

6-8 November
Atlanta Marriott Buckhead
Hotel & Conference Center
Atlanta, Georgia

REA Annual Meeting 2015 Proceedings

connecting, disrupting, transforming

Imagination's
Power as the
Heart of
Religious
Education

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The Religious Education Association (REA) is an Association of
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From space and (non-)place to place attachment and sense of place

An exploration of the role of imagination as the key to transform spaces into places children and youngsters feel attached to

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Abstract

In our research¹ we focus on the physical and architectural characteristics of a location, and the possible ways to furnish and/or decorate a space to address learners' imaginative power, a precondition to satisfy their (presupposed) spiritual hunger and longings for a better world. The core concepts 'space', 'non-place' and 'place', 'place attachment' and 'sense of place' are central in our research. Pupils reflected upon safe and unpleasant places in school and wrote down their stories. As such pupils enable us to perceive the world through the eyes of a child and listen to the voice of the child. Preliminary findings of the analysis of the pupils' texts show a central place for friends and teacher(s) in their 'place attachment' and 'sense of place'. We read in pupils' comments that in the (decorative) architecture of a classroom the personal touch of the teacher is pivotal. Remarkably, even now, focusing on physical aspects of the classroom nevertheless it depends on the person of the teacher.

¹ The research we report about is part of a larger three years project 'Samen leven doe je zelf' ('Living together, just do it!') (Ter Avest, Commissaris and Bakker 2014).

Introduction

We start with a description of the location of the three participating primary schools and refer in short to the project of which this research on ‘Living together, just do it!’ is part of.² Special attention is paid to the relation between a building, located at a specific place, and wellbeing. In the second paragraph we elaborate on the concepts ‘space’, ‘non-place’, ‘place’, and ‘place attachment’ and ‘sense of place’. We present in the third paragraph the research method and the data of our research constructed by 35 pupils age 10-11. The last paragraph is for conclusions and recommendations.

1. Location – three primary schools in the Bijlmer district in Amsterdam

In 2000, due to renovations in the neighbourhood the three participating schools had to leave their temporary buildings. Challenged by the need for new housing the developments for collaboration between the three schools were accelerated about fifteen years ago. Planners, architects and educationalists joined forces and added two new ‘wings’ to the building of the ‘Bijlmerhorst’ safeguarding the distinguished own school identity of each of the three schools (the *neutral* state school ‘Bijlmerhorst’, the *Islamic* school ‘As Soeffah’ and the *secular-christian* school ‘Polstok’).³ The three ‘wings’ are connected with each other by a central hall, an open space that mere by its location does open up for ‘things to happen’.⁴

The aim of the research project ‘Living together, just do it’ is to strengthen the relationship between teachers and parents, being ‘partners in education’ and as such create social cohesion amongst the schools’ primary stakeholders. The child’s perspective is central in this project. Parents and teachers, first separately, then together are expected to have conversations about

² The first piloting year (2014-2015) of this project is funded by the municipality of Amsterdam as part of their policy and subsequent activities on anti-radicalization.

³ Avest, I. ter (2012). *The plural of togetherness is future*, poster presentation at the REA conferentie, Atlanta, 2-4 November 2012.

⁴ Ipgrave, J. (2015).

the meaning of children's perspectives and create feelings of bonding with regard to a shared pedagogical strategy - recognizing, respecting and bridging differences.

2. Theoretical framework

According to Augé⁵ we are 'now placed in the invidious position of promulgating the individual as source and guarantor of all meaning production' (Augé, in Buchanan 1999, p. 396)⁶. Augé states that the difference between a non-place and a place is of being observed in a role (passenger at the airport, customer in the mall) or being approached as a person subsequently resulting in a personal relationship with that specific place – which then by consequence becomes a meaningful place. Augé states that 'a person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver. Perhaps he is still weighed down by the previous day's worries, the next day's concerns; but he is distanced from them temporarily by the environment of the moment' (Augé 1995, p. 103). A non-place offers 'the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing.' (ibid., p. 103). 'Frequentation of non-places today provides an experience of solitary individuality' that is not experienced in full and not reflected upon since it offers, according to Augé, a substitute for human interaction. What is needed, according to Buchanan reviewing the work of Augé, to transform a space into a place is 'a mode of behavior attributable to a type of space' (Buchanan 1999, p. 395), recognizable habitual or ritual behavior as an invitation to become part of and relate to that space, as such transforming the space into a meaningful place – a place to feel at home, that is to feel safe. We follow Buchanan in the question he formulates and that we will give a preliminary answer in this contribution: 'To what extent is the experience of a space tied directly to the objective conditions of that space?' (Buchanan p. 397). To answer this question we first turn to the German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt who points to the need of reflection.

⁵ Augé, M. (1995). *Non-places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Translated by J. Howe. London/New York: Verso.

⁶ Buchanan, I. (1999). Non-Places: Space in the Age of Supermodernity. *Social Semiotics*, vol. 9, no. 3. Review Article.

A central theme in Arendt's work is 'thinking' as a weapon against the 'banality of evil'⁷. According to Arendt imagination is needed in thinking; thinking as a kind of internal dialogue to arrive at coherence between experiences and make them meaningful.⁸ Whereas Arendt focusses on 'thinking', the cognitive reflective process turning non-places into places, the social geographer Gert-Jan Hospers in his publication on 'Geography and emotions; how we interact with (non-)places'⁹ articulates the emotional effect of the environment on meaning-giving and accordingly people's well-being.

For our thinking about processes in the transformation from non-place to place and 'place attachment' and 'sense of place' we are inspired by De Botton's work 'The Architecture of Happiness'¹⁰. De Botton takes as his starting point a multiple self, consisting of a variety of 'personalities', each of them being evoked in different contexts. Whether and how we get to know our selves is dependent of (the architecture of) the environment we are in – an environment that can be characterized by its size (e.g. of a room), its view (of a window), its colours (e.g. of the sky and the clouds; shades of the sun), and its smells (e.g. of flowers). Who we are and how we present one of our selves is related to the context we are in and the images, associations and memories such a context evokes¹¹ The other way around the architecture can also help to keep certain qualities in mind and to keep certain memories vivid.

The concept 'sense of place' then is central in our research and used to describe the feelings of a person; the concept of 'place attachment' is introduced to describe the experiences of a person - be it positive or negative – in the context he or she lives in. Also the experience of pleasant or negative memories coming into mind in a certain context, is part of research of the field of *topophilia*. According to Tuan the field of *topophilia* is closely related to the field of *geosophy*, the field of 'the study of geography from different points of view, including geographical ideas,

⁷ Borren, M. (2008). Arendt en Derrida over vriendschap en het probleem van politieke gemeenschap [Arendt and Derrida on friendship and the problem in political relationships]. In: *Hannah Arendt Cahier*. Radboud Universiteit. Budel: Damon.

⁸ Arendt, H. (2013). Denken [Thinking].

⁹ Hospers, G.-J. (2014). *Geografie en gevoel: wat plekken met ons doen* [Geography of emotions: the influence of places on our wellbeing]. Koninklijke Van Gorcum.

¹⁰ De Botton, A. (2006). *De architectuur van het geluk* [The Architecture of Happiness]. Olympus, Uitgeverij Atlas Contact.

¹¹ See Hospers (2014, p. 28) and de Botton (2006, p. 28, p. 119).

be they right or wrong, from different people - not only geographers, but also farmers, fishermen, business people and poets, novelists and painters, Beduins and Hottentotters - and by consequence for the greater part this field is about subjective meanings'¹²

We follow Buchanan in our research question: what are the characteristics of a particular space in school that opens up to become a meaningful place for a pupil characterized as 'place attachment' and a 'sense of place'?

3. Research method, presentation of data and preliminary results of data-analysis

In our qualitative research we focus on the affective relations of pupils of the three Bijlmer schools. Three groups of pupils (one group of the *Bijlmerhorst* and two groups of the *Polstok*¹³ aged 10-11; N= 35) were invited to reflect upon safe and unpleasant places in the school, and to write down their stories.¹⁴ Answering questions like 'How come that you choose this place?' 'What did you experience?' 'How did this all feel? Next to that they were invited to show the place they wrote about to the researcher, and at that place tell their story. This 'visit' to the place is videotaped.

Pupils' written stories are analysed according to the theoretical concepts of 'place attachment' and 'sense of place'. These key concepts are the lenses through which we look at pupils' stories.

3.a Presentation of data

Children pointed to very *different located spaces*, and the experiences and feelings that accompany that turn that space into a place, like:

¹² Tuan, in: Hospers 2014.

¹³ For different reasons, a.o. due to a visit of the Inspectorate, the pupils of the *As Soeffah* school could not participate in the research.

¹⁴ Jonker, S. (2015). *Mag ik jou wat antwoorden; verslag van activiteiten met leerlingen van groep 6 van basisschool 'de Polsstok'* [Let me give you an answer; report of activities with 6th grade pupils of primary school 'de Polsstok']. Amsterdam: Zina/Female Economy/Utrechtse Adviesgroep.

*the space where pupils have their gymnastic lessons ('.. there I am allowed to jump and dance, and jump my sorrows away');

*one specific classroom, for example the classroom of grade 1 and 2 ('... there I got my first friends, and the teacher was very kind'), the classroom of grade 4 ('... I fell in love with a girl for the first time'), or the classroom of grade 2 ('... I got very angry and I kicked the door, I just did it, I don't know why');

*the room of the school's psychologist (*Interne Begeleider* – school psychologist), because this pupil in that specific space feels free to talk with the school's pastor (*Identiteits Begeleider* – school pastor) about his father who passed away;

*some pupils state that the space of the school in general is liked as a place, because 'in school I can ask questions; at school they don't think you are rude when you ask questions.'

Different *emotions* are evoked sometimes in the same space or with the same teacher, for example

*the room where children change their cloths for their gymnastic-lessons 'It's a nice place, because it *smells good* in that room'. The *bad smell* in the boys's bathroom for an other pupil is the reason to point that space as an ugly place to be: 'The place stinks, that's why I pee there within three seconds, keeping my nose closed with my fingers';

Many of the children point to a specific (class) room and recall memories of the teacher, and in particular of classmates and friends, and the feelings that accompany these memories. Sometimes a liked place evokes a mixture of memories:

*A girl says: 'This is the tree were I played with friends when I was a little child. I feel good when I recall these memories. Over there the teacher's goldfish was burried; this fish was in our classroom in grade 6. For me this is a precious memory, and it's also a very old tree. I like to be here, because all those memories then come to my mind.'

3b. Preliminary results and reflection

Reflections of the child that accompany the choice for a liked place gives information about what a child recognizes in her or his own feelings, or lacks in her or his own (family) environment (De Botton 2006, p. 176).

In some stories we may read in between the lines a strong desire, for example the boy pointing to the room where he can talk with the school pastor about the death of his father. One might say that this boy longs for his father, and the school pastor gave him words for his father's presence in speech, well aware of the father's absence in real life.

Such a longing can also be read in the story of the child who likes to do gymnastics because 'I can jump my sorrows away.' 'Jumping sorrows away' possibly points to a kind of domestic violence – gymnastics to a kind of coping strategy.

With regard to the architecture of the space, in order to make it possible that 'something can happen' not very often pupils' narratives give specific and articulated information about decorative aspects as openings for 'something to happen'. When talking about the gymnastics a relation may be established with the interior design as inviting for 'jumping away sorrows', like the posters of the decorative architecture presented below invited students to have conversations about metaphoric lines or songs chosen by students of the previous class RE. Also the condition of the bathrooms can be seen as giving room for 'something to happen', in this case something unpleasant like being locked up. It seems that in the associations with experiences pupils narrate about, other people – be it the teacher or classmates - come to the foreground; the decorative architecture most of the time staying in the unconscious background.

An interesting example with regard to the effect of 'decorative architecture' of a classroom is given by De Pater writing about Religious Education (RE) with students in a secondary school.¹⁵ The teacher, like an interior designer, decorates her classroom with originals of texts of her students. Students were invited to select from a favourite pop song one metaphoric line and write that line down on a poster, in their own handwriting – clear and readable for others. If necessary they are asked to translate that sentence in Dutch. The students put up the posters in the classroom, resulting in a decorated classroom with an ambience determined by subjectivity. Students of the next class entering the room do know what to expect of an RE class, however upon entering this decorated space they don't know yet what might happen within the familiar framework of an RE class - the class as a non-place where students know and take up their role as learners, sit down, open their books to acquire knowledge about religion(s). Entering this decorated classroom they can not but read the handwritten texts, being

¹⁵ De Pater, J. (2015). Het boekje met de honderd vragen. In gesprek met Rachele Tahapary over het creëren van tijd en ruimte. *Narthex*, jaargang 15, nr. 1, maart. p. 62-69.

touched by the subjective and sometimes intimate expressions of their schoolmates and in a natural and informal way it triggers their imagination and produces associations upon which they reflect, be it in an internal dialogue or thinking aloud with their classmates.

In their publication ‘Neural consequences of environmental enrichment’ Van Praag *et al.* report about their research on this topic; ‘enriched environment’ they see in comparison with a standard context, paired with a voluntary opportunity to interact with this enriched environment.¹⁶ In our example above the decorative architecture is an enrichment in comparison with a normal classroom, paired with the natural and informal invitation of the posters to interact with the handwritten metaphoric song lines, commented upon by their schoolmates. The consequences of the interaction in the enriched environment ‘enhances the memory function in various learning tasks’ and ‘the degree of learning improvement might be greater following enrichment that includes exercise than exercise alone’.¹⁷

Generally speaking it seems that for pupils in primary school age that the process of transformation of a space into a meaningful and safe place is dominated by a relation with persons – be it the teacher and/or the classmates. For students in secondary school age the interior design seems to play a more explicit role.

4. Concluding remarks and recommendations

From the data we conclude that we should not neglect the interaction with the personality of a teacher and her or his qualities to take the role of an interior designer and construct an environment that triggers imagination and allows for ‘something to happen’, at the same time inviting pupils to reflect upon the ‘something’ – cognitively as well as affectively.¹⁸

To give room, and to change space into a meaningful place it would be nice to have ‘a dictionary connecting architecture and expressions of interior design to feelings and emotions’.¹⁹ DE

¹⁶ Van Praag, H., G. Kempermann, F.H. Gage (2000). Neural Consequences of Environmental Enrichment. *Nature Reviews/Neuro Science*, p. 191-198.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 193

¹⁸ Zondervan, T. and J.-M. Praamsma (2015). Leren voor het leven. *Narthex*, jaargang 15, nr. 1. p. 85-89.

¹⁹ De Botton, p. 109

Bijlmer Schools and its classroom(s), designed as open spaces and turned into places by way of decorative architecture and shared habits and rituals, places full of reflected memories, turn into places of attachment where the child relates to and gets to know who he or she is - not in the role of a mere learner, but as a unique person.

Since learning takes place not only in school (in formal learning) but also in the family, the sportsclub, and the neighborhood (informal learning) we recommend to start conversations with parents, sport leaders and people living in the neighborhood about the pedagogical strategies (including decorative architecture) needed for the Bildung of the child.



Making the Familiar Strange: The Sociological Imagination and Religious Education

Prepared for the Religious Education Association Fall 2015 Conference

Melissa James, Ph.D.

Abstract

In the mid- 20th century the concept of sociological imagination, coined by C. Wright Mills, created a significant and lasting shift within sociological engagement with the world. To employ the sociological imagination one must “make the familiar strange” whereby everyday experiences are seen as parts of larger social structures. This study draws on a content analysis of children’s religious education curricula focused on social justice and world religions read through a conceptual analysis of the sociological imagination and the relationship. This paper asks whether or not a more robust employment of the sociological imagination is warranted within children’s religious education.

Making the Familiar Strange: The Sociological Imagination and Religious Education

The sociological imagination is a term first coined in 1959 by C. Wright Mills, a 20th century American Sociologist. In this concept, Mills attempted to bridge the two primary foci of study, the macro asking questions of large scale institutions and systems, and the micro asking questions of individuals, agency, and relationships. For our purposes, the two key aspects of the sociological imagination central to our task here are the dual tasks of “making the familiar strange” and the connection between the individual and society. These two areas of insight of sociology continue to set the course for much of the sociological task since Mills.

The central task of making the familiar strange hearkens to the commitment of sociology stemming from the influences of modernity and enlightenment influences to scientifically study the world of human behavior and systems. In order to analyze the social world we must take a step back and look at it with open and critical eyes. Entering into a culture and asking questions about how relationships, culture, and social order operated were not new in Mills time. However, most of this work had been happening with anthropologists going into far off “exotic” cultures. Mills and his contemporaries argued that we must do that in our own setting in order to do the type of analysis that would lead to sociological insight. To make the familiar strange one analyzes their situation as though they were completely unfamiliar with their context would do so. Often times this is taught using the alien thought experiment wherein students are asked to imagine they are an extraterrestrial who is entering the student’s context for the first time. All of the sudden, simple and forgotten aspects of our world become interesting items for question—body language betrays relationships, interactions become understood as intricate cultural ritual. By naming and questioning even the most basic and taken for granted aspects of our context we begin to see things in new ways and offering deeper analysis.

The most significant contribution, many would argue, of Mills’ sociological imagination is the way he bridges the link between the micro and the macro, the personal and the social structures. Mills described this as the link between biography and history:

“The ability of understanding the intersection of one's own biography and other biographies with history and the present social structure you find yourself and others in. In essence, it is understanding the private in public terms” (Mills, 1959).

Mills is arguing that sociology allows us to see that an individual’s situation or problem can often be seen as linked to larger social problems. A family’s inability to pay their bills on a full time minimum wage job is taken out of the realm of personal problem or personal failure and seen as a micro-level expression of wider socio-political structures that shape the economics of wage labor. A ten year old receiving a diagnosis of Type 2 Diabetes is seen as it relates to national trends of childhood obesity and can be examined with questions related to the way class and race shape health outcomes of children.

While the concept of the sociological imagination has been expanded and employed by many and is a standard in introduction to sociology courses, it is not without

critique. Postcolonial theorists have also critiqued Mills' concept for its roots in modernity with a Euro-centric perspective and perpetuating the hegemonic understanding of the world (see Bahambra 2007). For example, Sociologist Gerardo Lanuza (2011) puts Mills' sociological imagination in conversation with Michel Foucault and argues that Mills' SI is a "totalizing analysis of society" (p. 2). For Lanuza, the sociological imagination is strengthened by a more complex understanding of power as found in Foucault and a critique of the assumption of understanding all of social structures as a total rather than a web of power relationships. In recent times, feminist sociologists such as Martha E. Thompson and Michael Armato (2012) have offered extensive works on the use of the sociological imagination to help people become "gender analysts" with the skills to "deconstruct competing definitions of important terms and ideas, assess how gender inequalities have persisted and how they have changed over time and evaluate which social actions and social changes promote social justice and empowerment" (p. 300). These efforts to reframe the sociological imagination in light of contemporary scholarship and critique suggest that this concept can continue to be useful for many applications including those within Religious Education.

Sociological Imagination and Religious Education

Nineteenth century Unitarian theologian William Ellery Channing famously wrote

"The great end in religious instruction is not to stamp our minds upon the young, But to stir up their own; Not to make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly And steadily with their own; Not to give them a definite amount of knowledge, but to inspire A fervent love of truth; Not to impose religion upon them in the form of arbitrary rules, But to awaken the conscience, the moral discernment. In a word, the great end is to awaken the soul, to excite and cherish spiritual life."

When considering the purpose of religious education, the task of stirring up minds into ones that seek knowledge rather than an imposition of "arbitrary rules" has inspired religious educators much broader than Channing's own Unitarian ranks. This stirring up of minds involves providing the tools and resources for one to critically analyze one's own and others' assumptions and beliefs.

One of the central tasks of the sociological imagination is the ability to step outside of oneself to look anew at one's assumptions, surroundings, and contexts. Much of this task is reflective of the stages based in faith development theories. At the thirty-year mark of his influential work on faith development, James Fowler (2004) writes that faith development theory combines cognitive development (ala Piaget) and moral development (such as Kohlberg and I would add Gilligan). However that is not all there is to faith development. Fowler adds that theories of faith development have "made explicit the role of social perspective-taking (Selman)" (p. 420). Here we begin to see the overlap of the sociological imagination with faith development theories. More explicitly, however, we see confluence in what Kohlberg calls the constructive dimensions of faith development, in particular in the development of "Bounds of Social Awareness." This is described as "[t]he quality and extent of our capacity for both a deepening and widening of the imaginative construction of the perspectives of others and developing the capacity

for moral reasoning” (p. 420). Being able to analyze one’s own and others’ situations and place it in a broader context, connected to social issues is foundational for building the capacity to make the normative claims of ethical reasoning.

A critical application of sociological imagination to increase understanding of the perspectives of others moves us beyond tolerance or shallow multiculturalism. Theologian Boyung Lee (2010) contends that Religious Education pedagogy (for her, particularly Christian Religious Education) must move beyond multiculturalism, which she argues, does not challenge the model of one center with which marginalized groups and cultures interact. This echoes the post-colonial critique of the sociological imagination that challenges a notion of one overarching social structure as the center of our analysis. Lee argues that Religious Education must therefore move toward interculturality which focuses on paying attention to multiple voices both in their own right as well as in conversation with each other rather than solely in relation to the dominant group. Religious Education should have as its purpose “Liberating Interdependence.” She writes “to have *Liberating Interdependence* be the purpose of our pedagogy, religious educators need to ask whether our pedagogy brings the liberation of those who are the most marginalized among and beyond our community” (p. 291, emphasis in text). Using the critiques of the sociological imagination which decentralizes the totalizing sociological perspective and allows for multiple, interconnected understandings of relationships of micro and macro level players, we can add elements of Liberating Interdependence into Children’s Religious Education.

