophyte. Students have their own life narrative with their own unique archeology (past) and teleology (future). Attention must be paid to their unfolding life story. However, their individual life story (or text) is immersed in a tradition, a societal story (or text). Good teaching is rhythmically meshing of both unfolding stories. Both can participate in the formation and reformation of the others story. The student's life can be renewed through the truthfulness of the tradition, and the emerging truthfulness in the student's life-story can reshape the tradition.

Teaching-learning is frequently viewed from a psychological angle. However, it is also a social and political process and project. Teaching religion takes place in communities with social and political structures and arrangements. These social and political arrangements form the third content in the educational environment. No education is neutral. Teaching religion is a political endeavor – it seeks to influence by directing the conversation. What are the governing structures and the social-political arrangements operative in the setting? What are the power dynamics? What is the relationship of the student to the tradition? Whose interests lie behind religious knowledge? Who is powerful and powerless in the setting? Our current educational language of socialization, initiation, political control, growth and behavioral objects frequently hide the power dynamics operative in the setting. Good teaching brings under suspicion and lays bare the relations of one person to another and the relation of teacher and student to the tradition.

Nicholas Lash, in reference to the Roman Catholic Church, notes, “I have long maintained that the heart of the crisis of contemporary Catholicism lies in...subordination of education to governance, the effect of which has too often been to substitute for teaching proclamation construed as command”(Lash 2010,17). Those with the task of exercising the pastoral teaching office seem not in fact, Lash asserts, primary to be teaching. “The teacher”, Lash writes, “looks for understanding, the commander for obedience ... What we call ‘official teaching’ in the church is, for the most part, not teaching but governance” (18). Failure to attend to oppressive patterns of power in the classroom teaching of religion can silence and marginalize students and fail to honor the tradition at its widest and deepest. The key to teaching to transform, then, is to hold the three sources of content in interplay with each other. To hide this creative tension is to slide into tragedy.

### **Learning Without Teaching**

There is no greater tragedy in education than to assume that you can learn without being taught. Yet, Allen Tough provided the first comprehensive description of adult “self-directed learning” under the title, *Learning without a Teacher* (Tough 1967). This turn towards learning undergirds the theoretical basis of the literature of secular adult education. It also brings with it a set of philosophical assumptions underpinning the enterprise. Part of the tragedy in church and synagogue education today is its near uncritical acceptance of the presuppositions on teaching and learning rooted in secular adult education.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A constructive exception is the recent work of Sarah Tauber in her rich portraiture of three rabbis as teacher: gardener, midwife and learner (Tauber 2015).

Malcolm Knowles is widely acknowledged as a founder of contemporary adult education as a separate discipline in the United States. Knowles worked from the assumption that adult students are a wholly different breed. This set the stage for the claim to uniqueness of the field: adult education is unique because it is different. Its clientele are different. Its processes are different. Its purposes are different – exclusively different (Knowles 1980). These claims quickly acquired the status of a rigid orthodoxy guarded by a self-regulating guild of professional adult educators.

The starting point of adult education is not the teacher but the learner. Sarah Tauber notes, “the literature on adult education has concentrated on the learner and the learning process” (Tauber 2015, 18). Any of its theoretical insights on the role of the teacher and teaching grow out of psychology of learning theory. The teacher, Tauber observes, is never the focus of the research.

In light of this new emphasis, a dominant conceptual model of adult learning emerged in theory and practice in the United States. Knowles introduced (with language from Edward Lindeman) the concept of andragogy as descriptive and prescriptive of this model. For Knowles, andragogy is the art and science of helping adults learn. In contrast, pedagogy is the art and science of helping children learn. A striking contrast is set up to the teaching of children: the child is dependent, the adult is independent; the child learns subjects, the adult solves problems in which they are interested; the child’s learning is directed by others, the adult is a self-directed learner. And most of all the child needs to be taught, the adult does not need teachers – they learn on their own. Tauber notes, “..it was Malcolm Knowles’(1973/1984,1980) research on the concept that established andragogy as a dominant, widely disseminated model for applied theory and practice since the 1970’s” (19-20). Even though the model has been modified and critiqued (Brookfield 1985; Pratt 1993; Collins 1991), it seems impermeable to fundamental change.

Adult education, in its attempt to carve out a distinctive place and discipline for itself has, in fact, separated itself from the rest of education. With the guiding model of andragogy, it has intentionally defined itself over against the child, the teacher and the classroom in the school. Implicitly, this creates crude stereotypes of the adult learner and the child learner that are a disservice to both. Children and adults are not different learning species. There are differences (physical and social), of course, but the modes of teaching and learning do not differ for each. There are emphases which shift from age to age. There are differences in degrees but there is no difference in kind. We need to describe learning that shows the continuity of development from birth to death. There is no sound basis for a distinction between andragogy and pedagogy. Teaching, it is claimed, is something done to children and accepted as an authoritarian form of teaching. On the other hand, adult education sought to get away from teachers and teaching with its contrived language of andragogy. Adult learners, it is proposed, need democratically to have their learning “facilitated”, “mentored”, “guided”, “coached”. The language slides into the therapeutic. Teaching is suspect. And this is a profound tragedy.

### **Re-Orientating Adult (Religious) Education**

The first task is to reunite teaching and learning. They ought to be imagined as a single process at opposite ends of a continuum. Teaching is showing someone how to do something. Learning is responding to being shown how (Moran 1997, 39-42). Moran writes, “I begin with this premise that leaning always implies teaching. In fact, the only proof that teaching exists is

the existence of learning... they are descriptions of one process, seen from two different directions. Where there is teaching, there is learning, and where there is learning, there is teaching” (40, 60). This enables us to look at teaching-learning not only psychologically. It enables us to see it also as social, political and religious relation. People learn because they have been taught throughout their lives.

The second task is to reground and reclaim the fullness and richest meaning of teaching in all its diversity (Moran 1997). Teaching needs to be re-set and reviewed within the perspective of lifelong teaching-learning. It is an enriching and transforming human activity that runs from birth to death. It is the transmission of what is most valuable for one generation to the next. Within this process, critical questions need to be asked at every step of the way. But at its fullest realization, it is actively directed by adults toward adults. Here is where the academic teaching of religion is most valuable.

Finally, the reason for the traditional antipathy of secular adult education toward teaching may be found in its attitude toward religion. The enterprise has been driven by rationalistic enlightenment ideals of the human person. It has incapacity to deal with sin and death. Sarah Tauber writes, “The scholarly study of adult education historically avoided [the] three domains of spirituality, religion and faith. “Slowly”, she notes, “researchers are increasingly giving attention to them” (25). There is an urgent need today for the education of adults in our churches, synagogues and mosques. And this urgent need needs to include any ways people express their religiousness. Our religious traditions, however, are the chief repository of the rich meaning of teaching. This meaning needs to move to the center of our educational work.

In one of his earliest writings some fifty years ago (1962), Dwayne Huebner envisioned the teacher as artist and teaching as an artistic process. He writes, “Teaching is almost an impossibility, really, when all of the complexities and difficulties of teaching are enumerated... [It] is this constant search for perfection, for satisfaction, and in a sense, for beauty. It is the frequent disappointment and sadness of vision unrealized, and the joy and contentment of occasional success” (Huebner 1999, 26). It is the permanent tension between conservation and change, between tradition and transformation. And yet we must persevere without falling into pessimism or utopianism. As we enter the classroom to teach religion each day, the final words in Samuel Beckett’s tragic drama, *The Unnamable*, resonates in our bodies:

“You must go on.

I can’t go on.

I’ll go on” (Beckett 1979, 382).

...with hope in face of uncertainty...lured by the Transcendent.

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## **Connecting the dots: Service-learning as a Viable Option for Discipleship Curriculum**

### **Abstract**

This paper analyzes the viability of service learning as a valid curriculum for discipleship, as a response to Christianity's "Exodus Problem" with youth and young adults. It elaborates on possibilities for such a curriculum to provide a platform for ongoing spiritual development. As research ponders issues of youth, young adults and church, Service-learning provides an alternative approach to Christian education and faith formation. The discipline re-focuses energy towards practical application of religious principles rather than memorization of concepts. Studying the relationship between service and learning provides a challenging new option for education.

A Google search of the question "why do young adults leave the church" reveals approximately 8,020,000 results addressing the question, in just .59 seconds.<sup>1</sup> This example demonstrates the immense interest in opinions and research in the Christian community regarding the issue of young adults and church. The consensus is that young adults are abandoning the traditional church during or right after their high school years and not returning until their late 30s, if at all.<sup>2</sup> The wealth of interest in this young adult "Exodus Problem" has resulted in significant writing and study that is long on opinion and short on solutions.

Compounding the problem is the evidence that the departure actually begins with students *during* their high school. An underlying, and false, assumption is that young adults leave when they go off to college. The reality is that students begin to drift during their later high school years, particularly around the age of 16.<sup>3</sup> While there is almost universal agreement that this exodus is actually happening, little consensus exists on how to turn the tide. In spite of all the hand wringing over the issues that the exodus has caused, it is difficult to find consistent ideas for addressing the problem, particularly in the area of youth ministry education. The question remains: How can churches foster commitment in students, before they become statistics in another online article about the young adult exodus?

Beginning in their late teen years, youth and young adults develop a strong desire for a theology of *doing* faith rather than simply hearing or talking about faith.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, these younger generations also have a strong sense—either real or perceived—that valuable

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF->

<sup>2</sup>E.A. McMillin, "Young adults change their thinking on church," *The York Dispatch*, December 9, 2009, [http://yorkdispatch.inyork.com/yd/local/ci\\_12106667](http://yorkdispatch.inyork.com/yd/local/ci_12106667).

<sup>3</sup>David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 18.

<sup>4</sup>Audrey Barrick, "Survey: Young adults want genuine church," *The Christian Post*, December 7, 2006, [www.christianpost.com/news/survey-young-adults-want-genuine-church-23925/](http://www.christianpost.com/news/survey-young-adults-want-genuine-church-23925/).

opportunities are not happening in and through the church.<sup>5</sup>

One concept that can help youth and young adults “connect the dots” between faith and action is the educational discipline of Service-learning. This paper will review writing and research related to Service-learning, in order to offer greater understanding of the principles involved in the discipline. Further examination will explore research and writing related to youth ministry, demonstrating how impactful service can become a valuable component of educational faith formation. This will ultimately lead to a study of work related to ministry with young adults, and how serving others can create the connections between faith and action that young adults may be seeking.

### **Definition of Terms**

In an effort to use more positive terminology, the remainder of the work will refer to *young adults* when referring to people roughly between the ages of 16-35.<sup>6</sup> Although not limited to these exact parameters, this creates a framework for the ages of the people involved. Since the study also focuses on youth ministry discipleship, *youth* will refer to students age 12-18, which is a fairly standard age range for church youth ministries. *Older youth* means ages 16-18, and *younger youth* refers to ages 12-15. The crossover between older youth and Mosaics/Busters is explained by the similarities in the two groups. While there are still distinctions, older youth are taking on young adult characteristics, including a propensity for skepticism about church and religion.<sup>7</sup>

### **Why Service-learning?**

In order to help youth and young adults connect the dots between faith, action, and church, Christian leaders and educators can take multiple lessons from the field of service learning education. Service learning is a curriculum-based practice in which direct service clearly connects to concepts, principles and ideology expressed in the classroom and other educational settings.<sup>8</sup> Three components of Service-learning make it ideal as an educational response to the Exodus Problem: The learning component, the depth of service, and the potential long-term outcomes for participants, including meaningful relationships.

The first step to understanding Service-learning is to distinguish it from volunteerism or community engagement. While all three types of service are valuable, the *learning component* makes Service-learning distinct from other forms of service. Service learning is an intersection of knowledge, inquiry, compassion, and ongoing reflection at a point of *action* that meets a clearly identified community need. It empowers all partners involved to further action, based on research and greater understanding.<sup>9</sup> It is a particularly popular educational technique among colleges. This popularity continues to filter back into the high school ranks, as students prepare

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<sup>5</sup>Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters*, 212.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>8</sup>Edward Zlotkowski, “Pedagogy and Engagement,” in *Introduction to Service-learning Toolkit*, ed. Campus Compact (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2006), 63.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas S. LeGrand, Jr., “Live Learning: How Serving Others Opens Student Minds” (Faculty Training Session at Gardner-Webb University Faculty Retreat, Boiling Springs, NC, 2016).

for the more intensive expressions found in higher education.<sup>10</sup>

Effective projects focus on direct engagement with community members and stakeholders who benefit from the service. The discipline seeks to develop relationships between learners and community partners who receive ongoing benefits from the service. Best practices include projects that are ongoing and sustainable, rather than temporary or short-term.<sup>11</sup> Projects are marked by ongoing discussion and reflection on the nature of service, as well as research into the effectiveness of the project.<sup>12</sup> The depth of learning, as it is deeply rooted in the curriculum. For example, a college Biblical Studies class might work to help refugee families. They would research Biblical passages related to slavery or being an “alien,” and write on how those passages relate to how Christians might respond to modern refugee problems.

Service learning also seeks to engage learners in deep levels of service that create a path to understanding and advocacy for social justice, both in local and global communities. As a long time practitioner in the field, Susan Benigni Cipolle writes that service learning enhances self-awareness, awareness of others, and awareness of social issues.<sup>13</sup> During the service project, teachers and/or professors provide opportunities for discussion, written reflection and research on service. They should seek to develop projects that not only help others, but also empower them to improve their circumstances. Such practice enhances the learning experience of the student, while also allowing them to analyze the effectiveness of the service. Because service learning impresses the importance of deeply imbedded and well-researched projects, it prompts learners to ask more intense questions of *why* and *how* they can most effectively serve. The desired outcome is that they will develop a life long ethic of service and become agents of social change in their communities well into, and hopefully beyond, their young adult years.<sup>14</sup>

Long-term impact is the most hopeful aspect of the service learning approach. Cipolle’s ideal is that teachers/facilitators guide students from acts of charity to impactful Service-learning. As the depth of their involvement increases, they develop the awareness of self, others and social issues that compels them to form a lifelong ethic of meaningful service. Such an ethic empowers them to become change agents, both locally and globally.<sup>15</sup> In addition to these potential outcomes, significant evidence exists regarding long-term impacts of service learning. Students who engage in the practice in high school or college are more likely to continue serving as adults, to engage in civic activity (such as voting or political advocacy) and to give time and/or money to civic and social service organizations.<sup>16</sup> Finally, it also tends to create deep and lasting relationships between those providing service and community stakeholders.<sup>17</sup> As further evaluation of the literature will demonstrate, these may be the very ideals that older youth and

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<sup>10</sup>Cathryn Berger Kaye, *The Complete Guide to Service-learning: Proven, Practical Ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, and Social Action* (Minneapolis: Free Spirit, 2010), 14.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>13</sup>Susan Benigni Cipolle, *Service-learning and Social Justice: Engaging Students in Social Change* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc. 2010), 40.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 58-59.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>16</sup>Sally Berman, *Service learning: A guide to planning, implementing, and assessing student projects 2nd ed.* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2006), xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

young adults are seeking.

Perhaps this sounds like a fine ideal; however, it also leaves difficult questions. How can Christian educators utilize service-learning principles; and why would it work for keeping young adults involved beyond their years in youth ministry?

### **Youth Ministry: Fresh Ground for Growth**

Service is not a new concept in the world of youth ministry. Volunteer projects and basic service are almost “par for the course” in youth ministry settings. While these activities might create an initial interest in charity, it is most likely minimal service with minimal learning. How can youth ministry teachers and leaders elevate these initial projects to facilitate formation into full-fledged service learning?

A starting point for this discussion comes from Zach Hunter, author of *Generation Change*, a book that he wrote as a teenager and had published in 2008. Although not necessarily a work of academic research, Hunter’s expression provides an excellent starting point for understanding youth views on faith and service. He argues for the validity of service as a path to education and discipleship for youth with a similar perspective to advocates of service learning: Youth learn by doing, not by sitting.<sup>18</sup> Older youth in particular are seeking identity and purpose that is not found in the typical adornments of youth ministry, but instead are found in radical service in the name of Christ.<sup>19</sup> He proceeds to describe various issues of service and social justice, including education, poverty, slavery, and environmental justice.<sup>20</sup> Hunter also adds ideas for integrating service in these areas into the life of the church and the discipleship practices of the youth ministry. The connection that Hunter draws between service and discipleship creates a solid basis to grow service-learning education.

Christian education authors lend significant support to Hunter’s idealistic perspective on service. Jim Dekker outlines the significant impact of service projects on youth ministry participants in the United States, both from positive and negative perspectives. He argues that significant theological reflection must become a significant component of service if the actions are to have lasting, positive influence.<sup>21</sup> He also points out that projects must consider the interactions and the impact with the recipients of service (stakeholders).<sup>22</sup> Dekker’s argument mirrors Cipolle, in that he advocates for significant reflection as a pathway to growing service towards ministry for social justice.<sup>23</sup> Pamela Erwin furthers this case, stating that youth ministry, at its best, is a cross-section of theological/Biblical understanding, social science, and performing practical ministry service.<sup>24</sup> The connection between these three aspects of faith, life and action open the door for youth to comprehend what they believe and to act on it in life.<sup>25</sup> This multidisciplinary approach to ministry is similar to the intersection that defines service learning

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<sup>18</sup>Zach Hunter, *Generation change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 20-21.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>21</sup>Dekker, Jim. “What are we doing with the faith development of adolescents in service projects?” *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 6, no. 1 (2007): 59.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>24</sup>Erwin, Pamela. “Youth Ministry Education: Where Practice, Theology, and Social Science Intersect,” *Journal of Youth Ministry*, 4, no. 2 (2006): 11.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 13-14.

earlier in the paper. By bringing these ideas together at a point of action, youth ministry can begin to utilize service as a viable method of Christian education.

Although few would identify it as such, these and other Christian educators are describing service learning theory for youth ministry education and discipleship. In an article written even before Hunter's book, Catherine Stonehouse makes the case that children and youth learn first through experience, and encountering Christian action within Christian community opens the door to discipleship formation. "Children and teens are blessed when they have a faith community to show them how to be Christians and live as Christians...Christian spirituality requires service to others, and the young are spiritually enriched when service becomes a part of who they are during the early years of life."<sup>26</sup> Ellen Charry warns against the "malforming culture" of youth in North America, and the obligation of religious communities to guard youth against the dangers of such a culture.<sup>27</sup> Taking this concept a step further is Joyce Ann Mercer, as she articulates the importance of acting on behalf of social and economic justice as mandates of Christian life.<sup>28</sup>

The key to developing these ideas into Service-learning curriculum is clearly connecting the service to Biblical and theological principles. As Erwin says, the diversity of cultures within youth ministry demands that it become an "integrative discipline" that ties together social issues, theology, and practice.<sup>29</sup> To talk about abstract Biblical concepts such as grace or compassion without demonstrating *how* to act on these through serving others nullifies their meaning. Likewise, to serve without understanding deeper questions of why and how is to abandon Christian formation. Additional research indicates that connecting the dots between service and scripture brings theological ideas to life for youth, particularly older youth.<sup>30</sup> When service is left to itself, then it loses its power to impact the faith formation of youth and deters their understanding of both the service and the scriptures behind it.<sup>31</sup> True Service-learning will

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<sup>26</sup>Catherine Stonehouse, "After a Child's First Dance with God: Accompanying Children on a Protestant Spiritual Journey," in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, eds. Karen Marie Yust, Aostre N. Johnson, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc. 2006), 105.

<sup>27</sup>EllenT. Charry, "Countering a Malforming Culture: Christian Theological Formation of Adolescents in North America," in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, eds. Karen Marie Yust, Aostre N. Johnson, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc. 2006), 437.

<sup>28</sup>Joyce Ann Mercer, "Spiritual Economies of Childhood: Christian Perspectives on Global Market Forces and Young People's Spirituality," in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, eds. Karen Marie Yust, Aostre N. Johnson, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc. 2006), 464.

<sup>29</sup>Erwin, "Youth Ministry Education: Where Practice, Theology, and Social Science Intersect," 11.

<sup>30</sup>Thomas S. LeGrand Jr., "Connecting the Dots: A Case Study Examining the Impact of Service-learning on a Youth and Young Adult Student Ministry," (EdD Thesis, Gardner-Webb University, 2013), 122.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 122-123.

develop Bible studies and discussions as well as interesting and engaging service projects. Such study and discussion will challenge youth to seek deeper and more impactful projects rather than surface level religious activity.

Several authors and researchers note that young adults are seeking—and not finding—these connections in the church. Service-learning might be a viable option for youth ministry, but why and how could it connect to young adults?

### **Young Adults: Questions in Demand of Answers**

As stated at the outset, most ideas on addressing the “Exodus Problem” seem to be opinion rather than suggestions for tangible action. The discipline of Service-learning, on the other hand, provides a valid and achievable response that this problem demands. The research regarding the thoughts and ideas of young adults reveals why Service-learning can possibly make a difference.

A significant portion of this research suggests that young adults are more interested in what religious faith is *doing* and less interested in what it is *saying*.<sup>32</sup> While older youth and young adults want deeper, more engaging study of the Bible and faith,<sup>33</sup> they have significant interest in participating in the application of faith through rather than the mere discussion of it.<sup>34</sup> They also seek enhanced, meaningful relationships with both believers and those outside of the church.<sup>35</sup> Service-learning principles and goals address all of these desired outcomes. If it is to be successful in keeping youth engaged, the practice and principles must continue on through young adult ministry.

One of the early authors to point out this trend is religious researcher George Barna in his book *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary*. Barna describes disinterested young believers who shun “established systems” of religious expression in favor of integrated faith that is part of daily life and practice.<sup>36</sup> While they may participate in religious discussions and perhaps even acts of Christian charity, these “revolutionaries” often do this outside of the church.<sup>37</sup> They are much more thoughtful and savvy about where and how they invest their abilities/resources than traditional generations of church members.<sup>38</sup> They seek meaningful relationships and in-depth conversations around their faith.<sup>39</sup> As the research about Service-learning demonstrates, serving together can provide a productive environment for these types of relationships and conversation. Without service as a key component of the community, the church is missing a valuable incubator for relationships with and among Barna’s “revolutionaries”.

In their book *un-Christian*, Barna researcher David Kinnaman and *Catalyst* cofounder Gabe Lyons build on Barna’s assertions through specific research with young adults. Older youth

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<sup>32</sup>George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of Christianity* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 14-15.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters*, 212-213.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>36</sup>Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of Christianity*, 13.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 34-35.

and young adults tend view Christianity/churches as insincere and uncaring;<sup>40</sup> too “sheltered” from real-world realities; and more judgmental than loving towards others.<sup>41</sup> Serving others in meaningful capacities can provide a valid and engaging response to these perceptions. Young adults have a strong desire to serve as a way of demonstrating that they are *not* typical “church people”.<sup>42</sup> They hope for a Christian experience where the church looks beyond itself to meet the variety of needs of those who are not a part of the church.<sup>43</sup> Rather than viewing acts of service as individual events, young adults are anxious to embrace a “culture of compassion” that integrates serving others into all avenues of life.<sup>44</sup>

Young adults are not merely seeking opportunities to make donations or send emergency relief packages to distant lands. They are willing to serve, but want to know how their service engages people and creates opportunities to build community, even across well-defined lines of faith and culture.<sup>45</sup> The desire for genuine, meaningful expressions of love and service for others demonstrates the potential impact of service as a means of reconnecting, or remaining connected, with young adults.

A popular article from *The Huffington Post* perhaps sums up the case that engaging service is a key to connecting the dots with young adults, and perhaps the non-Christian world as a whole. Writer and activist Christian Chiakulas makes the case that young adults like him are open to church, perhaps even “yearning” for some avenue of organized faith expression; and yet, “. . .no number of projectors, hip, youthful pastors, or Twitter hashtags. . .” will compel them to attend.<sup>46</sup> What young adults are seeking is a faith community that gives expression to Jesus as someone who “took up the cross of the poor, the weak, and the marginalized” and for whom “social justice *is* love.”<sup>47</sup> If this is the Jesus that young adults are seeking, then serving those who are marginalized creates a golden opportunity to establish a community that gives tangible expression to their understanding of faith.

## Conclusion

The “Exodus Problem”, as described by the literature, is almost literally screaming for Service-learning. Beginning a Service-learning education ministry with youth, and *continuing* that ministry with young adults, would provide the valuable active learning experiences that they seek. As youth grow into young adults, they can expand the depth of their service to move from helping underserved populations to *empowering* them. Service-learning fosters ongoing development of all stakeholders involved, both those offering service and community members who benefit from it. The development of this ideal can begin with even younger youth, and can thread through their high school years and well into young adulthood. This may provide the very

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<sup>40</sup>Kinnaman and Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters*, 68.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 121 and 181.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 212-213.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 215

<sup>45</sup>Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of Christianity*, 46-47.

<sup>46</sup>Christian Chiakulas. “Churches Could Fill their Pews with Millennials if they just Did This,” *The Huffington Post*, Sept. 30, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-chiakulas/churches-millennials-if-they-just-did-this\\_b\\_8215846.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-chiakulas/churches-millennials-if-they-just-did-this_b_8215846.html).

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

connection that both churches and young adults are seeking in order to continue the formation of faith and practice.

One more point that must be made is that Service-learning is a valued discipline in education, particularly in colleges and universities. If youth and young adults are experiencing it in other settings, then it builds on an ideal that they already understand and have practiced on some level. Christian ministries can further develop what is already familiar, thereby providing a level of comfort to the very population they are trying to reach. Once again, these natural points of connection provide opportunity to tap into an existing practice within the context of faith.

Merging impactful, well-researched service with theological/Biblical study and reflection creates the potential for a powerful link that connects the dots between the church, youth ministry, and young adults; as well as between faith, understanding, and action that youth and young adults long to find in their religious experience. These are the very connections that older youth and young adults appear to be seeking in their faith formation. Implementing them into the life of the church could move Christianity away from the ledge and towards tangible responses to the “Exodus Problem”--perhaps to the point that it is no longer a problem.