A critical employment of the sociological can bring these three perspectives, the stirring up of minds, an intercultural approach focused on “liberating interdependence” together. However, because of the deeply analytical nature of the sociological imagination, there are developmental limitations to its employment. It would be easy to dismiss the role of the sociological imagination in early childhood and elementary aged religious education due to their cognitive development stage. However, studies in empathy show us that the foundation for being able to step outside of oneself is laid very early. Like many Psychologists, Nicole McDonald and Daniel Messinger (2011) connect the development of empathy with moral reasoning and argue that the:

“the ability to empathize is important for promoting positive behaviors toward others and facilitating social interactions and relationships. Empathy is involved in the internalization of rules that can play a part in protecting others, and, significantly, it may be the mechanism that motivates the desire to help others, even at a cost to oneself. In addition, empathy plays an important role in becoming a socially competent person with meaningful social relationships.”¹ (19)

In other words, as children develop empathy they develop as relational and moral beings. McDonald and Messinger show that learning empathy begins in infancy and continues throughout the stages of development. Learning empathy involves a progressive understanding that other people have experiences different than one’s own, connecting

¹ McDonald and Messinger, p. 19

with and responding to another's distress, and being able to come to an understanding of the cause of that distress and respond not only to the immediate distress but the roots. As children develop empathy, they are, in essence, laying the foundation for employing the sociological imagination.

If one of the purposes of religious education is to equip participants with tools to critically engage with the world of religion in ways that allow them to enact their faith/spirituality in the world a critical and intentional use of the sociological imagination used in developmentally appropriate ways can provide a key link between religious education and the formation of social change agents rooted in their religious and spiritual tradition.

Sociological Imagination and Children's Curricula

Many of the core theoretical components such as fostering the ability to make connections with broader social issues and understanding texts and issues from perspectives other than one's own are present in many children's religious education curricula goals.

For the sake of this paper I analyzed two Unitarian Universalist curricula for their use of the sociological imagination. The first, "Picture Book World Religions" by Kate Tweedie Erslev, a religious educator since 1984, is a 15-session curriculum for grades Kindergarten through 2nd intended to be used in a congregational setting. The second, "In Our Hands: A Peace and Justice" was created in 1990 by the Peace and Social Justice Curriculum Team of the Unitarian Universalist Association and is still being used in congregations. "Though the In Our Hands" series has curricula for grades Kindergarten through Adult grade, my analysis is limited to the 4-6 grade curriculum which includes 16 sessions. Both curricula continue to be in use in Unitarian Universalist congregations throughout the United States.

Picture Book World Religions focuses on helping lower elementary-aged children learn about Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam through the use of picture books, themed classroom décor, and theme-based activities. World Religions curricula like this one are often placed in the context of a "roadmap" for the Unitarian Universalist children's education programs which rotate through some combination of the foci of World Religions, Unitarian Universalist Identity and History, Ethics and/or Justice, The Judeo-Christian heritage of the movement. I specifically analyzed a primary grades curriculum in order to see how foundational skills that would develop the ability to employ the sociological imagination are used. I coded the curriculum for use of language consistent with the task of the sociological imagination in both the instructions provided for the teachers as well as instructions and prompts to be given to the children and activities requiring the use of the sociological imagination and/or empathy building skills. The stated goal of the curriculum is "to introduce world religions through stories and allow young children to explore the differences and similarities to their own lives." The author has the philosophy that young children cannot "grasp abstract concepts of comparative religious studies" but through this curriculum Religious Educators can "help them begin a journey of understanding, tolerance and celebration for the diversity of human

expressions of faith.” These expressed goals seem largely in keeping with an age-appropriate application of the sociological imagination insofar as children are developing skills to step outside of their personal experience to think about their experiences critically and make connections with the experiences of others. Many of the picture books provide the children with the opportunity to learn about a faith or spiritual tradition presumably other than their home tradition through a story of a child in that tradition. This is an effective tool for helping children foster basic empathic skills through hearing and understanding the experience of others. However, when instructing the teachers how to talk with the children about the picture books, the author writes “spend a few moments, if possible, connecting the story to the larger picture of the faith.” Three out of the 15 lessons ask the children to connect the experiences of the story to their own experience or reflect on their own experience.

Surprisingly, both for the age group and the topic, this curriculum does not contain the word “imagination” or “imagine.” It uses the word “pretend” in 1 lesson where children are instructed to pretend to be a child of the tradition they are studying as an aid for the teacher to help them sit for a longer story. Overall, while the curriculum is age appropriate, it falls into the pattern many curricula focused on multiple world religions do of learning about the traditions rather than employing the sociological imagination. Because of the importance of developing religious literacy with attention to avoiding cultural appropriation, teaching about religious traditions outside of the expressed tradition of the community in which the education program is being held hold both challenges and promises. These challenges and promises can both be addressed using the sociological imagination.

The second curriculum for our consideration, “In Our Hands” is intended for slightly older children (9 to 12 years old) and therefore in my analysis I looked for the ways we would find the second focus of the sociological imagination: connecting biography with history. Children of this age are gaining cognitive and critical thinking skills that allow them to make larger connections. While not fully developed to understand all of the complexities of the relationship between micro- and macro-level concerns, I would expect curriculum, particularly curriculum explicitly focused on peace and justice, for this age to help children begin to make that connection. What I found instead was a strong focus on “making the familiar strange” rather than connecting biography and history. Throughout this curriculum, children are invited to participate in guided meditation that are most often phrased as “journeys of the imagination.” In these guided meditations they explore different situations they have faced or they have witnessed as an observer. In short, they examine them with the sociological imagination. These meditations are supported by discussions and other activities that continue to foster the skills of analysis of everyday situations and the development of empathy. However, where this curriculum misses out on vast opportunity to employ the sociological imagination is in its lack of connection between the experiences they are analyzing and wider social systems, privilege, or systems of oppression. They begin to bridge this divide in the final unit that focuses on being “stewards of the Earth” but fail to do so even when introducing concepts like prejudice and stereotypes.

What could the Sociological Imagination Do for Children's Religious Education Curricula?

Critical application of the sociological imagination and foundational skills which lay the path for children to develop such an imagination have significant potential to strengthen and enrich children's religious education curricula. In lower grades, curriculum should build in basic empathy skills and connection to thoughtful examining of one's own experience lay the foundation for being able to do deeper analysis and learning as the child develops. In curricula like the Picture Book World Religions framing the task not as learning about someone else but as understanding experiences of others and self are central to such a task. One primary way of doing this is by guiding discussion and thinking about the stories provided in terms of two key things: 1) Empathy for the characters of the books: questions about identifying their experiences and feelings help children learn to relate to the needs of others, questions about how the children may have responded to help or be a friend to the person help them develop empathic responses; 2) Connecting to similar experiences in the children's live, having the children be able to identify what is significant in the story and find corollaries in their own life help them develop skills around thinking about and analyzing their own experience. Teachers can take this further through questions about what the children/characters in the story would say about the child's experience.

In upper elementary, curricula should focus on helping children make the connection between biography and history. By continuing to develop the ability to think about one's own experience as an outsider this age can develop critical skills for analysis. Our task, then, is to help them then think about how the experience of one person relates not only to individuals but to larger social realities.

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CLOCKS, EGGS, AND OTHER THINGS LIQUID: SALVADOR DALÍ'S RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

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In our 2013 book, *Theology and the Arts: Engaging Faith* (Routledge), Ruth Illman and I offered a proposal that combined the work of practical theology (including that of religious education) with the emerging discipline of theology of the arts.ⁱ The theme of this Annual Meeting for REA provides an opportunity to reflect on religious imagination in the art of Salvador Dalí as a case study in a “practical theology of the arts” that we have developed there. Rather than examining all seven of the themes found in the book, the paper will focus on two aspects of a “practical theology of the arts”—the role of dialogue in this approach to theology and the experience of “otherness” that is at the heart of our proposal. In addition, it will examine Dalí’s work during the latter period of his long career and focus on three masterworks from this period will be utilized to accomplish this objective: “The Madonna of Port Lligat” (1949), “Christ of St. John of the Cross” (1951), and “The Last Supper” (1955.)

A “Practical Theology of the Arts”

A “practical theology of the arts” represents a move away from modernity’s reliance upon a Cartesian dichotomy that placed “practice” below the central role of “theory” and had the effect of privileging the rational, independent self in relation to tradition, ecclesiology, and liturgy. “Real” theology was what was conducted by the great “doctors” of the church whose intellectual, philosophical, and systematic process of rational analysis developed theological “truth.” The church was, as a result led through what Edward Farley and others have referred to as a “clergy paradigm.”ⁱⁱ

As an alternative to this dominant theological approach, practical theology has proposed a theology that is dialogical, more horizontal than vertical, and more directed by *praxis* than by propositions.ⁱⁱⁱ Paul Ballard and John Pritchard describe practical theology as, simply, “the practice of Christian community in the world,”^{iv} and continue, “theology starts where God is to be found, in the concrete reality of the immediate situation.”^v

Paul Ballard and Pamela Couture claim practical theology and the arts both provide sources of understanding and means of grace.^{vi} The arts, like practical theology, are dialogical in character, as Richard Viladesau states:

To the extent that we respond to this call positively, the other becomes for us not merely a function of our own existence or an object within the horizons of our minds, but another mysterious ‘self’ over against our own... Dialogue is thus an event of purposely and freely uniting separate persons and is therefore (implicitly, and to different extents) a

potential act of love....Every true assertion is meant to contribute in some way to the other's being.^{vii}

Richard Osmer explicitly identifies the post-modern character of practical theology as containing a moment in which one experiences being “brought up short” by being engaged in dialogue with another.^{viii} Jean François Lyotard has claimed that this “otherness” (what he calls *un differend*) is precisely what makes a person a *subject*, rather than a dehumanized *object*.^{ix} The sheer otherness of the artist's own horizon “brings one up short” and shocks one's world-view enough to cause a transformation of one's previous ways of making sense of the world.^x

The dialogue at the basis of a practical theology of the arts requires *listening* intently and intentionally to the voice of the other. The arts are among the most transparent means of accomplishing this objective.^{xi} As Illman and I claim, “The gaze of the artist and the focused activity of the practical theologian both begin with the otherness of the claim to truth being brought as a summons that ‘brings one up short,’ as Osmer puts it.”^{xii}



Even the most casual observer would recognize the spectacular imagination of Spain's Salvador Dalí. “The Persistence of Memory” (1931, pictured above), arguably among the most famous of all Surrealist paintings, pays homage to the influence of Sigmund Freud's claims about the unconscious and the importance of dreams and—especially—nightmares upon those in the Paris-based Surrealist movement.

What is less known is Dalí's life-long love/hate relationship with his Spanish Roman Catholic grounding and the effect that internal, very personal struggle had on the seismic change in his art during the final decades of his long and controversial career. Raised by a devout Roman Catholic mother and a domineering, bureaucratic father who espoused atheism, Dalí struggled with personal as well as intellectual challenges that contributed to his turn toward the Surrealist movement.

Yet his close friend and biographer, the artist Robert Descharnes, claims that Dalí was a mystic throughout his life, and explicitly so after the 1940s.^{xiii} During a visit to Avila, Spain in 1950 he gained access to the journals of the 16th-century Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross and viewed a sketch of the crucified Christ the saint had drawn. This experience led to what Dalí described as a “cosmic dream” resulting in his famous painting “Christ of St. John of the Cross.” (1951)^{xiv}

“I believe in God, but I have no faith”^{xv}

Because of a series of dramatic transitions in the 1940s and later, Dalí began to rail against the “decadence” of modern painting (including Surrealism,) which he said “was a consequence of skepticism and lack of faith, the result of mechanistic materialism.”^{xvi} Matthew Milliner claims Dalí believed, “Modern Art painted nothing because it believed in nothing.”^{xvii}

Dalí’s attitude toward Roman Catholicism began to change as early as 1941, and his painting began to reflect an intentional dialogue with his Christian roots. During his emigration to the United States during World War 2 he began to envision a fusion of science and traditional elements of the Christian faith.^{xviii} The result of this mix of influences was the development of a new approach to painting and personal theology/philosophy he branded as “Nuclear mysticism.” Paul O. Myhre identifies the elements of “nuclear mysticism” as:

Heavily influenced by scientific developments in the 1940s and 1950s, Dalí’s aesthetics stewed within a mixture of Spanish Catholic mystical Christology and contemporary notions of theology, psychology, and scientific discoveries. Coupled with an intense spiritual longing, Dalí concentrated his efforts toward finding a means of connecting with a mystical and material sacrality through two-dimensional art. Out of this diverse mix of influences and Dalí’s own inner spiritual quest, he developed an aesthetic founded on what he called ‘nuclear mysticism.’^{xix}

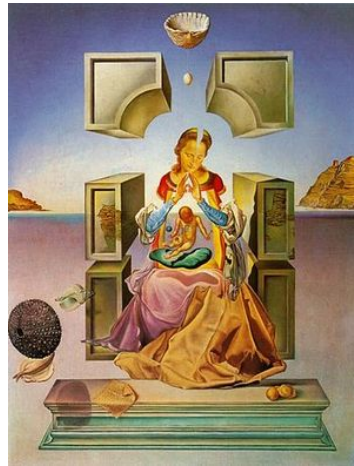
The progress of the sciences has been colossal

One clear influence in Dalí’s transformation at the end of the 1940s and through the 1960s was a series of dramatic advances in the sciences. Dalí claimed the destruction of Hiroshima in 1945 “shook [him] seismically.”^{xx} A life-long interest in science found, in the new research on nuclear physics and quantum theory, a ready dialogue partner for his equally lengthy spiritual search. “It was as if his study of physics added a fourth dimension to the world he painted, another twist—not Surrealist but metaphysical—to the inner landscape he portrayed.”^{xxi} Elliott King reports that Dalí “became captivated with nuclear physics. For the first time, physics was providing proof for the existence of God, he said, and it was now up to the artists to integrate this knowledge into the great artistic tradition.”^{xxii} As Dalí said:

In the first place, in 1950, I had a “cosmic dream” in which I saw this image in color and which in my dream represented the “nucleus of the atom.” This nucleus later took on a metaphysical sense; I considered it ‘the very unity of the universe,’ the Christ! In the second place, when, thanks to the instructions of Father Bruno, a Carmelite, *I saw the Christ drawn by Saint John of the Cross*, I worked out geometrically a triangle and a circle that aesthetically summarized all my previous experiments, and I inscribed Christ in the triangle.^{xxiii}

Robert Radford states that the developments led Dalí to conclude that “the physical world could no longer be conceived of, nor pictorially represented, in terms of fixed, unmoving, weighty objects, but rather in terms of isolated objects held in suspended relation to each other.”^{xxiv}

The intentional dialogue between emerging scientific discoveries and what he refers to as a “paroxysm” (a type of explosive revelation or “aha!” moment of realization) of metaphysical clarity is represented in his 1949 masterwork, “The Madonna of Port Lligat.”

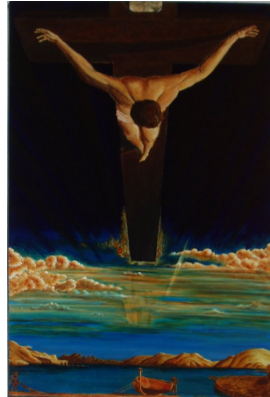


Here, Dalí presents a scene that quotes Renaissance artist Piero Della Francesca’s “Brera Altarpiece.”^{xxv} The sheer “otherness” of scientific revelations became for Dalí enough of a shock to the “modern” worldview and mystical atheism of his earlier work that it became a partner in dialogue, rather than a threat.^{xxvi} Paul Myhre claims the hovering figures symbolize “...dematerialization which is the equivalent in physics, in this atomic age, of divine gravitation.”^{xxvii} The transparent windows in the chests of the Madonna and the suspended Christ-child open onto the world of Dalí’s beloved Cape Creus.^{xxviii} An earlier version of this work was presented to Pope Pius XII in 1949, marking the artist’s formal return to the Church and an official end to his association with the Surrealist movement.^{xxix}

Truth and Deoxyribonucleic acid

A second advance in the sciences in the middle part of the twentieth century was the discovery of the double-helix structure of the DNA molecule—the very building blocks of physical life on earth. In a 1964 interview for *Playboy* magazine, he stated, “And now the announcement of Watson and Crick about DNA. This is for me the real proof of the existence of God.”^{xxx} For Dalí, these two scientific partners in dialogue functioned as *others* whose claims to truth were significant voices to which his rapidly changing approach to art responded dramatically.

As Ted Gott suggests, “After Francis Crick’s and James D. Watson’s discovery of the double helix structure of DNA in 1953, Dalí also frequently incorporated DNA imagery into his drawings and paintings, as further proof of nature ordered by a divine hand.”^{xxxi} He was so fascinated by the metaphysical implications of DNA that he met with Watson in 1965 to discuss whether “the double helix proves the existence of God.”^{xxxii}



“Christ of St. John of the Cross” (1951, shown above) is among the most celebrated paintings of the last half of the twentieth century. A Web site covering the showing of the piece in Australia remarks that Dalí focuses on the serene beauty of Christ rather than the agony that has been characteristic of traditional Roman Catholic iconography.

As the work was executed during a period in which the artist was seeking a religious faith that made sense to him in the light of contemporary science, it may indicate his desire to focus on a metaphorical reading of the crucifixion which transcends the purely physical, a theory compounded by Dalí’s own comments that the drawing represented the nucleus of an atom which became for him a symbol of the unity of the universe.^{xxxiii}

Dalí’s concept of God is also a creative mix of these disparate elements that emerges from his intentional dialogue with intellectual, theological and scientific *others*: “For [Dalí], God is an intangible idea, impossible to render in concrete terms. Dalí is of the opinion that He is perhaps the substance being sought by nuclear physics.”^{xxxiv} Descharnes and Néret continue by quoting Dalí, “God is present in everything. The same magic is at the heart of all things and all roads lead to the same revelation: We are children of God, and the entire universe tends toward the perfection of mankind.”^{xxxv} He saw nuclear physics and the DNA structure of all substances as being far closer to mysticism than to Newtonian rationalism.^{xxxvi}

In a lecture in Iowa, he claimed, “Physicists have proved the truths of religion. We now know how matter can be changed and it is no longer difficult for the scientific mind to understand how the Virgin may be taken physically into Heaven.”^{xxxvii} Meredith Etherington-Smith claims Dalí’s version of the Assumption—in works from this period such as the “Anti-Protonic Assumption” (1956) and “Assumpta Corpuscularia Lapislazulana” (1952)—“represented the culminating point of Nietzsche’s feminine will to power, the superwoman who ascends to heaven by the virile strength of her own antiprotons.”^{xxxviii}

A return to classicism

James Thrall Soby points to an artistic shift that occurred simultaneously with his dialogues with science, a move that “summarized in extreme degree the artist’s intention TO BECOME CLASSIC (Soby’s emphasis), as the foreword to his 1941 exhibit proclaimed in bold type, to paint pictures ‘uniquely consecrated to the architecture of the Renaissance and to the Special

Sciences.^{”xxxix} This attention to painting *well* led to his dialogue with the giants of Renaissance painting as partners whose work as well as their unique claims to truth influenced the way he viewed art and truth.^{xl} This is quite evident in the careful way Dalí paints the shoulders, arms, and torso of the Christ who floats against the cross as though attached to it only by his own will and intention, rather than by a dictator’s hammer and nails.



Among Dalí’s most controversial paintings in this period was “The Sacrament of the Last Supper” (1955.) Theologian Paul Tillich considered the work “junk” and deplored the depiction of Jesus as “A sentimental but very good athlete on an American baseball team....I am horrified by it!”^{”xli} Chester Dale, a banker and art collector, takes credit for inspiring the masterwork, if not directly commissioning it, challenging Dalí to “match the work of the Renaissance master Tintoretto.”^{”xlii}

The painting’s classical focus can be found in the attention to detail that can be seen readily throughout the composition. The architecture of the room is based upon the classical vision of Plato’s dodecahedron, which the philosopher claimed to embody the universe.^{xlili} In this painting, he pays tribute to theological tradition and classical art, yet allows it to engage in dialogue with his own unique intellectual and spiritual imagination so that the result emerges from the dialogue itself.

Paul Myhre and Michael Novak both identify the Eucharistic character of the painting as an answer to many of the theological critics who have reviled it. Novak claims, “Dalí gives us the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.”^{”xliv} The classical rendering of the disciples is countered by a semi-transparent figure of Christ at the center of the scene. Likewise, the transparent torso of God floats above the scene, connecting the event at the table with God’s presence in heaven. The construction of Dalí’s scene draws the eye of the viewer to the central figure—Christ—whose gestures point, first to himself with one hand and simultaneously upward to God, perhaps a reference to John 14:8-9^{xlv} Novak concludes his discussion,

Dalí’s intention is to make visible what occurs in every celebration of the Mass: that worship on earth makes present the realities of worship in heaven. The real presence of Christ means the real presence of the Father. The community drawn together in recognition of this miracle—the church—reveals the real presence of the Holy Spirit. Where the Trinity is, heaven is: unseen with our eyes, but sensed and recognized in our prayer.^{xlvi}

Myhre points to Dalí's "artistic" and religious imagination that sought to connect with an experience of divine truth while challenging his viewers to consider questions of spirituality and human existence in a nuclear and post-Holocaust age.^{xlvi} Myhre claims painting was for Dalí a "sacramental action" that served as an "access point to nuclear mystical truth" and a means of grace.^{xlvi} Myhre continues:

The resurrection of Christ, the assumption of the Virgin Mary, the transformation of bread into the body of Christ began to become more real to him as he reflected on the fundamental building blocks of creation. Real presence could now be something more than a dogmatic assertion, doctrinal declaration, or assent of faith. For Dalí, the emergence of a mystical essence evoked ideas of an ever present God intimately linked with all molecules and thereby able to be accessed through materials like paint and visual images.^{xlvi}

The sole difference between a madman and me is that I am not mad.ⁱ

Dalí's art was always intended to provoke and to challenge. He and his wife, Gala, carefully constructed a public persona that emphasized a bizarre and often blasphemous lifestyle. His religiously-themed masterworks were no exception to that intention.

At the same time, it is clear that Dalí also engaged in a kind of dialogue that transformed his own view of the world and of the truth of tradition. In the final decades of his work, Dalí entered into a multifaceted dialogue that truly honored traditional doctrinal claims and scientific breakthroughs as *others* whose voices he felt compelled to honor. What resulted from this commitment is what results from a "practical theology of the arts" whenever it is employed: in a truly *intersubjective* dialogue some *new* claim to truth emerges from the process. Dalí's art work changed dramatically as a result of his dialogue with the multiple partners of his intellectual journey; but it is also true that Dalí *himself* was transformed—as an artist and as a person. His commitment to dialogue and his willingness to listen to the voices of numerous *others* allowed his fertile imagination to push the understanding of art as well as science and theology in such a way that anyone "with eyes to see" could not help but see the world and its God more clearly—and, with Dalí, much *differently* than it could without his unique artistic and spiritual voice.

ⁱ Ruth Illman and W. Alan Smith. 2013. *Theology and the Arts: Engaging Faith*. New York. Routledge. There are seven key themes identified as characteristic of a "practical theology of the arts": embodiment, regarding the "face" of the other, acknowledging the voices of ones who have been silenced historically, the central role of dialogue, attention to the "practice" of theology rather than to its abstract conception, the process of "clearing a space where the community of truth can be practiced," and a commitment to transformation rather than formation.

ⁱⁱ Edward Farley. 1983. "Theology and Practice outside the Clerical Paradigm." In Ed. Don Browning, *Practical Theology*. San Francisco, Harper & Row, 21-41.

ⁱⁱⁱ Joyce Ann Mercer. 2005. *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood*. St. Louis. Chalice Press, 12.

^{iv} Paul Ballard and John Pritchard. 2006. *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*. London. SPCK, 18.

^v 33.

^{vi} Paul Ballard and Pamela Couture. 2001. "Setting the Scene. In Paul Ballard and Pamela Couture. *Creativity, Imagination and Criticism: The Expressive Dimensions in Practical Theology*. Cardiff, Wales. Cardiff Academic Press. np.

^{vii} Richard Viladesau. 2000. *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art and Rhetoric*. New York. Paulist Press, 180.

^{viii} Richard R. Osmer. 2008. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, Mich. Eerdmans, 22.

^{ix} Jean François Lyotard. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis. University of Minnesota Press, 77.

^x Illman and Smith, 31.

^{xi} Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore. 2001. "Aesthetics, Hermeneutics and Practical Theology." In Ballard and Couture, 21.

^{xii} Illman and Smith, 58-59.

^{xiii} Robert Descharnes and Gilles Nerét. 1998. *Dalí. Salvador Dalí 1904-1989*. London. Taschen. 96.

^{xiv} Patricia Frisch. 2014. "An Alternative Paradigm to the Oppression of Nuclear War: Salvador Dalí's Painting of Christ of St. John of the Cross." *Crosscurrents. March*. 112.

^{xv} *The Dalí Dimension (DVD)*. 2004. Directed by Susi Marquès. Media 3.14. Barcelona. The quote can be found in numerous locations among Dalí sources.)

^{xvi} Salvador Dalí. 1951. *Mystical Manifesto*. Quoted in Matthew Milliner. 2007. "God in the Gallery." *First Things*. <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2007/12/god-in-the-gallery>. 1 (accessed 7/15/2015)

^{xvii} Milliner.

^{xviii} "Salvador Dalí: Liquid Desire." Dalí and Religion. A National Gallery of Victoria (Australia) Education Resource. <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/dali/salvador/religion.html#d=DaliAndReligion&num=01>. 1

^{xix} Paul O. Myhre. 2005. "Painting as Sacrament: A Search for Dalí's Sacramental Imagination." *ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies*. 17:2. 24

^{xx} Dawn Ades. 1982. *Dali and Surrealism*. New York. Harper & Row. 174.

^{xxi} Meredith Etherington-Smith. 1992. *The Persistence of Memory: A Biography of Dalí*. New York. Random House. 330.

^{xxii} Nora Hamerman. 2010. "A New Look at Dalí's 'Sacrament.'" *The Arlington Catholic Herald*. 2.

^{xxiii} Descharnes and Néret, 168-9.

^{xxiv} Robert Radford. 1997. *Dalí*. London. Phaidon Press Ltd. 236.

^{xxv} Ades, 175.

^{xxvi} Radford, 236.

^{xxvii} Myhre, 27.

^{xxviii} 26.

^{xxix} Swinglehurst, 103.

^{xxx} Salvador Dalí. 1964. *Playboy*. July. As quoted in Alan Lindsay Mackay. 1991. *A Dictionary of Scientific Quotations*. Philadelphia. Institute of Physics Publications. 66.

^{xxxi} Ted Gott. 2009. "Salvador Dalí and Science." *Chemistry in Australia. September*. 23.

^{xxxii} Ibid.

^{xxxiii} "Liquid Desire: Discover More." N.p.

^{xxxiv} Descharnes and Néret, 164.

^{xxxv} 173.

^{xxxvi} Radford, 251.

^{xxxvii} Myhre, 28.

^{xxxviii} Etherington-Smith, 332.

^{xxxix} James Thrall Soby, 1968. *Salvador Dalí*. New York. Arno Press. 23.

^{xl} Salvador Dalí. In Ed. G. Barry Golson. 1983. *The Playboy Interview*. 11, 35.

^{xli} Paul Tillich, as quoted by Michael Anthony Novak. 2012. "Misunderstood Masterpiece." *America*. November 5, 2012. 1. <http://americamagazine.org/print/154019>. Accessed 7/15/2015.

^{xlii} Hamerman, 2.

^{xliii} 1.

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- ^{xliv} Novak, 3.
^{xlvi} 2.
^{xlvi} 3.
^{xlvi} Myhre, 24.
^{xlvi} Ibid.
^{xli} 27.
ⁱ Descharnes and Néret, 79



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Ignatian Contemplation in the Classroom: Fostering Imagination in Scripture Study

Abstract: The practice of Ignatian contemplation, a method of praying suggested in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, can ignite the imagination in Scripture study. By involving the bodily senses and emotions, Ignatian contemplation helps one enter and be immersed in a Bible scene. More than just a technique that can lead to an imaginative wrestling with texts, Ignatian contemplation seeks to facilitate an encounter with God. But to integrate Ignatian contemplation in teaching the Bible, one needs a more dynamic understanding of the essence of Scripture, an appreciation of ritual, and an expanded view of Scripture study that, while rooted in historical-critical methods, also goes beyond them.

When the Bible as taught in the classroom becomes nothing more than a valley of dry bones, what can breathe life into it again? The key I present in this essay is imagination.

Paul Ricoeur, writing on the Bible and imagination, asks:

Is not the imagination, by common consent, a faculty of free invention, therefore something not governed by rules, something wild and untamed? What is more, is it not condemned to wandering about the internal spaces of what we conventionally call the mental kingdom, and does it not therefore lack any referential import, being entirely disconnected from what is really real? As for the Bible, is it not a closed book, one whose meaning is fixed forever and therefore the enemy of any radically original creation of meaning? Does it not claim to give rise to an existential and ontological commitment, one hostile to any imaginative drifting from here to there?¹

In answer to these questions, Ricoeur defines imagination first “as a rule-governed form of invention or, in other terms, as a norm-governed productivity” and secondly “as the power of redescribing reality.”² As for the Bible, Ricoeur asserts that reading is “a dynamic activity that is not confined to repeating significations fixed forever,” and that reading a text such as Scripture involves “a creative operation unceasingly employed in decontextualizing its meaning and recontextualizing it in today’s *Sitz-im-Leben*.”³

¹Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 144.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 145.

In the next pages, I present Ignatian contemplation as a way of praying with our imagination that, far from just fantasizing, is a norm-governed productivity, an engagement with Scripture that redescribes reality, and a dynamic activity that enables the Bible to speak to us today. I first describe how Jesuit novices are prepared for and then guided through the experience of contemplation during the thirty-day retreat structured by St. Ignatius of Loyola. I then propose a way to incorporate elements of this process into classroom teaching.

Contemplation in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius

Contrasted with more discursive styles of reflection that mainly involve thinking through things, contemplation – as it is practiced in the *Spiritual Exercises* (SpEx) of Ignatius of Loyola – is more imaginative and leads the pray-er to immerse himself or herself in a scene from the Bible. As a method, contemplation consists in entering faith memories recorded in Scripture in such a way as to experience oneself as present in biblical episodes. God, Jesus, and other characters are met as real persons “face to face.” How can using the imagination in this way already be considered prayer and not just an exercise of fantasy? As Richard Kearney has written, imagination “encounters limits to its own free play when confronted with the irreducible otherness of the other.”⁴ Essential to an imaginative contemplation of Scripture is the belief that the Bible is the Word of God. Imagination is still answerable and responsible to the other; in Ignatian contemplation, this other is God. In contemplating Scripture, a believer in honest search of the Divine encounters God who continues to reach out to us today in our lives, drawing us into union with Godself, and sharing God’s vision and desires for the world with us.⁵

How are Jesuit novices prepared for and guided through the *Spiritual Exercises*?

Remote Preparation

Preparation for a thirty-day retreat includes workshops on the what, why, and how of prayer. But aside from these, there are also modules on the historical-critical aspects of the Bible, revelation, Christology, and other branches of theology. For Ignatius, intellectual reflection and rational thinking are not foreign to spiritual experience. Official Catholic teaching also promotes the use of historical-critical methods in reading and praying with Scripture. Scripture is God’s words through human words, and so we must study these human words with all our human faculties.

Filipino biblical scholar and auxiliary bishop Pablo David, in a course on the role of imagination in biblical interpretation, couches imaginative reading in terms of interpolative reading: Interpolation is “connecting the dots” and finding upward, downward, or sideward trends. But before you can connect the dots, the dots must first be found and taken seriously.⁶ These “dots,” in Ricoeur’s terms, are the norms or rules that govern the imagination. Historical-critical methods help us see more clearly some of the dots in the text. These dots can also serve

⁴Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination* (New Jersey: Humanity Books, 1995), 101.

⁵Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary; A Handbook for Retreat Directors*, Iñigo Texts Series, vol. 4 (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 90.

⁶Minerva Generalao, “Viewing Last Supper Through Imagination,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 2, 2015, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/682948/viewing-last-supper-through-imagination> (accessed April 20, 2015).

to make our imagination more vivid. For example, archaeological studies of the Jerusalem temple can give us a better picture of Jesus turning over the tables of the money changers and driving out those selling animals for sacrifice. But historical-critical dots are not the only dots we need to connect. As Scripture scholar Luke Timothy Johnson urges, we cannot just be preoccupied with the world that produced the Bible. We must enter the world that the Bible produces.⁷ And this world that Scripture invites us to enter includes us.

Part of the remote preparation for the SpEx are psycho-spiritual sessions to help the novices process possible issues involving family and relationships, sexuality, and personal vocation. We cannot deny that a reader's context and preconceptions affect his or her interpretation. The subjective element in reading anything cannot be taken away – nor should we try to, especially in reading Scripture. But we must always seek to be more humbly aware of where we are coming from and what our assumptions may be. Many times, too, it is precisely in the act of wrestling with a text that these assumptions come to light. Psycho-spiritual realities are part of the dots which govern our imagination, dots which we need to connect.

Immediate Preparation

During the thirty-day retreat, each Jesuit novice is assigned a spiritual director who lays out prayer points and Scriptural texts he should consider. Once the Bible texts are given, the novice is expected to familiarize himself with the passage. The texts themselves and their actual contents should be the first “dots” or “rules” that must be considered by the imagination.

Ignatius also suggests that retreatants, immediately before prayer, mark the beginning of the session with a mental act and bodily ritual: “A step or two before the place where I have to contemplate or meditate, I will stand for the space of an Our Father and, with my mind raised up, consider how God our Lord is looking at me... I will then make a genuflection or some other act of humility” (SpEx 75).

The Experience of Contemplation

Ignatian contemplation begins with a “composition of place.” An example from the contemplation of the Nativity of Christ: “Here this will be to see with the eyes of the imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, considering the length and the breadth of it, whether it is a flat road or goes through valleys or over hills...” (SpEx 112). In other contemplations, aside from seeing the persons (SpEx 106), Ignatius encourages the retreatant to listen to what the characters in the episode are saying and how they talk (SpEx 107), and to be immersed in the scene by imagining the smells and tastes (SpEx 124) and what sensations may be brought to touch (SpEx 125). One of the purposes of imagining what the body may sense is to stir up the emotions. In Ignatian contemplation, the pray-er must use not only his or her understanding but must also wrestle with emotions, “inner feeling,” and “affections” (SpEx 2-3). For example, in contemplating Jesus' prayer and agony after the Last Supper, after composing the place and seeing with the eyes of the imagination Jesus sweating blood (Luke 22:39-44), the exercitant is directed to ask for the grace of “grief with Christ in grief, to be broken with Christ broken, for tears and interior suffering on account of the great suffering that Christ endured for me” (SpEx 203).

⁷Luke Timothy Johnson, “Imagining the World Scripture Imagines,” *Modern Theology* 14, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 165.

Neuroscience has shown that by imagining bodily expressions of emotions (e.g., facial expressions, posture, and vocal intonations – and even sweating blood), we are able to comprehend the emotions of others. These emotions do not remain in the abstract but are also embodied or felt in the body of the one imagining. These embodied emotions then produce emotional states. In other words, by imagining the physical signs of the emotions of others, our bodies are able to feel what they are feeling, and we come closer to empathizing with others. Moreover, these emotions mediate cognitive responses involved in recognition or identification, evaluation, and memory.⁸ The body has a way of “knowing,” and emotions, too, are a way of “knowing” which affects what the mind comes to know.

Physical senses and feelings are effective ways to trigger the imaginative process, but they also serve a greater purpose. Knowing through our bodies and knowing through our emotions (two ways of knowing which cannot easily or clearly be separated and even distinguished) are not supposed to end only in the acquisition of new thoughts and ideas or sentimentalism. The point of these bodily and emotional preludes is to facilitate an encounter with God.

Philip Sheldrake shares the contemplation experience of one retreatant:⁹

She was contemplating the incident of Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-33)... [A]s she had sailed when she was younger... [s]he was familiar with the frustration and fear of fighting against a strong wind and current. This helped her to “get inside” the scene. (Here we see how bodily memories can help the imagination.) Jesus was there, and she, like Peter, had a strong desire to join him on the water. However, she also felt unable to get out of the boat. Though she tried, she could not imagine herself stepping out of the boat and so the prayer, according to her, “went wrong at that point.” Why did she feel that the contemplation had broken down? Up until then, she could identify with the actual events in the Gospel, but when she could not get out of the boat, the story took an unexpected turn. She said to Jesus, “I cannot get out of this boat.” She felt Jesus asking her why, and she had to admit that I was scared, “I can sail, but I can’t swim very well.” She then felt that Jesus was asking her whether she thought that he would make her do something beyond her capacity. Her answer: “Yes, you would... you often have.” This experience led the person to spend the remainder of the prayer sitting and talking to Christ about the fact that she did not really trust him because she did not know him well enough.

It would help us to understand contemplation better by noting a few observations. Sheldrake points out that retreatant was not just a spectator in the story; she was fully involved. Though she identified with Peter, the experience was not just a retelling of Peter’s story but an unfolding of her own, which included her present context and all of her concerns – conscious and unconscious. While bodily sensations were strong in the beginning, they gradually faded. These can help one enter into contemplation, but they are not the point of the prayer. These are also only one aspect of the imagination. The retreatant did not just hear Jesus speaking to her. She

⁸See Paula M. Niedenthal, Lawrence W. Barsalou, François Ric, and Silvia Krauth-Gruber, “Embodiment in the Acquisition and Use of Emotion Knowledge,” in *Emotion and Consciousness*, ed. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Paula M. Niedenthal, and Piotr Winkielman (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 21-44.

⁹Philip Sheldrake, “Imagination and Prayer,” *The Way* 24, no. 2 (April 1984), 92.

“felt” Jesus asking her things and conversing with her. This is the purpose of imaginative contemplation: an encounter with the Lord that engages our deepest realities.¹⁰

Sheldrake asks if the prayer went wrong because it did not follow the text of the Gospel. The experience was still set in the general parameters of the passage, but from the “dots” and “rules” of the text, there was a shift to more relevant “dots” and “rules” – the retreatant’s most pressing needs, which she may also not have been aware of or at least not been able to articulate until that time. Sheldrake writes, “Imaginative contemplation, when it works, takes on a life of its own – and [this] life is that of the person praying.”¹¹ Returning to Kearney’s thoughts on imagination, the irreducible and undeniable other that we encounter in contemplation is also ourselves and our experiences of the world.

Processing the Experience

“After finishing the exercise, I will either sit down or walk around for a quarter of an hour while I see how things have gone for me during the contemplation...” (SpEx 77). This is when the exercitant can do some journaling about the contemplation experience and interpret it. This “review of prayer” is a transitional space of processing which would have been inappropriate during the prayer itself.¹² During prayer, the exercitant should try to lose himself or herself in the experience and not yet be concerned about its meaning or interpretation, which is essential to the experience but which must be dealt with only subsequently.

Interpretation post-prayer is also a work of the imagination. Interpretation is a way of seeing things that seeks to grasp them and make meaning out of them. And making meanings is one step towards what Ricoeur speaks of as redescribing reality. For example, a tragic accident involving the loss of limbs and mobility can be interpreted as the end of someone’s life. But later on, that same person can interpret his or her loss as the impetus to discovering new things about himself or herself and the beginning a new life. The undeniable fact of the accident is given new meaning, and with this new meaning, reality is redescribed.

There are good and there are better interpretations. For better interpretations, we must be open to interpretations and input coming from others. The retreat director, in this case, must clarify Christian tradition and help the retreatant discern the meaning of his prayer experience.

Part of the processing of the entire thirty-day retreat are multiple sessions at the end of the *Exercises* for the novices to share their most important contemplations or those that they still have to figure out. These become opportunities for the Jesuits to hear other interpretations of similar experiences and to challenge or further deepen their own.

How can we integrate Ignatian contemplation in classroom teaching?

What may have been unexpected in the preparation for the *Exercises* – the turn to historical-critical methods – is, of course, very much expected in and should be the bulk of the classroom experience of Scripture study. What I propose to include in classroom teaching are the elements of imaginative prayer, encounter, and ritual.

¹⁰Ibid., 92-93.

¹¹Ibid., 93.

¹²Ivens, 68.

Before each class, students should be assigned a passage (the shorter the better) that will be discussed during that session. They are then expected to familiarize themselves with it and its context and perhaps read one commentary about it. At the start of each meeting, the teacher can begin with a simple ritual similar to what Ignatius suggests above to briefly consider God looking at the class. It can be as simple as the teacher saying, “Let us open our Bibles and prepare to listen to God,” and then pausing for a few moments with heads bowed. This ritual already begins and emphasizes the encounter.

A student can then be asked to read the passage slowly. If, for example, the class is on the passion of Jesus, the passage can be John 18:15-18, the first time Peter denies Jesus. After a few moments of silence, the teacher can ask the students to focus on one part of the passage that is open to bodily sensations. It would be good if this part of the passage can be connected to an important point in the discussion that day. The teacher can ask the students to engage their bodily senses as they put themselves in the scene. In our sample passage, this can be the charcoal fire that Peter stood close to in order to warm himself. Let this detail be the entry point to the contemplation. The students can then be asked to imagine themselves in the scene. After a few minutes, the teacher can end the short contemplation by asking the students, “What feelings have been aroused in you during this short prayer experience?” An important question follow-up question is, “What do you think God is communicating to you through these feelings and through what you just imagined?”

“What do you feel?” is a question rarely asked in the academic study of Scripture, and this may be a reason for dryness in reading the Bible. Adam Zeman, a cognitive neurologist from the University of Exeter Medical School, used state-of-the-art functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) technology to map the way the brain responds to poetry and prose. He scanned and compared the brains of volunteers while they read two types of material: literal prose such as an extract from a heating installation manual, and more poetic writings such as evocative passages from novels and sonnets. He found that more emotionally charged texts aroused areas on the right side of the brain which had previously been shown to give rise to the sensation of having “shivers down the spine.” This reaction was also seen in volunteers listening and being moved emotionally by music.¹³

If poetry and music are processed in what is usually the non-dominant right side of the brain, while materials like heating insulation manuals are processed by the dominant and analytical left side,¹⁴ does this mean that dryness in reading biblical texts comes from analyzing them too much and depending on just the left side of our brains? How can we go beyond treating Scripture like a heating insulation manual? An attention to emotions may help us involve the right side of the brain. We must remind ourselves again though that the point here is not just to be moved to feel but to dispose ourselves more to an encounter.