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**Abstract:** The traditional structure of the Roman Catholic parish is destined for major change as a result of the confluence of many significant challenges concurrently facing dioceses in various parts of the world. Some dioceses have begun or are beginning to address the future with various experiments to face these challenges. Four types of change are presented in this paper as well as focus on the “Renew My Church” initiative in the Archdiocese of Chicago. Significant change in traditional parish life disrupts the familiar pattern of faith life for many church going Catholics, often leading to a loss of hope, resignation, and depression among many parishioners. How might Religious Educators develop programs to help alleviate the pain of losing familiar parish structures and provide hope for the future as dioceses reconfigure parish structures?

**Title: Religious Education for a Roman Catholic Diocese’s Structural Reorganization**

Despite the myriad challenges facing Catholic parish life, Pope Francis is hopeful and visionary about the Catholic parish.

The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be ‘the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.’ This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few.”  
(*Evangelii Gaudium*, 28)

Consider for a moment some of the myriad cultural, financial, demographic, and administrative challenges of church structures today. In the past two decades there has been a precipitous decline of the number of people who attend church regularly. They no longer financially support the church. Many Catholic immigrant groups from round the world who are church goers, often live on the economic margins of American life. They do not have the financial capability to support the church.

Financial settlements for sexual abuse have been costly for most all involved dioceses. Some dioceses have declared bankruptcy as a result of these settlements. Another financial drain are the great number of parishes that no longer have many Catholic church-going

households. Particularly in urban settings, many of these parishes are saddled with impressive but costly cathedral-sized church edifices built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, now needing ongoing expensive maintenance, and today serving a chapel-sized congregation.

The reality of more parishes than priests to pastor them is a fact in some dioceses, and will become the norm in the not too distant future in many more dioceses. An increasing number of priests now pastor more than a single parish.

Clearly, institutional Catholicism is *in media res* with these complex and interrelated problems. An epic sized leadership solution is needed rather than a managerial quick fix. Diocesan-wide master plans that involve the clergy, both priests and permanent deacons, lay ministers, religious, educators, parishioners, and members of the civic communities are called for to find a relevant and sustainable future for Catholicism.

This paper explores the question: How might Religious Educators contribute to this ongoing process that will facilitate hope rather than despair as the church works its way past this set of significant challenges to a sustainable and faith-filled future? Might a curriculum be developed that: (1) provides comparative information about ongoing realignments in various dioceses, both nationally and internationally; (2) eases the anxiety of faithful people who are immersed in a significant time of change; and (3) facilitates a transformation of ecclesial consciousness among all stakeholders in the life of faith?

This paper focuses primarily on the first point – useful information about ongoing experiments aimed at creating and sustaining a viable future for Catholic Church parish life. Four significant experiments of reconfiguration of parishes and parish life are presented. The newly launched, “Renew My Church” initiative of Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago as well as some history and tradition of that archdiocese give a substantial though not exclusive context for understanding and exploration of the epic task at hand. This paper concludes by exploring what might Religious Educators have to offer this ongoing tectonic shift of parish life.

## TRACING SOCIAL AND PERSONAL CHICAGO CATHOLIC HISTORY AND CULTURE<sup>1</sup>

“What parish are you from?”

At one time this was quintessentially Chicago-Speak. Answering this question in the latter part of the nineteenth century when parishes were organized by nationalities, identified one’s ethnicity. As parishes began to be organized by geographical boundaries rather than ethnic identity in the twentieth century, answering this question revealed the particular city

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<sup>1</sup> This inquiry into the restructuring of the Archdiocese of Chicago is both personal and professional. I am a product of this archdiocese. I also have studied and taught courses in pastoral leadership, written a book titled, The Emerging Pastor which documented and reflected on the emergence of non-ordained people who pastored Catholic parishes that no longer had resident priests, a phenomenon begun in the early 1980s in rural dioceses in America, and has been adopted as a pastoral model for some parishes in mid-size and urban dioceses since that time.

neighborhood or suburb where one resided. Even some non-Catholics in Chicagoland used Catholic parish identification as a means of telling people where they lived.

I lived in St. Philip Neri parish through my third grade education, including kindergarten, at the parish school. The Adrian, Michigan Dominicans ran the grammar school and a Catholic high school for women, St. Thomas Aquinas, also on the parish grounds. The church was mammoth, the pastor, a monsignor with the added honorific *Protonotarius Apostolicus* (P.A) which gave the pastor the right to wear a miter and process with a crozier, the usual artifacts of a bishop. “I’m from St. Philip Neri” as that time meant living in a heavily Jewish neighborhood as part of a strong Irish subculture.

My parents moved to St. Cajetan’s parish the summer after third grade, and I went to that parish school for grades four through eight. “I’m from St. Cajetan’s” meant living at the edge of the city, more suburban than urban, with many newly built houses as a result of the GI Bill of Rights amidst the older area of Morgan Park, and far away from the block by block racially changing neighborhoods endemic to the south and west sides of Chicago. Racial prejudice was baked into the DNA of the area, many homeowners having fled their changing neighborhoods to what they considered a “safe” area of the city, not so much in terms of crime, but in terms of maintaining their property values.

This particular Chicago-Speak communicated far more than ethnic identity and/or neighborhood affiliation. It also echoed a triumphal pride about being Catholic in an American Midwest city grown muscular through immigrant settlement from Europe. This pride was incarnated primarily in specific parishes serving the needs of Catholic immigrants and their succeeding generations. Sunday masses, baptisms, first communions, confirmations, weddings, and funerals were the liturgical bulwark of the parish experience. Novenas, missions, Stations of the Cross, First Fridays, Benediction, and other para-liturgical devotions further buttressed parishioners to parish. Church basements and school halls were the epicenter of parish/neighborhood social life hosting a myriad of activities and clubs. One parish, St. Alphonsus, built a huge activity center known as The Athenaeum housing a gymnasium, theatre, bowling alleys, and meeting rooms. (Koenig, 56)

The vast Catholic school system of the Archdiocese of Chicago, once the third largest school system – public or private -- in the United States, further anchored children and their parents to their parish. More often than not, building the parish grammar school predated the construction of the church. At the time of the Great Chicago Fire in October, 1871, there were more Catholic schools than public schools in Chicago. The title of the monograph, The Church that was a School<sup>2</sup> well captures premier place of Catholic education in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century parish life.

## TODAY’S CATHOLIC REALITIES

Today, the above portrait of Chicago Catholicism is largely a gone world. “After a century and a half of steady expansion, Catholic parishes in the United States have entered an era of restructuring and consolidation.” (Clark p. 93.) To be sure, there are stand-alone vibrant

Catholic parishes, both in the city and suburbs, but most all do have a homogeneous ethnic population from a surrounding, insular neighborhood. Parishes are no longer the still point of the turning world for most all urban Catholics in America today. Nor do many parishes today have their own schools, and those that do have very high tuition rates in comparison to the time when parish schools were staffed almost exclusively by female religious orders who received minimal stipends for their extraordinary dedicated service.

There is yet another significant change in Catholic parish life the last quarter century. Increasingly, Catholics, particularly in urban areas, choose what parish to attend rather than their geographical parish. The 1917 Code of Canon Law assigned Catholics to their geographical parish (Canon 216). The 1983 Code of Canon Law no longer holds geography as the sole determinant of parish participation (Canon 518). “Destination parishes” are on the rise in contemporary Catholic culture. So too are “intentional parishes,” officially designated parishes to serve a particular group of people, e.g., young adults, particular immigrant groups, or Tridentine mass enthusiasts.

The reasons more church going Catholics choose a parish are many, among them: some follow a particular priest to another parish when he is transferred; some search for high quality of music; some are attracted by powerful homilies that touch their lives; some feel called to social justice actions embodied in a particular parish; some go to the parish where their children attend Catholic school.

Parish allegiance according to choice rather than geography is one of the major realignments in contemporary Catholicism. This ever increasing reality acknowledges that all parish are not alike, cannot be alike, and should not be alike. The ever growing diversity within Catholicism is manifested by an array of parish styles. The massive cultural shift from “pray, pay, and obey” to active, participatory membership in church, from, “father knows best” to personal formation of conscience, particularly in sexual matters, e.g., birth control (the 1968 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* has been widely ignored) irregular marriages, and LGBTQ issues, has led close to 50% of church going Catholics in urban areas to choose their faith community rather than be assigned to a parish through their geographical residence. (Wedam) Parish allegiance therefore becomes transitory.

This phenomenon of attending “destination parishes” reflects a larger trend in society.

One engaging alternative may be the “ecclesial movement:” a fluid, open-ended, temporary, choice-driven set of relationships and activities where entry and exit are easy and frequent. Such “loose connections” in sociologist Robert Wuthnow’s pointed phrase, increasingly describe the ties among citizens of late modernity they are people who voluntarily choose the relationships they enter rather than be compelled by obligations or ascriptive (intrinsic) bonds. (Wedam)

## THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

In November, 2014, the long serving Francis Cardinal George was replaced with Archbishop Blase Cupich. This cosmic shift of leadership within the Archdiocese of Chicago mirrors the shift of emphasis, style, and content brought about with the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI and the election of Pope Francis in 2013. Archbishop Cupich has set about to restructure the entire archdiocese in a way that is fiscally responsible while at the same time

prioritizing the mission of the church rooted in the Gospel, with special concern for evangelization, social justice, and pastoral services. What has been announced as perhaps a decade long process given the name, *Renew My Church* appears to be a holistic enterprise with wide-ranging input from all stakeholders within the archdiocese: clergy, i.e., priests and deacons, lay ministers, people in the pews. Information from other dioceses facing similar situations will be collected and considered. An extensive archdiocesan parishioner survey was conducted in 2015 to begin this process.

Twenty vicariate meetings were subsequently held for parish staffs and parish lay leaders across the archdiocese. The Priests' Day held on June 7, 2016 focused on an update on the *Renew My Church* progress and process. A Power Point presentation viewed by the priests in attendance marked, “- CONFIDENTIAL FOR PRIESTS -” seemed to compromise the initial announcements of wide ranging participation for all stakeholders. The fact that some stakeholders, i.e., priests, are more privileged to information than other stakeholders unfortunately belies the outreach to all stakeholders as full and equal participants in this ongoing process, and promotes an unhealthy clerical culture.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago has to its advantage several experiments ongoing in dioceses in this country and around the world. It also has to its advantage an Archbishop who is willing to confront the present untenable situation in a long term, holistic manner, avoiding a quick fix that favors substitution and management over ministry and sacramental community. Among the ongoing experimentations are: (1) parish mergers; (2) multi-cultural parishes; (3) diocesan-wide reconfiguration abandoning the traditional parish led by a priest pastor; (4) non-ordained people pastoring parishes. Each of these experiments, or variations of each, that reorganizes traditional parish structures into new modes of delivery sustainable for the future is beneficial information for all stakeholders to know.

From a Religious Education perspective, it is the first step in the traditional stages of religious education: (1) information; (2) formation; and (3) transformation. While this first stage – informational – is the substantial focus of the remainder of this paper, the other two stages, ultimately, are critical to role Religious Education can play in the restructuring of American Catholicism.

## PARISH MERGING

The first model, the merged parish, combines two or more parishes into a single entity. Merged parishes, according to William Clark, S.J. “are fraught with now-familiar problems including community identity and loyalties, turf battles, staff redundancies, and changing clerical leadership roles, the very sorts of problems that can encourage suspicion and even the direct undermining of collaborative efforts.” (Clark, forthcoming) The style by which parishes are merged into a single entity is crucially important both to the short term and long term health of the merged parish. Clark has identified two styles of merger: (1) administrative and (2) communal.

An administrative style favors efficiency, cost effectiveness, and the availability of priests as the central authority, i.e., the diocese acts, usually with dispatch, to create the new parish structure. One notable example of this administrative style was the 2005 restructuring of the Diocese of Essen, Germany. Overnight, the number of parishes was reduced from 270 to 43! (Henkelmann and Sonntage)

A community style, in contrast to the administrative style, view the involved parishes as those who best understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and rely on their input to eventually shape an ultimate strategy for merger. This latter style takes much more time to unfold organically than does the administrative style of mergers.

William Clark, S.J. has identified four salient benchmarks for parish mergers: (1) process; (2) pastoral leadership; (3) community identity; and (4) social ministry. These four benchmarks are carried out in contrasting behaviors in the administrative and the community style.

Clark concludes his observations on his detailed study of merged parishes:

To put it very starkly, a combinations of too little regard for the communities and staffs and too great regard for the clerical leadership cannot result in a happy situation for the leader, nor for the staffs, nor for the communities. A successful merger cannot result from a process that unfolds as if the very existence of the communities and staffs were already something of an inconvenience, or as if any ordained person could effectively lead any combination of communities by virtue of his ordination alone.

When, on the other hand, the whole leadership recognizes the special character of each sub-community, and the ways they are inter-related, and makes efforts to acknowledge, reverence, and nurture those sub-communities, all sorts of creative solutions became possible. (Clark, 125)

## THE MULTI-CULTURAL PARISH

The second model, the multi-cultural parish, reflects the reality of the United States' change of immigration law in the mid-1960s which admitted many more peoples from around the world rather than heavily favoring European populations. Catholic immigrant populations who settle in urban areas like Chicago frequently become parishioners of already existing Anglo parishes. Their particular styles of practicing Catholicism, different not only in language, but also in devotional pieties, are not served well by parishes exclusively oriented toward an Anglo congregation. Immigrant groups often feel as outsiders in Anglo parishes. Some Anglos fear that as their parish becomes multi-cultural, their needs will no longer be met.

A parish moving from a single culture of Catholicism to serving two or sometimes more cultures of Catholicism is increasingly a challenging demographic of urban Catholicism. Likewise, parish mergers might combine parishes with more than one ethnic population creating a similar situation.

Studies of multi-cultural parishes, whether created by immigrant groups moving into a specific parish boundary, or by merging parishes, reflect various ways of proceeding, from top-down authoritarian decision making to bottom up consensus building. Brett Hoover, author of the 2014 book The Shared Parish: Latinos and the future of U.S. Catholicism has made several observations about multi-cultural parishes. He claims that because of the task orientation of American culture, clerical leadership often reflects this value that favors top down authoritarian management. However, successful leaders of multi-cultural parishes, "...understood their leadership as primarily about shaping the corporate identity and culture of the parish." (Hoover, forthcoming) This is best accomplished through bottom up consensus building. Furthermore,

since many multi-cultural parishes serve working class or poor populations who do not have the educational qualifications to be employed as lay ecclesial ministers, they rely on volunteers, most all of whom are women, to staff the religious education and sacramental preparation programs. Apostolic movements frequently serve as schools of lay leadership and spirituality for immigrant populations in multi-cultural parishes rather than graduate programs in ministry at universities and seminaries.

Brett Hoover sees the multi-cultural parish as a difficult venue for welcoming everyone equally, and eventually coalescing varying cultures into a single, mature faith community. “In my experience as a researcher, only a few parishes manage to balance the real pastoral need for worship and ministry in distinct languages or for different cultural groups with a coherent common sense of parish and Church.” (forthcoming)

#### NON-ORDAINED PASTORS, aka PASTORAL ADMINISTRATORS

In the early 1980s some bishops in rural dioceses of the United States, rather than closing and/or merging long existing parishes, decided to appoint non-ordained personnel to administer parishes no longer having resident priests. Eventually this movement spread to certain mid-size and large dioceses also. Initially many parishioners in these parishes who were the recipients of non-ordained pastors feared it was the first step of their diocese to close or merge their parish, and were hesitant to accept or approve of non-ordained leadership. However, the repeated behavior pattern in these parishes is that once the parishioners realized ministry continued, sometimes more effectively than past performances of some priest-pastors, most all embraced this model. (Gilmour)

This model of parish leadership continues to grow throughout the United States, but with two caveats. First, a change of bishops in a diocese might well mean a change in policy regarding the appointment of non-ordained pastors. Secondly, there has been a decided shift from religious women and lay people functioning in this role to permanent deacons functioning in this role. Most all of the early appointments of non-ordained pastors were religious women who were familiar with consensus oriented decision making in their respective religious orders, and employed this style of leadership in their newly found role as non-ordained pastors. Thirdly, though “non-ordained pastors” is the most highly descriptive and communicative phrase that captures the reality of their presence and ministry, the term, “pastoral administrators” is now commonly used to identify people who function in this role.

This experiment advantages the already existing parish by maintaining its singular heritage and identity, its church building along with other physical structures, and its pastoral services and programs, except for the daily celebration of the Eucharist on weekdays and sometimes funeral and nuptial masses. Most Sundays a visiting priest or an officially assigned sacramental minister leads the Eucharist. But in the future that could become less frequent depending on the number of priests who are available to carry out the Sunday Eucharist.

#### DIOCESAN RECONFIGUREMENT

A far reaching reconfiguration of a diocese has been an ongoing experiment in the Archdiocese of Poitiers, France, located about 200 miles southwest of Paris, since the 1980s. Instead of replacing priests with religious women, deacons, or lay ministers, the diocese inaugurated a remarkably participative synodal process that embraced Canon 516.2 which allows

a bishop to develop other ways of serving the faithful when traditional parish structures no longer work. The archdiocese was reconfigured into “pastoral sectors,” each with a pastoral council responsible for the proclamation of the gospel, prayer, and service, in addition to the financial management of the sector. Additionally, they are responsible for renewing membership of the sector’s pastoral council newly elected members every third year.

This model challenges the viability of traditional parishes, and the long entrenched clerical model of leadership. “One world is being erased another is emerging, without there being any pre-determined model for its construction” wrote the French Bishops in their 1996 letter. In the diocese of Poitiers, France centralization and reproductive change were abandoned for a new way of doing things, i.e., decentralization and productive change. The bishop is the pastor of every sector. This experiment, launched a quarter century ago, is still considered to be in an early stage of development even though other dioceses have emulated parts of this plan.

The reconfiguration of the Archdiocese of Poitiers is similar to what Marshall McLuhan calls a break-boundary, and classically trained Latinists would call a caesura. The previous way of doing things, i.e., the traditional parish, cannot be a useful template for this new way of organizing pastoral presence and services across a diocese.

#### THE CONTRIBUTION RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS MIGHT FACILITATE TO THE RECONFIGUREMENT OF CATHOLIC PARISH LIFE

The above four models of diocesan reconfiguration, even though they are very much ongoing experiments, have a better chance of succeeding with a long term approach that relies on widespread, bottom up consultation. Religious educators can play a significant leadership role in a long term, highly consultative process to reconfigure diocesan structures. Should a diocese opt for a short term, top down managerial fix, the voice of the religious educator, as well as other stake holders, becomes mute. The following comments and reflections are predicated on a long term and widespread consultative model for diocesan reconfiguration.

If religious educators are to bring their professional competencies to this major challenge facing dioceses and parishes, they must, first educate themselves about the many and varied experiments already in progress in various dioceses around the world. Subsequently, they need to focus on the adult population of church going Catholics, especially older adults who have a strong memory of and satisfaction with the traditional ways of parish life.

The four brief, thumbnail sketches of ongoing experiments presented above are examples of what needs first to be investigated, probed, reflected upon, and evaluated by Religious Educators, and subsequently develop programs that will present information about these ongoing experiments in diocesan and parish restructuring to parishioners.

Religious Educators need to keep in mind that many of their parishioners will be in the grieving process for a parish that no longer can independently sustain itself as they had known it and treasured it. Many parishioners will be working their way through the classic five stages of grief -- denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance -- but each at their own pace in their own way. Not only must Religious Educators keep in mind this grieving process, realizing that individual parishioners will be in different stages of grieve simultaneously, but also build an educational program which recognizes and honors everyone’s process of grieving.

Whatever educational programs Religious Educators might develop to help move the church of the present into the church of the future, long term processes need to be incorporated, not short term solutions. The problems facing the structures of Catholicism did not appear overnight and cannot be solved overnight. Short term management must be eschewed in favor of long term leadership. Any program that suggests a quick fix solution is not doing anyone any favors.

All of the above models, or various combinations, are dependent upon a vision and practice of leadership that is widely participatory and consultative. “The health of our church communities calls for collaborative approaches that engage and sustain contributions from across the rich spectrum of the Church’s membership. Such approaches can only be developed through experimentation, continual practice, research, and reflection which themselves include careful listening and cooperation.” (Clark/Gast)

Canon Law regulating the internal management of the Roman Catholic Church is a remarkably tensile body of laws. It is not a rigid rule book applicable in the same manner to each and every situation in the thousands of dioceses in the world. Therefore one cannot look exclusively to Canon Law as holding the solution or acting as arbitrar of differing experiments aimed at securing a viable future for the church.

Rather, Canon Law often codifies what has already been established as custom in local church practice. Edward Schillebeeckx makes this point in his book, Ministry:

If we are to evaluate the possible theological significance of present-day new alternatives and forms of ministry which often deviate from the established order of the church, and are on the increase everywhere, we must steep ourselves in the facts of the history of the church: in antiquity, in the Middle Ages and in modern times. It will then also become clear that authoritative documents (the authority of which the Catholic theologian accepts, albeit not always to the same degree) are always prepared for by new practices which arise from the grassroots. (3)

Once codification of custom occurs in Canon Law, poly-variant interpretations emerge. One reason for varied interpretation is that Canon Law is filled with provisional language. For example Canon 517 begins, “When circumstances so require”. But there is no explanation of these circumstances. Canon 526 reads, “A parish priest is to have the parochial care of one parish only. However, because of a shortage of priests or other circumstances, the care of a number of neighbouring parishes can be entrusted to the one parish priest.” What the “other circumstances” are and what might be the maximum number of parishes one priest is allowed to pastor is not delineated.

Interpretation and application of Canon Law differ widely among dioceses. Here in the United States, one diocese might apply certain canons quite differently from another diocese. Some bishops allow non-ordained people and permanent deacons to pastor parishes; other bishops do not. In the dioceses that employ non-ordained pastors, what they are allowed to do also varies. Some bishops allow non-ordained pastors who are not permanent deacons<sup>1</sup> to baptize and witness marriages. Other bishops do not. Some bishops allow non-ordained pastors who are not permanent deacons to deliver the homily at mass which is permitted by Canon 766. Other bishops do not.

Another facet of interpretation of Canon Law is which canons are employed and which canons are not acted upon in particular situations. Canon 517.2 which allows for non-priests to be appointed for the pastoral care of parishes, has been widespread in many dioceses both in the United States and elsewhere. However, canon 516.2 which reads, “When certain communities cannot be erected as parishes or quasi-parishes, the diocesan bishop is to provide for their pastoral care in another way” has not been acted upon in American dioceses. This canon was a guiding principle, not a recipe for the restructuring of the Archdiocese of Poitiers, France as mentioned above.

The ecclesiological context is crucial to framing the processes by which the future will be brought about. Clearly, one size doesn't fit all, and never did. Rather than looking at worldwide uniformity as a strength or goal, the ever increasing diversity of the world and church becomes its strength. Karl Rahner offers insight into this style of church. According to Rahner, World Church is the third major epoch in the history of Christianity, and began with Vatican II. The first epoch, Jewish Christianity, understood the church as a sect of Judaism. Gentile converts needed first to become Jewish in order to embrace Christianity. The second epoch, Euro-centric Christianity, Rahner describes as

...the actual concrete activity of the Church in its relation to the world outside of Europe was in fact (if you will pardon the expression) the activity of an export firm which exported a European religion as a commodity it did not really want to change but sent throughout the world together with the rest of the culture and civilization it considered superior. (717)

This present epoch we now find ourselves living, World Church, is characterized by a church “inculturated throughout the world”. (Rahner, 718) This shift away from a Euro-centric church to a World Church, now in its nascent stage, is as radically boundary breaking as was the shift from Jewish Christianity to Euro-centric Christianity.

The celebration of the Eucharist, the heart and soul of Roman Catholicism, runs the risk of being less available to church going Catholics as long as its practice is totally dependent upon ordained, male, celibate priests. The change of church discipline opening the ranks of the ordained to wider groups of people, e.g. women and married men, would preserve the centrality of the celebration of the Eucharist. Such a move would not only serve the managerial dimensions of substitution and management in a future configuration of church, but also the theological aspects of ministry and sacramental community in a church of the future. It would fulfill the psalmist's dream:

I wash my hands in innocence  
And join the procession round your altar,  
Singing a hymn of thanksgiving,  
Proclaiming all your wonders.  
I love the house where you live,  
The place where your glory makes its home.  
I bless you, Yahweh, at the Assemblies. (Psalm 26, 6-8, 12)

Until such a time when wider groups of people become eligible for ordination, the celebration of the Eucharist will become more and more infrequent, and the psalmist's poetry

mute. Who will be our priests is, in many ways, is a foundation question for future structures of parishes and their pastoral practices.

Other foundational questions center on parishioners themselves, the laity, whose active participation in the pastoral life of the parish is crucial to the future structures of church. Will the church eventually move from a clerically-centered church to a laity-centered church? Will a new culture of priesthood emerge that is not clerical, i.e., authoritarian, in charge, and answerable only to their bishop?

The stakes are extraordinarily high in the future reconfiguration of church structures. Religious Educators have significant gifts to offer local churches as they find a way forward that is holistic, sustainable, and touches hearts. It is important that Religious Educators see themselves as significant leaders in this ongoing enterprise of experimentation to bring about, in Rahner's terminology, World Church, or, in the rhetoric of this convention, "in a globalized world".

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## Hope, War, and Education: A Deweyan Analysis

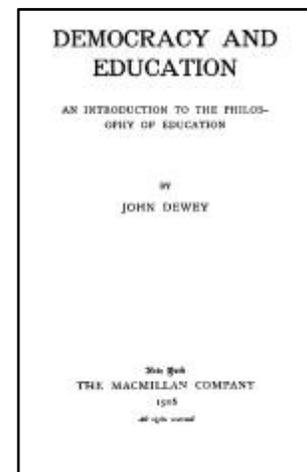
### Abstract

2016 is the 100-year anniversary of the publication of John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. In honor of this centennial, this paper explores the significance of this book for religious educators who seek to generate hope in a conflicted world. An analysis of how a wartime context shaped Dewey's remarkable text is followed by an examination of Dewey's on-the-ground work with teachers immediately following the publication of *Democracy and Education*. Deweyan pedagogy offers a realistic account of how teachers can generate hope in seemingly hopeless times.

### Paper

#### The Religious Reception of *Democracy and Education*

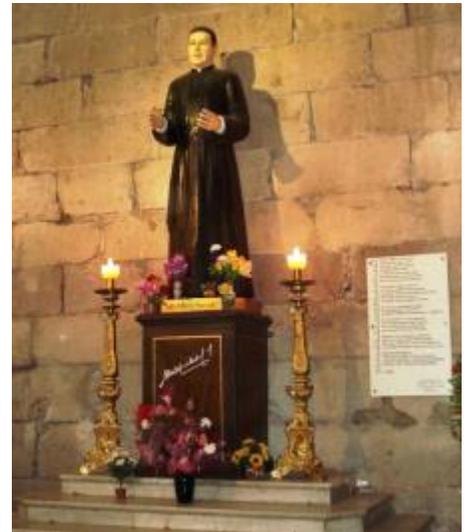
2016 is the 100-year anniversary of the publication of John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. John Dewey claimed this book contained a summary of his "entire philosophical position." The book was revolutionary when first published and remains in-print today. In this book Dewey envisions a moral ideal for society and a social ideal for morality. More than a form of politics, democracy is a spiritual-cum-intellectual-cum-cultural form of "associated living" in which the interests of the individual and group are mutually enhanced. In honor of this centennial, the paper explores the significance of Dewey's *magnum opus* for religious educators who seek to generate hope in a globalized world.



The Religious Education Association Annual Meeting provides an apposite context for commemorating this book. *Democracy and Education*'s favored metaphor of growth is imagery that had been employed years earlier at the first Annual Meeting of the REA.<sup>i</sup> In that February 1903 address, held in Dewey's own Chicago, he referred to the "germinating seed, growing leaf, [and] budding flower" of religious development, an idea that would be developed in the 1916 text which compares educators to farmers, experiences to budding plants, and social advancement to biological growth.<sup>ii</sup>

Dewey's book was not received with universal acclaim. The conservative magazine *Human Events* famously rated *Democracy and Education* as one of the five "most harmful" books of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—alongside *Mein Kampf*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. Such concerns were fuelled by religious fundamentalism which pitted Dewey as no friend of religion. In his day Dewey was popularly branded as "godless," "completely atheistical," "pagan," and "anti-Christian." This continues into the present with influential Christian commentators commonly blaming Deweyan pedagogy for a host of social ills.

There is, however, another strand of interpretation which recognizes a very different Dewey—a Dewey whose educational insights are rich in religious significance. To give but one example, the Jesuit Alberto Hurtado wrote an appreciative doctoral dissertation titled "El Sistema Pedagógico de John Dewey Ante las Exigencias de la Doctrina Católica" (John Dewey's Pedagogical System Facing the Demands of the Catholic Doctrine). The young Chilean's reading of Dewey did not anathematize him: Padre Hurtado, one-time Dewey scholar, was canonized as Saint Alberto in 2005.<sup>iii</sup>



Religious educators can continue to draw inspiration from Deweyan pedagogy. One way is to follow Dewey is by resisting instrumental valuations of educational work. Contrary to caricature, Dewey was no callous utilitarian. Educational values (a title of one of *Democracy and Education*'s later chapters) are not isolated from intrinsic values. The nuts and bolts of curricula and pedagogy are connected to what we value most deeply. Indeed, in his 2015 Presidential Address to the American Academy of Religion, Thomas Tweed cited *Democracy and Education* in support of the position that defences of the place of religion (as an academic field of study) in the curriculum can be based on the inherent value of understanding religion. When Dewey says "there is something that is intrinsically good, good for itself" he may offer aid to religious educators and scholars of religion who seek to demonstrate the innate meaning of their work.<sup>iv</sup>

### A Context for *Democracy and Education*

In large part this RIG will focus on situating *Democracy and Education* within its cultural and philosophical context. The first section gives particular attention to the text's relation to the First World War. "As this is written, the world is filled with the clang of contending armies," Dewey writes. Although it would be a mistake to confine the meaning of *Democracy and Education* to its immediate milieu, it must also be recognized that Dewey's "democratic criterion of education" was all the more relevant in the face of this particular global exigency. He understood that "the horrors of war" as well as "international jealousy and animosity" were not considerations remote to his educational philosophy.

It is no mistake that these last comments appear in the chapter on “The Democratic Conception of Education” where Dewey observes that “the existing situation of human intercourse” in which “each nation lives in a state of suppressed hostility and incipient war with its neighbors” was bred by a confusion of social ideals with national aims. Nationalism threatened true democracy, still Dewey held out pragmatic hope based on the principle that conflict ameliorates thought. Thus he noted that war had an unintended positive benefit: “conflict of peoples at least enforces intercourse between them and thus accidentally enables them to learn from one another...”<sup>v</sup>

### A Philosophy for Conflict

*Democracy and Education*'s philosophical context will be sketched, especially with reference to the influence of Darwinian principles on Dewey's metaphor of growth. It will also be shown that the thinking-is-bred-by-conflict theme of *Democracy and Education* is augmented in Dewey's later philosophical works. Epistemological insights forged in wartime classrooms were existentially extended. This will be illustrated with reference to his discourse on “Existence as Precarious and as Stable” within *Experience and Nature* (1925). There Dewey argues that human learning occurs best amidst difficulty: “Reflection only occurs in situations qualified by uncertainty, alternatives, questioning, search, hypotheses, tentative trials or experience which test the worth of thinking.” Because the world is contingent, we cogitate. Because of mortality, we muse. “The ultimate evidence of genuine hazard, contingency, irregularity and indeterminateness in nature is thus found in the occurrence of thinking.”<sup>vi</sup>

### Taking the Message to Teachers

The years following the publication of *Democracy and Education* saw Dewey issue a flurry of thought-pieces and civic talks on the topic of war and education. Dewey earned his stripes as a public intellectual by demonstrating how a naturalistic outlook translated socially. To teachers unions and socialist organizations, in magazines and on university campuses, Dewey posed a question: what can the War teach us about education?

Dewey's pragmatic hope was “forged in the context of devastating personal losses” and failures in the outcomes of some of his public initiatives.<sup>vii</sup> The final major section of the paper examines specific ways Dewey applied *Democracy and Education*'s argument to educators working “on the ground” in an era of global conflict. His addresses to organizations of educators much like the REA (Vocational Education Association., California Teachers Association, etc.) addressed practical ways educators could harness the “social idealism” generated by war for times of peace.

While war was tragic, Dewey believed it held residual benefits for education. For example, when patriotic fervour was leading to a requirement for universal military training, Dewey advised that educators pin their hopes on something other than nationalism. Truly inclusive, democratic education was vital in case “some other social catastrophe, if possible even greater than the present one, shall overwhelm us.”<sup>viii</sup>

100 years later, this insight has not gone stale.

## Generating Hope

The 2016 Annual Meeting explores ways educators can generate hope in a globalized world. Educators must be intentional about hope-generation because globalization often works against goodwill. Our interconnected world is a conflicted world, a postcolonial domain more often at battle than at peace. If religious educators are to teach hope it will not be done in a halcyon vacuum. Hope is experienced amidst despair; social progress is gained in spite of inevitable conflict. Freire's "pedagogy of hope," for example, was an act of resistance to a "slavocratic past" and a neoliberal present.<sup>ix</sup>

Hope is not self-spawning, and thus it is helpful to locate guides for confidently finding ways forward. Indeed, one question this Meeting considers is "What can we learn from other disciplines, such as sociology and psychology of religion, educational sciences, learning theories, etc., on the role of the educator/teacher?" While there are many ways of facing an instable world with courage, what is the particular contribution educational theory makes to hope-generation? These questions of 2016 are addressed by a book of 1916—to wit, the purpose of this Research Interest Group session is to initiate scholarly conversation regarding the relevance of John Dewey's educational philosophy to the theory and practice of religious education. By responding to existential precariousness and international combat Dewey offers a realistic account of how religious teachers can educate hopefully in times which seem hopeless.

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<sup>i</sup> See these two REA webpages: <http://old.religiouseducation.net/Org/reahistory.htm> and <http://old.religiouseducation.net/Publications/historicalArticles.html>.

<sup>ii</sup> See John Dewey, "Religious Education as Conditioned by Modern Psychology and Pedagogy," in *The Middle Works of John Dewey: 3* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977).

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<sup>iii</sup> I explore the positive and negative reception of Dewey by religious writers more fully in my *John Dewey among the Theologians* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

<sup>iv</sup> Thomas Tweed, "Valuing the Study of Religion: Improving Difficult Dialogues within and Beyond the Aar's 'Big Tent'," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>v</sup> See John Dewey, *Democracy and Education. The Middle Works of John Dewey: 9*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1916/1985).

<sup>vi</sup> See *Experience and Nature. The Later Works of John Dewey: 1* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 62-63. For a helpful commentary on this theme, see Andrea English, *Discontinuity in Learning: Dewey, Herbart and Education as Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>vii</sup> Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy, *John Dewey and the Philosophy and Practice of Hope* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), xvii.

<sup>viii</sup> John Dewey, "Vocational Education in the Light of the World War," in *The Middle Works of John Dewey: 11*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 69.

<sup>ix</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Paulo Freire Reader* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 240, 48.



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## TEACHING FOR COSMOPOLIS: BERNARD LONERGAN'S HOPEFUL VISION FOR EDUCATION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

### *Abstract*

*Canadian philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan offers a vision for education that promotes what he terms "cosmopolis." For Lonergan, authentic cosmopolitanism does not seek to impose a universal totalizing metanarrative. Rather, it embraces the particularity and historicity of one's own cultural, religious, and intellectual traditions, while remaining radically open to dialogue with the other. By doing so, education for cosmopolis fosters both authentic appropriation and reflective critique of one's own traditions, as well as an appreciation for the authenticity of others. Teaching for cosmopolis is an invitation to dialogue which promotes mutual understanding, mutual respect, and mutual interdependence in a globalized world.*

### **Introduction**

It has become almost cliché to describe the contemporary world as "globalized." Yet, as political philosopher Fred Dallmayr argues the term often "conceals more than it reveals" insofar as it raises fundamental questions about identity, sense of place, and selfhood.<sup>1</sup> What does it mean to live in globalized world? Is the global "world" a habitat or a horizon? And, is it possible to become members of a global community without sacrificing one's particular identity? Paradoxically, these questions reveal some of the underlying tensions of globalization as countervailing forces of xenophobia, ethnic violence, and global terrorism threaten a sense of global cohesion. While education offers the hope of promoting a global consciousness, educating for cosmopolitan citizenship can seem problematic at best, if not naively quixotic in the context of an increasingly multivalent, yet globalized world. As Dallmayr points out, "cosmopolitanism in our time cannot assume a homogeneous global community, but has to proceed through cross-cultural dialogue."<sup>2</sup> Teaching for cosmopolis, then, requires an invitation to substantive conversation that fosters a deeper awareness of, a deeper respect for, and a deeper commitment to both self and other as authentic subjects acting in the world.

Here, Canadian philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan presents a vision for education that promotes a cosmopolitanism that invites authentic dialogue among multiple traditions, multiple perspectives, and multiple ways of being in the world. For Lonergan, cosmopolis is not the imposition of a universal ideal. Rather, cosmopolis involves authentic

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Dallmayr, *Being in the World: Dialogue and Cosmopolis* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 1

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

engagement in dialogue with the other. It is a commitment to be attentive to our own and others' human experiences, to be intelligent in the questions we ask about the meaning of those experiences, to be reasonable in our judgements about those experiences, and ultimately, to be responsible as to how we act toward the other on the basis of our experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a philosophical methodology that examines Lonergan's thought on education through the lens of philosophical hermeneutics. It seeks to create a "fusion of horizons"<sup>3</sup> which brings Lonergan's philosophy of education into dialogue with contemporary philosophical concerns of teaching and learning in a globalized world. And, it explores the potential of Lonergan's notion of cosmopolis for the future of teaching in schools to be an agent of hope and change. At the same time, it examines the potential of Lonergan's cosmopolitan claims for education as an agent of transformation in our globalized world by promoting dialogue and mutual understanding. It unpacks Lonergan's philosophy of education as a basis for promoting cosmopolitan citizenship. And, it explores the possibility of Lonergan's vision for education as a way of fostering hope in today's globalized context.

## **Education as a "Re-Horizoning" of the Subject**

In his philosophy of education, Bernard Lonergan contends that the good of the human person is developing his or her human potentialities fully as a subject, that is, developing the human person as a free, intelligent, and responsible self-in-the-world.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, he recognizes that such development is not automatic, but requires engaging persons at ever increasing levels of critical awareness of themselves as knowing and valuing subjects. For Lonergan, such awareness involves coming to appropriate oneself as a subject through the manifold operations of human consciousness: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding.<sup>5</sup> Through increasing critical awareness of oneself as a knower and chooser of values, one comes to know oneself more fully as a knowing and valuing subject, meaningfully engaged in the world. As such, the subject becomes increasingly aware of his or her own world horizon and is thus constituted as a self-in-relation to the world. The development of selfhood is as a self in relation to a "world mediated by meaning and motivated by value," a world of ever expanding horizons, of ever more complex distinctions, and of ever increasing wonder.<sup>6</sup> In other words, education is an ongoing process of the "re-horizoning" of the subject in relation to the world of

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second Revised Edition, Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (NY: Continuum, 2004), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran, Vol. 10, *Topics in Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 79.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick Crowe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 155.

meaning and value.<sup>7</sup> Authentic subjectivity, then, moves not simply from point to point, but from horizon to horizon as the subject's world is continually reconstituted though ever expanding horizons of meaning.

According to Lonergan, knowing and valuing subjects are also self-appropriating subjects insofar as they take possession of themselves as knowers and choosers of values precisely by attending to experience, intelligently inquiring for deeper understanding, reflecting to make more reasonable judgments, and deliberating over which courses of action are most valuable, most meaningful, and most worthy of a life worth living. Hence, as Lonergan notes "By his [sic] own acts the human subject makes himself what he is to be, and he does so freely and responsibly."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, knowing and valuing subjects do not simply know and value; rather, they also *act* on the basis of their knowing and valuing, and as such, they are also "existential" subjects, free and responsible selves-in-relation to the world.<sup>9</sup>

Human subjects, then, are both self-transcended and self-transcending as active participants in the world of meaning and value.<sup>10</sup> This world exists prior to, yet is open to transformation by, the subject. It is a world in which the subject is self-transcended insofar as he or she is born into a given socio-cultural ethos that forms, shapes, and conditions the subject as a knower and chooser of values. Yet, it is also a world in which the subject is self-transcending insofar as he or she develops as a knowing and valuing subject: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding for him or herself. Hence, the world of meaning and value remains radically open to the subject's new experiences, fresh insights, revised affirmations, and revitalized appropriations of values and beliefs.

Here, Lonergan makes a distinction between two, mutually dependent processes of human development "from above downward" and "from below upward."<sup>11</sup> Frederick Crowe points out that development "from above downward" is the "way of heritage;" it is the handing on of tradition in community.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, development "from below upward" is the "way of achievement;" it is the individual's growing in his or her capacity to make sense of the self-in-relation to the world and the world-in-relation to the self.<sup>13</sup> In effect, these two vectors of human development operate together in a dynamic interplay that allows the individual to organize mentally his or her world as a world of meaning and value. As Brian Braman observes, Lonergan shows how the human person is "both a constituting and constituted subject. The way down describes the lived and already given cultural and linguistic matrix that structures the person's

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<sup>7</sup> Frank Braio, "Towards the Re-Horizoning of Subjects: Restructuring Classical-Modern Educational Perspectives," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 13, no. 1(1995): 99.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *The Subject* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968), 19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method*, 110.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *A Third Collection*, 196-197.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Crowe, *Old Things and New: A Strategy for Education* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985), 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

sense of identity. The way up explains the constituting activity of the human subject: the intentional activity of the person as she constitutes herself to be a knower, chooser, and lover.”<sup>14</sup>

For Lonergan, then, development “downward” represents the human person as self-transcended. In other words, the human person is embedded in a larger world of meaning and value which constitutes the given horizon of the knowing and valuing subject. It is the way of “heritage” and it is the way of tradition.<sup>15</sup> The human subject is thus “constituted” by his or her own particular socio-cultural location, which, in turn, shapes, conditions, and forms the subject as an historical subject-in-relation to the world. Through development “upward,” the human person is self-transcending, insofar as he or she develops the capacity to experience, understand, judge, and decide for him or herself. The knowing and valuing subject, then, is not held captive to knowledge, beliefs, and values that are inherited; but rather, the knowing and valuing subject is free to appropriate, adopt, accept, reject, critique, or adapt inherited knowledge, beliefs, and values from tradition in order to make them alive, vibrant, and life-giving in the present. Such development requires cultivating both the human person’s potential as inherited “from above” by way of tradition and “from below” by way of personal achievement. It is this creative tension between the subject as self-transcended and self-transcending that invites the growth and development of human persons toward authentic subjectivity.

In essence, the process of self-transcendence reshapes one’s world. It is a broadening of one’s horizon. And, it is a re-constituting of the subject him or herself. As Lonergan observes, “The broadening, deepening, developing of the horizon... is also a broadening, deepening, developing of the subject, the self, the ego. The development that is the constitution of one’s world is also the constitution of oneself.”<sup>16</sup> Through the process of self-transcendence one becomes more authentically him or herself as a self-in-relation, as an intelligent, free, and responsible subject acting in the world.

### **Teaching for Cosmopolis as Educating for Authentic Inter-Subjectivity**

The term “cosmopolis” originated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE with the Greek cynic Diogenes, for whom it meant being a citizen of everywhere and nowhere at the same. It literally means to be a citizen of the *cosmos* and thus part of no particular *polis* or state. In effect, it originally implied a cynical “hostility to place, tradition, and community” that eschewed all traditional bonds of affiliation.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, later Enlightenment conceptions envisioned cosmopolis as a “universal moral community” that regulated relations between states. It represented the promise

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<sup>14</sup> Brian Braman, *Meaning and Authenticity: Bernard Lonergan and Charles Taylor on the Drama of Authentic Human Existence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 74.

<sup>15</sup> Crowe, *Old Things and New*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *A Third Collection*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> RJ Snell and Steven Cone, *Authentic Cosmopolitanism: Love, Sin, and Grace in the Christian University* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 147.

of a “good” world order, wherein peace and harmony reign supreme.<sup>18</sup> Both conceptions prove problematic in the contemporary globalized context of a multiplatform world. While a cynical cosmopolitanism undermines the very possibility of community, the Enlightenment legacy of cosmopolitanism represents a “hidden agenda of modernity” that seeks to regulate a global society along the lines of a rationally ordered Newtonian universe through subtle forms of domination, power, and control.<sup>19</sup> Political, cultural, and economic hegemonies that promote globalism whether in the form of a new political world order or a ubiquitous McWorld seem to threaten a mutually responsible sense of cosmopolis in a post-modern, post-colonial, and post-holocaust world. As Dallmayr points out, what is needed to sustain a contemporary cosmopolitan outlook is a “dialogic cosmopolitanism” that invites “multiple forms of border-crossing” as authentic subjects encounter each other in dialogue, trying to make sense of self and other in a polysemous world.<sup>20</sup>

It is precisely this form of “dialogic cosmopolitanism” that Lonergan proposes as the basis for education. For Lonergan, authentic subjectivity develops through engagement with the world of meaning and value. Such engagement invites dialogue within and among a multiplicity of intellectual, cultural, and religious traditions. This requires forming an “intersubjective community” of persons willing to enter into that dialogue. Community, then, is at the heart of an “authentic cosmopolitanism.”<sup>21</sup> It is a community that invites not only intellectual engagement, but authentic encounter. As Lonergan notes, “cosmopolis” is not “an unrealized political ideal;” rather, it is “a cultural fact,” expressed through the “influence of artists, scientists, and philosophers.”<sup>22</sup> It is both a community and a conversation that extends throughout history. In effect, it is “a heightened grasp” of humanity’s past and, at the same time, “a discovery of historical responsibilities” in the present.<sup>23</sup> Hence, cosmopolis incorporates the two vectors of education as the “way of heritage” and the “way of achievement” as concrete historical subjects meet “through interpersonal encounter” and “through dialogue with inherited tradition.”<sup>24</sup> Michael Himes suggests that such encounters embody the essence of good teaching metaphorically as a “host or hostess” at a “four-thousand year old cocktail party” would introduce his or her guests to interesting people “into an enormously immense conversation with people of different places and extraordinarily different times.”<sup>25</sup> It is a conversation that invites

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>19</sup> See Thomas McPartland, *Lonergan and the Philosophy of Historical Existence* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 128. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*.

<sup>20</sup> Dallmayr, 5.

<sup>21</sup> See Snell and Cone, 151

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Collection: Papers of Bernard Lonergan*, ed., Frederick Crowe (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1967), 115.

<sup>23</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed., Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran, Vol. 3, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 266.

<sup>24</sup> McPartland, 130.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Himes, “Living Conversation: Higher Education in a Catholic Context,” *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, ed. George Traub (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 238.

everyone, that excludes no one, and that encourages each one to become his or her own authentic self in relation to the other.

A central locus for forming such a dialogic “intersubjective community” is the school, in general, and the classroom, in particular. As Gabriel Moran notes, the school “is a zone of intellectual freedom” that invites dialogue, questioning, and critical reflection.<sup>26</sup> Central to the purpose of the school is school teaching itself, and central to that purpose is the classroom as a place of inquiry, discovery, and ongoing critical dialogue.<sup>27</sup> As Lonergan suggests, teaching in schools is directed toward opening students out toward new worlds of meaning and value. It is an invitation to explore new horizons. And, ultimately, its purpose is to hand students over to themselves as authentic knowing and valuing subjects.<sup>28</sup> Thus, teachers can initiate students into the language of academic discourse, empowering them to become authentic conversation partners in a dialogue of mutual questioning, mutual engagement, and mutual self-discovery.

Such conversation is never one-dimensional as students themselves are invited to become active participants in that multifaceted discourse, bringing their own sets of experiences, their own prior understandings, their own preconceived judgments, and their own previously made decisions. If they are willing to enter into real conversation, to engage in genuine discourse with multiple voices, and to be truly open to further experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding, then, paradoxically, they can begin to appropriate themselves as knowing and valuing subjects in the encounter with the other as their world of meaning and value is, at once, affirmed, challenged, and expanded. They can begin to enter the discourse as authentic subjects-in-relation. And, they can begin to take possession of their own knowing, believing, and valuing. As Lonergan notes, it is then that one can “move beyond dialectic to dialogue, to transpose issues from a conflict of statements to an encounter of persons.”<sup>29</sup> Michele Saracino points out that “dialectical encounter encompasses the process by which the subject is challenged by another’s position,” where “dialogue is an event in which the subject and the other can move from conflict to friendship.” Saracino insists, “an encounter with alterity can challenge and reposition the subject to an alternative posture, to a higher viewpoint”<sup>30</sup> Inviting students to engage in ongoing critical discourse opens them up not only to new horizons of meaning and value; but also, it opens them out to new ways of relating and being in the world. In effect, it invites them to claim their role as citizens of cosmopolis as authentic knowing and valuing subjects acting in the world.

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<sup>26</sup> Gabriel Moran, *Religious Education as a Second Language* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1989), 239.

<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Moran, *Showing How: The Act of Teaching* (NY: Continuum, 1997), 161-162.

<sup>28</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed., Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran, Vol. 10, *Topics in Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 221.

<sup>29</sup> Lonergan, *A Third Collection*, 182.

<sup>30</sup> Michelle Saracino, *On Being Human: A Conversation with Lonergan and Levinas* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003), 141.

## Conclusion

Loneragan's claims that authentic cosmopolitan education can promote hope and transformation are grounded in his conceptualization of the human person as a knowing and valuing subject acting in the world. This conceptualization is not so much a product as a process of ongoing engagement of self and other through openness, encounter, and dialogue. Such a process leads to the transformation of the person as a transcendent being, inviting ongoing questioning, conversation, and a re-thinking of one's own questions, beliefs, and values in relation to the wider world of meaning and value. In effect, for Lonergan, the human person is a work in progress who continues to shape and reshape his or her own sense of self as a knowing and valuing subject acting in the world. In other words, the human person is always a being in the process of becoming.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the purpose of education, especially education in schools, is to facilitate that process by helping human beings critically appropriate knowledge and values for themselves, thus inviting them to become authentic subjects of their own education. Such a process is the basis for hope insofar as education is always based on the hope of becoming one's own authentic self. Yet, in an increasingly globalized world promoting authenticity is only possible in the context of an authentic cosmopolitan vision. Given such a world, authentic subjectivity is only fostered in dialogue with the other who challenges, affirms, or disturbs one's own experience, understanding, judgements, and decisions. Authentic subjectivity is only realized through an "intersubjective community" that allows ongoing conversation with the other. And, authentic subjectivity is only achieved through a willingness to engage the other in the dialectics of identity, place, and selfhood.

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<sup>31</sup> Michael McCarthy, *Authenticity as Self-Transcendence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 138.