After their individual experiences of contemplation, the students can be asked to share in small groups what happened in their prayer. Sharing not only gives students the opportunity to vocalize and understand for themselves their experiences but also to learn from others.

¹³Rick Nauert, “Poetry: Music to the Mind,” PsychCentral, October 10, 2013, <http://psychcentral.com/news/2013/10/10/poetry-music-to-the-mind/60555.html> (accessed March 15, 2015).

¹⁴See Solomon Snyder, “Seeking God in the Brain – Efforts to Localize Higher Brain Function,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 358, no. 1 (January 2008): 6-7.

As the class proceeds, the teacher, in his or her lecture, must give space for themes that come up in the students' prayers. Ignatian contemplation cannot just be an added activity but must affect the way the class is taught and what is discussed. Allowing space for what happened in prayer to enter class discussion emphasizes how Scripture is able to address our lives today.

To integrate Ignatian contemplation in the classroom is to raise Scripture study to a communal practice. Social theorist Pierre Bourdieu invokes the notion of *habitus* in making sense of the power of communal practices. *Habitus* is a system of “durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.”¹⁵ *Habitus* is internalized as “second nature,” functions as “accumulated capital,” and is akin to a “practical sense,” know-how, and an acquired and embodied rhythm.¹⁶ Scripture study should not just be about dispensing information but inculcating a *habitus* of encountering God in praying with the Bible and encountering God in the prayer of others.

There is a trend in Scripture study that has sometimes led to an “over-historicization” of the Bible: finding the original text, the original context, and the original intention of the author. In this obsession with “originals” what is many times left out is a consideration of the original way of engaging Scripture. If we take the general lack of literacy and the great expense of producing texts into account, it is very easy to imagine communities gathered together around one manuscript being read out loud by one member. There are many clues in Scripture that tell us these texts were read in worship (open the Psalter and this becomes clear) – in prayer settings. Scripture was originally experienced in communal prayer. Perhaps it is time to retrieve this type of communal practice in the study of the Bible.

[Note: Space constraints have not allowed me to go more deeply into areas which will hopefully be discussed in my presentation: What are the advantages and disadvantages of Ignatian contemplation? What is needed from the students to integrate Ignatian contemplation in the classroom? How will the teacher's role change when Ignatian contemplation is practiced in class? What are the underlying assumptions about Scripture in Ignatian contemplation?]

¹⁵Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 56, 66.

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Children and Imagination: Envisioning and creating change together

Abstract

Imagination is a divine gift that helps persons enter into a relationship with the Holy and participate in the creative process of transforming the world. This paper presents data collected from an extensive qualitative research study with children that reveals imagination as a tool children use to engage, recognize, claim, and respond to God's presence in their lives. Suggestions are made for a pedagogy that encourages the use of imagination in order to develop creative and critical thinking, self-discovery, and awareness of others. This opens a space for compassion and understanding inviting children to engage in the world around them with empathy and creativity as they seek to be voices that connect, disrupt, and transform.

Introduction

Imagination is a divine gift that helps persons enter into relationship with the Holy and participate in the creative process of transforming the world. As we seek to envision, articulate, and promote lifelong religious learning, it is essential that we begin by pausing our forward thinking, taking a step back, and reminding ourselves of how persons make meaning. We must remember how people learn and discern how to show up in and respond to the world around them. When we take time to review our theological assumptions, developmental theory, and effective religious pedagogical methods, we are reminded of fundamental truths that impact the creative process that leads to discovering possible solutions for modern day issues.

A qualitative research study with 28 children reveals imagination as a tool children use to engage, recognize, claim, and respond to God's presence in their lives. When this tool is modeled for and encouraged in children, and when the children are invited to practice using their imagination, new possibilities emerge. The process of imagining equips children for their work in the world as they question the status quo and seek to discover faithful ways to participate in all that God is doing in and through them and others for the transformation of the world.

A call to listen to children

Childhood has been understood differently throughout history. In North America, these views of childhood often made their way into theological discourse, religious education, and many other facets of the church, influencing how faith communities view, interact with, and teach children. Whether viewed as asset or burden, depraved or innocent, spiritual or unable to claim God's presence, these ambivalent views of children continue to influence modern theological assumptions of children and cause many to underestimate the value of the child's presence in the faith community. Current anthropological and theological conversations often present adulthood as the normative understanding of humanity, placing children as other. It is as

adults that persons are perceived and welcomed as full participants in the life of the faith community and, therefore, God's transformative work. This normative theological framework presents a negative and oppressive narrative that does not value children or their experiences. It overlooks the creative possibilities that come from within the youngest members of God's good creation. When religious communities do not pay attention to God at work in children they silence children, ignore their creative potential, and prohibit them from participating fully in creation. This minimizes their ability to connect, disrupt, and transform the world.

Religious educators must shift their perspective. In order to move forward, we must not ignore God's active presence in the lives of all people, nor shall we look past the gifts God's given children for this Holy work. The expectation should not be "that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a mature age; but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed."¹ As Karl Rahner argued, children are partners with God and are aware of the divine transcendence. God is with every person throughout the "individual phases of human life."² God, through prevenient grace, goes before creation inviting each person to participate in the creative process of transformation through imagination, wonder, and play.

This theological truth calls religious educators to pay attention to God at work in the lives of the youngest members of their community, to honor their presence and gifts, nurture their spirituality, and guide all children as they seek to live in relationship with God and neighbor. As we seek to reimagine the world around us, discerning a new vision- a radical hospitality is needed. Religious education must move beyond welcoming and caring for children creating an environment that honors the divine within every person. A faithful pedagogy will seek to discover with and learn from the youngest members of the faith community. This requires active listening, wondering, creating, and discovering together.

Qualitative Research Study: Experiencing God together

Responding to this call to listen to children, a space was created in which children could wonder and share together. During this extensive qualitative research project, twenty-eight children demonstrated how they make meaning and respond to God's presence in their lives. The children demonstrated how they engage their imagination as they connect with the Holy and envision a better world. Their work revealed eight tools they use to engage their imagination as they recognize, claim, and respond to God's active presence.

Method

Through this research project entitled *Experiencing God*, I observed and actively listened to children. I collected and coded that data as I attempted to interpret and make sense of the meanings within each child's narrative. Five qualitative research methods were used in this

¹ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (Wipf & Stock Pub, 2000), Kindle E-Book, Part I:1. What Christian Nurture Is.

² Karl Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood." In *Theological Investigations: Further Theology of the Spiritual Life*, VIII (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 33.

project. These methods include grounded theory, researcher as participant, participatory action research, and individual interviews within group context. During the project, the final and potentially most useful method in engaging children's imagination was revealed- active wondering. The method used to create a safe space and engage children in active wondering was built on Jerome Berryman's *Godly Play* curriculum and liturgy alongside other Montessori-based religious education methods.³ The ontological approach of this project took a deep look into the child's reality. Active listening and wondering helped create a space for children to share their stories as they demonstrated how they experience God.

This project reflects nine months of intentional work. Twenty eight children (ages 5-12) gathered every week for seven weeks at two different site locations to participate in this program. While both sites were United Methodist Churches, the first site was a downtown urban congregation. The program took place during the Sunday school hour with children who have experience with the Christian faith tradition. The other site took place during a neighborhood United Methodist after-school program. These 16 children came from a diverse faith background, and only one child was a member of the United Methodist church. Over all, the children reflected a diverse community in faith, race, and economic status.

Findings

The data gathered from these twenty-eight children demonstrates how children use their imagination to engage with God and others. Paying attention to children offers "an understanding of how children develop" and "helps us know better how to relate to them and what to provide for them."⁴ Coding the data from both sites revealed eight reoccurring categories- story, awareness of God, awareness of others, wonder, location, liturgy, work, and objects. These categories reveal eight tools for children as they begin to engage, recognize, claim, and respond to God.

Taking these eight tools and rearranging them into specific groups helps bring order to the categories:

Story and liturgy are brought together demonstrating how religious language helps children in their meaning-making experience. Story provides an entryway into imagination and discovery. Through the words and/or the text, children *engage* in the meaning-making process.

"Good liturgy engages our imaginations to a point where the question of God and how we stand before [the Holy] become inescapable... liturgical gestures... heal, mobilize and ultimately lead us deeper into the inexpressible mystery of our faith and our hope."⁵

³ Jerome Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991), 7-8.

⁴ Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 44.

⁵ Richard Cote, *Lazarus! Come Out!: Why Faith Needs Imagination* (Canada: Novalis Press, 2003), 43.

The children shared that they often experienced God in the story. They felt off-balance when a piece of the liturgy was forgotten or skipped. Body postures revealed every child's focus as they listened and responded to the story, took care as they handled the stories, actively participated in the liturgical actions, and showed concern when space for reflection, silence, and stillness was not given. When children are invited into a story alongside stillness and moments of silence, the imagination has space to breathe, live, and move. They yearned for a space where they can actively participate and reflect on the information presented. When the story is told in an engaging way, children stop and pay attention. "Story is one of the most powerful ways we pattern our world and discover its meaningfulness."⁶ As children experience the story and hear the words of their faith, they engage with God and with each other- making meaning out of what they see and hear. It was with a listening heart and a highly creative imagination that the children were able to engage with and capture the spirit of the text.⁷

Awareness of God, Self, and others reflects the children's ability to make meaning in response to their relationships and experiences as they *recognize* God's active presence in their lives and the lives of others. Through the children's interactions their "awareness of being in relationship with something or someone else" became clear.⁸ Their relational awareness offers a lens through which the children experience the words presented in the story and the liturgy. The story and liturgy do not simply reflect something that happened at a specific place or time to some unknown character. Children recognize their place within God's creation and hear how the story provides information about themselves, about others, and about God. This realization creates a space for children to make deep connections and meanings in response to the text presented, because the story says something about them, about God, and about others.

Object and location offer ways for children to *claim* and share their experiences remembering the information they collected through this essential process. Over time the children began to share their experiences, of God describing how they "'see' a reflection of God in the 'everyday' sights and sounds of their otherwise quite ordinary" week.⁹ When the children shared their stories they always included location and an object in their narrative as a way of marking their experience. For example, one child shared: "I experienced God on the swing [object] at my grandparents farm [location]." It became clear that these memory markers help children take a mental photograph of their experience. These memory markers (or stampers as the children described them) help children claim and remember God's presence in their lives. They provide

⁶ Sarah Arthur, *The God-Hungry Imagination: The art of storytelling for postmodern youth ministry* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2007), 65.

⁷ Cote, 48.

⁸ David Hay with Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child* Revised Edition (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), 109.

⁹ Cote, 31.

tangible evidence for children that God exists. The objects then become symbols for the children when they engage their imagination and experience “a spiritual power that is released from within” the object or location.¹⁰ The swing no longer remains a piece of wood that a child sits on, but it becomes a tangible reminder of the joy the child felt when she was swinging and how she felt God in and through that everyday experience. The swing is now a symbol that points to the Holy.

Wonder and work offer the tools for children to *respond* to all they experience finding ways to articulate what they are learning, discovering, and the meaning they are making in response to this process. “What the imagination does, and does very well, is make us creatively forge ahead into the future, knowing, as we do, that there is no road or path in front of us, especially in a desert wilderness.”¹¹ Through their wondering and work (which included a response time using a diverse array of tools such as blocks, wipe-off boards, pipe cleaners, beads, clay, water colors, markers, the story itself, and many more options) the children demonstrated how their imagination comes alive as they wonder together and then take time to reflect and process all they are experiencing. “Imagination allows us to “see” beyond what actually meets the eye,” inviting persons to create new possibilities in response to their reality.¹² During several sessions, one of the children described what the world looks like when “God is reaching out and offering everyone a hug.” Through their work the children imagined what it looks like for them to help someone on the side of the road, discovered ways to help their friend raise money to help a church rebuild after a fire, and created ways to support each other when someone was having a hard day. In this space children used their imagination to respond to the world with empathy and care.

Using these eight tools, the 28 children in this study demonstrated how engage, recognize, claim, and respond to God’s active presence in their lives. Imagination moves in and through this entire process. It is the thread that allows children to consider the possibilities, make meaning, and discover faithful ways of participating in the world.

A Faithful Pedagogy

Creating a space for children to use their imagination

“Imagination is the essential means, humanly speaking, by which faith becomes possible.”¹³ Through story, liturgy, relationships, objects, locations, wonder, and work, the children in this study imagined and created their own reality and worldview in response to their

¹⁰ Ibid, 39.

¹¹ Ibid, 11.

¹² Ibid, 83.

¹³ Ibid, 92.

own experiences. This is their way of “finding meaning- or faith... through relationships, their own actions and observance of the actions of others, and a strong dash of imagination.”¹⁴ The early years of childhood (roughly ages 3-7) offer the greatest opportunity to model and practice this crucial tool.¹⁵ During this time, children need to observe and practice using their imaginations in a way that helps them develop a healthy understanding of the world around them while imagining what could be created in response to their reality. Imagination “is one of the primary ways we learn... [it is] the doorway to wonder, prompting questions that lead to such things as philosophy, scientific inquiry, and poetry.”¹⁶ It is when imagination is modeled and practiced that children develop the ability to respond to the reality of racism, poverty, and injustice through creative and faithful action. It is through an active and healthy imagination that people learn how to problem solve and discover creative solutions for modern day problems.

Imagination must be cultivated in our children through a faithful pedagogy that listens to the children, respects their stories, and encourages them in their work. Religious educators should not seek to “deposit doctrine” into the minds of children, but instead should seek to explore with the children “God’s unpredictable way of loving us in today’s world.”¹⁷ The work becomes less of memorizing and moves more towards experiencing, wondering, feeling, sharing, learning, and knowing. Effective religious pedagogical models must model and promote empathy and creativity through the following actions:

- Create a safe space where children are respected, invited to wonder, and supported as they share their thoughts. “To step across the threshold of the classroom is to enter a ‘place of imagining.’”¹⁸ In this space leaders must not seek to provide the “right” answer but instead work to nurture the child’s ability to problem solve, think critically and imagine. “A different language is spoken here. Relationships are attended to in a careful and caring way to promote both the learning and use of that language to know God.”¹⁹ This might mean providing the child with more information, or inviting the child to consider a different possibility. Imaginative and creative work should be modeled and practiced without judgement or shame.

¹⁴ Dorothy Jean Furnish, "Rethinking Children's Ministry" in *Rethinking Christian Education: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, edited by David S. Schuller (Missouri: Chalice Press, 1993), 76.

¹⁵ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1981), 133.

¹⁶ Arthur, 47.

¹⁷ Cote, 160.

¹⁸ Berryman, 88.

¹⁹ Ibid.

- Include opportunities to engage the faith through story and liturgy. Religious Educators must ask: how are the stories and the liturgy of our faith being shared and experienced? What liturgy do we use that invites persons of all ages to participate fully?
- Nurture relational awareness: Work to build relationships with the children and with God. Help children see the larger community- their neighborhood, city, state, nation, and the world. Invite them to imagine what living in different places might feel like. Encourage them to consider ways they might connect, disrupt, and transform the world around them.
- Work to help children claim their experiences- identifying locations and objects that help children remember and retell their story. Again, this is done through modeling and practicing as both adult and children share their experiences.
- Invite and encourage children to wonder together as they imagine how they might respond to all they have seen and experienced.

Concluding thoughts

Children will participate in the creative process of connecting, disrupting, and transforming when they are invited, encouraged, supported, guided, and affirmed. With faithful guidance and encouragement children will step into this role and will participate in the work that God calls each of us to do. We must pay attention to God at work in and through people of all ages. Building a religious education model that uses story, liturgy, relational awareness, objects, locations, wonder, and work, opens a space for compassion and understanding and invites children to engage in the world around them with empathy and creativity as they seek to be voices that connect, disrupt, and transform. Religious education must nurture these values, guiding persons as they connect with the world around them, helping them recognize places and ideologies that need to be challenged, and encouraging them as they envision alternatives, disrupt status quo, and work to transform the culture. “Imagination not only builds bridges, it gives us the courage to cross them as well and thus to embrace what we hitherto believed was unthinkable.”²⁰ Faithful pedagogies must nurture the imagination, so that persons will continue to live in faithful relationship with each other and with God- participating together in the creative process of transforming the world.

²⁰ Cote, 101.

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers how children are imaginative and full of wonder and how these qualities are foundational in developing their religious imaginations when teaching children how to pray. This paper explores how children can be taught that imagining the possibilities life holds can help them construct and reconstruct a sense of the meaningfulness of their lives and the world they live in. The author looks at how parents and religious educators can invite children to engage their imaginations and form a religious imaginations leading them to becoming more ontologically whole.

CHILDREN, PRAYER, IMAGINATION AND ONTOLOGICAL WHOLENESS

This paper explores the interplay between children, prayer and the imagination by discussing the nurturing of the creative imagination, spiritual sensitivity, and the religious imagination. The paper concludes by considering how teaching children to pray and helping them develop an active spirituality can enable them to develop a greater sense of ontological wholeness, that is a greater sense of themselves as being made in the image and called to grow in the likeness of God.

The God of Christian prayer is an involved God, a social God. Involvement and society are among the essential marks of Christian prayer because this prayer is actually a participation in God. God is involved with humanity, and so prayer is an involvement in humanity. God is social and not isolated, and so prayer is a social, not an isolated, activity. The quest for union with God and the quest for the unity of mankind is one quest.¹

¹ Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1990), 8.

In questing for union with God people pray; and through prayer, they can encounter a living God.² Hence, prayer is the motion that is between God and humanity; it is a rhythm of meeting and reply.³ In this meeting with God, Christians come to understand that nothing is private, especially prayer. (The word “private” is derived from the Latin *privatio* which means robbery.). True prayer finds its meaning within a social context. The social meaning of prayer is expressed in the symbol of the Trinity, which represents a relational God who is social and communal.⁴ When God created humanity in God’s image, God intended for people to live in relationship with each other. As God is best realized as the Holy Trinity, three distinct persons in one, God is a God of relationship.⁵ Through prayer, the human experience of knowing God and being in community establishes a cooperative relationship with God, where adults, youths and children of good will live and work harmoniously together as equals.⁶

The Creative Imagination

Imagination, Jerome Berryman suggests, is what happens when action becomes a creative process.⁷ Berryman contends that imagination is the key to unending renewal of life: “Enter the existential game with imagination, wonder, and laughter if you want to become new without end.”⁸ One might go further and say that imagination in action is life itself. Imagination provides necessary and vital energy; it provides life; it makes life possible. Berryman uses the amoeba adapting to life as an example of the imagination at work as well as of how the human body functions at its own cellular level “and in our own intrapsychic, interpsychic, and spiritual dimensions.”⁹ Additionally, “the ambiguity of the imagination is at the root of our being.”¹⁰ Berryman explains: “The fundamental ambiguity of the imagination is expressed most profoundly in its humble and yet grand use in the world of everyday.”¹¹ Consider how life can be a paradox in that the imagination is a creative process that can image ways of bringing together things that are normally separate from one another or even contradictory.¹² Berryman adds: “The Incarnation focuses the fullest expression of the ambiguity of the imagination. The story of one who was completely God and completely human made the intensity of this ambiguity available to us. Even as creatures of space and time we can enter deeply into the image and life of Christ.”¹³ This paradox can be resolved by acknowledging that the creative life-giving image of God is embodied in and through life. God, having created Adam and Eve in God’s likeness, provided the foundation and destiny of humanity. In the words of the fourteenth

² Ibid., 8.

³ Ibid., 8.

⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵ John Westerhoff III, *Living the Faith Community: The Church That Makes a Difference* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1985), 13.

⁶ Leech, *True Prayer*, 24.

⁷ Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education* (New York: Harper San Francisco Publishing Company, 1991) 133.

⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁰ Ibid., 135.

¹¹ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 133.

¹² Ibid., 135.

¹³ Ibid., 131.

century mystic Julian of Norwich: “Greatly ought we to rejoice that God dwells in our soul; and more greatly ought we to rejoice that our soul dwells in God.”¹⁴

Karl Rahner’s *Theology of Worship* considers the human body as the symbol of the soul, and each individual as an embodied spirit.¹⁵ Rahner’s theology supports the indwelling of God in each person as “Spirit-in-the-World” who is capable of conscious acts of worship, and as finite creatures humans are able to embrace a relationship with the infinite Creator.¹⁶ Maria Harris explores this relationship more fully: “Because we are made in the image of the Creator God, we, too, are fashioners. Our human vocation is to be in partnership with God to fashion even as we are being fashioned, attempting to realize our artistic capacities as this happens. For to the question, ‘Who is fashioning?’ the response is, ‘God and ourselves.’”¹⁷ To be alive biologically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually offers the possibility of being co-creators with God; where endings are understood as beginnings and beginnings are understood as endings.¹⁸

Imagination and Spiritual Sensitivity

Research by Hay and Nye (1998) shows that children, through their imagination and sense of wonder, go beyond the superficial, the mundane, and the ordinary; bringing themselves into the realm of the transcendent or spiritual and enabling them to develop “spiritual sensitivity.”¹⁹ Hay and Nye identified categories of spiritual sensitivity that they feel could provide the “media” for spirituality: “One such category of spiritual sensitivity identified was that of *mystery-sensing*. Mystery-sensing pertains to the wonder and awe, the fascination and questioning that is characteristic of young children as they interact with the mystery of the universe.”²⁰ Brendan Hyde states: “The notion of wonder (and awe) is one that has come to be associated with children’s spirituality.”²¹ Hyde points out that through both wonder and imagination children encounter the mysterious, and the mysterious provides a door to perceptions of transcendence. In terms of religious education, experiences of the mysterious can enable children to be open to an encounter with the Transcendent God.²²

For young children the world is full of wonder and the emergence of new life. They are experiencing revelations of new things all the time. Young children often express awe and wonder, as they are curious to understand everything that is around them.²³ Also, children can have an ability to enter into “deep currents of consciousness,”²⁴ which can open new ways to view the world. Brendan Hyde notes that children are open and eager to participate and to fit into their world, and that these currents of consciousness stir up feelings of awe, as well as initiate a

¹⁴ “Julian of Norwich,” <http://www.goodnews.ie/wisdomlinejuly2010.shtml>. Accessed October 21, 2014.

¹⁵ Michael Skelley, *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner’s Theology of Worship* (Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 37.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁹ Brendan Hyde, “Children’s Spirituality and ‘The Good Shepherd Experience,’” *Religious Education* (2004), 99: 2, 141.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

²² *Ibid.*, 141.

²³ Kate Adams, Brendan Hyde and Richard Woolley, *The Spiritual Dimension of Childhood* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishing, 2008), 60, 61.

²⁴ Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 56.

connectedness with reality that includes others.²⁵ Moreover, children's conscious experience of wonder and awe is a connection with the forces of the natural world. This connection can provide insights that help them to define and develop their ongoing relationships with others.²⁶ Hyde points out that this sense of the "other," in a Christian context, can lead people to strive toward understanding their lives in relationship with the Ultimate Other who is God.²⁷

The Religious Imagination

Harris points out that there is another language for disclosing the imagination, namely, through the use of "religious language." Religious language allows us to penetrate deeply into the profound, into broader and wider fields of perception and understanding that exist below the surface and beyond the superficial.²⁸ Harris notes: "If the function of language is to give form to our experience of the world, then the use of religious language to speak of imagination can help us understand the mysterious, the numinous, and the mystical elements residing at the heart of the world."²⁹ Here the religious imagination influences religious language and here is where the "holiness within teaching itself is more readily claimed and reclaimed, more readily released," because imagination and words matter.³⁰ When teaching children how to pray through the use of the religious imagination, the creative imagination is activated and the process of giving form to the subject matter or content of learning happens.³¹ Harris writes: "New form comes into being because we take the risk of becoming artists, becoming creators, becoming teachers."³² Artists, creators, and teachers similarly work toward giving form to their endeavors. This "form-giving" can then open doors through which the emergence of new life can flow.³³ The use of religious imagination in teaching children to pray can also foster revelations that can lead to the re-creation of the earth.³⁴

It is through prayer that adults and children can engage the "religious imagination." It is here that the past, present, and future can intertwine, revealing the entrance into God's reign. In discussing the religious imagination encountered through teaching and learning prayer, Harris writes:

First, I propose that religion provides a way to speak about, qualify, distinguish, deepen, and direct imagination. When brought to bear upon teaching, the religious imagination enables us to see teaching through another lens. It enables us to pose the possibility that to dwell as a teacher with other human beings is to dwell in the area of *mystery*, not because subject matter is dense, but because we humans as the *Imago Dei* are ourselves mysteries, and interaction between us always takes place on holy ground, the only kind of ground there is.³⁵

²⁵ Ibid., 54.

²⁶ Ibid., 56.

²⁷ Ibid., 54.

²⁸ Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 19.

²⁹ Ibid., 19.

³⁰ Ibid., 20.

³¹ Ibid., 35, 36.

³² Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 36.

³³ Ibid., 36, 37.

³⁴ Ibid., 181.

³⁵ Ibid., 16.

In sharing Christian traditions of prayer with children, parents and teachers can offer ways to explore the *collective wisdom* of Christian prayer traditions as being vital for the formation of a *religious imagination*. They can strive to enable children to see God in all things, to have faith in the conviction that God “reaches out to us,” to have faith that humanity can and will respond in the ordinary events of everyday life.³⁶ Maria Harris writes, “Teaching is an act not only of the imagination, but of the *religious imagination*.”³⁷ In teaching children to pray, parents and teachers invite them to embrace the religious imagination of their religious community as central to developing and continually nurturing both a personal and communal relationship with God.

Children and Imagination

Engaging children through the use of their imagination is at the heart of teaching, as children are naturally imaginative.³⁸ In teaching children to pray educators can and should encourage them to employ their imaginations in order to artistically, creatively, and consciously communicate with God. Consequently, imaginative prayer can break new ground and allow original, diverse, and spontaneous forms of prayer to emerge, celebrating children’s personal relationship with God.

Showing how to use the imagination is a way of creating possibilities, and children have the capability to alter their destinies and their existence through the exercise of imagination.³⁹ “Imagination can change, reverse, and re-create present reality,” Harris notes. It is important to teach children that imagining possibilities and asking questions is natural for everyone to do. These activities can help them make meaning out of everyday situations. Children should also be taught that imagining the possibilities life holds is a natural way to be involved with constructing and reconstructing realities that are never complete, and that one can view reality from multiple perspectives.⁴⁰ Maxine Greene postulates: “Imagination will always come into play when becoming literate suggests an opening of spaces, an end to submergence, and a consciousness of the right to ask why.”⁴¹ The imagination allows us to know a reality that is no longer too big for us to fit our minds into or too small that we might by omission simply dismiss as being not important. From a religious perspective, Harris acknowledges that there are aspects of the mysterious that can be known, yet not everything mysterious can be known.⁴² With *religious imagination* we are called to *meet* the mysterious, to meet the “unknown” with “multiple perspectives” just as we are called to ask questions.

The Spiritual Nature of Children and Ontological Wholeness

³⁶ Thomas H. Groome, *Will There Be Faith: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 242.

³⁷ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1987), 10.

³⁸ Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁰ Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Boss, 1995), 130, 131.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴² Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 13.

Research suggests that human spirituality is universal and can be considered a natural expression of tendencies or characteristics that are inherently human.⁴³ Moreover, everyone is created in the image of God; therefore, everyone has the capacity to grow in God's likeness.⁴⁴ This natural spiritual predisposition or spiritual consciousness continually seeks "articulation" in human life from childhood onward.⁴⁵ Children's quests to discover, connect, and engage with others and their sense of their own humanity is propelled by this quality of spiritual consciousness, which arises from the depths of their being.⁴⁶

Spirituality is often a controversial subject not only within the ordinary sectors of society but also within the scientific and academic worlds. Harvard theorist Howard Gardner explains: "Many of us do not recognize the spirit as we recognize the mind and the body, and many of us do not grant the same ontological status to the transcendent or the spiritual as we do to, say, the mathematical or the musical."⁴⁷ However, Gardner considers spirituality to be an ontological as well as a biological reality. Based on his research of this ontological reality, Hyde contends that the natural path of spiritual existence moves toward a transcendence of the ego in order for the self to achieve a higher consciousness. In a state of higher consciousness the *self* is free to be joined with the *other*, forming a relationship of Ultimate Unity.⁴⁸

Ontological awareness is closely linked with becoming unified with the surrounding world and ultimately with God.⁴⁹ Hyde explains: "Ontological awareness is the ability to perceive with one's whole Self – one's whole being – in a direct, experiential, and concrete way. In such a way of knowing, a person enters the realm of holistic experience."⁵⁰ The mind, body, and soul of persons are involved in the experience in which they are engaged.⁵¹ Hyde goes further to report that this kind of awareness has been observed among children as they were engaged in learning activities that invited them to work with tactile materials that seemed to "bridge" the division of Self and the object. Each child seemed to merge into a union with the event of creating as a single entity.⁵² Hyde posits: "While they may not have been aware of the presence of others around them, those children were ontologically aware of themselves and their connectedness to the activity in which the divide between Self and object had been bridged."⁵³ This is an act of "being," an experience of wholeness and this "unity" of experience might be called "Ultimate Unity." Although the children may not be able to articulate their experiences, for a moment they may have become one with the Other, having transcended time and space.⁵⁴ Hyde continues: "In these holistic experiences of unity, it was possible that these children were being led to a sense of their unity with Other in the more cosmic dimensions – in creation, and possibly the Transcendent."⁵⁵ Karl Rahner points out that the goal of transcendence is "the

⁴³ Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 29.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 332.

⁴⁵ Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 29.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁷ Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 53.

⁴⁸ Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 43.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁵¹ Ibid., 89.

⁵² Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 90.

⁵³ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 90.

infinite, ultimate reality which remains at the root a mystery: that is to say, God.”⁵⁶ Correlatively, in the action of “being,” “these children had perhaps experienced something of the presence of God,” for here they encountered the indwelling of God in their own “being.”⁵⁷

Conclusion

Prayer offers an experience of self-transcendence – of being one with God. Prayer involves self-giving and “being set free from isolation.”⁵⁸ Teaching children to pray offers them the opportunity to understand that through prayer they can enter into a special relationship with God and “be transformed” *in* God.⁵⁹ Consequently, children can develop a sense of ontological wholeness through prayer; by being shown how to freely reach out beyond the ordinary events of each day, by being shown creative manners of prayer, and by exploring how religious imagination interconnects their relationship with the Divine Spirit.

⁵⁶ Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt, eds. *Karl Rahner: The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1986), 57.

⁵⁷ Hyde, *Children and Spirituality*, 90.

⁵⁸ Leech, *True Prayer*, 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

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Liturgy as Prophetic Imagination: A Form of Church Curriculum

Abstract

Liturgy, the ritual prayer of the community, is a centuries old way of giving thanks and praise to God. Researched from a Roman Catholic point of view, this paper explores the practice of liturgy "as a component of the curriculum of educational ministry,"¹ and in turn, explores the profound elements of the prophetic imagination that are present in and through liturgy. This research draws its educational insights from the work of Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran. In addition, its theological and liturgical insight is profoundly influenced by Karl Rahner's theology of worship.

LITURGY: PROPHETIC WITNESS OF THE CHURCH

Liturgy proclaims and celebrates what God is doing among us and for us. This ritual tradition can give order, meaning, and guidance to life's quest to live more fully and re-appropriate insight and practice for a new worldview. "For Rahner," writes Michael Skelley, "the beauty of true worship is that it shows just how graced our lives really are."²

Liturgy connects us to the ever-present mystery of God and offers a hope-filled pattern for living and dying. This hope-filled pattern, encountered in the paschal mystery, is the point of departure for all ritual prayer, and much like art and poetry, the ritual prayer of the church expresses what ordinary speech cannot. It is for this reason that Mark Searle aptly asserts liturgy is "an act of the imagination."³

This profound action of the church, that gathers a people together, discloses rich meaning when we dare to leave the comfort zone of the rational and enter into the imaginative sphere where we can find the hidden embrace of God's presence. Taking place within

¹ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 94-95.

² Michael Skelley, S.J., *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 105.

³ Mark Searle, "Images in Worship," in *Vision: The Scholarly Contributions of Mark Searle to Liturgical Renewal*, ed. Anne Y. Koester and Barbara Searle, 126-137 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 126.

time and space, this centuries old prayer is prayer for the hope of the world. From age to age the prayer of the church is the “hope-filled language of prophecy.”⁴ The act of liturgy is analogous to that of what Walter Brueggemann calls the prophetic imagination. He writes, “The task of prophetic imagination ... is to *bring to public expression those very hopes and yearnings* that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we no longer know they are there.”⁵ Liturgy, at its very core, has the potential to bring forth this expression. Fundamentally God’s work, liturgy is human dialogue with the living God.⁶ And, notably, liturgy’s aim is to transform the world. Ritual activity symbolizes resistance to current patterns of injustice, or what Brueggemann refers to as the dominant culture or *royal consciousness*.⁷ Rather, it embodies what he refers to as an *alternative community* that replaces despair with “the public presentation of hope.”⁸

Re-appropriating the vast implications and prophetic nature of liturgy blends meaning and memory and ultimately reveals that Christian ritual is animated by God’s action and presence in the world. In this regard, liturgy is a way to touch and be touched by the mystery of God’s self-communication. Illustrative of Karl Rahner’s theology of worship, Skelley writes, “... worship is an experience of interpersonal communion in which God shares our lives and we participate in the life of God.”⁹ Sealed in baptism, we are “ordained of God to be people of hope”¹⁰ in and through liturgy we remember such prophetic hope.

This community life of prayer is commonly referred to as the work of the church. Reflecting on this understanding, Gabriel Moran suggests, “The work that is liturgy is not a metaphorical extension of the forty-hour week but a call to center all other forms of work within the origin of the meaning of work: ‘God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good’ (Genesis 1:31).”¹¹ Moreover, “Rahner is convinced that the liturgy will become a life-giving encounter with the absolute mystery only if we first discover the experience of God hidden in the midst of our daily lives.”¹² Images of ritual prayer season us in this mystery and aid in the unveiling of the depth of human experience.

Referring to Liturgy as one form of church curriculum, Maria Harris gives depth and meaning to the church’s life of prayer. She writes, “We are educated *to* prayer, and we are educated *by* prayer. And that education can happen anywhere and everywhere, not

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 67.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶ Skelley, *The Liturgy of the World*, 43.

⁷ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁹ Skelley, *The Liturgy of the World*, 43.

¹⁰ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 66.

¹¹ Gabriel Moran, *Fashioning A People Today: The Educational Insights of Maria Harris* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007), 72.

¹² Skelley, *The Liturgy of the World*, 75.

only in classrooms.”¹³ In relation to liturgy, Harris’s thought complements Karl Rahner’s view “... that the experience of God, if it is to be found at all, will be found in the joys and struggles of ‘real’ life ...”¹⁴

According to The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) the liturgy of the church is the “summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed;” and “... the fount from which all her power flows” (SC 10).¹⁵ This statement, which today, roles limply off the tongue needs to be revitalized in our time. It is for this reason that the educational ministry of the church must work more effectively to make this statement, which percolated in the hearts and minds of prophetic thinkers during the nineteenth century, confirmed only a little over fifty years ago at the dawn of the Second Vatican Council, vibrant to worshippers once again. Insight into the rich background of the first conciliar document provides a deeper understanding of the prophetic work that brought about the liturgical reforms of Vatican II.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

The Liturgical Movement: Context for Reform

On December 4, 1963 The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was the first document to emerge from the Second Vatican Council. It is important, and very significant, to realize that the context of this document is reflective of the passionate work of an earlier time. What we recognize as the early liturgical movement, which began in Europe, established the groundwork for reform - the official changes sanctioned by the church at Vatican II.

Attempts at reform can be traced back to 1563 following the Council of Trent. However, enthusiasm for the Roman Rite grew in the early eighteen hundreds with Louis Pascal Guéranger (1805-1875), a French monk who founded the abbey at Solesmes in France. The work at Solesmes influenced the liturgical reforms of Pius X in the early twentieth century. In addition to the abbey in France, German and Belgium monasteries were also considered great liturgical centers for learning. Keith Pecklers notes that Odo Casel (1886-1948), from the Maria Laach monastery in Germany, wrote countless articles and books that were initially considered controversial. Significantly, Casel expressed noble insight into sacramental participation and the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.¹⁶ In Belgium, there was a more pastoral focus on the liturgy. Exemplifying this, in 1909 Lambert Beauduin, OSB (1873-1960), of Mont César Abbey, claimed “‘active participation in the liturgical life of a Church’ to be the most fundamental factor in the

¹³ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church*, 95.

¹⁴ Skelley, *The Liturgy of the World*, 17.

¹⁵ References to Vatican II documents are from Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1987).

¹⁶ Keith Pecklers, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America: 1926-1955* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 6.

life of a Christian.”¹⁷ Significantly, a common thread in all of the attempts toward reform was the call to active participation of all in the liturgy. These early attempts at reform reflect a distinct shift in liturgical scholarship toward patristic principles.

While the roots of the liturgical movement took place in Europe, there were many highly motivated American students who were sent to study at the great liturgical centers. Among these scholars was Virgil Michel, OSB (1888-1938) of St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, who is regarded as the founder of the liturgical movement in the United States (1926-1955). It is interesting to note that he was also the founder of Liturgical Press and *Orate Fratres* (*Worship* today). Remarkably, Michel’s legacy continues to this day through both of these venues. Against the backdrop of the individualism of the 1920’s and the Great Depression of the 1930’s, Michel drew his own thinking and plans from the practice of the early church. He is best known for making the profound connection of liturgy to the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, which in turn promoted the profound connection of liturgy with social justice. According to Pecklers, “Michel believed that American Catholics had become too materialistic and individualistic: ... Liturgy was the solution to individualism, capable of opening the eyes of American worshippers to the possibilities of a truly Christian culture. For this reason, he saw the liturgical movement as the primary apostolate.”¹⁸

Another important aspect of the early liturgical movement was education toward liturgy. Lack of knowledge often led to resistance to change. People had to be educated about the meaning of their baptism and consequently the role they played in the Mystical Body of Christ. Such liturgical catechesis flourished during the 1930’s and 1940’s in schools and among families.¹⁹

Undoubtedly, the pioneers of the early liturgical movement were prophetic thinkers. Their aim to bring the ideal of full, active participation of all people in the liturgy to the forefront was met with resistance. However, this call for participation in the liturgy of the church was a hopeful call not only to recover a deeper sense of tradition but a call for an alternative way of being in the world. The celebration of the liturgy was meant to stir within the Christian a deeper sense of discipleship – a radical call to be Christ in the world and, in turn, a call to live for others. The generative work of this movement nourished and evoked a new consciousness against the dominant culture. It attempted to raise hope in a world recovering from the ravages of war. Michel’s prophetic voice had to penetrate, among other things, the lamentation of the Great Depression in the United States. In this regard, Pecklers notes, “For Virgil Michel the labor encyclicals of Leo XIII and the liturgical reforms of Pius X did not just by accident happen within one generation, but were responses to cries of the masses for Christ, who had power and gave the good tidings. They belonged together.”²⁰

¹⁷ Katharine Harmon, *There Were Also Women There: Lay Women in the Liturgical Movement in the United States 1926-59* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 17.

¹⁸ Pecklers, *The Unread Vision*, 128-29.

¹⁹ Ibid., 151.

²⁰ Ibid., 23.

The doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, which was so valued by the early reformers, was not commonly accepted until Pius XII gave it credence in his 1943 encyclical, *On the Mystical Body of Christ* (*Mystici Corporis Christi*). Notably, Pius XII also gave expression to this profound theme in his 1947 encyclical, *On the Sacred Liturgy* (*Mediator Dei*). Essentially, Pius XII put “the seal of his supreme authority” on the liturgical movement.²¹ The official project for liturgical reform began in 1948 with the appointment of a commission that accomplished enormous work during a twelve-year time frame. It is interesting to note, “The first fruit of the commission’s work was the restoration of the Easter Vigil (1951), which elicited an explosion of joy throughout the Church. It was a signal that the liturgy was at last launched decisively on a pastoral course.”²² In addition, as noted by Annibale Bugnini, during the proceedings of the First International Congress of Pastoral Liturgy held in Assisi in 1956, Pius XII made a historic remark, “The liturgical movement is ... a sign of the providential dispositions of God for the present time [and] of the movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church.”²³

The seeds of a movement that fostered the ideal of full, active participation in the liturgy of all the members of the Body of Christ flowered when Paul VI brought about liturgical reforms confirmed at Vatican II.

The Second Vatican Council and Liturgical Reform

On January 25, 1959 Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council. Preparation for this “epoch-making”²⁴ event began immediately and lasted until the opening session on October 11, 1962. In his opening address, *Mother Church Rejoices* (*Gaudet Mater*), John XXIII proclaimed, “It is but natural that in opening this universal council we should like to look to the past and to listen to its voices, ... These are solemn and venerable voices, throughout the East and West, from the fourth century to the Middle Ages, and from there to modern times,”²⁵ Clearly, the intent of Vatican II was to re-appropriate the richness of the past in order to find meaning for the present. In addition, as noted above, and as Julia Upton writes, “Radical as the changes were, it is a mistake to look to the Vatican Council II as the beginning for our consideration of

²¹ Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 6.

²² Ibid., 10.

²³ Ibid., 12.

²⁴ Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012), 1.

²⁵ John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater: Mother Church Rejoices: Opening Address of John XXIII at the Council*. <http://conciliaria.com/2012/10mother-church-rejoice-opening-address-of-john-xxi>(accessed 7-23-15).

liturgical studies ...”²⁶ Therefore, the liturgical reforms set in motion as a result of Vatican II can only be properly understood within their historical context. Notes and journals from those who served the council’s various commissions are invaluable resources for understanding. In regard to liturgy, Bugnini, secretary to the preparatory commission of the liturgy under Pius XII, brings together his personal notes and valuable recollections in *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*. For twelve years (1948-1960) the commission held eighty-two meetings, the first fruits of which were the reform of the Easter Vigil in 1951 followed by the complete reform of Holy Week in 1955. Interestingly, three years before Vatican II, in 1956, a congress was held in Assisi to discuss the pastoral nature of the liturgy.²⁷

After official announcement of the council in 1959 another commission was formed in 1960, which included theological, spiritual, pastoral, musical, and artistic scholars and experts from all over the world. Sub-commissions explored various topics, for example, “The mystery of the sacred liturgy and its relation to the life of the Church,” “The Mass,” “Sacramental concelebration,” “Divine Office,” “Sacraments and sacramentals,” “Revision of the calendar,” “Use of Latin,” “Liturgical formation,” “Participation of the faithful in the sacred liturgy,” “Sacred music,” and “Sacred art.”²⁸ Among the most debated issues were the use of Latin and sacred music.²⁹ Before the opening of the council these commissions met several times and by the summer of 1962 a draft of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was ready.