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## **Gratitude as a Spiritual Path: The Art of Ministry from the Heart**

### Abstract

This paper explores the theological roots of gratitude as a virtue within the Judeo-Christian tradition, and will follow scientific dispositional dimensions of gratitude. Compared with the relatively recent attention to gratitude in the field of education, it is no surprise that religious education has yet to address the effects of gratitude. To this end, I invited seventeen Mongolian Bible college students to participate in an experiment of practicing gratitude for a period of one semester of 2013. Using the results from the Mongolian experiment, I explored the power of gratitude by identifying the dynamics of the physical, psychological, social and spiritual benefits, especially those emerging from the new discipline of neurocardiology and brain science. The focus of my research is twofold: exploring God’s call to gratitude, and identifying the benefits of gratitude observed through current scientific research. The results can build upon and broaden the discussion of how gratitude enhances our spiritual, psychological and physical well-being and wholeness. These findings, I hope will make a modest contribution to the field of theological education. More broadly, I propose that the cultivation of gratitude be considered an essential imaginal entry point for the discipline of religious education.

Gratitude has been the object of study in the disciplines of sociology, moral philosophy, ethics, and politics. It has also been recognized as a moral and a spiritual virtue, as well as an emotional disposition in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other major religions. In the last 16 years, many social science researchers have observed that practicing gratitude enables people to experience healthier hearts, positive emotions and relationships, increased longevity, and deeper intimacy with God<sup>1</sup>. As one researcher concludes, gratitude yields notable power and benefits: “Gratitude broadens people’s modes of thinking, which in turn builds their enduring personal and social resources. Gratitude appears to have the capacity to transform individuals, organizations, and communities for better<sup>2</sup>”.

Recent research projects have explored gratitude from various aspects. For instance, a study by Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade<sup>3</sup> concluded that the set-point of happiness or

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<sup>1</sup> Greater Good Science Center. Retrieved from <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/gratitude>

<sup>2</sup> Fredrickson, B. L. (2004). Gratitude, like other positive emotions, broadens and builds. In Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (Eds.). (pp. 145-166). *The psychology of gratitude*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. p. 159

<sup>3</sup> Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 111.

gratitude is determined by 50% of one's genetic code, 40% of deliberate efforts, 10% of one's environments. Another study points out that gratitude must be intentionally cultivated because one cannot increase one's level of happiness or gratitude without practicing a certain degree of reflection and retrospection<sup>4</sup>. One recent study concludes that candidates who count their blessings every day through practicing cognitive habits raise the level of their set-point of gratitude and happiness<sup>5</sup>.

In the discipline of positive psychology, gratitude is recognized as one of 24 character strengths that lead people to live purposeful and prosperous lives<sup>6</sup>. Researchers observe that individuals with gratitude as a character strength are connected to a deep cognizance and recognition of goodness in their lives.

Howells, in *Gratitude in Education*, points out that gratitude plays a central pedagogical role in education<sup>7</sup>. Her qualitative study explores the positive outcomes in the teaching-learning process when pre-service teachers think with a thankful heart. Cummings<sup>8</sup> and Pelsner<sup>9</sup> further strengthen Howells' observations in two ways: the use of an enlarged sample size and length of work and the documentation of the flow-on effects of gratitude based on the teaching-learning experience.

Religions and philosophies have long considered gratitude to be an indispensable expression of virtue, and an integral component of health, wholeness, and well-being. Studies in behavioral psychology have also observed the surprising life improvements that can result from the practice of gratitude.

This paper explores the theological roots of gratitude as a virtue within the Judeo-Christian tradition, and will follow scientific dispositional dimensions of gratitude. Compared with the relatively recent attention to gratitude in the field of education, it is no surprise that religious education has yet to address the effects of gratitude. To this end, I invited seventeen Mongolian Bible college students to participate in an experiment of practicing gratitude for a period of one semester of 2013. Using the results from the Mongolian experiment, I explored the power of gratitude by identifying the dynamics of the physical, psychological, social and spiritual benefits, especially those emerging from the new discipline of neurocardiology and brain science.

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<sup>4</sup> Froh, J. J., Miller, D. N., & Snyder, S. F. (2007). Gratitude in children and adolescents: Development, assessment, and school-based intervention. In *School Psychology Forum*.

<sup>5</sup> Watkins, P. C., Usher, J., & Pichinevskiy, S. (2014). Grateful recounting enhances subjective well-being: The importance of grateful processing. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1-8.

<sup>6</sup> Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A classification and handbook*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

<sup>7</sup> Howells, K. (2012). *Gratitude in education*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

<sup>8</sup> Howells, K., & Cumming, J. (2012). Exploring the role of gratitude in the professional experience of pre-service teachers. *Teaching Education*, 23(1), 71-88.

<sup>9</sup> Pelsner, J. N. (2013). *Adventures in gratitude: Exploring the possibilities of gratitude in education*.

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The emerging science demonstrates that feelings of gratitude produce a direct and powerful impact on our physical and spiritual well-being. Both positive and negative emotions affect our hearts, our brains, and even those around us. For example, positive emotions like love, compassion, and appreciation stabilize the physiological reaction. They settle heart rhythms into a steady, coherent sequence. However, negative emotions like anger, frustration, and resentment can traumatize our bodies into a state of great anxiety and stress, generating toxic hormones in our body, leaving our brain on alert.

Recent research in the new discipline of neurocardiology shows that the heart is a sensory organ and a complex center for receiving and governing information. The nervous system within the heart (or “heart brain”) allows it to learn, recall, and make reasonable judgments independent of the brain’s cerebral cortex. Furthermore, plentiful tests have verified that the signals the heart endlessly directs to the brain affect the role of higher brain centers engaged in awareness, reasoning, and emotional processing<sup>10</sup>.

The focus of my research is twofold: exploring God’s call to gratitude, and identifying the benefits of gratitude observed through current scientific research. The results can build upon and broaden the discussion of how gratitude enhances our spiritual, psychological and physical well-being and wholeness. These findings, I hope will make a modest contribution to the field of theological education. More broadly, I propose that the cultivation of gratitude be considered an essential imaginal entry point for the discipline of religious education.

## Grace and Gratitude

Thirteenth-century theologian Meister Eckhart posits, “If the only prayer you say in your life is ‘thank you’ it would be enough<sup>11</sup>.” Gratitude is a hallmark of spiritual maturity and a cardinal virtue in Scripture: thankfulness is cited 150 times and classified as a commandment in all circumstances 33 times. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul exhorts the Thessalonians: “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thess. 5:16-18).

In the Old Testament, gratitude is corporately and communally practiced to testify to God’s goodness in the whole faith community (Miller, 1994). “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His love endures forever” (I Chr. 16:34, Ps. 106:1, Ps. 107:1, Ps. 118: 1, 29, Ps. 136:1). Karl Barth writes, “Grace and gratitude go together like heaven and earth: Grace evokes gratitude like the voice and echo<sup>12</sup>.” John Calvin (1509-1564)<sup>13</sup> in the “Institutes” eloquently

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<sup>10</sup> The Resonant Heart - HeartMath Institute, <https://www.heartmath.org/research/research-library/relevant-publications>.

<sup>11</sup> Cited by Emmons, R. A. (2007). *Thanks! How the new science of gratitude can make you happier*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

<sup>12</sup> Cited by Emmons, R. A. (2007). *Thanks! How the new science of gratitude can make you happier*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

<sup>13</sup> This second-generation Protestant Reformer published *Institutes of Christian Religion*, which was later expanded to four volumes and 80 chapters. Key themes of Calvin's theology in the *Institutes* highlight the unmerited and ever-present grace of God poured out upon fallen humanity, and restoration of the broken image of God.

states that there is nothing in the universe more powerful than the sovereign grace of God. In return for God's sovereign and amazing grace, we as human creatures are to respond to God with gratitude as God's children. God's grace deserves our gratitude. The theology of Calvinism, otherwise known as Reformed theology, can be summed up in the phrase, "grace and gratitude." It is the great rhythm of the Christian life and the movements that define our Christian identity.

Reformed theologian Brian Gerrish describes how Calvin's theology of the Lord's Supper orchestrates these movements in *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin*. He cites Calvin's earliest version of the *Institutes* (1536): "In this sacrament...the Lord recalls the great bounty of his goodness to our memory and stirs us up to acknowledge it; and at the same time he admonishes us not to be ungrateful for such lavish liberality, but rather to proclaim it with fitting praises and to celebrate it by giving thanks<sup>14</sup>". Gerrish eloquently captures Calvin's "teaching on the Lord's Supper into harmony with other parts of the whole. In itself, the meal is a gift of God, but—like every gift—it is also an invitation to give thanks<sup>15</sup>." God offers the "spiritual banquet" in the supper, and in return, we express our deepest gratitude and praise! The holy banquet is the liturgical performing of grace and gratitude that lies at the heart of Calvin's entire theology, in short, a 'eucharistic' theology"<sup>16</sup>.

Prominent Evangelical scholar Kevin Vanhoozer describes the gospel as the triune "theodrama" of redemption that is God's "communicative action" in Jesus Christ<sup>17</sup>. The world is the theater of God's glory and grace. The drama of salvation is being played out on the stage of the world. "Life is divine-human interactive theater," he accentuates, "and theology involves both what God has said and done for the world and what we must say and do in grateful response<sup>18</sup>". Here faithful participation and engagement in the world with gratitude is a central part of Christian life. In other words, "Theodrama" involves relationships in which Christians perform truthful propositions (beliefs), experiences (feelings), and narratives (actions) to reflect God's absolute revelation in Christ<sup>19</sup>. God's saving work through Christ's incarnation revolutionizes our thinking by redirecting our attention to the Spirit that empowers us to live lives of gratitude to the Father. In Vanhoozer's view, the church needs to be a community that tells the "theodrama" well:

The church is a performance aimed not at earning but at exhibiting the righteousness of God, the life eternal, and the hope of the world. To perform the drama of doctrine is to do and become a constant display of faith and faithfulness, grace and gratitude, mercy and love. *This glorious show must go on*<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> B. A. Gerrish (2002). *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin*. Wipf & Stock p19.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p20.

<sup>17</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer (2014). *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox. p9, p230.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer (2005) *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. pp. 37–38; cf. 46–48, 65–66.

<sup>19</sup> P110

<sup>20</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer (2014). *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox. p9, p237

## Gratitude as Practice and Discussion

To this end, I invited seventeen Mongolian Bible college students, enrolled in my class, “Education and Spiritual Formation,” to practice gratitude.

They were required to study and implement gratitude practices throughout one semester. During the first three class sessions, I lectured on a study of the benefit of gratitude, exposed the students to literature on gratitude, and instructed them to practice gratitude through writing a gratitude journal entry each day. They were also asked to write thankyou letters of approximately 350 words that expressed specific thanks to a close person whom they never appropriately thanked before.<sup>21</sup> Every other week students were invited to share the insights they gained through these gratitude practices. On the last day of the course, the students shared their final reflection papers, in which they were asked to examine any changes in their inward attitude and transformational experience as a result of practicing gratitude.

As a result of this course and assignment, students reported significant psychological and spiritual healing. They also experienced healing of broken relationships with family members, as well as greater satisfaction in their emotional and spiritual lives. Furthermore, the majority of students had a stronger positive attitude and stronger engagement in my class. The overriding premise of this paper is that practicing gratitude as a part of Christian education pedagogy can foster wholistic transformation in both the individual and in the larger faith community. Hopefully, my research will positively impact theological education.

Froh, Miller and Snyder<sup>22</sup> point out that gratitude does not come effortlessly; rather, it is a learned process that requires effort and a certain level of self-examination and reflection. Likewise, Watkins, Uher, and Pichinevskiy<sup>23</sup> discovered that as the participants count blessings daily, they are training their brain with cognitive habits to magnify the blessings in their lives.

In light of this, this section discusses how gratitude needs to be intentionally practiced and cultivated. My research also includes the testimonies of students’ transformation in the inner attitudes and their insights on practicing gratitude. All names have been altered to keep confidentiality.

As most of my students reflected upon their experience of practicing gratitude, they confessed that they initially did not feel at ease in writing a gratitude journal. For example, Tuochi wrote,

“I was quite upset when my professor asked me to write a gratitude journal. If I look at my life and the situation I am in, I have nothing to be thankful. It makes me feel more miserable and hopeless. I force myself writing gratitude journal because it was a part of my class’s assignment. Considering my journal book as a garbage can, I started to pour out all my frustration and anger on my journal. After expressing all my filthy emotions, I felt more connected and more in the present. These days I started to count blessings from

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<sup>21</sup> Research indicates that writing and receiving gratitude letters can increase joy for both the writer and the receiver (Emmons, 2007; see Greater Good Science Center, focus: gratitude).

<sup>22</sup> Froh, J. J., Miller, D. N., & Snyder, S. F. (2007). Gratitude in children and adolescents: Development, assessment, and school-based intervention. In *School Psychology Forum*.

<sup>23</sup> Watkins, P. C., Uher, J., & Pichinevskiy, S. (2014). Grateful recounting enhances subjective well-being: The importance of grateful processing. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1-8.

God and people and felt grateful and peaceful. Writing a gratitude journal has been a time for arranging my complicated and messed up life in order. As I wrote the gratitude journal consistently for three months, I started to face my reality with confidence, instead of avoiding it. I also developed a habit to plan the next day every night and started to have a very sound sleep. When I got up in the morning, I felt very refreshed and had great quiet time and prayer time. Writing gratitude journal is miracle medicine for me. I am now truly thankful for my professor who gave us the assignment of writing gratitude.”

As a result of writing the gratitude journal, Tuochi gained more physical energy, regular sleep, and a healthier lifestyle.

Another student, Miga, also expressed the changes he saw in himself as he intentionally practiced gratitude. Miga responded in his reflection, “My life has been very boring recently. When I was assigned to write the gratitude journal, it gave me the time to stop and count blessings, savor those blessings. I realized that I was horribly unthankful person before God. The more I was thankful, the more things I felt thankful for a day.” As he practiced gratitude, he experienced a greater connection with God, as well as more peace and contentment in his heart.

Munghu expressed the benefit of intentionally practicing gratitude, “Practicing gratitude is an awesome discipline. It was not easy in the beginning. I think that over three months of writing gratitude journal develops my habit of being thankful in my brain. As I make conscious decisions to be thankful every moment, I noticed that I feel much more optimistic, joyful, energetic, and of course happier than ever before.” Munghu testified that she gained ripples of joy and happiness as a result of developing the habit of gratitude.

Gala echoed a similar experience, “When I have money, I give thanks and when I did not have money I also give thanks. When I gave thanks for the things that I used to view negatively, the great things happened in my life. Instead of complaining about my finance, I started to thank God that at least God gave me a healthy body (Normally I was grumpy and complained about shortage of money in my life). A couple of weeks ago, we were about to leave for a mission trip. I really wished that I have sunglasses. Right before the trip, one of my classmates told me that her sunglasses did not fit her well, so she wanted to give them to me. I strongly felt that since I started to thank for everything good or bad in my life, so many good things happened in my life and I see many more thing to be thankful for – more than I could count! I felt good about myself and happy and at peace with myself and other people<sup>24</sup>. Even some people told me that I got prettier and slimmer.”

I remember that Gala received a full scholarship at the end of the semester<sup>25</sup>. She looked much more attentive and focused in my class. She showed eagerness to learn and very engaged in the class discussion. Amazingly, not only Gala but also the rest of the class seemed to be more positive and engaged in sharing and learning. According to the educational research, grateful people are more attentive, alert, creative in problem-solving, and display improvement in their learning.

During that semester, I observed that the learning faith community was turned into a circle of thanksgiving to God. Another finding of my research is that the power of gratitude can

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<sup>24</sup> Gala wrote on her previous reflection paper that she thought about herself that she was ugly, fat and worthless.

<sup>25</sup> Gala got all A's on her report card.

foster positive transformation and promote engaged environments and reinforced relationships between the students and for both teacher and students. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to recognize that all we are and have is given to the faith community as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy. Here ripples of gratitude were observed as positive flow-on effects in their classrooms.

### **Munghung's story**

Recently, Dr. Robert Emmons (2014), a leading scholar in the scientific research of gratitude, concluded the gratitude study at the Gratitude Summit, "Gratitude has the power to heal, energize, and transform lives<sup>26</sup>." His study argued that cultivating a spirit of gratitude enhanced the well-being of the whole person.

My research concurs with his proposition. After three months of incorporating gratitude practices, my students were asked to self-identify how they became engaged in gratitude practices, the effects of these practices, and challenges of implementing these practices.

As my students practiced gratitude through writing the gratitude journal and writing thank-you letters, they demonstrated that the quality of their lives became substantially, psychologically, spiritually, physically, and cognitively better, along with relationships that were strengthened.

One of the outstanding examples of my research is Munghung's amazing transformation. On the first day of my class, I met Munghung whose head was completely down and she was barely holding her body up. At that time, I was very curious and wondered why she was in my class and not in the hospital. As weeks passed by, I noticed that she seemed to smile more and looked healthier and happier. Later I heard from other students that she was suffering from a terminal disease. Her reason for coming to school was to get to know Jesus before she died and made sure she would go to heaven.

The following is her testimony on her final reflections.

"We all suffer from pain but the pain that I went through was barely unbearable. I had many emotional scars, which caused me to complain and criticize other people. I had no confidence in myself. I believed that God knew my problem and He sent me to Professor Grace's class so that I could be healed. When I was young, my grandmother raised me. When I just turned to 9 years old, my grandmother passed away, so I moved back to my parent's house. My parents had horrible relationship, yelling and fight with each other every single day. My parents completely ignored me and never showed me their affection. It made me long for my grandmother's love more. I've got sick more and more due to stress. After I had been diagnosed with the terminal disease, I decided to attend Seminary hoping that I would know God better before I die. During the first semester of my school, the professor assigned us to write thankyou journal every day. At first, it was hard to write because I had nothing to be thankful for. So I started to thank God for whatever I could find. I gave thanks for the opportunity to take classes at the Bible college. Then I thank that I can breathe and am still alive. I wrote the journal every

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<sup>26</sup> Emmons, R. A. (2014, June). *Why does gratitude matter?* Paper presented at the Greater Good Gratitude Summit, Richmond, CA.

night for 10 to 15 minutes. Every week I wrote more things to be thankful for. Even though I was literally abandoned and abuse by my parents physically and emotionally, I began JUST to thank my parents. I also thanked my husband who is not a good provider, instead of yelling at him. Although my body was in great pain all the time, I thanked God for my body and life.”

Even though she felt deeply hurt, resentful, and bitter, Munghung decided to choose gratitude, instead of complaints. She disciplined herself to make the deliberate choice to fill her heart with gratitude in words or actions to her close ones. Moreover, she started to experience emotional and spiritual healing.

“About a month later, I noticed somewhat slow changes in my life. My view of my parents had always been very negative. However, strangely after starting to express thanks to them in words and actions, I felt that they cared for me. I also noticed that my parents were doing many things for me. My attitude toward my husband also got changed. I used to criticize him all the time but now I have great love for him and even respect him for all his hard work for me. I sensed slowly I was being healed. I was not afraid of things that once haunted me. Instead, I gave thanks for everything in my life. I even noticed that people around me started to show more positive and welcoming attitude toward me and even gave me special favors. This is a really miracle.”

Practicing gratitude was her active and conscious choice and training for her well-being. Here she experienced a dynamic interchange of giving and receiving a thanksgiving gift. As a result, she experienced emotional healing and developed healthier relationships. Gratitude was not a thought or emotion. Rather it is an inner attitude and strength, which can be recognized as the opposite of resentment or complaint.<sup>27</sup> Her amazing healing is not just emotional but also physical. She got completely healed from her terminal disease and now she became an assistant pastor at a local Mongolian church.

My study shows that my students experienced tremendous psychological and spiritual healing, in addition to recovering broken relationships among the family members and achieving greater satisfaction in their emotional and spiritual lives. Overall, the majority of students seemed to improve their attention span and have more positive attitude and strong engagement in my class. The overriding premise of this paper is that practicing gratitude as Christian education pedagogy can foster wholistic transformation not just in individuals and but also the larger faith community.

### **The Grateful Brain: What does a grateful brain look like?**

Positive psychologists have published some interesting findings related to the effects of gratitude. For instance, a gratitude visit reduced depressive symptoms by 35% for several weeks; and a gratitude journal helped people to lower depressive symptoms by 30% as long as the practice was continued. Furthermore, National Institutes of Health (NIH) inspected blood flow in several brain regions while participants mustered up feelings of gratitude<sup>28</sup>. They discovered that the more grateful the subjects were, the higher levels of activity they experienced in their

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<sup>27</sup> Howells, 2007, p. 12

<sup>28</sup>The Grateful Brain | Psychology Today. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/prefrontal-nudity/201211/the-grateful-brain>

hypothalamus. This increased activity of hypothalamus has made wide-ranging impacts such as increased exercise, decreased depression, better sleep, and fewer aches and pains. It also helped to control better metabolism and stress levels. These results on brain activity also demonstrated that levels of gratitude positively influenced general vitality and energy<sup>29</sup>.

Furthermore, the emotional state of gratitude directly galvanized brain regions associated with the neurotransmitter dopamine. This Dopamine is commonly called the “reward” neurotransmitter because it instigates people to initiate action, as dopamine increases in our body. As dopamine reinforces our ability to see things for which to be grateful, our brain actively searches for those things that stimulate feelings of gratitude. That is how the virtuous cycle is created. Even a brain-scanning study in *NeuroImage* reveals that a simple gratitude writing task helps people to experience many psychological benefits<sup>30</sup>.

The emerging science demonstrates that feelings of gratitude produce a direct and powerful impact on our physical and spiritual well-being because they engage our brain in a virtuous cycle. Indiana University researchers, led by Prathik Kini, researched 43 people who were going through treatment for anxiety or depression. Twenty-two were assigned to a gratitude intervention during their 60 minutes counseling such as writing a gratitude letter to their recipients for the first 20 minutes. The other participants acted as a control group and attended their counseling sessions as usual without the gratitude task. As the first group started seeing things to be grateful for, their brain searched for more things to be grateful for. The outcome of the research advocates that the more you practice gratitude, the more your brain adapts to the mindset of gratitude. As times passed by, they started to develop gratitude “muscle” in their brain that can be exercised and strengthened<sup>31</sup>.

In this sense, gratitude can be an upward spiral. As they practice choosing grateful thoughts over stress and discord, their brains calm their parasympathetic nervous system. Repeated thanksgiving tasks change their pattern of behavior, emotion, thought, and can eventually alter their physical brain. We call it neuroplasticity which is the aptitude of our brain to change form and function with our repeated thoughts instigated by cellular reactions in our body whether they are to our benefit or not. This is why gratitude practice can have such a powerful effect on our life. God has called us to engage our brain in a virtuous cycle<sup>32</sup>.

As described above, as Mongolian students exercised their gratitude brain muscles through writing a gratitude journal, the virtuous cycle in their brain developed. Since they could not change their environments or the miserable situations they faced, they instead consciously chose to respond to their life situations with a thankful heart and a positive perspective. This differed from the way in which they previously reacted to the same situations. When my Mongolian students decided either in action or imagination<sup>33</sup> to be thankful in all circumstances, their new neural circuits start to run. As they gave up anger, bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness, neurologically they actively stopped firing unhealthy neural circuits. At the same

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> How Expressing Gratitude Might Change Your Brain. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/science-of-us/how-expressing-gratitude\\_b\\_8984510.h](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/science-of-us/how-expressing-gratitude_b_8984510.h)

<sup>32</sup> As we look for things to be grateful for, our brain searches for more things to be grateful for. That is how the virtuous cycle becomes fashioned.

<sup>33</sup> Our brain does not differentiate between visualizing something and a real event. So just visualizing something or thinking about it can change our neural circuits.

time, their neurological “heart,” (ACC)<sup>34</sup> got activated, reinforced and retained. It is because the ACC is “the processing points between our judgment (DLPFC<sup>35</sup> and OFC/VMPFC<sup>36</sup>) and our emotions (limbic system). Ultimately, it is in the ACC that our choices are made<sup>37</sup>.” When the ACC of Mongolian students started to be thankful, healthy neural circuits grew stronger, the prefrontal cortex began to be recovered, love was inflamed, and fear was impaired. Ultimately, holding to the truth about God continually helped them to restore God’s image within us. When they received the truth and exercised the God of love, the PFC-including the ACC got healthier, and fear was overcome. Eventually, their unhealthy thought patterns started to melt down, and they began to be transformed into Christ’s likeness.

This is why our thoughts cause lasting, physical changes in our brain and eventually alter our life mentioned in Proverbs 23:7<sup>38</sup>. Apostle Paul puts emphasis on the importance of giving thanks in all circumstances in 1 Theologians 5:16-18, “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Paul knew that if we continue to rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; those healthy circuits grow stronger, and our characters will be like Jesus Christ. It is why we bring every thought into captivity to Jesus.

### **Give Gratitude from the Heart**

The most common anthropological term, "Heart" (Hebrew *lebab/leb* [b'bel], Gk. *kardia* [kardiva]) is mentioned over one thousand times in the Scripture. Ancient people believe that it represents a person's center as a central organ and has emotional-intellectual-moral functions. However, moderns have associated some of the heart's emotional-intellectual-moral activities only with the brain and glands.

Recently, neuroscientists have discovered intriguing evidence about the heart. The heart does not simply pump blood. It has its own independent nervous system referred to as “the heart’s brain<sup>39</sup>.” This heart-brain consists of an intricate network of neurons, neurotransmitters, proteins and support cells. Its elaborate circuitry allows it to function independently of the cranial brain<sup>40</sup> to learn, remember, and even sense<sup>41</sup>.

According to the research of Heart Math Institute, the brain operates in a linear, logical manner. However, heart intelligence provides us with an intuitive awareness that extends beyond linear, logical thinking. As a result, when we use our heart, our perspective and decisions can become more flexible, creative, and intuitive<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> The anterior cingulate cortex is the part of the brain between your eyes and slightly back from your forehead. This brain region helps people to experience compassion, love, and empathy and furthermore to choose right from wrong.