In the fall of 1962 the schema on the sacred liturgy was well prepared and considered to be among the most important topics for the council. Therefore, liturgy appeared first on the council’s agenda.³⁰ Bugnini notes the words of Pope John XXIII on December 8, 1962 at the close of the first session:

It was no accident that the first *schema* to be considered was the one dealing with the sacred liturgy. The liturgy has to do with man’s relationship with God. This relationship is of the utmost importance. It must be based on the solid foundation of revelation and apostolic teaching, so as to contribute to man’s spiritual good; and that, with a broadness of vision which avoids the superficiality and haste often characterizing relationships among men.³¹

²⁶ Julia Ann Upton, R.S.M., “*Carpe Momentum: Liturgical Studies at the Threshold of the Third Millennium*,” in *At the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, ed. Francis A. Eigo, O.S.A., 103-138 (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1998), 103.

²⁷ Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, 11.

²⁸ Ibid., 15-16.

²⁹ Ibid., 22.

³⁰ John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 128.

³¹ Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy*, 33.

Sadly, Pope John XXIII died on June 3, 1963 and did not live to see the completion of the liturgy document. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the first document of the council, was voted on – “2147 for, 4 against.”³² Promulgated on December 4, 1963, in the presence of Pope Paul VI, this profoundly significant document, is not only a design for liturgical reform, but it also holds within it significance, beyond liturgy, that impacted the rest of the council, and in turn the identity of Catholic Christians throughout the world.

LITURGY: A FORM OF CHURCH CURRICULUM

Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran consciously imagine religious education as an artistic process of shaping, forming, and fashioning a people within (and between) our ordinary forms of life (family, classroom, job, leisure). Religious education, then, is a life-long, life-wide process of interactions occurring within and between several forms of life.³³ These forms embody the values, purpose, and experiences of one’s lifetime. They suggest a relational aspect that unites family with community, classroom with knowledge, job with work, and leisure with wisdom. Thus, religious education is a movement toward community, knowledge, work, and wisdom.³⁴ Although each form takes on importance at different times during the individual’s life, each continues to be part of the dynamic of human life. In and through these experiences, religious education discloses meaning and nourishes one’s vision for future possibilities.

Harris sites Acts 2; 42, 44-47 as a portrait of the church’s educational curriculum.³⁵ The educational work of the church, as described by Harris, supports the interplay of life’s forms. Religious education, then, viewed from this perspective, affirms the value of a group and sees a particular event, such as the celebration of the liturgy, as a manifestation of deeper possibilities. “One way to summarize this picture,” writes Moran, “is to say that education is about ‘tradition,’ that it is about the transmission of what is most valuable from one generation to the next Education does not hand on tradition; education *is* tradition, the process of handing on,”³⁶ And, at its core, liturgy *is* traditioning.

The educational ministry of the church must continually strive to uncover deep insights for patterns of hope experienced through Word, symbol, and sacrament. In addition, it is imperative to understand that liturgy - the ritual prayer of the church does not take place in isolation. Liturgy is celebrated for the life of the world. As Nathan Mitchell asserts, “... ritual is principally about *connections*, about discovering what links us to God, to one

³² Ibid., 37.

³³ See Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

³⁴ Gabriel Moran, *Religious Education Development: Images for the Future* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1983), 166.

³⁵ Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 16-17.

³⁶ Gabriel Moran, *Religious Education as a Second Language* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1989), 49.

another, to space, time, and history, to world and planet, to memory, desire, and expectation. ... The point of our coming together in prayer is not congratulations and comfort but challenge and change.”³⁷ In much the same way, as Harris points out, education through prayer must “refuse to divorce prayer and action for justice.”³⁸

CONCLUSION

The Second Vatican Council was a watershed moment in the life of the church. Perhaps for young people it is merely a piece of history. For some it was an exciting time, and for others it continues to be a source of confusion. It is for this reason that greater attention to liturgical research and education (both pastoral and academic) is crucial. The visionary story of liturgical reform must be remembered and appropriately rediscovered in our time. If not, the prophetic insight of Vatican II runs the risk of being overshadowed by, as Andrea Grillo remarks, ... “enemies of the reform,” who, “... with cunning and more than a little wordplay... prefer to weaken the very terrain on which the reform stands.”³⁹

Today, there is a marked conflict of interpretations in liturgical matters, one reason being that the context of Vatican II reform has been forgotten.⁴⁰ The norms established through the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy are based on the educative and pastoral nature of the liturgy. “Although the sacred liturgy is principally the worship of the divine majesty it likewise contains much instruction for the faithful. For in the liturgy God speaks to his people, and Christ is still proclaiming his Gospel. And the people reply to God both by song and prayer” (SC33). Liturgy, in its commemoration of dying and rising, stands firm against despair and brings to public expression a reason for our hope.

³⁷ Nathan Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 279.

³⁸ Harris, *Fashion Me A People*, 102.

³⁹ Andrea Grillo, *Beyond Pius V: Conflicting Interpretations of the Liturgical Reform* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), xiv.

⁴⁰ See Grillo, chapter 3. Grillo contends that the liturgical movement includes Vatican II, rather than concludes with Vatican II.

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Transformative Learning in Ecclesial Borderlands: Imagining Pedagogical Possibilities

Abstract

This paper utilizes the construct of “borderland parishes” to interrogate Jack Mezirow’s understanding of dialogue in transformative learning. Mezirow’s understanding of dialogue relies on idealized preconditions that presume that power is shared equally among all dialoguing parties. Borderland parishes – those shared by multiple cultural or linguistic groups – challenge Mezirow to take seriously power asymmetries that exist in culturally diverse communities of faith. I will argue that, in these parish contexts, shared participation in the planning and celebration of ritual offers a more robust transformative potential than dialogue alone and can serve as a fruitful precondition to Mezirow’s preconditions for dialogue. Such participation avoids overlooking or reinscribing power asymmetries amongst cultural communities in a parish; at best, it becomes the site of the suspension or subversion of such power dynamics. Shared participation in ritual discloses a potential for the cultivation of authentic cross-cultural relationships in divided communities and, as such, can be understood as a rich site of pedagogical imagining.

I. Introduction

In this paper, I draw on a theological understanding of borderlands as elaborated by U.S. Latino/a scholars to advance a notion of “borderland parishes” as liminal spaces of intercultural contact, contestation, and potential transformation. I argue that borderlands challenge Jack Mezirow’s understanding of dialogue in transformative learning by taking seriously power asymmetries that exist in culturally diverse communities. I suggest that in such parishes, shared participation in ritual provides a more fruitful precondition to dialogue than the idealized preconditions enumerated by Mezirow because it possesses a greater potential than dialogue alone for the cultivation of cross-cultural relationships and the suspension or subversion of power dynamics.

II. An Emerging Model: U.S. Catholic Parish Life Today

The twenty-first century has witnessed the emergence of a new model of parish life, the so-called “multicultural” or “shared” Catholic parish.¹ While tremendous cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity has been a defining characteristic of the Catholic Church in the United States throughout its three-century history, until the mid-twentieth century individual parishes were largely culturally homogeneous. In parochial territories where multiple cultural groups would have shared the same parish, bishops often established so-called “national” and “ethnic” parishes as a means of dealing with diversity.² Reliance on this segregationalist model of parish life declined during the mid-twentieth century, and the 1983, the revised Code of Canon Law all but did away with the national parish model.³ While “*de facto* national parishes” continue to exist, today parishes are expected to serve all Catholics within their territories, regardless of culture or language. As a result of this paradigm shift, 2013 estimates indicate that 38 percent of U.S. parishes – roughly 6,700 – can be identified as “multicultural.”⁴ This number is projected to increase rapidly in years to come.⁵ This shift has coincided with a significant increase in Latino/a immigration to the United States. Today, roughly 40 percent of Catholics in the U.S., and more than half of Catholics under the age of 18, are Hispanic/Latino/a.⁶ White Euro-Americans will soon no longer represent a majority of U.S. Catholics.

The convergence of these trends means that today, the Catholic Church in the United States is in the midst of an unprecedented and unanticipated paradigm shift as parishes struggle to adapt liturgically, pastorally, and catechetically to exceptional levels of intra-congregational cultural diversity. As Brett Hoover observes, some parishes intentionally foster cultural diversity by articulating diversity as part of their core mission. Others “[wander] into cultural diversity and then [try] to make sense of it”⁷ – an approach that tends to be less successful but is far more common. Hoover’s analysis of “All Saints,” the pseudonym of a Catholic parish in the Midwest shared by Euro-American and Latino communities, rings true of many parishes navigating the challenges of cultural diversity:

[M]ost parishioners did not feel they had chosen the shared parish arrangement; it had been thrust upon them, and so they felt only a little responsibility toward it. A language barrier and cultural misunderstanding made interaction across cultures costly. Avoidance usually seemed like a safer strategy...

¹ The complexity of this new reality is illustrated by the difficulty scholars have encountered in

² In the Northeast, for example, at the height of the “national parish era” during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, roughly one in three parishes was a national parish. See Joseph Casino (1987), 40; in Finke and Stark (2005), 135

³ Revised Code of Canon Law, 1983, no. 518

⁴ A multicultural parish is defined as one in which two or more cultural, ethnic, or linguistic groups share the same parish facilities for liturgical purposes and at least 20 percent of the congregation is of the parish’s non-majority racial/ethnic group.

⁵ Mark Gray, Melissa Cidade, Mary Gautier, and Thomas Gaunt, SJ. *Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University, 2013.

⁶ CARA, 2010

⁷ Brett C. Hoover, *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S. Catholicism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 214.

This involuntary sharing of the parish also made it difficult to alter asymmetries of power and privilege in the parish. Longtime residents had not set out to share the resources and facilities they had so painstakingly built up over the decades, and many felt a strong sense of ownership over those resources and facilities. This made it difficult for them to conceive of a larger group of newcomers as equal partners. For their part, Latino parishioners never lost sight of the inequalities they perceived in the larger social ecology of Havenville. The gratitude of many to the Euro-American community for “allowing” them to worship at All Saints betrays the way they still felt like guests. Others explicitly articulated how they would be better off left on their own as much as possible.⁸

The lived experiences of the parishioners of “All Saints” reveal deeply contested understandings of Church identity and mission. In the post-Vatican II era, the image of the Church as communion has become the most influential ecclesiological model.⁹ The notion of *communio/koinonia* (Acts 2:42-47) is a rich and expansive one that, as Dennis Doyle notes, has proven fertile ground for a broad range of ecclesiological reflection.¹⁰ This emphasis on the essential unity of all believers in the Body of Christ is a vital ecclesiological starting point for reflection on multicultural communities of faith. Despite its theological fruitfulness, the example of “All Saints” Parish draws forth whether and to what extent communion ecclesiology has functioned in practice as a sort of conflict avoidance mechanism on both theological and practical levels. Uncritically appropriated notions of “unity in diversity” have the dangerous capacity to elide or spiritualize real differences, inequalities, and asymmetries of power that persist in dividing communities in favor of an aspirational notion of harmony, while at the same time upholding the dominant narrative (the white Euro-American cultural status quo) within the Church. Indeed, as is clear from the racial, cultural, and class separation that continues to characterize Catholic parish life in the United States, real unity has consistently proven more challenging than such widely invoked metaphors would suggest.

III. Imagining the Transformative Possibilities of the Borderland

What can be gained from viewing multicultural parishes not as problems to be solved in ad hoc, improvisational ways or as drains on already limited resources, but rather as potential loci of theological insight? Here I offer an interpretation of multicultural parishes through the lens of the “borderland,” suggesting that such communities, and the religious practices that emerge from them, disclose a potentially transformational capacity. A borderland perspective offers us a new way of thinking about catechetical dynamics that is fruitful not only for parishes challenged to navigate the complexities of cultural diversity but for all parishes and the church more broadly.

⁸ Hoover 2014, 214.

⁹ The International Synod of Bishops in 1985 identified *communio/koinonia* as the prevailing ecclesiological metaphor of the Second Vatican Council, a point reiterated by Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (19).

¹⁰ See Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Visions and Versions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).

a. Multicultural Parishes and the Potential of Shared Practices

As we see clearly in Hoover's analysis of "All Saints," multicultural parishes are often ambiguous spaces. Such ambiguity is evident in the contested nature of such parishes' mission, identity, liturgical and worship style, leadership, and administration. In his classic *The Ritual Process*, Victor Turner elaborates an understanding of liminality in which ambiguity functions in a transitional and even transformational capacity.¹¹ In such contexts, ritual plays an especially critical role in allowing multiple cultural, ethnic, or linguistic groups to inhabit a shared "third space" that is "betwixt and between," "neither here nor there."¹² In a liminal space, clarifies Jane Wilkinson, "the proximity of cultures in the same space contains the seeds of change, the potential to break down barriers, overcome differences and create something new."¹³

In the parish context, a parallel can be drawn between Turner's understanding of liminal space and the conceptual construct of the *borderland*. Borderlands, elaborated vividly by U.S. Latino/a scholars, are liminal "third spaces" where identities are formed "betwixt and between." Though geographically-speaking the border in focus in the writings of most U.S. Latino/a theologians is the one that divides the United States and Mexico, Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa clarifies that "the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."¹⁴ I would suggest that the contemporary multicultural parish – as a place of contact and contestation – can thus be fruitfully conceptualized as a "borderland," a *locus theologicus* where Christ is revealed in a unique and privileged way.

Latino theologians such as Roberto Goizueta and Virgilio Elizondo have argued that borderlands represent a critical theological category that is central to Christian faith. Borders are places of revelation and challenge, of evangelization and de-schooling. Elizondo portrays Jesus as one from the margins and Galilee as a theological symbol of marginality. In this light, persons and communities on society's borders are privileged witnesses of the good news of Christ. There is a distinct soteriological value ascribed to the geographical, social, cultural, political, and religious reality of the borderland which is reflected in the reality of *mestizaje* – of undefined identity and subsequent marginalization, the product of the confluence of two histories out of which a new and renewed history emerges.¹⁵

It is important to note that liminality connotes encounter but does not necessarily require the "genuine mixing of cultures"¹⁶ as implied in processes of "creolization" or *mestizaje*. While this may appear to be a negative assessment of liminality, in reality the construct proves helpful

¹¹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 95.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jane Wilkinson, "Staging Liminality at the German-Polish-Czech Border: The Trinational Theatre Production *Dreiland*." *German Life and Letters* 63:1 (January 2010), 90.

¹⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), Preface.

¹⁵ Virgilio Elizondo, "Mestizaje as a Locus of Theological Reflection," in *Beyond Borders: Writings of Virgilio Elizondo and Friends*, edited by Timothy Matovina (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 162.

¹⁶ Wilkinson, "Staging Liminality," 90

in three respects. First, it impedes overly idealized interpretations of such communities and their practices as entirely harmonious or utopic. Borderlands are not utopias or spiritualized constructs but rather real social and political spaces often characterized by confusion, conflict, contestation, and violence. Second, it helps to subvert the risk of cultural erasure and the normativization of hegemonic cultural expressions by an uncritical application of the ecclesiological language of unity in diversity by more thoroughly acknowledging the reality and necessary persistence of difference. Third, the possibility of “in-between-ness” helps to support the notion that shared rituals and practices that emerge from “borderland parishes” can become fruitful sites of genuine encounter and constructive re-envisioning between cultures without disintegrating into sites of violence or aggression.

IV. Transformative Learning Theory: A Critique from the Borderland

Pioneering transformative learning theorist Jack Mezirow describes transformative learning as “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference.”¹⁷ Frames of reference are “the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings. They set our ‘line of action.’”¹⁸ Once our frames of reference are established, we tend to eschew or not even notice ideas that do not fit within their parameters. Instead, we tend to view ideas that fall outside of our frames of reference as “unworthy of consideration—aberrations, nonsense, irrelevant, weird, or mistaken.”¹⁹ Frames of reference are transformed through, in Mezirow’s words, “critical reflection on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based.”²⁰ Through the process of transformative learning, learners move from unexamined frames of reference toward those that are more inclusive, critical, and self-reflective.²¹ It is this kind of transformation – from a frame of reference that is limited by uninterrogated prejudices to one that is more expansive and encompassing of difference – that seems to be called for in a borderland parish context.

Mezirow suggests that transformation is catalyzed by a “disorienting dilemma,” an experience that disrupts one’s pre-existing structure of meaning making by causing one to interrogate one’s core assumptions. In the wake of a disorienting dilemma, transformation is fostered through critical reflection. Mezirow emphasizes the vital role of discourse – “the process in which we have an active dialogue with others to better understand the meaning of an

¹⁷ Jack Mezirow, “Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice,” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 74 (1997), 5.

¹⁸ Ibid. Frames of reference are comprised of habits of mind, which are in turn expressed in points of view. Mezirow provides the example of ethnocentrism (a habit of mind, which is difficult to change), which is manifested in judgments and attitudes toward specific groups of people (points of view, which are easier to change).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mezirow, “Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice,” 7

²¹ Ibid., 5

experience” – in this process.²² He enumerates seven preconditions for free and full participation in discourse. Participants in dialogue must possess:

1. “More accurate and complete information;
2. Freedom from coercion and distorting self-deception;
3. Openness to alternative points of view: empathy and concern about how others think and feel;
4. The ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively;
5. Greater awareness of the context of ideas and, more critically, reflectiveness of assumptions, including their own;
6. An equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse; and
7. Willingness to seek understanding and agreement, and to accept a resulting best judgment as a test of validity until new perspectives, evidence, or arguments are encountered and validated through discourse as yielding a better judgment.”²³

I would suggest that borderland contexts pose a critical challenge to the preconditions for dialogue that Mezirow proposes. As Belenky and Stanton note, Mezirow presumes relationships of equality among participants in dialogue.²⁴ Mezirow himself acknowledges that he is speaking of ideal conditions. Yet this presumption of symmetrical power relationships is more than just a minor caveat in Mezirow’s understanding of dialogue. In reality, virtually all human relationships are characterized by some degree of asymmetry. Such relational asymmetry is abundantly evident in borderland parishes. For example, as implied in Hoover’s analysis, many within the Euro-American community at All Saints seemed to lack what Mezirow calls “openness to alternative points of view” and “empathy and concern about how others” – at least those within the parish’s Latino community – “think and feel” (precondition 3). Those in the Latino community, in turn, lacked “an equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse” (precondition 6). Mezirow provides no indication as to how participants in dialogue should arrive at these preconditions, which when evaluated against the complexities of real communities begin to sound more like aspirational end goals than prerequisites. At the very least, it is clear that these seven preconditions require a precondition of their own.

As I argued, models of church that evince an inability to deal with difference by operating under an idealized presumption of unity in diversity not only exhaust their pastoral and theological adequacy but actually have the capacity to reinscribe structures that uphold a white, Euro-American status quo within the U.S. church. In the same way, it is difficult to imagine how an understanding of dialogue that ignores issues of power and privilege by falsely presuming relations of equality can lead to transformation that does not merely perpetuate the dominant

²² Jack Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, edited by Jack Mezirow and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 14.

²³ Ibid., 13-14

²⁴ Mary Field Belenky and Ann V. Stanton, “Inequality, Development, and Connected Knowing,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, edited by Jack Mezirow and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 73.

ideology.²⁵ Borderlands presume asymmetry. Borders are political spaces where power dynamics and issues of race, class, language, etc. are constantly at play. If dialogue that occurs in such contexts is to be just and mutually transformative, thorough attention to these dynamics must be both priority and prerequisite.

Under non-ideal conditions, where power relations are asymmetrical and where shared identities are contested and constantly being renegotiated, how does critical reflection occur? I would suggest that in borderland parish contexts, a more fruitful and realistic precondition to dialogue is shared participation in ritual.²⁶ In such contexts, shared practices that are lived and embodied disclose a greater potential for transformation than dialogue alone. Rituals have the capacity to become spaces in which power differentials are exposed and perhaps subverted and in which relational trust is fostered through the cultivation of meaningful and authentic cross-cultural relationships.

Barbara Morehouse argues that while borderlands always exist “between different socially constructed spaces,” these borderlands have the potential to become liminal, and thus transformative, when groups intentionally “take advantage of the in-between space” to engage in practices that promote reconciliation, conflict resolution, etc.²⁷ Conceptualizing the multicultural parish as a borderland allows us to view shared rituals and practices, in which multiple cultural groups within the parish come together in an intentional way, as expressions of this liminality and thus as important precursors to transformation within such communities. R. Stephen Warner emphasizes the “crucial role of embodied ritual as a key to the capacity religion has to bridge boundaries, both between communities and individuals.”²⁸ In multicultural parishes, shared religious practices that emerge at the border of distinct religio-cultural experiences help to

²⁵ This speaks to Brookfield’s contention that to be genuinely “critical,” critical reflection must include ideology critique. See Stephen D. Brookfield, “Transformative Learning as Ideology Critique,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, edited by Jack Mezirow and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 125.

²⁶ As Wilkinson (2010) noted, borderlands are places of encounter but not necessarily of genuine mixing. Cultural identities are shaped by border crossing, but these distinct identities are ultimately preserved, not erased. This suggests that if shared participation in ritual is a precondition to cross-cultural dialogue in a parish, then some sense of assuredness in one’s distinct cultural identity is a precondition to shared participation in ritual. One wonders whether one source of challenge of collaboration in multicultural/shared Catholic parishes is a weak understanding of individual cultural identity, especially among groups of white Euro-American parishioners. To a white Euro-American cultural contingent within a parish, the arrival of a group with a seemingly strong religio-cultural identity could heighten the sense of threat that Hoover identifies. Thus, navigating borderland parish life involves not only an encounter with the other but also, and as importantly, an interrogation of the self. Pursuing this question further this lies beyond the scope of the present paper, but it represents an important area for further exploration.

²⁷ Barbara Morehouse, “Theoretical Approaches to Border Spaces and Identities,” in *Challenged Borderlands: Transcending Political and Cultural Boundaries*, ed. Vera Pavlakovich-Kochi, Barbara J. Morehouse and Doris Wastl-Walter (Aldershot 2004), 31. This excerpt is cited in Wilkinson (2010), 90.

²⁸ R. Stephen Warner, “Religion, Boundaries, and Bridges,” *Sociology of Religion* 58:3 (1997), 217-218.

express the unfolding social, spiritual, and ecclesial experience of the parish community by creating space for the sharing of stories both individual and collective. In so doing, rituals allow us to construct and operate out of a sense of what Adam Seligman calls “life in the subjunctive” – the collision of the “was” of memory, the “is” of present reality, and the imaginative “as if” of possibility.²⁹ The organic cultivation of relationships and a sense of community through shared participation in ritual can thus be seen, in the words of theologian Lewis Mudge, as a “tool capable of breaking the hegemony of the given.”³⁰

We must be careful not to idealize ritual. Shared participation in ritual does not make dynamics of power and privilege disappear. In fact, we can envision many ways in which collaborative processes of planning and bringing to fruition a shared practice could actually serve to reinscribe, rather than subvert, existing power asymmetries amongst communities within the parish. But in parishes wherein power dynamics generally go unnamed and uninterrogated, the messy, frustrating, even awkward process of collaboration in ritual can itself become a disorienting dilemma, especially for members of dominant communities. Thus, even in this way, the bridge-building potential of the ritual process renders it a valuable precondition for achieving the type transformative dialogue imagined by Mezirow.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that multicultural Catholic parishes can be fruitfully reimagined as borderlands wherein intercultural contact and contestation disclose a potentially transformative capacity. Reimagining parishes as borderlands provides the basis for a critique of Mezirow’s preconditions for dialogue, which fail to take seriously the impact of power and privilege. I have suggested that in borderland parish contexts, shared participation in ritual provides a helpful precondition to dialogue. The embodied and participatory nature of ritual has the capacity to call attention to and perhaps eventually help to subvert asymmetrical power relations – and thus to pave the way for genuine transformation – in a way that far exceeds merely talking about these issues.

Adopting an understanding of the Catholic parish that has a greater capacity to deal positively and realistically with difference offers us a more just, radical, transformative, and indeed more Christian understanding of communion than do hasty, uncritical distillations of the language of “unity in diversity.” Increasing levels of racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity within U.S. Catholic congregations indicate that the “borderland” experience will soon become the norm rather than the exception in parish life. Yet while this paper has maintained a focus on the challenge posed by cultural diversity within parishes, to some degree all parishes can be fruitfully reimagined as borderlands. Anzaldúa acknowledges the presence of many types of borders in a community: psychological, sexual, spiritual, and others.³¹ Even in parishes not characterized by cultural diversity, other types of borders amongst parishioners exist and beg to be negotiated. The patience, honesty, and embodied communion that shared practice invites helps us to see more clearly the inequalities and asymmetries in our communities. At the same

²⁹ Adam B. Seligman, et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³⁰ Lewis S. Mudge, *Rethinking the Beloved Community: Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, Social Theory* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 71.

³¹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/Lat Frontera*, Preface

time, it orients us toward a vision of community marked by the kind of equality that makes free and full participation in authentic dialogue a possibility.

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***Teaching Love:
Embodying Prophetic Imagination through Clowning***

Abstract:

Christian religious educators are charged with teaching the practice of loving as Jesus did—transforming what is oppressive and enacting radical, life-giving ways of being with and for one another. The author presents clowning as a liberative pedagogy that “tutors” learners to embody prophetic imagination, thereby approximating God’s new creation. The session explores a video of seminary students experimenting with clowning led by the author. In mimicking “fools for Christ,” they surprise themselves and those they meet by loving. The video is analyzed through interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing on D.W. Winnicott, Walter Brueggemann, Maria Harris, Paulo Freire and others.

In a world of unequal power and privilege, oppression and marginalization, one might assume that religious educators have no time for foolishness, but holy fools from Christian tradition would have us imagine and do otherwise. It is said that Saint Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226 CE) and Brother Ruffino stood naked at the pulpit and were mocked by people who thought they “had gone mad out of an excess of penance.”¹ However, when Francis preached on the nakedness and humiliation of Christ, they wept with remorse. Not only did they glimpse Christ in Saint Francis, they also became aware of the ugly side of human nature that would humiliate another. Francis called his disciples to be “jongleurs of the Lord” [*joculatores Domini*], preaching, singing praise, and moving the hearts of the people to spiritual joy.² The kind of mirth in which Francis and others reveled was characteristic of a Western Catholic tradition.³ In this vein, St. Philip Neri (1515–59) was known for constantly telling jokes, performing silly dances in front of cardinals, or wearing his clothes in ridiculous ways. He used to make people laugh by taking hold of someone by the chin, hair, or beard.⁴ As the hagiography of holy fools suggests, these radical pedagogues orchestrated situations to unmask the hypocrisy of a powerful church that was failing to live up to Christ’s teachings, to provoke the faithful into questioning their own reactions to the marginalized, to make them aware of their hidden prejudices, pride, and self-centered preoccupations, and thus to consider the wisdom expressed in holy foolery.

¹ Serge Hughes, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis and Other Franciscan Writings* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 107f.; John Saward, *Perfect Fools: Folly for Christ’s Sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1980), 85.

² Leo Shelley-Price, *St. Francis of Assisi, His Life and Writings* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1959), 274f. Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 87.

³ Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 95.

⁴ Saward, *Perfect Fools*, 97-8; Beatrice K. Otto, *Fools are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 169-70.

Most but not all fools for Christ were Orthodox and Roman Catholic monastics who simulated folly and lived “as if” they *were* Christ.⁵ Living secret lives, holy fools were deliberately playing by pretense, meaning no one knew whether they were encountering a saint or a crazy person. They pretended to be insane, gave up their wealth, never set down roots, and called into question the ways of the powerful and privileged.⁶ They modeled themselves on Christ’s humility, poverty, and experience of being ridiculed. As the first “fool for Christ,” Paul argues that unlike worldly wisdom, which seeks power and fortune, God’s wisdom God speaks through what is weak.⁷ The heyday of holy fools began in the thirteenth century and ended in the sixteenth, reaching its height in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁸ Holy foolishness in Russia enjoyed its golden age from the fifteenth to the first half of the seventeenth century.⁹

Holy fools have counterparts in many other religions and cultures.¹⁰ One can liken holy fools to the Sufi *majzub* and the Hindu *avadhuta*.¹¹ In Zen Buddhism, one might associate holy madness with the master’s use of shouting, *koan*, handclapping, or physical discipline to bring the learner to enlightenment.¹² Holy fools might also bear resemblance to what we might see as “ritual clowns” in Navaho, Pueblo, Hopi and Zuni sacred ceremonies.¹³ In multiple religious traditions, fools challenge religious institutions and practitioners, not allowing them to remain comfortable and to rely solely on conventional ways of knowing, which in Christian terms is a prophetic role.

Holy fools evoke what Hebrew bible scholar Walter Brueggemann has called “prophetic imagination.”¹⁴ He writes, “The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us... the alternative consciousness to be nurtured, on the one hand, serves to *criticize* and dismantle the dominant consciousness. On the other hand, that alternative consciousness to be nurtured serves to *energize* persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which community of faith may move.”¹⁵ Brueggemann helpfully argues for imagination that disturbs, destabilizes, as well as galvanizes the faithful so that they might live into more life-giving possibilities.

Although the tactics of holy fools might seem radical and bizarre, especially by today’s standards of education, they set pedagogical, historical, and theological precedents worth examining in greater detail. According to Paul, habitual ways of being in the world—selfishness, self-deception, and self-righteousness—need to be challenged because they sustain structures and processes of sin and evil. The drastic measures of holy fools speak to their conviction of how deeply implicated their fellow human beings were. Unfortunately, these human issues were the same as they are today. As was true in the time of holy fools, faith

⁵ Seward, *Perfect Fools*, 25.

⁶ Seward, *Perfect Fools*, 25-30.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:26–30.

⁸ Seward, *Perfect Fools*, 80.

⁹ A. M. Panchenko, “Laughter as Spectacle,” in *Holy Foolishness in Russia: New Perspectives*, eds. Priscilla Hart Hunt and Svitlana Kobets (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2011), 42.

¹⁰ See Otto, *Fools are Everywhere*, 157-86.

¹¹ Peter C. Phan, “The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity,” *Theological Studies* 62, no. 4 (December, 2001), 740-41.

¹² Phan, “Wisdom of Holy Fools,” 732.

¹³ Michael Bala, “The Clown: An Archetypal Self-Journey,” *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche* 4, no. 1 (2010), 50.

¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001).

¹⁵ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 3, my emphasis. As quoted in Jamie Gates and Mark H. Mann, *Nurturing the Prophetic Imagination* (San Diego; Eugene, OR: Point Loma; Wipf and Stock, 2012), xv-xvi.

communities in powerful countries are likely to exhibit the same myopia as the wider cultures in which they live. Correspondingly, in wealthy regions of the world, religious educators teach believers who are complicit (and may themselves be complicit) in cultures and structures of power, prejudice, and privilege. At times radical pedagogies may be called for to help the faithful imagine and embody the possibilities of radical love that Christ exemplifies.

The thesis of this paper is that *forming the faithful in dispositions of love must involve embodying prophetic imagination that transforms sinful cultures, processes, and structures and enables to people to be with and for others*. In the discussion that follows, I explore the challenges of teaching love and a proposal to supplement traditional pedagogies with those that invite embodied imagination that is both bold and prophetic. A video of a clowning experiment I facilitated with my students and their reflections serve as a basis for discussion. In the spirit of holy foolery, clowning involves donning a disguise and playing by pretense through mime and improvised antics. I analyze the experience of clowning through multiple analytic lenses (historic, aesthetic, theological, and psychoanalytic).

In a book project, I have explored how Christian life involves playing for the sake of faith, that is, practicing life-giving relationships with one another so that people can create and be created anew.¹⁶ However, in this discussion I focus on the role of prophetic imagination, using an example from my own teaching, which I do not explore in the book. The paper is intended to contribute to religious education literature that addresses imagination by offering some thoughts about teaching love through playing.

My work is situated in the vicinity of and builds on the work of many religious educators, but I will mention two. First, my analysis of clowning follows similar contours as the work of Christie Cozad Neuger and Judith Sanderson who describe teaching a seminary course to nurture prophetic imagination.¹⁷ Learners deconstruct oppressive images found in biblical, theological, sociological, and psychological texts and reconstruct them using creative imagination from a diverse group.¹⁸ Though the authors focus on images and I on bodily experience and improvised encounter, our pedagogies attempt to help learners become aware of how injustice is perpetuated, using similar dual moves. Neuger and Sanderson facilitate deconstructing and reconstructing imagination, while I draw on Breuggemann's twin steps of "criticizing" and "energizing imagination." While Neuger and Sanderson guide learners to examine images in their theological and cultural world, I direct student to investigate their experiences of a situation created by clowning—a more Freirean approach. In this regard, my clowning pedagogy resonates with Maria Harris' appropriation of Paulo Freire's work.¹⁹ She writes, "Teaching is the creation of a situation in which subjects, human subjects, are handed over to themselves."²⁰ Harris understands that learners must critically reflect on their own engagement of the world to better understand the world and themselves. Harris mentions the power of clowning with her students, though she neither theorizes the experience deeply nor pushes at the prophetic potential

¹⁶ Courtney T. Goto, *The Grace of Playing: Pedagogies for Leaning into God's New Creation* (New York: Wipf & Stock, 2016).

¹⁷ Christie Cozad Neuger and Judith E. Sanderson, "Developing a Prophetic Imagination: A Course for Seminary Students." *Religious Education* 87, no. 2 (1992), 269-282.

¹⁸ Neuger and Sanderson, "Prophetic Imagination," 270-71.

¹⁹ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

²⁰ Harris, *Religious Imagination*, 33.

of clowning to expose oppression. She describes it simply as a practice in discovering the wisdom of foolishness.²¹

In general, clowning continues mostly among practitioners in religious education, not receiving much scholarly attention in the field.²² Having been introduced to clown ministry as a teenager in my home church in the 1980s (probably when clowning was more popular), I am retrieving and revisiting a pedagogy that impressed me deeply and that newer, scholarly religious educators might not know. What has changed since then is the growth of scholarly interest in theology to address imagination, including prophetic imagination.²³ Especially in Protestant traditions, prophetic imagination has often depended on the power of words to evoke the senses—as a mental and spiritual exercise. By contrast, the physicality of clowning (costuming, silence, and gesture) shapes prophetic imagination through bodily knowing, which allows students to dabble in new ways of being with and for one another.

The Challenges of Teaching Love

Because much of life in Jesus is relatable to love, teaching love seems to be everywhere and all the time, yet knowing exactly how to form people to be disposed to loving is by no means straightforward. It does not help that love is so multi-faceted as to be mind-boggling, with many types of love overlapping sometimes and bearing close resemblance to one another. In Christian tradition, there is self-sacrificing love (*kenosis*), brotherly and sisterly love or neighborly love (*agape*), erotic love (*eros*), and love between friends (*philia*). Despite the different nuances, expressions, and implications of each type of love, they contribute to a disposition of caring and showing concern for the other, which is how humans are continually being created and re-created in the Spirit. Love is a symbol of God's new creation in which people are no longer captive to fear, ignorance, and oppression but instead live in response to God's grace. Love requires a person to be vulnerable, authentic, and empathic with others—so much so that the struggles and captivity of others becomes one's own struggle and desire for freedom. Moreover, the present and future of all God's people depends on loving, not just those in our community (who often look like us) but all people, and most especially those at the margins, which requires becoming aware of what inhibits us from being responsive to their well-being and needs.

Because all human beings fall short of God's new creation, prophetic imagination is needed in religious education, but imagination must be "tutored"²⁴ in the service of love. Ideally, prayerful reading of the scripture "schools" the imagination, as does liturgy, preaching, art, and the study of theology. One could argue that the teaching tactics of holy fools were especially effective because they tutored prophetic imagination not simply in one way but through

²¹ Harris, *Religious Imagination*, 153, 156.

²² One can find many versions of clown communions on YouTube, which suggests the continuation of clowning in local faith communities. Scholars in pastoral care have given some attention to clowning, mostly in the late 1980s to the late 1990s. Jerome A. Travers, ed. [Issue on Clowning], *Journal of Pastoral Counseling* 24, no. 1 (1989), 1-119; Angelika Richter and Lori A. Bonner, "Clowning--an Opportunity for Ministry," *Journal of Religion and Health* 35, no. 2 (1996), 141-148; Dan Feaster, "The Importance of Humor and Clowning in Spirituality and Pastoral Counseling," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 25, no. 5 (1998), 380-387. One recent exception is in homiletics, Johan Cilliers, "Clowning on the Pulpit?: Contours of a Comic Vision on Preaching," *Scriptura* 101 (2009), 189-197.

²³ See for example, Gates and Mann, *Nurturing*.

²⁴ Paul W. Pruyser, *The Play of the Imagination: Toward a Psychoanalysis of Culture* (New York: International Universities Press, 1983).

scripture, tradition, reason, and experience (John Wesley). Their practices were based in *scripture*, their stories became the stuff of a hagiographic *tradition*, they challenged social norms that were taken to be *reasonable*, and they did it by orchestrating personal *experiences* with the faithful. They were simultaneously forming the prophetic imagination of both individuals and the community.

Teaching love (or any other subject) is challenging because the religious educator must be prepared for the unique group of learners (s)he is teaching, which is different every time. In this particular case, learners come to the religious educator with a wide range of experiences of being open to their own and one another's feelings, histories, and needs. Students bring different capacities for introspection and critical thought and display a wide range of resistances to giving and receiving love in its many forms. Furthermore, the chemistry between and among learners is different in every group, as well as with the instructor. How receptive they are to taking risks together depends on who is in the group, how they relate to one another, and how well the teacher leads the process of learning. The task of the religious educator is to nurture individual and communal dispositions of openness, courage, and capacity for loving, even with the many differences and histories within a single group.

Facilitating dispositions of love might be understood in public terms as character formation for both individuals and groups of learners. From the perspective of liberal education, educators not only equip people with skills and knowledge but also form the character of learners. Often taken for granted, public education seeks to produce human beings who not only *can* but also *want* to contribute to society, which means inculcating dispositions that lead students to value what teachers value. The hope is to produce not only educated individuals but also an educated citizenry that values, for example, hard work, freedom, justice, and equality. The formation of groups is cultivated intentionally in fields such as business, athletics, and science—where learning and working as a team are essential. Religious education is no different, except for the values we hope impart to learners (in this case, love). Instead of building “team spirit,” I am advocating communal formation in which learners challenge implicit assumptions by relating to one another (and others, in this instance) vulnerably and authentically, which I am symbolizing as love. In secular frames of reference, teamwork is often for the purpose of producing a tangible product—for example, a marketing plan, a championship, or a scientific discovery. In religious education, embodying what a community hopes and imagines for itself in light of faith is the end goal.

Clowning as an Experiment in Prophetic Imagination

Emboldened by Maria Harris' precedent of clowning in her class, I recently engaged students in clowning as part of my Creative Pedagogy course, taught at a university-based Christian seminary in the northeastern United States. By this time in the course, students had already been introduced to the practices of holy fools, theories of playing, and other concepts that form the basis of the discussion that follows. Students were also accustomed to moving their bodies, engaging in improvisational techniques, and mutual risk-taking—capacities we (graduate teaching fellow Francisca Ireland Verwoerd and I) had intentionally nurtured and named from the first day of the course.

After a short warm-up of re-imagining and enacting a modern-day nativity in New York City, the main exercise was simply to engage people we met on the school grounds in playing. First, we costumed and came up with devices to interact with people without speaking. As a

group, we agreed to parade through the school, passing out flyers, enticing people to follow us to the “playground.” We would serve a “love feast” of juice and cookies along the way. At the playground, we would have multiple play stations that the students created (e.g., invisible catch, massage train). A few students came up with their own clown characters and signature gags that helped them interact. As captured at the end of the video, one student dressed as “Death,” offering her heart (a plastic anatomical model) to anyone as a gift of love. Another student costumed as a clown surgeon, who would diagnose someone and write a love prescription.

Having offered a historical perspective by discussing holy fools, I offer second, third, and fourth analytic lenses—esthetic, theological, and psychoanalytic. Video, analysis, and implications to be presented at the REA conference.]

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Shaping Practical, Scriptural Imagination in Communities of Faith

Abstract: In Acts 10, Peter experiences an imaginative conversion with regard to the inclusion of the Gentiles. I suggest that educators interested in the imagination's role in Christian formation can glean profitable insights from Luke's account of this event. The first section foregrounds a broad definition of imagination that integrates theories about its function on both conscious and preconscious levels. After analyzing the biblical text through this pedagogical lens, I move toward suggestions for reading biblical narratives for imaginative formation.

Defining Imagination for Christian Formation

Imagination often appears in educational arguments without definition, yet the connotations and comprehensions of the term can vary considerably. For much of the modern and late modern era, imagination was relegated to the realm of fancifulness, that which stands opposed to the cold, hard, and infinitely more valuable facts.¹ When adults apply the adjective “imaginative” to children, this is typically what they mean. In other permutations, imagination came to be associated almost exclusively with artistic creativity, the “image making” capacity in the most literal sense of the term. In some philosophical treatments, imagination is defined in terms of traditional “faculty psychology” as a discrete sphere of mental operation that exists alongside of and clearly differentiated from reason, intuition, the will, and so forth.² In much common usage, then, imagination refers specifically to a discrete, creative faculty for image-making, which people possess to various degrees.

More recent literature in a variety of fields, however, has more broadly defined imagination as a fundamental, creative and constructive capacity that integrates the understandings held by both the body and the brain, the conscious and unconscious, and the personal and social, and gives rise to a whole way of being in the world. The “way of being” that arises from the work of the imagination includes not only what we might describe as comprehension, but also ways of seeing, construing, and acting. In this way, imagination serves as helpful shorthand for the holistic way of knowing that has been the concern of epistemic proposals hoping to move away from strict, Cartesian paradigm.³

Trevor Hart and Garret Green, two Christian theologians, both make imagination central to their respective projects. Hart, working out of a theological framework of the incarnation of

¹ Garrett Green traces the challenges to imagination's value through Feuerbach, Nietzsche and Marx. Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 9-27.

² Ibid., 88.

³ Thomas Groome's appeal to “conation” comes to mind as another way of referring to a holistic way of knowing, though his discussion of conation does not discuss the sense of operation here as “preconscious construal.” Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 30.