<sup>35</sup> The Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex is where we reason, strategize and plan.

<sup>36</sup> Orbital frontal Cortex and the ventral medial prefrontal cortex is where we experience the conviction of guilt and recognize socially inappropriate behavior.

<sup>37</sup> L. Peoples, “Will, Anterior Cingulate Cortex, and Addiction,” *Science* 296 (May 31, 2002):1623.

<sup>38</sup> “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”

<sup>39</sup> Dr. J. Andrew Armour first introduced heart brain 1991.

<sup>40</sup> **Cranial nerves** sometimes are called **cerebral nerves** which emerge directly from the brain and the brainstem.

<sup>41</sup> Let Your Heart Talk To Your Brain | Care2 Healthy Living. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.care2.com/greenliving/let-your-heart-talk-to-your-brain-2.html>

<sup>42</sup> The research of The Heart Math Institute

Recent research concurs with the Hebrew definition of the heart. The Bible strongly argues that the heart be the core of not only our spiritual activity but also all the operations of human life. The heart is the seat of the conscience (Romans 2:15) and has intellectual-spiritual faculties. For instance, the heart thinks (Matt 9:4; Mark 2:8), remembers, reflects, and meditates (Psalm 77:5-6; Luke 2:19). Sometimes, the heart represents the man himself and is considered to be the seat of the emotions, passions, and appetites (Genesis 18:5; Leviticus 19:17; Psalms 104:15)

Both the Bible and science affirm that the heart is a primary source of our emotions and actions. This is a new paradigm for understanding our emotions, according to the discovery called “heart intelligence.” The solid scientific tie between heart and emotion proves that positive emotions like gratitude and appreciation set our heart rhythms into a more stable, coherent pattern. Negative emotions like anger and frustration, on the other hand, cause the heart to beat with an erratic, disordered rhythm. This occurs because toxic hormones flow, and our brain is put into an alert state (fight or flight). These data prove how different emotional states can set the heart-rate into a variable pattern<sup>43</sup>.

According to recent scientific research, the heart communicates with the brain and the rest of the body and delivers extensive emotional and intuitive signals to our brain in three ways: neurologically (through transmissions of nerve impulses), biochemically (through hormones and neurotransmitters), and biophysically (through pressure waves)<sup>44</sup>.

The increasing scientific indication posits a fourth way of communication— energetically (through electromagnetic field interactions). This evidence suggests that our hearts may essentially be the "intelligent force" behind the intuitive thoughts and feelings we all experience. The Heart Math Institute discovered that the heart emits an electromagnetic field exactly like the brain. The electromagnetic field of the heart extends several feet from our bodies and is about 60 times stronger than the electromagnetic energy emitted by the brain<sup>45</sup>.

This electromagnetic field is conveyed as either negative or positive emotional energy. In this sense, our emotional state affects not only us personally but those around us. In fact, there’s good evidence that your particular heart-rate rhythm can be reflected in the heart-rate rhythms of those around you. So when we sense that he or she is in a good mood, most likely we are reading and feeling the electromagnetic field emitted by the other person. This is why those who are in tune with their hearts may have the capacity to know and sense this energy and even read the mood of other people.

Through these biological communication systems, the heart has a significant influence on the function of our whole body. The research of the Heart Math Institute reflects this aspect of the teaching of Scripture. Our face and body exhibit either negative or positive emotions: “A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit” (Prov. 15:13 ); “a cheerful

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<sup>43</sup> Give Gratitude from the Heart. Your Brain Will Thank You ... (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://thebhaktibeat.com/give-gratitude-from-the-heart-your-brain-will-thank-you>

<sup>44</sup> Let Your Heart Talk To Your Brain | Care2 Healthy Living. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.care2.com/greenliving/let-your-heart-talk-to-your-brain-2.html>

<sup>45</sup> Give Gratitude from the Heart. Your Brain Will Thank You ... (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://thebhaktibeat.com/give-gratitude-from-the-heart-your-brain-will-thank-you>

heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” ( 17:22 ). The emotional state of the heart affects the whole person.

Gratitude might be one of the most effective ways to feel that “warm-glow’ feeling. Gregg Braden, an author and activist who draws on science to explain spiritual phenomena, demonstrated a test on some volunteers. According to his test, the simple act of feeling thankful is the most reliable way to bring our heart rate into a “coherent” rhythm<sup>46</sup>.

The more we are in tune with our heart (spirit) in which the Holy Spirit resides, the more we will have balanced, coherent emotions and characters’ and the less likely we will be to experience physical, emotional, and spiritual sickness and disease.

As proven by the ever growing scientific research on heart intelligence, it may be time for us to renew our mind and develop a new heart for Jesus and rethink about how we can best follow our hearts in which dwells the Holy Spirit. Teaching people to practice gratitude from the heart and the brain can be a pathway to become more involved in the heart of God. This new research on the heart and brain should encourage Christian educators to incorporate its effect on gratitude as an imaginal educational entry point in our discipline.

## **Appendix: Ways to Practice Gratitude**

A lifestyle of thanksgiving is a spiritual practice that gains momentum over time and grows with practice. Gratitude is rewarding and contagious.

**The following suggestions are ways to help you develop a spiritual discipline of practicing gratitude and experiencing its wholesome effects in your life:**

### **1. Make a Vow to Practice Gratitude: Commit yourself to cultivating a grateful attitude**

Write your gratitude and post it somewhere where you will be reminded of it every day. Research indicates that making an oath increases the probability that the action will be executed.

### **2. Every morning focus on God’s loving kindness and grace**

Begin each day by worshipping God and acknowledging His goodness and love for you. Expect to see God at work during the day – then watch for it! The psalmist gives us many examples to follow. You can utilize spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:18, 20) too.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

### **3. Train your eyes to see God’s goodness even in “small” blessings and take note of them throughout the day (health, nature, and relationships)**

Think Outside the Box. Creatively look for new, small blessings from God and circumstances in which to feel grateful. Make the most of the opportunities to flex your gratitude muscles.

### **4. Feel it through our five senses—the ability to touch, see, smell, taste, and hear**

Cultivate the appreciation of your capacity to touch, see, smell, taste, and hear. Put your hands on your heart and feel gratitude in your heart, let it percolate through every cell in your body. Move into the feeling of gratitude.

### **5. Set aside time for writing Gratitude Journal on a daily basis**

On a day-to-day basis set the time to recapture moments of gratitude related to regular events, your personal attributes, or valued people in your life.

### **6. Practice present-moment gratitude**

Throughout your day, pause now and then to sense the presence and grace of God that surrounds you in the moment. Add those gracious gifts from God to your gratitude list as they come to mind.

### **7. Cultivate your "gratitude" vocabulary**

In gratitude, focus on the inherently good things that others have done on your behalf rather than on how inherently good you are.

### **8. Share the gratitude**

Partner with someone in a covenantal relationship to keep each other accountable. Write a Thank You Note in an old-fashioned way.

### **9. Allow yourself to be human before Prayers of Gratitude**

You can grumble with an audible voice about anything to God. It might get mixed up in your prayers of petition, but let God sensitize you to your internal complaint. The Psalmist frequently complained to God You could too.

### **10. Use Visual Reminders of Gratitude**

Visual reminders can serve as cues to prompt thoughts of gratitude since our human tendency is to be forgetful and lack mindful awareness. So hang up signs or Bible verses on your walls, at your desk, and in your car.

### **11. Learn Prayers of Gratitude**

In many spiritual traditions, including Christianity, prayers of gratitude can be the most powerful and effective form of prayer. Through these prayers, we acknowledge that the ultimate source of

all goodness is God. Gratitude puts everything into perspective; it enables us to see God's many blessings all around us.

## **Pressing On: Pauline Perspectives on Formation in Hope-filled Vocation**

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**Abstract:** Christian hope, a powerful, liberating, and embodied reality, constitutes an essential element of Christian formation, one that gains definition and perseverance on the basis of God's redemptive and liberating work through Christ. Drawing on Paul's theology of participation, I describe a theological basis for Christian hope. Subsequently, and in sustained engagement with the book of Philippians, I posit three pedagogical instantiations of such hope: exemplars of God's redemption as a pedagogical practice, kenosis as a pedagogical disposition, and "hope-filled vocation" as a pedagogical goal.

Here at the end of 2016, hope could hardly seem a more timely topic for the Religious Education Association to engage in sustained form. Within the American context, not only individuals in the communities to which Christian educators are responsible, but also the Christian educators themselves, may find that their supply of hope runs low. We are weary of violence, of extremism in all of its forms, of terror, and of institutional racism – not to mention the persistent, privileged denial that it even exists. We are weary of inflammatory rhetoric with no constructive action. We are weary of war. We are weary of ambivalence or apathy.

In response to realities faced by religious communities, and indeed the whole world, several bases of hope are on offer. We find no shortage of platitudes and vague exhortations based in general, but ungrounded, claims about humanity's inherent goodness. Other suggestions imply that communities might simply pull themselves up by their own moral and political bootstraps, as it were, suggesting that if people were just better organized, or more persuasive, they might inaugurate a day in which these problems no plague them, or, at least, not as much. Still others might invoke subtle or explicit salvation narratives that place hope for deliverance in elected officials and strategically oriented campaigns. While there are grains of truth in each such account, on their own they may ultimately prove too anemic to withstand the challenges of the present day or, indeed, any day.

For educators and ministers within the Christian tradition, hope is always something more than the province of inspirational posters and strategy sessions, because Christian hope derives its power from the work of God and in the call to participate in God's purposes. For the apostle Paul, the basis of hope is profoundly Christological, oriented by the story of God's

redemptive and liberative work in Jesus and culminating in God's kingdom fully come. Such a deeply Christological account of hope mitigates against the presumption that the capacity for hope arises from a little more effort, a little more information, a little more rhetorical skill or political power. A Christian account of sin and grace, and the Christian confession that it is ultimately *God's* liberative power that wins the day, reminds us of the real limits imposed by human fallibility, finitude, and our own (even unwitting) complicity in the operations of the powers of Sin and Death in the world.

Educators in the present day share with Paul the opportunity and challenge of supporting communities in the process of living into a Christian vocation – both its in the broadest sense of living within the kingdom of God that Christ inaugurates and in the more narrow sense of exercising ones distinct giftedness within the body of Christ. In every age, Christian communities faces challenges to their vocation – some from outside, some from within. While different Christian communities might define those problems diverging ways, each community of faith is nonetheless tasked with responding to their circumstances in a manner “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil 1:27). That active response of faith requires hope - the capacity to imagine and live in light of that which you do not yet see, to lean into the anticipated future that God will bring about.

On the question of what it looks like to *form* and *be formed* in theologically grounded hope, Paul provides compelling interlocutor. As Paul makes clear, for those of us who live in the contested days between Christ's first and second coming, hope is not merely a passive disposition giving the church the courage to inactively endure. The theological basis of Christian hope does not remove the call for Christian action; by no means! Writing to Philippi in the midst of his own active struggle for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul provides an evocative account of Christian vocation as a form of participation in Christ, living in the world as hope-filled citizens of God's kingdom even in the midst of suffering, conflict, and injustice. Paul conveys to the Philippian church that he wants them to live,

“in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents . . . For he has graciously granted you the

privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well – since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”<sup>1</sup>

This “statement of purpose” reveals something of Paul’s formational objectives (Smit 2013, 80). First, the context of the desired learning and living is the experience of difficulty shared by both Paul and the Philippian church. The desired outcome for the community is a striving with “one mind” to live in a manner worth of the gospel. In its use here and throughout the letter, “one mind” most likely refers to a shared practical reasoning – a form of *phronesis* (Rooms 2012, 85; Fowl 1998, 140–153). It quickly becomes clear that a *phronesis* “worthy of the Gospel of Christ” is a practical reasoning that is Christologically normed, for Paul exhorts the congregation to “let the same mind [to auto *phronēte*] be in you as it is in Christ Jesus.” A hymnic – even dramatic – recollection of Christ’s incarnation, passion, and exaltation in Phil 2:5-11 (Eastman 2011, 2). Paul goes on in the letter to recognize two fellow ministers for their exemplary service (3:19-30) and to share his gratitude for the Philippians partnership with him in service of the gospel (4:4-20). Paul offers an autobiographical account of his own vocation as a form of sharing or participation with Christ, and in doing so extends a purposeful vocational invitation to his readers who he hope will have the “same mind” about their calling (3:15).

When welcomed into contemporary conversations about teaching for “hope-filled vocation” (Wimberly 2005, 13), the theology of participation in Christ that undergirds Paul’s autobiographical account of vocation in Philippians 3:4b-21 both resonates and re-orient. In what follows, I highlight three evocative correspondences between the concerns and approaches present in both Paul’s letter to the Philippians and some recent literature: the function of exemplars as part of pedagogical practice, the value of kenosis as a pedagogical disposition, and the place of “hope-filled vocation” as a pedagogical goal. I also indicate places in which Paul’s theology of participation helpfully reorients the discussion around Christian claims about the basis of hope – namely, the hope engendered by the resurrected Christ and the call to live as participants in God’s kingdom.

*Exemplars of Hope: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings”*

Anne Streaty Wimberly’s powerful pedagogical proposal in *Soul Stories* includes an explicit move to include exemplars within the African American faith tradition in pursuit of “liberating

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard version, unless otherwise

wisdom” and “hope-filled vocation.” Following engagement with the “everyday story” and a scriptural story, Wimberly proposes moving into the story of a figure from the community’s own tradition who faithfully lives into their vocation. The impetus behind this move, Wimberly says, is that “African American faith heritage stories convey a liberating wisdom and a liberation mindset that were at the center of the Christian life of African Americans in the past and that are worthy of emulation in the present.” The stories powerfully convey an “ethical stance” enacted even in difficult circumstances (Wimberly 2005, 32). An analogous interest in the role of exemplars in hope-building Christian pedagogy appears in Leah Gunning Francis’s new work on the work for justice in Ferguson. Francis (2015) offers snapshots of the participation of clergy in the work for justice, offering “sacred stories of courage and hope that might awaken in us seeds of possibility that, if nurtured, could bend our imagination and actions toward a future filled with hope” (4).

The potency of exemplars in learning is one of the oldest and most well-established pedagogical principles in the Western tradition. Imitation of exemplars was endemic to ancient Greco-Roman education across the ancient Mediterranean world, such that “the principle of imitation inspired ancient education from beginning to end” (Cribiore 2005, 132). Recent research into the function of mirror neurons adds scientific support to the common, even ancient, recognition that humans are social and imitative creatures. People imitate the behaviors of those with whom they spend time, but the imitation goes beyond mannerisms and forms of speech to include even desires and affections (Brown and Strawn 2012, 79). This element of human life, Brown and Strawn (2012) suggest, places a great deal of importance on the nature of Christian community, for imitation may be both a conscious and unconscious activity (82).

While direct instructions to imitate appear with relative rarity in the Pauline letters, the book of Philippians provides the most extended and well-developed account of imitation as formation in Christian life. Paul’s interest in the community growing in the same *phronesis* as Christ provides the first indication. In Philippians 3, Paul offers autobiographical reflections on the re-orientation and re-valuation of his own past and life in light of his encounter with Christ. Following those autobiographical reflections, he first gives the imperative – “become my co-imitators,” which I take to mean that he wants the Philippians to join him in imitating Christ.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Commentators debate Paul’s ambiguous phrase refers to the Philippians joining together in imitating Paul or joining with Paul in imitating Christ. Within the context of the letter, I prefer

He then refers to himself and some unspecified others as “types” for the community to follow (3:17). That group likely includes Timothy and Epaphroditus, ministers known to this community and lifted up as exemplary servants earlier in the letter (2:19-30). Before the letter concludes, this message is reiterated once again, as Paul exhorts them to put into practice whatever admirable behavior they have “learned and received and heard and seen” in him (4:9).

This appeal to imitation of their human teacher must, however, be understood within the the Christo-logic of the entire letter, namely, that Christ is the paradigmatic exemplar and that Christian’s are called to participate “in Christ.” Paul’s account of his own vocation conveys this theology of participation in Christ through clear semantic and theological links to the Christ hymn. The following table illustrates the correspondences.

<b>Jesus (2:6-11)</b>	<b>Paul (3:4-21)</b>
Does not consider [ <u>hēgoumenoi</u> ] his equality with God something to be “exploited” and so empties himself (2:6)	Now considers [ <u>hēgoumai</u> ] the things that were gain to be loss, or even “waste” on account of Christ (3:7).
Is “found” [ <u>heuretheis</u> ] in human form (2:7)	Wants to be “found” [ <u>heurethō</u> ] in Christ (3:9).
Takes on the form of a slave [ <u>morphēn doulou</u> ] and becomes obedient to death [ <u>thanatou</u> ] (2:7-8)	Reorients his life in hopes of knowing the power of Christ’s resurrection by first being made into – or somehow participating - the form of Christ’s death [ <u>symmorphizómenos tōi thanátōi</u> ]
Takes on the shape of humanity [ <u>chēmati . . . hōs anthrōpos</u> ] and humbled himself [ <u>etapeinōsen</u> ]	Citizens of heaven await the transformation [ <u>metaschēmatischei</u> ] of their “humble bodies” [to <u>sōma tēs tapeinōseōs</u> ]

The parallels make it abundantly clear that Paul sees himself as participating in the pattern of Christ’s own life and ministry. Thus, while the “type” of Christ can be effectively “mimicked” by other faithful followers, and while faithful followers can become “types” for

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the latter option. The imperative to imitate here in Philippians differs from its parallels in I Cor 4:16 and 11:1 by the addition of the sum- prefix, which appears elsewhere in the letter to indicate the unity of the Philippians with one another (1:27; 4:3a) or to indicate Paul’s common stance with them vis-à-vis Christ or another third party (1:7; 2:25 [2x]; 4:3b, 3c, 4:14).

others (3:17), the Christological reference point must consistently be claimed and reclaimed. Emphasis on Christ as the ultimate exemplar is not solely important as criteria for selecting other exemplars within with the community, though this is an important result. Paul's vocational participation in the pattern set by Christ generates hope not merely because Christ is a good moral exemplar, but because Christ is the Risen Lord exalted by the Father to whom every knee will bow (Phil 2:11) Maintaining the centrality of Christ as the ultimate exemplar provides a helpful corrective to accounts of hope that – even if only in rhetoric - place too much weight on the wobbly, uneven legs of human capability rather than Christ.

Paul's letter to the Philippians, like Wimberly's pedagogy for liberating wisdom and hope-filled vocation, assumes that exemplars present an "ethical stance" worthy of emulation by the community (Wimberly 2005, 32). In the specific case of Philippians, that "ethical stance" is a Christologically-inflected form of practical reasoning or *phronesis* that takes Christ as its model and places its confidence in Christ's resurrection and now and future reign. Paul's imagination, it seems, has been "bent . . . toward a future filled with hope," and he appears to hope that this "snapshot" of his own ministry might encourage his readers toward similar hope-filled vocation (Francis 2015, 4).

*Kenosis as Pedagogical Disposition – "have the same mind in you that is in Christ Jesus"*

The *phronesis* of Christ, this way of "thinking, acting, and feeling" (Fowl 2005, 29; Rooms 2012, 87), has considerable bearing on the function of power both *in* and *resulting from* Christian formation. Christologically defined kenosis is one important component of this practical reasoning that the community ought to share. By kenosis, I mean Christ's self-emptying love demonstrated in the refusal to cling only to his equality with God but to take on human form and the nature of a slave (Phil 2:6-7). While *kenosis* remains a theological category that requires very careful qualification given some past (mis)application, the self-emptying service that it represents and requires remains a central feature of the call to follow Jesus (John 13:13-15; Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Phil 2:5).<sup>3</sup> Such Christological *phronesis* or practical reasoning "dominates the

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<sup>3</sup> Theologians and scholars of various kinds object to a call for *kenosis* or self-emptying, due to the extent to which such calls are all too frequently unequally or inappropriately applied to people in different subject positions in a way that can perpetuate oppression (Cornwall 2015, 6). These concerns are quite legitimate, and space does not permit the kind of in-depth response they deserve and which others have offered (Coakley 1996). In a more limited sense, teachers of all stripes likely wield some positional authority within classrooms and, at least in that limited

imperative moments of the letter” (Fee 1995, 184). For Christian teachers, the kenosis of Christ as reflected and refracted throughout the letter has direct pedagogical implications in both process and outcome.

The educational implications of Christ’s *kenosis* may be clarified by a brief turn to the function of education in Paul’s historical context, particularly since the formation called for in Paul’s letter to the Philippians offers a radical counter to imperial pedagogies of the day. In the Greco-Roman world, imitation of a master teacher provided a means of gaining social status; in other words, “mimetic education tended toward the notion of an upwardly mobile assimilation by the imitator or student to the likeness of the virtuous model” (Eastman 2008, 434). In the imagery of some Roman commentators, the intent of education was to complete a strenuous upward climb to increasingly exclusive levels of superiority (Cribiore 2005, 1).

The movement of Christ enacts radically subverts this pattern of imperial *paideia*, for Christ embodies a pedagogy of “downward mobility” by becoming human (Eastman 2011, 32). In what Eastman suggests is a “reverse mimesis” of the common pattern in which students “im-personate” the teacher through imitation, in manner of speaking Christ “im-personating” the human condition even to the point of death (Whitmarsh 2001, 93; Eastman 2008, 450). The Christ hymn presents this downwardly mobile pedagogy as *kenotic*, as self-emptying. A similar self-emptying, participatory identification with Jesus appears in Paul’s account of his desire to know Christ in “the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death” (Phil 3:10). Here, and throughout his reflections on his imprisonment, Paul presents himself as one possible mimetic instantiation of the Christological phronesis (Fowl 1998, 149). Quite practically speaking, for the community to “have the same mind as in Christ Jesus” means resisting “selfish ambition and conceit” and looking “not to [their] own interests, but to the interests of others (2:3-4).

When employing the authority they hold within educational spaces, Christian educators must also resist “selfish ambition and conceit” and look “to the interests of others.” Kenosis, understood in light of Paul’s emphasis on Christ’s participation in humanity’s situation and the

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sphere, I believe that kenosis as understood within a Pauline theology of participation offers some important guidelines. What it means for each individual with his or her own situation to teach somehow “kenotically” remains a matter of their individual discernment and, I suspect, will vary according to both person and situation.

subsequent possibility of human participation “in Christ,” offers a theological framework for participatory, student-centered use of authority in the classroom. Paul positions himself as a fellow participant with the Philippian community, whom he calls co-workers, so-soldiers, and finally co-imitators of Christ. While this theological framework may be newly applied to this aspect of teaching, the principle at work here is hardly new to educational discussions. Freire’s (1996) participatory pedagogy enacted by teacher-students and student-teachers toward the end of their mutual humanization presents a counter to domineering forms of pedagogy that reinforce oppressive conditions and tightly control status by keeping authority in the hands of teachers (61). As Groome (1991) notes, an emphasis on partnership “calls the teacher to a new self-image, away from answer person or controller of knowledge” yet it does not mean that “teachers forgo their responsibilities as enablers and resource persons” (143). The common calling to participate in Christ’s kenotic pattern ought to inform the way that Christian teachers engage students in educational contexts.

Finally, teaching for the formation for Christian vocation entails formation into the kenotic *phronesis* of Christ, which in relationship to the upwardly mobile aims of ancient (and modern!) education is “counter-cultural to the extreme” (Eastman 2008, 448). Stated differently, to follow Christian vocation to some extent means to be willing to become like Jesus – even like him in his death - by participating in the pattern of his life. And, indeed, such expectations of those who would follow Jesus litter the gospels. The call to service is obvious but bears repeating, particularly given that the educational frameworks that tend to dominate in Western cultures value individual success and competition over collaboration and mutual service. Indeed, “one begins to suspect that the link between crucifixion and imitation turns mimetic education upside down” (Eastman 2008, 437). Christian hope and Christian vocation both entail a certain level of holy foolishness in the willingness to follow Christ’s downwardly mobile trajectory of sacrificial service in trust in God’s redemption, exaltation, and new creation.

*Hope-Filled Vocation as Pedagogical Goal – “I press on . . . because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”*

Just before Paul enjoins the Philippians to become his co-imitators, he admits that he has not yet reached the goal of full participation with the resurrected Christ, but in light of that hope that he nonetheless presses on in the midst of unjust imprisonment and difficult circumstances. Paul’s outlook is future oriented – a forward-facing straining for the heavenly call of God in

Christ Jesus. Christian maturity, Paul claims, consists in having the same hope-filled, active *phronesis* (3:12-15). The implied metaphor of a racer's exertion, one straining forward toward an end goal in their distant line of sight, adds a further dimension to our understanding of hope. Formation for hope-filled vocation is, in some respect also formation for hope *as* vocation, hope as a form of Christian labor in response to God's call.

Christian hope, in this rendering, is hope in the power of Christ's resurrection and the final transformation of all things as part of the good and gracious kingdom of God. Paul goes on to speak about present Christian life in the language of citizenship, of a body politic that functions as an outpost of a heavenly citizenship in hostile territory (3:18-20). The language of "heaven" here may require some clarification in order to resist that language in an escapist way, as if the work of the church is to get people to heaven with negligible emphasis on addressing contemporary realities and issues. When Paul speaks of the "heavenward call of God in Christ Jesus (3:14) and of the Philippians "citizenship in heaven" (3:20), however, he is speaking about an active reality with bearing on the community's concrete, common life in their social context. Thus this is not a passive hope only in arriving at "that fair and happy land by and by" as the old hymn says, but a call to active participation in the body politic that is the body of Christ in the world.

In the midst of their difficult circumstances, Paul wants the Philippians to "live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ," and, in an effort to support that calling, Paul offers his own autobiography account of vocation as participation in Christ. He does so, explicitly recognizing that he has not already attained all that for which he hopes, yet he presses on in confidence. In the meantime, as those who recognize themselves as part of Christ's body-politic, hopeful living in the meantime requires action and labor, straining toward a future which we have not yet achieved and which we will not, in the end, achieve on our own merits but through the culmination of Christ's redemptive work. Finally, the cultivation of hope as a pedagogical goal is may well be the cultivation of a form of community property, held and stewarded by co-laborers, co-soldiers, and co-imitators in Christ.

Near the end of his account of his own vocation, Paul proclaims that he presses on that he might "take hold" of that for which he has been "taken hold of" by Christ, a subtle indication of the cooperative working of both divine and human agency that is apparent in other places in the Philippian letter (2:12-13). I would suggest that formation in hope-filled vocation is a similarly

cooperative endeavor, for Christian hope as Paul understands it is ultimately and always a reality dependent on the resurrected Lord but also modeled and cultivated within the Christian community. Teaching toward hope-filled vocation as disciples of Christ, then, requires a community of faithful exemplars, of mutual self-less service, and common participation in the pattern of Christ's life in joyful anticipation of the resurrection.

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## **HOPE EMBODIED IN HUMAN HANDS: FAITH FORMATION IN CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

### **Abstract**

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) employs the tactile and sensorial pedagogical method that was first widely promoted and disseminated by Dr. Maria Montessori. Modern research in neuroscience, developmental psychology and educational psychology has validated her maxim – “The hands are the instruments of man’s intelligence.” [sic] In CGS, the proclamation of the Biblical narratives, both historical narratives and the parables, are presented with manipulative materials as ways for the child to enter into the mystery of God more holistically. This allows the child to more deeply explore the greater personal and communal existential questions, as basis for hope, pertinent to each developmental stage of the human person.

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“This is education, understood as a help to life; an education from birth, which feeds a peaceful revolution and unites all in a common aim, attracting them as to a single centre. Mothers, fathers, politicians: all must combine in their respect and help for this delicate work of formation, which the little child carries on in the depth of a profound psychological mystery, under the tutelage of an inner guide. *This is the bright new hope for [hu]mankind (sic).*” (Montessori 1995, 17)

Throughout her writings Maria Montessori articulated her conviction that the child is the apotheosis of hope for humankind. By designing classrooms responsive to the adaptive needs of a child, social microcosms could be built that optimized developmental outcomes in ways generative of hope. In contrast to traditional practices of education which are structured so that every child does the same thing at the same time, practices that serve more to stifle the promise inherent in the child than to cultivate potential, Montessori created ‘prepared environments’ where the child’s developmental needs and capacities could be honored and served in a way that allowed the child to develop pro-social sentiments and skills. In this paper we explore how hope and harmony is fostered in children of ages 3-12 through Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, a model of religious formation that uses the Montessori method as its pedagogical framework.

## **The Montessori Method**

During her early work with children with disabilities, Maria Montessori discovered that all children possess not only greater potential than they are given credit for, but also the drive to learn – she called this drive “the inner teacher.” She also observed that the primary way that children learned was through their senses, particularly through their hands. She designed and developed didactic materials that would teach through the senses – the sensorial materials. Concurrently, she also realized that the child displays certain needs and certain capacities at each developmental phase, and that there were ‘sensitive periods’ during which the child exhibited an inner drive to the mastery of a particular skill, and if taken advantage of, the learning of that skill could be accomplished almost effortlessly. However, if a sensitive period was not used optimally, the learning of that skill would become more difficult, if not impossible at later stages. Later psychological and neurological research has shown that this is a cogent concept, typically distinguished into “critical periods” (irreversible acquisition or non-acquisition of skills within a short window early in life); and “sensitive periods” (longer windows of learning that are similar to Montessori’s conceptualization of her sensitive periods), that should be given consideration in developmental and cognitive practices, particularly in early and elementary education. (Sylva 1997, 187)

In contrast to the prevailing educational models, where the adult was considered to be the authority and the child an empty vessel that needed to be filled by the adult, Montessori insisted that the child operates in obedience to its “inner teacher” and that the adult should be attentive to the child’s needs and capacities at each particular stage. Rather than being the one in charge, the adult takes on the role of a guide, or facilitator who provides direction for the child. (Kramer 1988, 178) Montessori also defined some key characteristics that were necessary for the adult to cultivate – what she called “spiritual preparation” (Standing 1984, 298; Montessori 1965, 45ff.) - in order to see the optimal outcomes that she saw as possible in children using her method. The most important of these characteristics is humility – a true humility that comes from the knowledge that one is an instrument through which learning is imparted to the child. (Standing 1984, 301) This also leads to a disposition of hope – hope that comes from the acceptance of the child as he/she is, and that he/she has much to teach the adult. When the adult approaches the child with self-abnegation, she is better able to recognize the needs and capacities of the child and honor them. It also enables the adult to recognize the “inner teacher” within the child, thus providing education that is more communal, cosmic and transcendent than merely intellect driven. One of the most important effects of this outlook is the positive relational context that is provided for the child. Besides being substantiated by modern research, all of the above attitudes in a teacher/significant adult form the very backbone of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, the model of faith formation that is based on the Montessori Method.

Early on in her work, Montessori intuited that the Liturgy was a particularly rich environment for the children to imbibe the faith through the reading of signs and symbols, (Montessori 1965, 32) and providing meaning to their being part of a community within and without the church itself. Montessori envisioned a “children’s chapel” (Standing 1984, 65) that she proposed be called an “atrium” (Montessori 1965, 35) in recognition of the fact that in the early church, catechumens desiring to become a Christian would be taught and prepared in this space between the street and the worship space called the atrium.

## **Catechesis of the Good Shepherd**

Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi, the former a Hebrew Scripture scholar, and the latter a Montessori directress, began a journey of collaborative work that was committed to observing and serving the children's spiritual and faith formation. Over a period of two decades they developed sensorial materials based on Scriptural and Liturgical narratives and symbols that were most meaningful to children, as seen in their being repeatedly drawn to them. Other materials based on other Biblical narratives or Liturgical aspects were discarded. These core materials were then recognized to be the most essential tenets of our Christian faith – narratives that reinforce hope for humankind rooted in the love and mercy of God. Soon, this model of faith formation came to be called the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, in recognition of the image of God that captivated and engaged the children in so singular a manner.

In following the Montessori Method, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is taught in a carefully prepared environment called the atrium. (Gobbi 1988) The atrium is furnished with hand-made wooden and clay manipulative materials that the children can use. Typically, the younger children need more sensorial materials than the older children, but all children are given some manipulative materials to work with, as they engage with Biblical narratives or Liturgical practices and symbols. The manipulation of the sensorial materials allows the children to enter more deeply into, and contemplate the mystery of God. In his recent encyclical, Pope Francis reiterates this ancient wisdom: “All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the *kerygma*.” (Pope Francis 2013, #165)

The preparation of the environment and the preparation of the catechist go hand in hand, insofar as they both serve to facilitate and eventually, establish, a relationship of love and trust with God – in other words, a covenantal relationship is fostered and nourished. In this environment, it is more important for the catechist to pay attention to the child than for the child to pay attention to the catechist. Systematic and careful observation of the child allows the catechist not only to assess the developmental needs and capacities of each child under her care, but also gives her the opportunity to learn from the child. The liberating power of this exchange is not unlike that promoted by Paulo Freire: “Through dialogue ... the teacher is not merely the one-who -teaches, but the one who is himself taught in dialogue...they became jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. ...Here no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are "owned" by the teacher.” (Freire 2000, 80)

In being attuned to the potential and need of each developmental plane, manifested uniquely in each child, the catechist becomes able to direct the learning and spiritual experience of the child. According to the developmental stages proposed by Montessori, the child up to the age of six, is in need of unconditional love and careful nurture. This is similar to what Erikson proposes – the early years are crucial for the formation of trust, thereby cultivating hope. This need of the child is discernible in his/her pure joy when presented with the Good Shepherd, who “calls by name,” who “lays down” his life, who “knows” his sheep (cf. John 10), a shepherd who will go after his sheep even when it goes astray (cf. Luke 15:4-6). A relationship has been initiated between the child and God, one that will build the foundation of trust and hope, on which moral formation can then be built as a celebration of God's mercy and a resolute hope in the redeeming power of God. (Cavalletti 1992, 62-78) The relational need of the child is nourished by the catechist/teacher who, in his/her disposition gives temporal meaning to the love of God. As Fr. von Balthasar says: “For a child, his parents' concrete love is not at first separable from God's. In the beginning the child cannot distinguish between absolute goodness, which is

divine, and the creaturely goodness he encounters in his parents.” (von Balthasar 1991, 18) In this case, a well-prepared catechist takes on the role of the parent as described above. Such a gift of love evokes a response of love in the child, whose later moral formation is more a reluctance to offend the One she loves, rather than the fear of punishment. (Cavalletti 1992, 58) The child is offered the image of the Forgiving Father (Luke 15: 11-24) as the epitome of God’s mercy, and continued meditation on the parable provides the older child a way to approach the merciful Godhead with more contrition than guilt and shame.

The predictability of the prepared environment and the communal existence within a classroom furnishes the child with freedom to choose and engage in what he/she is called to. However, since the environment has only one of each material, the children learn patience and forbearance. Also, such freedom also bespeaks the possibility of refusal to repeatedly make the choice in favor of harmony. But most children seem to be intuitively aligned to the community, even at a personal disadvantage, such as not being able to work with a particular material until the following week, despite a great eagerness to do so. Even a four- or five-year-old can display self-control and discipline, if guided with love and steadfastness. As they get older, children are taught that virtue is a matter of doing the good rather than avoiding evil, and it is cultivated by consciously choosing it repeatedly. Having contemplated on the Parable of the True Vine (John 15:1-11), the children recognize how inextricably we are connected to each other, whether in the immediate community or the global community, and even the heavenly community. This develops in them a deep empathy and respect for others and informs their choices, first in the prepared environment of the atrium, then in their larger communities outside with atrium, thereby building virtue and character.

### **Corroboration from social and medical sciences**

Other social scientists have also linked dynamics of the Montessori method to the cultivation of hope. Erikson, for example, regarded hope as the virtue that proceeded from the successful resolution of trust versus mistrust in the first stage of life. During the earliest years, emphasis was given to the nurturing provided by an infants’ primary caregiver, most often the mother, and generally in terms of visual contact and touch in response to a child’s bid for nourishment and attachment. When a child’s cries were accurately discerned and appropriately met the child would naturally develop a sense of optimism, trust, confidence, and security in the world. Care that is consistent, predictable and reliable, like that found in the ordering of a Montessori classroom and CGS atrium, and in the love nurtured between catechist and child, develops a transportable sense of security. For example, the secure child would be better funded with the resources for developing autonomy in the second stage of life than the child without trust who carried deep-seated insecurity or an internalized sense of worthlessness. The importance of this first psychosocial stage can be felt throughout the life course whenever a person encounters unpredictable events, enters new relationships, or moves into new social contexts where uncertainties cause them to ponder whether the world is a safe place. Where the infant looks to the primary caregiver for stability and care, adults may turn to more transcendent sources evoking a sense of Divine companionship and protection. Hence, Erikson writes, “Hope is both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive. If life is to be sustained hope must remain, even where confidence is wounded, trust impaired.” (Erikson 2000, 192)

Discoveries in neuroscience are also providing scientific vindication of Montessori’s teaching methods. “The hands are the instruments of man’s intelligence” (Montessori 1984, 37)

compelled Montessori to provide the child with manipulative materials for most every learning task. This was true not simply for learning the “courtesies of social life” through such things as sweeping, cleaning and allowing others to finish their use of objects before taking them for themselves; it also provided avenues for the child to experience and explore existential questions through the handling of sacred objects, liturgy, and ritual. Freire echoes this insight when he says: “...thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world.....Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information.” (Freire 2000, 77-79)

Neurobiology evidences not only that some brain structures may not form unless scripted by bodily experience, but has also evidenced neuroplasticity – i.e. the capacity for the brain to change, contrary to previous views that it was largely immutable. Gestures stimulate neural pathways that become avenues for embodied thought – “neurons that fire together wire together.” (Hebb 2002, 62) Motor mirroring is activated first in a child’s observance of the parent, and later, the catechist, engaging in liturgical acts and the telling of sacred stories. (Westbrook 2016, 108) In CGS, age appropriate participation in liturgies provide mental rehearsals and actual embodied experiences stimulating neural patterns that anticipate further engagement with the transcendent. Religious materials provided in the atrium effectually give physicality to early engagement in worship, reifying a sacred world that the child can feel and imagine their way through. Further linkages between neuroscience and Montessori’s method can be found to evidence that empathic prosocial behavior, as well as virtue, is now thought to derive less from deliberate decision-making and more from habituated interactions with the world. (Strawn and Brown 2016, 120-122)

This also builds a cosmic awareness within the child, and he/she is impelled from within to explore the world outside the relatively smaller communities that he/she has so far been conscious of. As in a Montessori classroom, the catechist in the CGS atrium is trained to be keenly observant of the child, knowing that it is the child who will guide what path is to be taken next. The child, in obedience to his/her own developmental needs and capacities, as well as the “inner teacher,” who Cavalletti identifies as the Holy Spirit (Cavalletti 1992, 54), will provide the catechist with the key to his/her unique formation. At the time the catechist recognizes in the child an awareness of the universe, the child is introduced to the sweep of history, beginning “in the beginning” – with the Creation account. All of Salvation History, as it plays out in human history, is presented to the child over a period of five to six years as a series of timelines. The history that begins at Creation ends at the Second Coming of our Lord, when God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 28). God created and prepared the world for humankind, and gave it us as a gift to enjoy and the children are invited to meditate upon their response to this gift. It is then proclaimed to the child that the greatest gift that humankind has been given is the very own self of God, in the person of Jesus Christ. It is then pointed out to the child that we, as children of God, are given the task of being collaborators (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9) with God as He continues to accompany humanity in the present time in the building of His Kingdom. This is called the “blank page” that we are each given, on which we “write” with God the story of our lives. How and what we write on our own blank pages are for us to choose – the freedom that the child experienced in the atrium, leading to the formation of inner discipline and virtue, is now mirrored in the disciplined exercise of the freedom that is given to us by God. But history does not end with our stories – no matter how rich or bereft they be. History ends with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as St. Paul tells the church in Thessalonica: “may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of

our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones.” (1 Thess. 3:12-13) As surely as we must prepare for this “coming” like the wise virgins, (cf. Matt. 25:1-13) we do so with an abiding hope, a *joyful* hope.<sup>1</sup> The children are challenged to imagine what that coming will be like, what the Parousia will be like when “God is all is all.” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:28) This is not far from the assertions of Jurgen Moltmann, for whom creation and eschatology are on a continuum of God’s engagement with humanity, and each derives meaning and fulfillment from the other. (Moltmann 1985, 88)

The cumulative outcome of this method is the development of the child’s innate perspicacity, especially during the adolescent years, when he/she seeks to comprehend the cultural and religious status quo, and begins to question and challenge it. Within this turbulent questioning and challenging lies the deep need of the adolescent to belong, to carve out his role in society. He/she strains to hear the call to his/her vocation. In this process, the growing child is guided to be the prophetic voice that expresses discontent with the ways of the world. Yet, this expression is one of dynamic action rather than passive despondency, the action emerging out of the conscious and habitual preference for hope, a hope “that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2000, #1818)

Religious educators will also find it important to test Montessori’s assumptions against revered models and methods of education. The brevity of this paper will not permit a comprehensive treatment of this matter, but perhaps one illustration of how this might bridge is in order. For this purpose, we have chosen to offer a few bridges to Groome’s praxis model. (Groome 1999, 184ff.) Groome’s model begins not with a teacher propounding a theoretical or definitional explanation (e.g. what is the Eucharist?), but by first tapping into a person’s experience “what do you do with the Eucharist in your life?” or “What do you say when you talk to God?” CGS similarly prioritizes the child’s present experience. Groome’s praxis model blends a high regard for the past (knowledge inherited by tradition), present (present needs and experience of the student), and future vision for what the student can become in serving the needs of society. In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd a high regard for past (knowledge inherited by tradition) is contained in the sacred symbols and learned in the telling of parables. The present social, cognitive and emotional needs of the child are central to the developmental planes that inform not only each educational environment, but also what experience each individual child is guided towards. The development of the personality via the society of other children, the careful accompaniment of a virtuous catechist, and the assumption of work roles that balances individual initiative with community goals prepares the child for future engagement in the intentional effort towards the building of the Kingdom of God in the here and now while looking forward with faith and hope to the fullness of the Kingdom that will be manifest in the Parousia. The dialectic, central to Groome’s theory, is anticipated in CGS as the programmed direct experiences of the growing child interact with Biblical narratives through sensorial and imaginative work.

### **Looking forward to the Parousia**

The pedagogical philosophy and methodology employed in CGS, in the author’s experience, are applicable across a wide spectrum of recipients, regardless of age, culture,

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<sup>1</sup> The prayer immediately following the Lord’s Prayer in the Catholic Mass is: “Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in *joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.*”

ethnicity, Christian denomination, and even religion. This then, is a model that is generative of hope in its very ability to be the “great equalizer,” as we who were created in God’s image and likeness offer our response of love to God through the work of our hands. And so, with all those who share this journey with us, especially the children, who do so most joyfully, we exclaim:

Hope, O my soul, hope. You know neither the day nor the hour. Watch carefully, for everything passes quickly, even though your impatience makes doubtful what is certain, and turns a very short time into a long one. Dream that the more you struggle, the more you prove the love that you bear your God, and the more you will rejoice one day with your Beloved, in a happiness and rapture that can never end. (Saint Teresa of Avila, Excl. 15:3)

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## **RELIGIOUS-THINKING-THROUGH USING BIBLIODRAMA: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF STUDENT LEARNING IN CLASSROOM TEACHING**

Bibliodrama in the classroom was examined by focusing on the relationship between student learning activities and teacher behavior; in doing so, a qualitative cross-case analysis of six lessons was performed. The effectiveness of religious-thinking-through was operationalized into three higher-order learning activities (testing positions, producing criticism and reflecting) and six teaching scaffolds. Correspondence analysis yields a scale that contrasts lessons that are more and lessons that are less effective in learning and teaching. The specific contribution of an effective religion teacher is to show understanding, give space and listen. When he asks meta-cognitive questions in a debating way of connective truth finding this leads to a higher level of religious-thinking-through by students.

### **LINE OF THINKING**

In Dutch secondary schools, an effective approach to religious education is “thinking through”. The most important learning theory wherein students think through is constructivism (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996), in which learning is a largely interactive process involving the construction of new knowledge and skills based on an individual’s prior knowledge (Glaser, 1991). Traditionally, theology is a subject that focuses on truth; for theologians and philosophers, the questions “What is truth?” and more specifically “How and why are statements about God true?” are among the most important (Lamberigts, Boeve, Merrigan, & Claes, 2006; Ormerod & Jacobs-Vandegheer, 2015; Roebben, 2015). However, in addition to contemplating this question, a method of truth finding must be adopted.

Teachers can use various activating exercises in truth finding and thinking-through religious education (Baumfield, 2002). Imants and Oolbekkink (2009) identified five components that affect the activation of didactic arrangements: the structuring of educational assignments, quality of collaborations/interactions, interim/final classroom evaluations, documentation of learning experiences, and explicating a line of thinking regarding a subject. As staff members at the Catholic School of Theology, van Dijk-Groeneboer, Boelens, and Kienstra (in press) developed teaching materials intended to activate didactic arrangements, which they dubbed religious-thinking-through.

The present authors are interested in how religious-thinking-through can be realized at a higher level. Hence, this study focuses on a teacher’s role, namely with respect to the use of scaffolds such as feedback, hints, instructing, explaining, modeling, and questioning—in addition to others (van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2011); the effectiveness of each respective teaching scaffold is nevertheless unknown. The conceptual framework of a religious education lesson is adopted wherein the relationship between teacher behavior and religious-thinking-through by students plays a central role. This relationship is influenced by the teacher’s lesson design. However, what behaviors do students exhibit when they perform

religious-thinking-through? To qualify such moments, Baumfield's (2003) higher-thinking skills are adopted (i.e., evaluation, critique, thinking about one's thinking). These stages entail testing, producing criticism, and reflecting (Kienstra, Karskens, & Imants, 2014; Kienstra, Imants, Karskens, & van der Heijden, 2015).

Teaching scaffolds are important in guiding students through the learning process (van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). Feedback involves the direct evaluation of students' behaviors, whereas hints entail providing clues regarding a given topic (or the deliberate withholding of a complete solution); instructing encompasses requesting a specific action or supplying information so that students understand what to do and how. Likewise, explaining involves providing information concerning how and why. Modeling encompasses demonstrating a behavior for the purpose of imitation; questioning entails prompting students to think, or to request a specific reaction. In this study, a distinction is made between lower-order, higher-order, and meta-cognitive questioning.

Teaching styles can be divided into three types: problem oriented, historically oriented, and person oriented (van der Leeuw & Mostert, 1991). In the problem-oriented teaching style, thinking through involves solving/answering philosophical and theological problems/questions. On the other hand, a philosopher or theologian's primary task in the historical teaching style is to interpret/reinterpret the philosophical and theological past by using each discipline's established texts. In the person-oriented teaching style, thinking through is an attempt to create an individual, reasonably justified worldview. Indeed, an alternative conception of philosophy or theology has a more positive impact on a teacher's practices than telling stories or reading texts, as it creates

a completely different atmosphere in the classroom, with an alternative distribution of student and teacher roles. In one classroom, students work quietly on a problem while an instructor assigns them tasks; in another, the teacher gives an energetic performance as fascinated students observe; in the third classroom, a lively exchange of ideas may occur (van der Leeuw & Mostert, 1991, 24).

Hence, van der Leeuw and Mostert propose combining teaching styles in order to accommodate curriculum demands, as well as those of students and philosophy/theology in their own right.

In a review of prior studies, Kienstra et al. (2014) identified 30 domain-specific exercises; a content analysis of these exercises revealed three common and distinct approaches to truth finding. The first involves a form of connective truth finding (CTF), wherein students collectively search for truth through narratives and conversations. The second entails a form of test-based truth finding (TTF), in which students search for scientific truth in a manner similar to scientists. The third, juridical debate (JD), encompasses a juridical approach to determining truth and truth values by discussing competing or opposing claims, after which a competent judge reaches a verdict (Oakeshott, 1975). In this study, these three approaches are employed to create a relevant educational context wherein teacher and student activities can be understood. The Bibliodrama religious exercise can be categorized as a CTF approach (van Dijk-Groeneboer, Boelens, & Kienstra, 2016).

## METHOD

To study the relationship between teaching context and students' learning activities, a mixed-methods comparative case study methodology was adopted (Yin, 2014), wherein complete lessons were compared and individual lessons thoroughly examined; student questionnaires, teacher logs, and classroom teaching materials were used to gather data. A two-phase approach was employed in which each lesson was analyzed separately, followed by

a comparison of cases. For the latter, Miles and Huberman (1994) proposed using a meta-matrix to easily compare the main findings of each summarized case. The present research comprises a qualitative study based on the meta-matrix in conjunction with the quantitative tool correspondence analysis (CA, Greenacre, 2007; compare Kienstra & van der Heijden, 2015), which will assist in comparing lessons.

Olav, a male teacher with a master's degree in theology, a teacher's certificate, and 21 years of classroom experience in religious education, participated in the study along with his students. There were a total of 83 students; however, the number of pupils in each class ranged between 4–24, with an average of 14. Six lessons were examined in their entirety. During the 2015–16 academic year, Olav was enrolled in a continuing education course at Tilburg University, which was intended to inspire instructors and their students through a new teacher education curriculum. The six aforementioned lessons were not associated with this continuing education course.

To ensure coding reliability, the following approach to researcher triangulation was used. Initial coding was performed by the article's first author, who developed coding criteria based on prior research and the collected data. The first and second authors then discussed these criteria until a consensus was reached. Monthly sessions followed wherein the first and second authors discussed the questionnaires' coding by examining all available data. Agreement was generally achieved regarding most coding decisions; nevertheless, there were occasionally differences in interpretation, owing primarily to ambiguous statements in some responses. These differences were considered until a mutual decision could be made. During the aforementioned phases, the article's third author functioned as a debriefer, who challenged the criteria when necessary through discussion and by supplying appropriate examples. In cases wherein differences arose regarding the interpretation of criteria or examples, the three authors deliberated until a second consensus was reached. The article's first author reviewed the data again if recoding was necessary.

## RESULTS

### *Religious-thinking-through by students*

The initial data analyses outcomes for the six lessons are provided in Table 1 as a meta-matrix; it shows results pertaining to lesson design, teacher behavior, and religious-thinking-through by students. The columns and rows include lessons and variables, respectively.

We provide a reading instruction for the lessons of Olav. There were six groups of adolescents from the teacher-training education primary school, four from PABO (13, 18, 8, and 16 students in 1A, 1B, 1C, and 1D, respectively), and two from WFS (24 and 4 in groups 1 and 2, respectively). The Bibliodrama exercise was used, which is in agreement with the CTF approach's underlying principles.

In 1A, the exercise was executed according to the CTF approach; nevertheless, the corresponding learning activity was more akin to a combination of CTF, TTF, and JD. Throughout the lessons, Olav successfully employed two of the three teaching styles concurrently. Moreover, from among the six scaffold types, he displayed 74 teacher behaviors; these included hints, explaining, and modeling (each displayed once), as well as instructing (twice), questioning (59 times), and showing understanding/giving space/listening/summarizing/anticipating (10 times). In addition, three higher-thinking skills were scored: evaluation/testing (level 3), producing criticism (level 4), and reflecting (level 5). The highest levels were reached for evaluation/testing in four lessons (i.e., 1B, 1C, 1D, WFS Group 2), and for reflecting in two lessons (i.e., 1A, WFS Group 1).

Table 1  
 Meta-matrix with results for variables regarding lesson design, teacher behaviors, and religious-thinking-through by students in six Bibliodrama lessons

VARIABLE	Lesson 1 (1A)	Lesson 2 (1B)	Lesson 3 (1C)	Lesson 4 (1D)	Lesson 5 (WFS Group 1)	Lesson 6 (WFS Group 2)	Instrument*
<b>I. Lesson Design</b>							
<i>Truth-finding approaches</i>							
Connective truth finding (CTF), test-based truth finding (TTF), juridical debate (JD)	Design	CTF	CTF	CTF	CTF	CTF	c
	Execution	CTF	CTF & JD	JD	CTF	CTF	b
	Learning activities	11.33 CTF 0.33 TTF 1.33 JD	17.33 CTF 0.33 TTF 0.33 JD	7.33 CTF 0.33 TTF 0.33 JD	14.33 CTF 1.33 TTF 0.33 JD	23 CTF** - -	a
<b>II. Teacher behaviors</b>							
Number of teaching styles		2	2	2	2	2	c
Interactions	Exercise design	Bibliodrama	Bibliodrama	Bibliodrama	Bibliodrama	Bibliodrama	c
	Execution of exercise	11 scaffolds	15 scaffolds	8 scaffolds	10 scaffolds	25 scaffolds	a
	Feedback						
	Hints (Hin)			1			
	Instructing (Inst)	1	1				
	Explaining (Exp)	1					
	Modeling (Mo)						
	Lower-order questioning (LOQ)	2	7	3	2	7	1
	Higher-order questioning (HOQ)	3	6	1	5	8	2
	Meta-cognitive questioning (MCQ)	4		2	1	4	1
	Miscellaneous (Mi)		1	2	1	6	
<b>III. Religious-thinking-through by students</b>							
Highest level reached (1–5)		5	3	3	3	5	3
							a

\* a = questionnaires; b = teacher logs; c = classroom teaching materials

\*\* One student did not respond on this question.

### ***Teacher behaviors***

In their questionnaire responses, students indicated how the scaffolds were used (excluding feedback, as it was not employed). The miscellaneous category comprised showing understanding, giving space, and listening. Further information regarding the scaffolds is provided in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Frequencies and descriptions of teacher behaviors (scaffolds) in the Bibliodrama lessons*

Number of teacher behaviors (total 74)	Behavior	Description	Example
0	Feedback	The direct evaluation of students' work/behaviors	
1	Hints	Providing hints with respect to a given topic (or deliberately withholding complete solutions)	<i>The teacher did not indicate who God is exactly; you can decide this for yourself, I think.</i>
2	Instructing	Supplying information so that students know what to do and how Requesting a specific action	<i>Using words regarding God's question. God's question may also involve self-confidence.</i>
1	Explaining	Explaining how and why	<i>Explaining meanings.</i>
1	Modeling	Demonstrating a behavior for the purpose of imitation Focusing on process rather than product	<i>Collectively searching for metaphors.</i>
59	Lower-order questioning (22) Higher-order questioning (25) Meta-cognitive questioning (12)	Questions that evoke thinking Questions that evoke further thinking Questions that evoke a specific reaction	<i>Who is God in the story? Was he the master? Asking questions, thinking-through questions, and clarifying questions. He solicited open questions. Questioning one's feelings.</i>
10	Miscellaneous	Showing understanding Giving space Listening Summarizing Anticipating	<i>Everything was alright, could be there. He was calm.</i>

### ***Relationship between lesson design, teacher behaviors, and religious-thinking-through***

Table 1 could not be analyzed using CA directly; hence, with some minor adjustments it was coded into a super-indicator matrix (not shown), which was subsequently analyzed using CA. In Figure 1, each variable is placed on a separate horizontal line, beginning with approaches and ending with the highest level; the scattered dots along the bottom line represent each lesson. CA examines differences between lessons; as such, the design of the truth-finding approaches (which were always CTF) and number of teaching styles (which were always two) were ignored, since they did not differ between lessons (see Table 1).

In Figure 1, lessons 1 and 5 are on the left, whereas 2–4 and 6 are on the right. Reflecting had the highest level of religious-thinking-through by students on the left (5), followed by testing on the right (3). This shows that religious-thinking-through was most effective during lessons 1 and 5, and least effective during lessons 2–4 and 6. In addition, teacher behavior often resulted in meta-cognitive questioning (see Table 1), predominantly during lessons 1 and 5. With respect to lesson design, CTF was generally used during the learning activities (in Figure 1 Approaches La), and is therefore at the center. The effective lesson (i.e., the first) mixed CTF with JD more frequently when compared to others, which is why JD appears on

the left. Likewise, TTF was used more frequently during the less-effective lesson (i.e., the fourth).

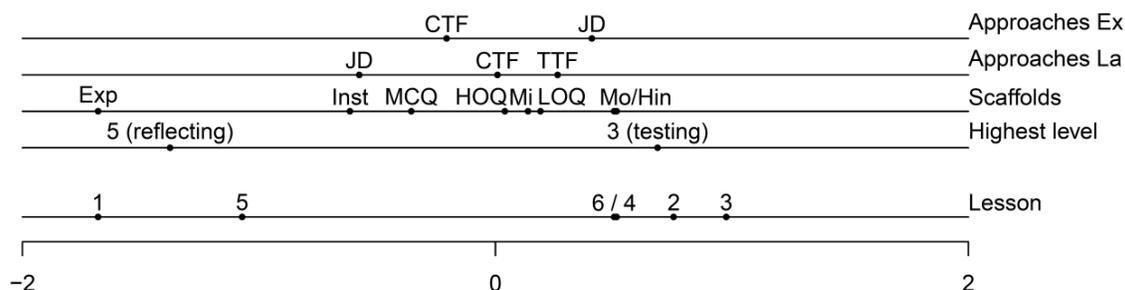


Figure 1. First dimension of the CA based on the meta-matrix results (see Table 1 for an explanation of the labels).

According to the CA, meta-cognitive questioning and CTF through a form of debate were closely related to higher level religious-thinking-through by students (i.e., when students are in fact religiously educated and learning). The two most extreme lessons (with respect to effectiveness and ineffectiveness) serve as examples to clarify the CA. Excerpts from the most-effective lesson (i.e., 1A), which was taught by Olav, follow.

### **Lesson 1: The most effective**

Teacher questions in the classroom material and students' questionnaire responses from this lesson are described below.

Questions concerning the calming of the storm by Jesus on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35–41).

- What other part would you have liked to have played and why?
- What do you think of the story's ending?
- Would you have enjoyed having Jesus as portrayed in this story in your boat?
- What kinds of emotions did you feel?
- Jesus calls on us to transform fear into faith, and anxiety into trust (i.e., transference): "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" What does Jesus mean by this exactly, and how can the transference process be achieved?
- How would you assist a terrified friend?
- What connects you and why?
- What values play a role in this text? Which do you believe is the most important?
- Everyone is occasionally afraid, particularly nowadays owing to international events. With respect to the fear surrounding assaults, war, violence, fugitives, and the economy, how do you think Jesus would react? Despite all of this misery, why should we remain unafraid?
- Why was Jesus unafraid of the storm?
- How can a higher power support people during a time such as this?
- What do you think of each other's answers? Are some better or worse?
- What do you think of each other's approaches? Are some better or worse?
- Are any improvements possible?

The questionnaire asked students to identify the teacher's behaviors. Examples of their responses (with a focus on meta-cognitive questioning) are as follows:

- [The teacher] asked what [we] thought about the master (i.e. God).

- [The teacher] asked questions about our choices.
- [The teacher] asked why we perceived [something] a certain way.
- [The teacher] asked why we selected a [certain] part.

### ***Lesson 3: The least effective***

Lesson 3 was the least effective. The following are responses from students concerning meta-cognitive questioning in the lesson.

- [The teacher asked us to] question our feelings.
- [The teacher] asked us to evaluate the time [in which] Jesus lived, whether we would be afraid, and those kinds of things.

## **DISCUSSION**

In this study, a single instructor was examined in various teaching contexts among different groups of students; in the future, greater data from a more diverse sample of teachers should be collected. Scaffolds such as showing understanding, giving space, and listening are important, and ought to be considered with respect to religious-thinking-through and theologizing in religious education lessons (Kuindersma, 2013).

CTF is not always the most effective truth-finding method (Kienstra, Imants, Karskens, & Van der Heijden, 2015). In this small-scale study, students learned most effectively using CTF through a form of debate during a Bibliodrama exercise (which is in agreement with the CTF approach's underlying principles). In executing the truth-finding approach, CTF was predominately used by the instructor during more effective lessons (see Table 1 and in Figure 1 Approaches Ex). This could be because the CTF approach, unlike debating in the JD approach, facilitates showing understanding, giving space, and listening.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Higher-thinking skills were evident among students during the Bibliodrama exercise. The lesson's design and execution were primarily based on CTF; JD occurred most frequently in effective learning activities. In addition to common scaffolds (e.g., hints, instructing, explaining, modeling), lower-/higher-order and meta-cognitive questioning were used; showing understanding, giving space, and listening were noteworthy complementary scaffolds. Meta-cognitive questioning produced religious-thinking-through of a higher level. Hence, Bibliodrama is an effective means of achieving higher-level religious-thinking-through when combined with appropriate scaffolds in a suitable teaching context.

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## **Metalheads in the classroom: encountering the stranger as a hermeneutical and spiritual exercise in learning diversity**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the world view, social position and psychological make-up of people who listen to metal music (metalheads) and the cultural reactions to this musical genre in order to prepare for an encounter with metalheads in the classroom. Only when teachers can connect with the world view of students can they fulfill their hermeneutical-didactical task of fostering religious identity. Using the spiritual model of Steggink and Waaijman (1985), the concept of 'meeting a stranger' is introduced as a spiritual exercise for teachers to open themselves up to the questions of life that these students are contemplating. Religious motives regarding hospitality to strangers foster an open attitude for a fruitful dialogue, enabling the religious educator to put his role as a moderator into practice, handling diversity professionally.

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In the classroom, metalheads may well be perceived as strangers. Their dark clothing, tattoos and sometimes extreme piercings, together with the brutal music they adore, often containing lyrics that are blatantly rude, provide teachers with a challenge in connecting to this world, their world. Religious education is a thorough hermeneutical enterprise involving three approaches (Schweitzer 2004): the teacher must be able to use a hermeneutical method in explaining historical sources like sacred texts; the ability to interpret students' experiences in their contemporary societal, religious and cultural context is a requisite; and students' religious development can be seen as hermeneutics of an active subject. The religious educator is a hermeneutic juggler, balancing these threefold hermeneutics in his didactics in order to foster the students' search for meaning and to support their personal construction of a religious identity. When students try to answer, however provisional their answers may be, their questions of life in engaging in religious sources and practices and in debating them in dialogue in the classroom with the teacher and other students, the outcome of this process is often an individual one. The hermeneutical paradigm presupposes an openness for religious diversity. Opening up to the 'otherness' of the other can be contemplated as hosting a stranger, which is not only a hermeneutical but also a spiritual exercise.

### Encountering metalheads as strangers: a spiritual exercise

Why do I call the deliberate and open-minded attempt to connect to metalheads not only a hermeneutical, but also a spiritual exercise? In the model of Steggink and Waaijman (1985), practice is one of the aspects of dialogical spirituality. Theologically speaking, they describe spirituality as the experiential aspect of faith in which transformation as a mystical process constitutes the core. This process evolves in an interplay of *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the age), *self*, *core inspiration* (core values) and *practice*. The authors find their working hypothesis suitable for different religious and non-religious world views. Later on, Waaijman (2002) defines spirituality as a divine-human relational, multi-layered transformation process. Following Steggink and Waaijman's model, I describe spirituality as a dynamic interplay of five aspects: self, core inspiration, practicing, *Zeitgeist* and transformation. The human self (soul, animus), the unique person, the I, interiorizes core inspiration through practice, in the context of the *Zeitgeist* which enables a spiritual transformation.

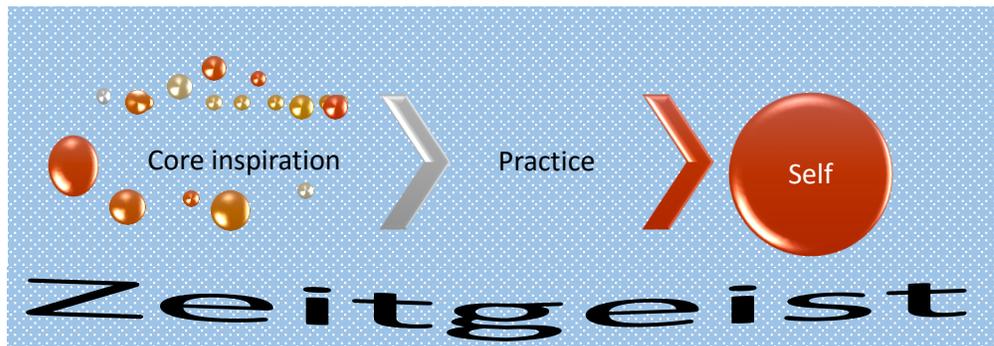


Figure 1: Spiritual Transformation

The *Zeitgeist* is the cultural atmosphere, the climate of an era, the very air we breathe. There are common symbols, roles, behavioral patterns, which become visible on the micro-, meso- and macro-levels of society. *Core inspiration* indicates the depth structures in our society: the fundamental motivations (*Leitmotivs*) and orientation underlying roles, groups, and institutions. They become visible in personal ideals, group ideals and macro-social values. *Practice* is the behavioral expression of the connection between self and core inspiration, influenced by the context. This connection takes shape through physical exercise (yoga), encounter, religious acts like prayer or contemplation, or through social action. Practice can be aimed at self-development, dialogue, societal transformation, or for example at protecting nature and the environment. The outcome and heart of the spiritual process of practice is spiritual *transformation* of the self. Christians might use terms like re-creation, or growing in conformity to the image of Christ. The five aspects are interconnected: the ways of practicing in time and in place are clothed in the current *Zeitgeist*. The language in which ideals are formulated is historically and culturally situated. The perspectives on the self and on transformation change over time and are bound to location.

I see initiating and experiencing a genuine encounter with metalheads in the classroom as spiritual practice, as interiorizing core inspiration. The core inspiration involved here is the value of hospitality. Kearney and Taylor (2011, 1) underline that hospitality is an important value in religious traditions: “Judaism tells of Abraham welcoming the three wanderers in the desert. Christianity speaks of the Annunciation as a moment of receptivity to a Word becoming flesh, Islam teaches hospitality to the stranger as a core principle of the Koran, Hinduism recognizes the guest as manifestation of the divine – *Atithi Devo Bhava* (God is not manifested through the guest; rather the guest by being a guest manifests God), while Buddhism cherishes a radical hospitality of “interbeing” as a way of overcoming illusory antagonisms between friend and enemy.”

In the Christian tradition, with which I am most familiar, the virtue of hospitality is an important theme in Scripture and in practice.<sup>1</sup> Two core motives can be discerned: first, we are strangers ourselves (as were the Jewish people), and we are never completely at home with ourselves; second, God reveals himself in the stranger. These motives demand a hermeneutical openness to be interrupted by unfamiliar thoughts and practices, as an act of theological hospitality (Moyaert 2011).

Offering hospitality to strangers belongs to the core inspiration of Christianity. It is a challenging and difficult task, but also a task that holds a promise of the opportunity to experience something that transcends the normal, something of God. Practicing this core inspiration to the metalheads as strangers in the classroom will not only offer an opportunity to grow spiritually as a religious educator, but will also provide the hermeneutical foundation for a genuine dialogue with them in the classroom.

### **Encountering metalheads as strangers: a hermeneutical exercise**

The religious educator as a hermeneutical juggler wants to understand the students' views, needs, emotions and behavior. Understanding requires the educator to be open to the 'otherness' of the other, and to step outside the context of popular cultural or religious frames that influence his attitude. Welcoming a stranger in his or her alterity also requires an active attitude and a curiosity about students' personal stories. Additionally, a professional educator has access to scientific information about metalheads' world view, cultural and societal positions, and behavior. I will first shed some light on metalheads from literature, and then present results from my own analysis of metal lyrics.

#### *Literature on metalheads*

What then are metalheads? A single, definitive metalhead does not exist, although a common denominator is that a metalhead is a fan of heavy metal music, which is a bricolage consisting of sonic, visual and verbal aspects (Weinstein 2000). Sonically, heavy metal is powerful music, performed (and played) at high volume, dominated by complex guitar work and fierce drumming, sustained by the sounds of a bass guitar. The vocals are important, since they include intense displays of emotion, sometimes expressed in yelling, growling or grunting. Visually, the bands in the genre use black as the basic color; artwork on album covers, patches, logos, and T-shirts opt for bold, angular typefaces and incorporate threatening motives from horror movies, heroic Gothic tales, or science fiction stories. Verbally, we see band using a prevalence of names that refer to mayhem, death and evil

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<sup>1</sup> I recall the following Biblical motifs: A stranger deserves protection from oppression, and must indeed be seen and loved as one of our own people "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:33-34). A stranger must be allowed to eat the leftovers from the harvest; farmers must leave some gleanings behind for the orphan, the widow and the stranger (Deuteronomy 24:19-21). A stranger shares in the benefits of living by the law of God, and may not be treated differently, for example: a stranger does not have to work on Sabbath (Exodus 23:12) or on religious feasts such as the day of atonement (Leviticus 16) and has to be judged within the same judicial system (Leviticus 24:22). It is God who feeds and clothes strangers impartially, and therefore we have to love them likewise (Deuteronomy 10:18). In the face of God, all people are equally strangers on earth (Psalms 119:19). Man is not created alone but in a plural: man and women for 'it is not good that the man shall be alone' (Genesis 2:18). This social character of being demands an openness to each other; Jesus identifies himself strongly with strangers in his narrative on the judgment at the coming of the Son of Man in Matthew 25:31-46: 'I was a stranger and you took me in'. Anyone who provides hospitality to a stranger extends that hospitality to Jesus and will receive the Kingdom. This sacramentality wherein the sacred appears in the profane act of hospitality – see also Abraham receiving three men presenting God – leads to the instruction in Hebrews 13:2: 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares'.

(Megadeth, Sepultura, Slayer). Power is a key theme in the lyrics. Weinstein (2000) describes two categories related to power: on the one hand, there are Dionysian songs about exuberating in lust, and in other aspects of life (for instance rock music itself), and on the other hand, there are songs about chaotic themes such as war, death, mutilation, conflict, violence and destruction.

The history of heavy metal goes back to the 1960s, starting off as a blend of blues rock (Cream, Jimi Hendrix) and psychedelic rock (Jefferson Airplane, Pink Floyd), initially emerging in Europe (especially Great Britain) and North America. Heavy metal is now – after a decline and subsequent resurgence – a major branch of music culture, with millions of listeners and fans spread globally and distributed in about 25 to 30 smaller branches or subgenres. Some metalheads adhere more closely to the roots of hard rock music by bands like Kiss and Deep Purple, while others prefer recent types like melodic death metal, folk metal or stoner metal. A somewhat superficial division – based on characteristics of sound, lyrics and economic production and mediation – arranges the metal landscape in three zones: lite metal (hair/glam metal, gothic metal), traditional/classic metal (New Wave or British metal) and speed/thrash metal (power/groove metal) (Weinstein 2000). Others refer to the lighter versions as pop metal or melodic metal, classifying the louder, faster versions as extreme metal (also comprising death metal and black metal). Some versions are mainstream and commercial, while others are underground scenes, sometimes deliberately chosen to preserve ‘real’ metal (Hahn-Harris 2007). A metalhead could therefore be a fan of one or more subgenres and may well dress differently and adopt different points of view on cultural and societal issues than other metalheads.

If we were to believe some of the early reactions by parents, teachers, senators, psychologists and church representatives in response to this music, we would have to consider the fans of these loud sounds and dark lyrics as regrettable. The history of heavy metal shows a strong cultural dislike of this subcultural musical genre, especially in the 1980s. Weinstein (2000) makes a distinction between progressive criticism, condemning this rock genre as apolitical, and conservative criticism, which draws the biggest attention because of lawsuits, banning of concerts and bands from various venues, lyric censorship, record-burnings and public hearings by the Parents Music Resource Centre. Conservative criticism targeted suicide, violence, sexual perversion, substance abuse and Satanism. Not only are these themes addressed in heavy metal lyrics, but these early objections alleged that listening to heavy metal would lead to unwanted behavior related to these themes. Generally, the arguments put forward do not hold weight scientifically. Moreover, empirical evidence was either not provided or not convincing, and the criticism often relied on a gross misinterpretation of lyrics based on superficial reading. A lot of songs containing references to violence, for instance, were read literally, whereas a symbolic interpretation would be more appropriate. Content research shows that heavy metal lyrics pay relatively little attention to sexual perversion, violence or drug use (Walser 2014, 139; cf. Arnett 1996, 46). Additionally, empirical research has not found causal relationships between listening to heavy metal and suicidal behavior or self-harm (Lacourse, Claes and Villeneuve 2001; Baker and Brown 2016). On the contrary: for some fans, listening to this music has a prophylactic and cathartic effect. Furthermore, research has shown that the intensity of positive emotions increases while listening to heavy metal (Bodner and Bensimon 2015) and there is no evidence that this music contributes to adolescent turmoil (Took and Weiss 1994) or to juvenile delinquency (Epstein and Pratto 1990). The musical preference for heavy metal does not contribute to heightened use of substances (Mulder et al. 2009). Finally, although there have been accusations that heavy metal promotes Satanism, there is no evidence that corroborates these claims. With the possible exception of some Scandinavian black metal fans and a few extreme metal bands, all researchers concur that neither musicians nor fans actually venerate the devil. Songs about

Satan must be read symbolically as indicating chaos or powers of the unknown. The Devil is associated with the dark side and horrors of the modern capitalist state (cf. Walser 2014, 137-72).

All these critiques must be read as a form of stereotyping and framing, in which the metalhead is estranged from a dominant culture with normative behavioral patterns and esthetics. There are feelings of estrangement, as is clear when we analyze interviews with metalheads. This observation brought Arnett (1996) to his thesis of ‘alienation’. Alienation is “a sense of estrangement from one’s culture, a deep loneliness arising from a lack of gratifying emotional connections to others, and cynicism about the ideals and possibilities for life offered by one’s culture” (Arnett 1996, 17). This sense leads to anger and anxiety. The metal scene provides a subculture and to some extent an alternative community, and the listeners derive a sense of significance from the music. Not only do many fans state that the music is cathartic and has a purgative effect, releasing anger, they also affirm that metal lyrics address issues that matter to them. As metalhead Brian puts it: “But I also listen to the lyrics, because that’s the thing about heavy metal. It exposes a lot of problems. It tells the truth about what’s really going on in the world, not just a bunch of bull.” (Arnett 1996, 59). The concept of alienation can imply a normative point of reference: there is a culture which you are alienated from, but that alienation is not the better alternative. Therefore, I would like to follow Walser (2014, xxvii) in a more neutral interpretation of heavy metal culture as “an attempt to create an alternative identity that is grounded in a vision or the actual experience of an alternative community. Heavy metal’s fascination with the dark side of life gives evidence of both dissatisfaction with dominant identities and institutions and an intense yearning for reconciliation with something more credible.” Metal music expresses experiences of disillusion, corruption, confusion and isolation which resonate in the lives of adolescents in post-industrial society, facing all kinds of difficulties in their lives (Bennett 2001, 52).

### *Content analysis of metal lyrics*

What are the contents of these metal lyrics that combine with music, imagery, dress codes and rituals to create an identity powerful enough to survive the darkness in society? As an example, I chose to analyze all 81 songs from the eight albums by thrash/groove metal band Machine Head from Oakland, California. The band started underground in 1992, but managed to grow and has sold now over three million records, selling out tours worldwide in moderate and bigger venues. I coded the songs based on themes and emotions in each song and did some overall analysis on keyword frequencies and co-occurrence of keywords using Wordstat 7.1.3.

**Table 1: Distribution of subjects**

	number	percentage
<b>Societal</b>	20	24.7%
<b>Personal</b>	53	65.4%
<b>Band</b>	8	9.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100%</b>

Almost two-thirds of the songs (Table 1) address *personal subjects* like coping with fear, depression, betrayal, abuse and hate; like the feeling of being wronged, unloved by parents, rejected and criticized by society, or experiencing life as a struggle. Many songs are about strength, the power to resist or rise from a fall (dealing with your mistakes), and the encouragement to walk your own path. There is a hopeful tendency in the songs, stressing the inner power of men that enables one to survive, stand tall, resist, and not to give in to addiction or unjust relationships. The songs about *societal subjects* address themes like legitimacy of war in the light of casualties (women, children) and of the financial costs. Quite

a few songs are about the political system, addressing abuses of power, lying politicians and the resulting societal impacts of the loss of hope, racism and killings. The excessive use of violence by police officers is also condemned. The general societal morality connected to the American Dream and the ideal of becoming rich as a supreme goal in life is viewed as generating corruption and greed. Kids grow up and are infected by this ‘impurity’, a word also used to refer to television churches grabbing viewers’ money, degrading religion to a moneymaking machine. Listeners are invited to resist the system by speaking out. In the end, society cannot break you. Some songs explore *band-specific subjects* like ventilating feelings of anger when a member leaves the band, or reacting to critique when new musical pathways are explored (daring to fail). There are also songs about the community established between band and fans, the electrifying relationship depicted as a brotherhood, fighting against the wolves (symbolizing all kinds of threats).

I was particularly struck by the results of a keyword analysis (see Table 2).

<b>Table 2: Top 10 frequencies in all cases</b>				
<b>KEYWORD</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>% SHOWN</b>	<b>NO. CASES</b>	<b>% CASES</b>
<b>SEE</b>	122	17.09%	33	40.74%
<b>PAIN</b>	91	12.75%	44	54.32%
<b>EYES</b>	82	11.48%	32	39.51%
<b>INSIDE</b>	80	11.20%	31	38.27%
<b>LIFE</b>	72	10.08%	31	38.27%
<b>TIME</b>	61	8.54%	21	25.93%
<b>FEEL</b>	54	7.56%	23	28.40%
<b>HATE</b>	54	7.56%	19	23.46%
<b>FALL</b>	50	7.00%	18	22.22%
<b>RISE</b>	48	6.72%	14	17.28%

Table 2 shows that the lyrics underline the serious subject matter covered in the lyrics of metal songs. What we see here is not songs advocating sex, drugs or rock and roll, but rather songs about encountering problems in the world and surviving them. The noun most often used is /pain/, which is present in 54.32% of the cases. This also holds true for the subset of songs about personal issues (13.98% of all key words in 29 cases). Therefore, I will conclude with a short summary on the meaning of pain in songs from Machine Head about personal subjects, the songs with which metal fans identify most strongly.

The deepest root of anger, hate, self-hate and depression – all of which are dominant themes – is pain. Pain could be caused by betrayal, a friend lying to you, dishonesty, a sense of not being respected by people, government, parents – abuse is specifically mentioned – or society. Pain causes inner tension that can be perceived as a big void inside, which leads to fear.

The response to pain should be to look it in the eye and come to terms with it. Rather than walking away from what is inside, pain must be faced. Framed in this context, facing the pain head-on provides inner strength, as an alternative to exacting revenge or inflicting physical harm.

Tears that made me  
 Ashamed to be me  
 But that gave me

Strength to see me  
Made a spark that  
Lit the dark and  
Let me shine  
Time to see  
Believe this in me  
This pain that I feel deep inside  
- Machine Head, *From This Day*

The lyrics do not advocate falling in the pit of self-reproach or self-accusation as a result of feeling inner pain. While acknowledging that it is indeed possible to be haunted by negative thoughts, these songs argue that it is necessary to face your deepest self, that it is possible break down the walls that keep you imprisoned in these feelings.

A second response to pain is to seek refuge in music:

Salvation is found alone  
Haunted by its melody  
Music it will set you free  
Let it set you free  
We build cathedrals to our pain  
Establish monuments to attain  
Freedom from all of the scars and the sins  
Lest we drown in the darkness within  
- Machine Head, *Darkness Within*

Lyrics in Machine Head's songs that are about hurting people, e.g. "smash face to concrete" from *In the Presence of My Enemies*, operate as a safe space in which feelings can be expressed without unleashing actual violence. Maintaining an internal sense of integrity provides a different perspective on adversaries, supposed friends and external oppressors: head held high, the listeners can be proud to be who they are and refuse to let critique, abuse and dishonesty hurt them anymore. Self-torture or drug abuse is not the appropriate response to pain: it is possible to fight the pain with patience, using willpower to regain control of life.

Other lyrics convey the message that it is possible to live in love:

I will go on  
Patience, belief  
Love will ascend  
Just listen to it  
Voice so true inside calling  
To pick you up and march you on  
Keep from falling  
Let go your sorrow  
Sun will shine, this I promise  
Rising tomorrow  
Rising  
- Machine Head, *Imperium*

Being part of the metal community provides a beneficial effect for the people in it: although society at large might despise and reject them, metalheads have a fairly strong online community based on shared contexts. These virtual connections are supplemented by a real,

physical community that emerges at concerts and festivals, providing a feeling that these people are not isolated in their pain:

The damned are we  
Abused and beat,  
We're left for dead  
We raise our head  
For we are strong  
And they are wrong  
So scream with me  
"I do believe!"  
I need your help  
For I have knelt  
Held fist at skies  
And cried out: "Why?"  
Your shoulder strength  
It gives me length  
We lift ourselves  
Together meld  
So take my hand  
And don't look back  
And sing with me  
"Let new life be  
Old life goodbye"  
- Machine Head, *Now We Die*

As a group, metalheads may be perceived as separate from or shunned by society, but within the community that has formed from a shared appreciation of metal music, they find a sense of strength and purpose.

### **The hermeneutical juggler welcoming proud pariahs**

In Machine Head's song *Old*, Jesus descends from heaven again. He sees hate, corruption and racism and a failing church; he weeps and is murdered again. This song is performed by Machine Head at almost every concert. At the crucial point in the song, the metalheads present scream their hearts out, singing along with the words: "Jesus wept." In the depths of their pain, they feel they are in good company. As a protest song, *Old* reflects a core inspiration that a religious educator may recognize. Machine Head is not a Christian metal band, but that does not mean that their themes are completely alien to the Christian core inspiration. Metalheads find stories, emotions and a hopeful perspective they can relate to in their lyrics.

Digging deeper into the world view of metalheads provides opportunities to establish a connection between the educator's own core values and theirs. Opening up to a keener awareness of the meaning of pain in the lives of metalheads may bring the religious educator in touch with his own pain and anger and with his core values, putting them into perspective. Feeling like pariahs in our societies, metalheads are able to develop an attitude of being "proud pariahs" – a term proposed by Weinstein (2000) – assisted by metal music. Learning more about metalheads' culture and world view is a hermeneutical obligation. Welcoming these students in the classroom and in life as a religious educator can be a spiritual exercise which provides a transformation, not only in relationships with metalheads, but also in the educator's own spirituality. The religious educator juggles various sources from different traditions and from the lives of his students for the benefit of all present in the classroom.

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## **Pivoting toward Hope: Interplay of Imagination, Fear and Life Experience**

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“I just kind of heard God just tell me that: ‘This isn’t what you need to be doing, you just need to open your eyes and your heart and forgive and forget and move on and kind of go on with the rest of your life because I have bigger plans for you.’” (Sandra, age 15)

“[Peacemaking is] a question about how you make people aware of different kinds of violence without having to experience it themselves, you know. . . . I never really so much cared about sexual violence until it happened to me, but that doesn’t mean that everyone should experience it to know exactly what is going on.” (Hee-kyung, age 23)

The words of Sandra and Hee-kyung initiate us into the complexities of hope in young lives. The purpose of this paper is to explore what young people can reveal to the larger human family about hope, especially in a world fraught with violence, injustice, and ecological devastation. This overarching question begs many others. Do young people carry any residue of hope in such a world? If so, from where does it come, how does it function in their lives, and how might it be nourished? An important place to begin is with the narrated yearnings and hopes of young people. The present study seeks to understand youth’s hopes and the social values that are embedded in them. The social values and commitments of young people are an understudied phenomenon, compared to studies of their intra-psychic and interpersonal relationships; however, young people carry abundant wisdom, born of their distinctive life journeys, social locations, and religious experiences. They live as young people within complex matrices of culture, social class, nationality, physical location, and personal experience.

The very accent on hope has been contested in recent years, often blurring the distinction between the psychological phenomenon of optimism and the theological value of hope. Hope is

often associated with a psychological predisposition to optimism, as opposed to pessimism, and is often decried as naïve or as providing inadequate motivation in the face of evil. Hope, however, is not a psychological state; hope is a theological value or virtue, which is actively chosen. Mary Elizabeth Moore (2015) made a case for imagination as a factor that enables or encourages people to *make decisions to hope*. That paper drew upon 48 oral histories of world-changers. The present paper builds upon that earlier work, but turns to young people to learn about hope, especially *to discover if and how an orientation toward hope in young lives is associated with imagination, fear, and life experience, including religious experience*.

The study began with a thematic analysis of interviews with 59 youth and 14 mentors, as well as 2 youth focus groups with a total of 16 young people.<sup>1</sup> Youth participants (identified by pseudonyms) were aged 12-24; four lived in the United Kingdom, and the remainder in the United States. They were largely Christian in practice or heritage, but represented a cross-section of ecumenical affiliations and non-affiliations, urban and rural locales, women and men, and diverse ethnicities, social classes, and sexual orientations. The research team, similarly diverse, utilized an ethogenic approach to analyze the data (Moore 2007). Building on the primary analysis of young people's stories, the authors then identified thematic strands that revealed the nature of hope in these young people. The thematization sharpened into three research questions: what visions do young people express; how are those visions embedded in their life experiences, and what do their visions reveal about the intersection of imagination, fear, and hope?

In this paper, we share our findings through portraits – two portraits of individuals and an aggregated portrait of youth interviews. Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot influences this approach with her social science portraiture (2009, 1994). She studies human interactions in communities and families in relation to larger cultural contexts, drawing upon ethnography, interviews, and

phenomenological analysis to create portraits of a situation. She thus accents aesthetic wholeness as she interweaves her qualitative findings into moving pictures. Further, she seeks to analyze goodness, or the *strong* fibers of human lives and institutions (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997, xvi). Lawrence-Lightfoot's portraiture corresponds with the ethogenic method (Moore 2013, 99-100), both of which claim that qualitative observations, phenomenological analysis, and an aesthetic portrayal of wholes can open windows of insight into human experience. Both also claim that goodness provides stronger building blocks for a compassionate, just, and peaceful world than a solo focus on problems. With this background, we turn to the portraits, followed by theological and educational analysis.

### **Pivoting toward Hope in Young Lives: Meet Sandra and Hee-kyung**

Young people live fragile lives in a fragile world. Yet they often pivot toward hope amid the dangers and fragility. How can that be? Meet Sandra and Hee-kyung, who vivify the themes we found in the several narratives of this study.

**Sandra.** At 15, Sandra is anchored in her Roman Catholic, white, Midwestern culture. Her life appears fairly smooth on the surface, but below the surface is her family life with an alcoholic dad and a mom who focuses most of her attentions on her husband. Sandra discloses many struggles as she shares her story. Early in her life, Sandra was verbally bullied in school, so her family arranged for her to change schools. Sadly, she experienced physical bullying in the second school, so she switched back to the first school, which seemed the less damaging. About this time, fully into her teenage years, she became depressed and suicidal. At the depth of her despair, when she was ready to give up on life, she had an epiphany moment, "I just kind of heard God just tell me that: 'This isn't what you need to be doing, you just need to open your eyes and your heart and forgive and forget and move on and kind of go on with the rest of your

life because I have bigger plans for you.” Sandra now looks back on that epiphany as a turning point in her life.

During the months of struggling with depression, her parish church was her lifeline. On a mission trip to South Carolina, Sandra participated with the youth of her parish in her first Adoration, which she describes in vivid detail:

I had never experienced it before, I didn't know what it was. I was really scared and nervous and there was a monstrance on the altar ... It's like a gold thing, they put the host of Jesus in it and then it's just really beautiful. And we get in there and you have the opportunity to go kneel at the altar if you want and you don't have to, but I kind of felt like I should, I just kind of had this feeling. I told God before I went up: You have me in here for a reason, what's the reason? I'll do what you want, just tell me what I need to do. So I kept feeling like I should go to this altar, so I go up, and I kneel, and I stare into the monstrance and it's just captivating, you're in awe, you're speechless. Every time I look into it I would just bawl, I couldn't stop crying, like my body would collapse because I was crying so hard.

Sandra proceeds to describe her response.

I was like: 'Ok, I'm at the altar, now what do you want?' I was just like: 'Is there someone here who I need to talk to, is there someone here who needs to hear your voice?' And I kind of thought, I just kind of heard, 'Yes.' And I was like: 'Ok, who is it? I know you won't just come down and tell me who it is, but, who is it?'

As Sandra stood, her eye fell on a gentleman nearby.

And I get up and I go up to him and I hug him and I still have no idea what I even said, it was one of those moments where God was speaking through me and I couldn't even control it, I just told him: 'God loves you, God loves you so much and he never wants you to give up.' And he just kind of told me this story of how he was doing drugs and he should've died and it was one of those times, where I told him 'You shouldn't be dead, God wants you alive, you're here for a reason.' That was the biggest moment of my religious life.

The hope Sandra drew from this transforming moment was soon tested. Shortly after, her best friend committed suicide; then, both her grandfather and her mother's best friend, who was like a second mom to her, were diagnosed with cancer. She describes these events as devastating personally and also as challenges to her faith. She asked God:

'Why would you do it to somebody that's never done something so wrong?' I always kind of ask, and I always get the same answer: 'You never know how strong you are until strength is your last option.' And um, that just kind of helped me get through it, that little saying.

The power of these moments became clear yet again when Sandra was asked what she considered the most important contribution she has made in her life thus far. She responded with "serving God" and "being there for people." At a crucial point in her life Sandra had an intense experience of the presence of God, and that gave her hope to keep going with her life and to enlarge her expectations for her life and her contributions to others' wellbeing. Receiving the gift of God's presence, re-inscribed by every experience of Adoration since the first one, she now sees her own role as sharing the gift of her presence with others.

**Hee-kyung.** Hee-kyung is a 23-year-old Korean-American living in a city on the East Coast. In telling her story, she describes a major turning point in her life when, at age 21, a church member raped her. This experience, together with what she describes as the closeness and yet exclusivity of her church community, has made her doubt God and her own identity:

It happened about two years ago, and that really changed my perspectives a lot. Right now, I am slowly beginning to realize that most of my problems at church is with people, and not so much about my relationship with God, because I don't think I ever really had a strong relationship with God. Still work in progress, yeah., but also like Korean American culture, as much as I have come to accept that identity, I still go...I don't know, Korean American church is...especially I have a lot of struggles with it. I am not exactly sure what about it is, but yeah...

When she told her father about the rape, he told her never to talk about it again. She did not remain silent, however. Even though she was afraid, she reported the incident and the perpetrator was brought to justice. Hee-kyung had not been the first to be assaulted, but she was the first who spoke up. She hopes that, through her actions, "other people can be healed and he will learn ... to be a responsible man."

Although Hee-kyung still has a positive relationship with her church and her congregation continues to be a place of connection for her, she critiques the inward focus of her community. Her experience of sexual assault has made her more critical regarding gender roles and views of women within the church, but also in society. The awareness of her own position has fed a growing awareness of the social and economic disadvantage of women in general. She is concerned not just about sexual violence, but also about poverty as a form of violence. She wondered with us:

How do you make people aware of different kinds of violence without having to experience it themselves, you know. Because again, I never really much cared about sexual violence until it happened to me, but that doesn't mean that everyone should experience it to know exactly what is going on. Awareness ... effective awareness.

Hee-kyung does not have a clear vision for her future yet, but she knows that her own awareness of violence is a key in shaping her identity and her future contributions. She knows that she wants to help people, in some form or another, even as she realizes that the reality of the issues she wants to address is very complicated.

Hee-kyung's life was colored by one traumatic experience of fear and violation. Even in the midst of her own trauma, she could imagine, a world where violence does not have the last word. That awareness freed her to speak up and report the person who had raped her. In the present moment, she is still uncertain about her Korean-American identity, her relationship with God, and her future; however, her outlook is being transformed by hope. She hopes that others will not have to have the same experience of violence that she had, or any other experience of violence, in order to gather together to end violence altogether.

### **An Aggregate Youth Story**

Sandra and Hee-Kyung represent themes that run through the interviews and focus groups, though each young person has a different story. The analysis of youth interviews and

focus groups reveals wide-ranging social concerns among the youth, seemingly influenced by their wide-ranging social contexts and personal experiences. Based on the frequency with which they named issues, the following hierarchy was revealed, from the most to the least frequent: (1) *broken family and community relationships*, including family conflicts, community splits and divisions, mental illness, and a deficiency in empathy; (2) *violence*, including bullying, violence in families, military torture, police violence, rape and street fighting; (3) *broken global relationships*, including war, imbalance of power, and economic disparities; (4) *condemnatory attitudes toward homosexuality*, including abuse, exclusion, and sharp community divisions; (5) *poverty and consumerism*, sometimes linked; (6) *racism and sexism*; (7) *drugs and alcohol*; and (8) *ecological destruction*.

The ordering of these concerns is revealing but not definitive, given the qualitative research design. The issues and experiences were embedded in larger youth narratives, and they reveal two telling features: (1) the extent to which their personal experiences correspond with their awareness and analysis of issues and visions; (2) the imaginative power with which they reconstituted destructive experiences as well as experiences of fear and adversity into a platform of hope. The hopeful reconstruction often propelled them into a trajectory where they saw themselves addressing larger social issues that were close to their own stories, as Hee-kyung did in reporting her rapist and in raising multiple issues of violence with others in her church. The interviews abound with other examples. Chung Hee, who grew up in a family in which his father beat his mother, envisions himself as a global “peacemaker.” Calvin, who is African American and has experienced years of overt and covert racial taunts, wants to address the “hateful violence” in our world. Duk Hwan, who grew up immersed in a culture of drinking, smoking and fighting, wants to be a business man who shapes the world to be more peaceful for all people.

Valerie, whose boyfriend is hooked on drugs, sees herself as helping people to break their drug habits and to develop communities that minimize temptations. Jorge, who was bullied as a child, wants to eliminate bullying among children. Mary, who has had many life-challenging experiences, wants to be present with anyone who faces life-challenging situations. Mary, for example, helped her family adapt to her mother's physical disability over a period of many years; she experienced her family's confusion when her aunt "came out" as a lesbian; and she witnessed extreme poverty when she travelled with her church's work team to Haiti. These experiences have not only broadened her perspectives and attitudes, but she now sees her future in helping people build better understanding and better lives for themselves. These are but a few examples of a major thread in the youth research. Youth seemingly care about that which they know best.

Some of the examples named above emerged within families – an abusive or alcoholic father, a disabled mother, an aunt who came out as lesbian. Other examples have to do with the larger social location of the young people. The African American young people, taken as a group, expressed concern about violence more than twice as often as any other racial-ethnic group. They often named racially-targeted violence, and they analysed its causes and effects with sophistication. Renee, for example, recognized that violence brings trauma to a community. Peter and Christena, two Latino/a young people, expressed a similar concern about what violence can do to families, including their own. Indeed, Christena had lost her brother to violence. The issues for these young people were larger than familial. Renee and Christena describe their loving two-parent families and strong schools; yet they experience racism in their larger African American and Latino cultural worlds. Other young people know racially-charged violence at a farther

distance, but their social locations place them in proximity with visible racism. One young white man lives in a working class town, and he has become conscientized to racism by his friends:

In a lot of my friend's neighborhoods and stuff the police are really racist towards black people and things. I've seen videos where it's like you have a regular black man just walking down the street, not doing anything wrong, he doesn't look suspect or anything, and policemen will hit them or keep on cursing at them, to make them do anything against the law so the police can bring them to jail. ... Racism is definitely alive.

The social location of young people plays a large role in their experience and in their concerns and visions.

The aggregate youth story reveals a clear link between life experience or cultural experience and issues that concern young people. What is striking in the interviews is that the young people are not only aware of issues, but most of them have also pivoted toward hope. The very issues that trouble them in their personal and cultural lives are the ones for which they can imagine an alternative future. Further, they not only imagine an alternative, but they express determination to change the world in the direction of that alternative. Both fear and imagination seem to be linked to their life experience and to their concerns and commitments. They fear what the world will be like if nothing changes, but they can imagine alternatives. The combination seemingly contributes to their ability to pivot toward hope. One cannot draw a cause-and-effect conclusion from the qualitative research of this project, but the evidence points in that direction, suggesting the possibility of an empirical study that would test the hypothesis.

### **Theological Questions Revisited through Eyes of the Young**

For the young people in this study, hope is a throbbing reality, and it does not seem to be based in naïve notions of a smooth, safe, satisfied world. Rather, all of the young people express deep concerns about the world in which they live, and the young people who make the strongest claims for hope are almost always the same youth who have experienced extremes of violence,

abuse, neglect, or hurt. Sometimes their ability to envision an alternative is a mystical gift, as in the case of Sandra, for whom experiences of God's presence in an epiphany moment and in Adoration reversed her way of seeing the world and her practices of daily living. Sometimes the young people's visions are acts of resistance, as in the case of Hee-kyung, who could not let the rapist in her congregation, nor the denial of her father or the congregation, have the last word; she felt compelled to resist silence or denial. These young people, with their determined decisions to hope, point religious scholars and leaders to revisit theologies of hope, which are imbued with new energy and insight by the youth.

Since John Macquarrie published *Christian Hope* in 1978 and Jurgen Moltmann published *Theologie der Hoffnung* in 1965 (later to be published in English as *Theology of Hope*), the theological theme of hope has been abundantly discussed, both as a source of vision and strength, and a lens on social critique. Both scholars were writing in times of cultural rebuilding, Macquarrie in the United Kingdom and Moltmann in Germany. Indeed, Moltmann (1993) saw his work as critiquing the emerging materialism of his day and the optimistic rebuilding of a cultural past. Instead, he encouraged people to open themselves to radically new possibilities for the world. His peculiar blending of existentialism and systematic theology opened him to theological constructions that honoured both the grittiness and the mysteries of life. Similarly Leonardo Boff turned to the ecclesial base communities as a source of hope for the church and society. He observed these communities in which people gather weekly to share their existential struggles and to find ways to navigate through those struggles with the help of their faith. People in the base communities make decisions for hope as they seek to navigate the oppressive forces in their worlds. For all three of these theologians, hope was drawn from the forces of life that flow *within* the devastations of their existential worlds.

The gritty realities that stood behind these three theologians were motivating to them and to their readers. Similarly, the young people of our study have expressed in words and actions that their most passionate commitments have emerged in the grittiness of their lives. Their narratives reveal that their rawest experiences have shaped the most authentic and energizing claims on their lives. Considered alongside the theological treatises, the young people add a more textured view of hope, especially regarding the existence, sources, and functions of hope in their complicated lives. In particular, their narratives reveal the linkage of hope with imagination and fear, and the linkage of imagination and fear with life experiences of oppression and desolation on the one hand, and experiences of life and promise on the other.

A longer paper would be needed to expound on the theological constructs suggested by the young people's stories, and to consider those constructs in relation to dominant theologies in the present. What we can say definitively here is that hope is a theological construct that holds great meaning to young people, and that its function in their lives is not only to lift their spirits but also to sharpen their critiques of life-destroying realities in families, religious communities, and other social contexts and to fire their determination to change the world.

### **Conclusions for Religious Education**

We come now to the question of nourishing hope in young people and, through them, to others. Very practically, can religious education better prepare young people to be hope-bearers? This phrase "hope-bearer" resonates with visions of a "Godbearing life," advocated by Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster (1998). Dean and Foster argue that the most important quality for leaders with youth is to live Godbearing lives and to invite youth into living their own lives as Godbearers. In our research, we also discovered Godbearing as important to many of the young people – a theme to be developed more fully in another phase of the study. The focus of this

particular study was on hope, and the thematic analyses revealed young people as hope-bearers and as eager for mentors and peers who will honor, inspire, and nourish their hope-bearing.

We also discovered that young people are still fragile in their hope. Again, the discovery resonates with Dean (2010), who makes a case that young people's faith is not yet fully durable. She argues that Christian young people tend toward the benign faith of their benign churches; yet youth long for a consequential faith. Dean makes a case for a missional approach to Christian education, having discovered the importance of young people's immersion in a significant community of faith, a personal story of God (testimony), a strong sense of vocation, and hope. Dean's studies of Christian youth need to be brought into comparative dialogue with studies of young people in the global community of interreligious and non-religious youth. Though our study also focused on mostly Christian young people, the interviews and focus groups point to a much wider range of influences and implications than those of Dean. The young people, in narrating their lives, describe a wide range of life experiences and encounters with religion and the Holy that are significant for them; many of these are unconnected to their faith communities. Even in the complexity of their narratives, we discovered that hope is most commonly found among young people when they have a sense of a world beyond themselves; have faith in God or some version of a spiritual-moral universe; and have an active imagination. We also discovered the fragility of hope in the young people. Hope can be thwarted or suppressed by fear. This makes the role of religious educators all the more important.

To provide guidance for religious educators, grounded in the stories of youth, we have identified at least five key insights for religious education. First, *young people learn from their life experience, and they need maximum opportunities to reflect deeply on those experiences with others*. The gratitude that most youth expressed after the interviews, and the animated

conversations in the focus groups, reveal the yearnings of youth for reflective conversations, a conclusion supported by other research (Baker 2005; White 2005; Yust 2008; Bischoff 2011). A second insight is closely related: *young people learn from the social contexts in which they live, and their contextual experience can be stretched with pedagogies that expand their horizons.* Such pedagogies might engage youth with wide-ranging narratives of people and the earth, immersion experiences, and dialogues with people living in diverse contexts and circumstances. Third, *young people have formative life experiences which can become platforms of hope.* Teachers need to be role models from which young people can draw inspiration and encouragement. Fourth, *young people are capable of imaginatively transforming challenging and potentially damaging life experiences into a hopeful outlook for the social issues that concern them.* Finally, *young people learn from being in positions of responsibility and leadership, and they need mentors to listen, guide, and reflect with them on these roles,* whether they have sought the roles or been thrust into them by life circumstances.

Young people's knowledge runs deep and wide, grounded too often in devastating experiences of violence, neglect, and oppression. Further, they often carry daunting levels of responsibility. At the same time, they express the yearning and capacity to stretch and deepen their knowledge to benefit themselves and others. For religious educators, young people are delicate flowers to be appreciated, protected, and nourished; however, they are also gardeners themselves, who have great wisdom about gardens and the dangers and possibilities therein. If young people are to continue pivoting toward hope, they will need the tender care of the good gardeners, and they will also need to be entrusted to care for gardens themselves. They need mentors who will honor their experiences, their fragility, and their wisdom. Most important, they need mentors and communities who will honor and learn from their own hard-earned hope.

## Abstract

This paper explores transformative moments in the lives of young people, drawing from interviews and focus groups with 75 youth. We highlight the emerging theme of hope with portraits drawn from two young women's narratives as we give particular attention to the role of imagination, fear, and life experiences in their stories. Then we analyze more generally the interviewees' narrations of hope and the influences that evoke, support, and/or discourage their hopes. In conclusion, we create a dialogue between the young voices and the theological literature to discover how they challenge and enlarge one another. The paper closes with proposals for educational practice.

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