Christ, defines imagination as a “way of thinking, responding and acting across the whole spread of our experience.”⁴ Green explicitly rejects the faculty psychology approach, employing the broadest definition of “faculty” as the “ability to do something.”⁵ He places particular emphasis on the role of the imagination in the gestalt perception, the ways which we come to a sense of the whole, a process that is largely preconscious. Imagination has a paradigmatic function, helping us to “perceive and represent likenesses” that help us categorize and interpret experience.⁶ The function of religious imagination, then, is to tell us “what the world is like” in its broadest and deepest sense.”⁷ Scripture, in Green’s proposal, helps to shape the lenses through which we interpret the world; the scriptures shape the Christian imagination.⁸

Discussions among Christian educators echo this broad definition. Both Paul Avis and Sarah Arthur see the role of the imagination as perceiving connections and constructing meaning.⁹ Maria Harris’s *Teaching and Religious Imagination* is now a landmark text in the conversation. She describes imagination as the capacity that “binds into one (*einbildungskraft*)

⁴ Hart explicitly resists definitions that conceive of imagination as “some arcane ‘thing’ with carefully specified and limited remit.” He draws out the organ or faculty analogy in arguing against the faculty psychology approach, suggesting that “the imagination is the psychical equivalent not of our appendix (which, when it becomes troublesome or painful, we can simply cut out and flush away without loss) but the blood supply which circulates things (both good and bad) around our entire body. The question facing us, therefore, is not so much *whether* we shall be imaginative as human beings, but *how* we shall be so.” Trevor A. Hart, *Between the Image and the Word: Theological Engagements With Imagination, Language, and Literature* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 5. (emphasis original).

⁵ Green, *Imagining God*, 88.

⁶ Ibid., 79. Green employs Thomas Kuhn’s theory of the function of paradigms in the sciences in discussing how the imagination functions in Christian theology.

⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁸ Green identifies his debt to John Calvin for the metaphor of Scripture as lens. Ibid., 107. In a later work on imagination and hermeneutics, Green makes connects imagination with the hermeneutical imperative, the conviction that all experience necessitates interpretation. See Garrett Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination: The Crisis of Interpretation at the End of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁹ Paul Avis defines imagination as “the faculty that perceives connections, creates combinations, and extrapolates from those to new insights.” Paul Avis, *Theology and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol, and Myth in Religion and Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 41. Avis appears to use the term “faculty” here in the sense of faculty psychology, for he distinguishes imagination as something separate and apart from either “analytical reason” or “moral consciousness.” He draws heavily on both Newman and the Romantic philosophers in making this distinction. As stated above, I want to reject this compartmentalization in favor of an understanding of the broader, integrative understanding of the imagination. Sarah Arthur’s concludes that imagination refers to fundamental integrative capacity by which persons “discover, process, and creatively express coherent meaning . . . [and] make connections between thought and experience, word and image, self and other, seen and unseen.” Sarah Arthur, *The God Hungry Imagination: The Art of Storytelling for Postmodern Youth Ministry* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2007), 53.

the intellectual, conceptual, and mental powers associated with the mind and the incarnational, corporeal, and physical capacities associated with the body.”¹⁰

Harris’s insight about the importance of the body and the body’s ways of knowing to the imagination’s work has been developed more recently, and from different theoretical bases, by James K.A. Smith. Smith connects imagination to our bodily-based, implicit “take” on the world, a preconscious construal that becomes the basis for all subsequent thought.¹¹ By emphasizing the role of bodily ways of knowing in how we come to see and engage the world, Smith’s work adds a critical emphasis on bodily practices to these broad definitions of imagination.¹² Smith identifies narratives and practices as being particularly capable of operating on the pre-conscious register in addition to the conscious, and thus both are particularly capable of shaping the imagination.¹³

Christians claim, however, that the imagination is deeply ambiguous, and thus in need of direction or redirection. Even what operates under the label of “Christian imagination” must again and again be evaluated according to the norms provided by the Christian tradition and the wisdom of reflective practice.¹⁴ The question then becomes how Christian educators might contribute to the transformation of the imagination. The intersections at which the imagination operates and the ways of being that arise from that work are highly suggestive. First, if the imagination resides at the intersection of body and mind, then the corporal elements of human

¹⁰ Harris is following William Lynch in this broad definition. She explicitly states her objection to overly precise definitions of the imagination, fearing that too much technical precision obscures the paradoxical and mysterious ways in which the imagination operates. Harris gives her account of the imagination in her text aimed at expanding the ways that teacher’s conceive of their task to include the imaginative, the sacramental, and the aesthetic. Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 9.

¹¹ Smith draws on Mark Johnson, Pierre Bourdieu, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty in claiming that both practices and narratives are particularly capable of operating on the pre-conscious register, and thus are especially capable of shaping the imagination at the tacit level. As our “emotional perception apparatus,” imagination includes the affections and the tacit or preconscious knowledge (Pierre Bourdieu’s “feel for the game”) in the construal of a whole way of being in the world, including our thinking, acting, relating, and hoping. James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 36.

¹² Smith responds to critiques of his work, who feel that his approach is insufficiently rational, with the caveat that the formative nature of practices is facilitated by conscious attention to them. *Ibid.*, 188.

¹³ Smith sets out to offer a Christian philosophy of action that “1) recognizes the nonconscious, pretheoretical ‘drivers’ of our action and behavior, centered in what I’ll call the imagination; 2) accounts for the bodily formation of our habituated orientation to the world; and thus 3) appreciates the centrality of story as rooted in this ‘bodily basis of meaning’ and as a kind of pretheoretical compass that guides and generates human action. In short, the way to the heart is through the body, and the way into the body is through story.” *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁴ See Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University, 2010).

experience need to be taken as seriously as rational aspects of meaning.¹⁵ Second, if the imagination operates at the intersection of the personal and the social, attention must be paid to corporate aspects of our experience, the social bodies big and small in which people participate.¹⁶ Third, and following from these two claims, narratives and practices become central to the task of transforming the imagination, due of the deep ways that both integrate the corporal and corporate elements of human life along with closely held convictions and cognitive understanding. Practices, like imagination, do their formative work at both conscious and preconscious levels, and their formative function benefits by careful reflection on their shape even while reflection cannot replicate the tacit learning those practices can bring about. Narratives, for their part, shape the way individuals interpret the world, assisting in human capacities to interpret individuals as intentionally oriented characters within a complex narrative world, as cognitive scientists studying narrative have noted.¹⁷ Given the definition of imagination proposed above, the fact that storytelling aids in our capacities to “make sense of past experiences, map out the course of future events, or assess how wider cultural assumptions and norms might have shaped or been shaped by one’s own or another’s conduct,” places it at the center of the discussion of the imagination.¹⁸

I argue, as have Smith and others, that these components of the imagination’s formation and potential transformation make communities of faith especially well suited to the work. Christian communities confess the need for imaginal transformation, gather in corporate bodies that engage bodies in common patterns of practice, and claim a narrative of God’s action in and for the world communicated principally through the Christian Scriptures. Though Christian communities fail and falter in this work at best, or actively foster a deeply distorted “Christian” imagination at worst, they still offer profound contexts for counter-formation. Smith focuses on the power of the liturgy in this work, but I contend that the practices of engaging the Scriptures in communities of faith can be also be constructed in ways intended to facilitate the Scriptures formation of the readers imagination.

Though potential avenues for exploring this claim about the potential of scriptural study to shape the imagination of readers are many and varied, the Acts of the Apostles provides one interesting option. This narrative text in the New Testament functions as a sequel to the gospel by the same unnamed author, providing an account of the life of the early church as it negotiates

¹⁵ This includes the concrete practices and postures of the body, including patterns of relating, as they occur in particular historical and social contexts.

¹⁶ This level of attention includes the broader sense in which imagination, those broad ways of making meaning and coming to construe the world and those who inhabit it, is tacitly acquired through participation in broader social practices that conscript bodies in patterns of behavior that instantiate meaning. See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23-30. Smith claims that practices “conscript” or bodies into broader patterns of meaning. *Imagining the Kingdom*, 137.

¹⁷ David Herman draws on the broader theory of “folk psychology” in proposing that stories scaffold our understanding of the actions of human agents because stories support our capacity to relate intentions, beliefs, and behaviors within a contextualized individual. Crucially, this capacity depends precisely upon the imagination – the understanding generated by the intersubjective experiences of an embodied-person-in-relation. David Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 297.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 248.

its identity between its historical identity in the story of Israel, its Greco-Roman context, and the identity and ministry of its Lord, Jesus of Nazareth. The Acts narrative, I contend, is interested in shaping the imagination of its readers by providing an account of “narrativized ecclesial practices” that come to constitute the distinctive “Way.”¹⁹ I further suggest that using the lens of imagination to attend to the ways in which Luke imaginatively narrates the Christian Way of being in response to God’s action in Jesus Christ might both illuminate important features of the text and inform the broader pedagogical conversation.²⁰

Moving to the Text: Acts 10:1-11:18 as Imaginal Transformation

Acts 10:1-11:18 records the encounter of the apostle Peter with the Gentile Cornelius, a story that narrates a critical moment in the development of the Way as Gentile believers in Jesus are welcomed into the community that had been constituted only by Jewish believers. In this story, Peter undergoes an imaginal transformation, prompted by divine action and realized in cooperation with divine agency. Peter comes to a new way of construing the identity of the people of God in a way that is intimately related to the concrete and narratively situated practices of the community. After briefly summarizing the plot of this extended encounter, this section highlights what the discussion of imagination brings into clearer focus and which of those features are most suggestive for the task of facilitating imaginal transformation when Christian communities of practice gather around biblical texts.

The story unfolds in a series of roughly parallel scenes:²¹

- I. Cornelius’s vision during a time of prayer: an angel confirms his good standing before God and instructs him to send for Peter. He sends messengers (10:1-8)
- II. Peter’s vision during a time of prayer: a collection of ritually clean and unclean animals appears before him, while a divine voice commands – “kill and eat.” Peter resists eating unlawful foods, and the vision/command repeats three times. (10:9-16)
- III. Cornelius’s men arrive at Peter’s house: after arrival customs, Peter – with prompting from the Spirit – welcomes the messengers to stay and prepares to return with them. (10:17-23a)

¹⁹ “Narrativized ecclesial practices” is terminology coined by Kavin Rowe in *World Upside Down*. Rowe draws on Charles Taylor in arguing that narrativized practices are the means by which the author communicates the distinctive “social imaginary” of the community comes into being. He states, “The point is rather that Taylor’s description of the coinherence of practices, normative notions, and a larger moral or metaphysical framework is interpretively advantageous because it helps to uncover the deeper matters that are at stake in the way Luke tells the story of the Christian mission.” C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 146.

²⁰ The “Way” is a uniquely Lukan designation for the followers of Jesus. See Acts 9:2.

²¹ Beverly Gaventa discusses the parallel scenes and the novelistic format of the encounter in *From Darkness to Light*. The story comes as the final in a series of conversion stories, which include sometimes surprising figures like a eunuch and the greatest enemy of the church in Saul of Tarsus. Key figures have appeared for a brief series of stories in the text thus far, and Peter has stepped out of the wings as the main character of the plot at the end of the previous chapter. Beverly Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 108.

- IV. Peter arrives at Cornelius's house: Cornelius bows before Peter and is rebuked; Peter articulates his new conviction about the appropriateness of his presence among Gentiles (10:23b-28)
- V. Cornelius speaks: he recounts his vision and asks Peter to say what the Lord has commanded (10:29-33)
- VI. Peter speaks: confirming that he "truly sees" that God shows no partiality but accepts all who call, he preaches the news about Jesus (10:34-43)
- VII. The Spirit interrupts Peter by falling on the Gentiles: Peter commands that the Gentiles be baptized as response to God's action. He remains as their guest.
- VIII. The community's concerns: some circumcised believers take issue with Peter for eating with Gentiles; Peter recounts the events, along with his reasoning about them. The objections are silence (11:1-18)

This account narrates Peter's imaginal transformation regarding who can constitute the community of Christ's disciples, and attending to it through this theoretical perspective brings critical features of the text into clearer focus. First, Peter's imaginal transformation is intimately connected with his bodily practices, as the prominence of hospitality practices makes evident. The cultural resonance of hospitality practices, such as their ability to communicate messages of social association, is well established, and those cultural practices provide an essential background for understanding the passage.²² Critically, the concrete markers of hospitality in this passage are not simply the result of a change in Peter's understanding, but the crucible in which a vision about dietary practices comes to be associated with the inclusion of Gentiles in the community. The practice cooperates with Peter's ongoing reflection on events in facilitating a move beyond initial cognitive dissonance to a newly formed construal of the shape of the community.²³

The broader cultural import of hospitality in the Greco-Roman world already points to role of corporate human experience in the shaping of the imagination, but the social force of the Christian community also pertains. Within the text of Acts, hospitality is a fundamental practice of the community, both with regard to standard gatherings of the community and the reception of traveling missionaries. In the Gospel of Luke, the related "first volume" to Acts, hospitality practices frequently separates those who receive Jesus as Lord and those who do not.²⁴ Jesus' practices of dining violate social protocol with some frequency, and his instructions about hospitality aim to bring about practices that reflect the power dynamics of the kingdom of God (Luke 14:1-24). Peter participated in the inner circles of Jesus' ministry, bearing witness to and closely participating in Jesus' controversial and boundary breaking practices of hospitality. Though Jesus in his ministry never engaged in direct hospitality with Gentiles, it is implied that

²² For more information on hospitality customs see Andrew E. Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in Its Mediterranean Setting* (Sheffield : Sheffield Phoenix, 2005). and Joshua W. Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers in Luke-Acts: An Interpretation of the Malta Episode in Acts 28:1-10* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). The prominence of hospitality is signaled by a heavy concentration of key terms, including references to houses, greeting, welcoming, and going in.

²³ Following the cognitive verbs reveals Peter's progression from dismay and confusion to new conviction.

²⁴ See Luke 7:36-50.

Peter has been shaped by participation in that distinctive community of hospitality practices, formation that, I suggest, is central to the ways in which he responds to the situation with Cornelius.

The centrality of the practice of hospitality in the unlikely and divinely prompted encounter between Peter and Cornelius implicates both narratives and practices in the transformation of Peter's imagination.²⁵ Importantly, it is Peter's practice of hospitality, not his preaching to Gentiles, that becomes the source of the Jewish Christian community's objection – that he “went in” to the Gentiles and “ate with them” (Acts 11:2). In response to the objection, Peter offers a first person narrative account in which he summarizes the series of events and adds indications of his reasoning about them.²⁶ His retelling of the conclusion appears to solidify his own understanding, rather than simply reiterating what took place.

In this story, Peter, functioning as a representative of the Christian community, undergoes an imaginal transformation with tremendous import for the life of the Christian community. When this story is read through the lens of this broader discussion of the imagination's formation, key features identified in the literature become apparent. The imaginal transformation comes about through the confluence of the embodied and socially constructed practice of hospitality, Peter's formation in the ministry and teachings of Jesus, his ongoing reasoning on the basis of that experience, and the ongoing activity of divine actors. Attending to the ways in which these elements of the imagination's formation coalesce in the text leads to further suggestions about how communities of faith and practice might engage biblical narratives, like this one, as imagination forming stories.

Teaching Biblical Narratives for Scriptural Imagination

By way of conclusion, I want to suggest makes some initial suggestions about how a contemporary community of faith, gathered around a biblical narrative like this one, might instantiate analogous formative dynamics to those that operate in this text.

First, Peter's prior knowledge of the broader tradition, though implied rather than explicitly stated, performs a critical role in his imaginal transformation. It is first apparent in his resistance to the vision's command as a radical departure from his prior understanding of what is lawful. It is also apparent in his own account of events in which the teachings of Jesus are specifically recalled, though recontextualized in light of recent events. Information based approaches to Christian formation have been subject to appropriate critique as being overly rational in their orientation. Still, for Peter to arrive at a new way of construing the meaning of that textual tradition, he must first actually know it. While not explicitly indicated in the narrative, it is apparent that Peter has been instructed – catechized – and is thus able to bring that

²⁵ Hospitality is not the only practice playing a critical role in the development of the story. Prayer functions at the opening of the story in two ways: as a distinguishing mark of a godly person, applied to both Peter and Cornelius, and as a context in which divine actors enter the story. Prayer does not function mechanically, as it if *causes* divine intervention, but there is a broader pattern in Acts in which prayer serves as a location in which God speaks or acts definitively.

²⁶ He integrates a statement of Jesus into the account, along with his conclusion: “If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” (Acts 11:17).

robust knowledge to bear as he makes unprecedented yet still traditioned steps in response to divine initiative. With regard to increasingly biblical illiterate contemporary communities of faith, the point is well taken.

Second and subsequently, for knowledge of the scriptures to be formative for the imagination, rather than simply filling the coffers in our memory banks with textual information, then it needs to be connected to the world in which we live. I would point to Thomas Groome's praxis reflection and Chuck Foster's "eventful education" as two clear, strong examples of proposals that take the integration of text and tradition with ongoing praxis seriously.²⁷ Both of these pedagogical approaches begin somewhere besides the biblical text, but similar dynamics could still be brought to bear when a biblical narrative rather than a practice or event is the centerpiece of the community's study. The Acts of the Apostles contains many descriptions of the community's practice that serve as interesting sites of exploration; other texts may require more creative connections. The intent is not to work from text to practical application, but rather to facilitate a conversation among learners in which contemporary practices or postures function or could function in ways analogous to the biblical text.

Third, divine initiative and action play an undeniable role in Peter's transformed understanding here. Not only does Peter receive divine revelation in the form of a vision, but the Spirit further prompts him to accept the messengers from Cornelius and then interrupts his sermon by unexpectedly coming upon the Gentiles (Acts 10:11-16; 19-20; 44-47). Peter recognizes that his actions can either be in cooperation with or in (presumably ineffective) opposition to God's purposes. At the same time, Peter is not a passive figure or a particularly animated puppet; he reasons, decides, proclaims – he imagines. The cooperation of divine and human agents here is highly suggestive for the ways that teachers conceive of their task. Without so tightly defining the work of the Spirit that the community misses the signs of the Spirit's sometimes surprising action, educators can still do better than only assigning to divine agency only those outcomes of an educational encounter for which our own efforts do not account.²⁸ Space does not permit the exploration this topic requires, but an account of whether and how God acts in the transformation of imagination is needed.

Finally, hospitality provides a helpful framework for thinking of the community's engagement with the biblical text. The text is both familiar, known through congregational culture and study, and yet strange, a collection of disparate texts from historical periods quite different from the present one. In that way, current communities greet the text as stranger and guest. Critically – the biblical term for guest and host is identical. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus has a way of entering a home as a guest and sometimes emerging as host. Communities of faith may benefit by simultaneously regarding the biblical text in both senses - as guest, even as stranger, to be charitably welcomed and understood, but also as the host that sets the table for the community.

²⁷ Groome, *Sharing Faith*, 135-154. Charles R. Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 47-50.

²⁸ Carol Lakey Hess, "Educating in the Spirit" in *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 119-131.

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Restoring God's Reign in Religious Imaginations: A Pedagogical Approach for Promoting Integration in Learners' Minds, Hearts, and Lives

Abstract

The importance of attending to the imagination in religious education is paramount. Our cognitional needs demand it, Jesus models it, and our image-flooded culture makes it a practical necessity. But what does it look like to teach the Christian faith in a way that does not merely pay lip service to the importance of imagination but actually promotes genuine transformation of learners' imaginations? Synthesizing research on Jesus' teaching, cognitive science, and educational best practices, this paper presents a proposal for an innovative pedagogical process that meets the aforementioned cognitional, theological, and cultural exigencies.

Introduction

The importance of imagination for people's lives of faith has been a prominent theme in the writings of some of the most distinguished scholars of our time. Descriptions of the gradual shifting of Christians' "social imaginaries" lies at the heart of Charles Taylor's account of our present "secular age" and how we got here.¹ Andrew Delbanco in like manner has traced the permutations in Protestant Americans' imagining that facilitated a cultural devolution from a nation united "under God" to our present "stage of the self".² Andrew Greeley concluded from decades of research that people's preferences of religious images were more predictive of behaviors and attitudes than church attendance, doctrinal orthodoxy, or any other religious measure.³ In the field of religious education, leading scholars like Maria Harris, James Loder, and Thomas Groome have devoted significant attention in their writings to the importance of the imagination in for education in faith.

These scholarly influences do seem to have permeated popular thinking on some level, with most religious educators today making some effort to incorporate audio-visual elements into (e.g., PowerPoints and YouTube videos) their instruction. Notwithstanding such haphazard efforts, by and large the imaginative formation received by most contemporary Christians remains inadequate to withstand the fragmenting effects of postmodernity described by Taylor and others. What more could be done? In this paper, I endeavor to address this question, drawing upon my research from the past several years in a variety of fields including sociology, cognitive science, biblical studies, and religious education. I begin by offering three arguments for the centrality of the imagination to Christian religious education. In the latter half of the paper, I present a proposal for the sort of imagination-centered pedagogy needed to empower people to

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007).

² Andrew Delbanco, *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10318500>.

³ Andrew M. Greeley, *Religious Change in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 100; *ibid.*, *American Catholics Since the Council: An Unauthorized Report* (Chicago, IL: Thomas More Press, 1985), 105, 201.

live meaningful, integrated lives of faith in today's postmodern culture. While the challenges, possibilities, and responses I describe are applicable to religious educators of all faith traditions, I write primarily out of my experience within the Catholic Christian community in the United States.

Three Arguments for the Centrality of Imagination to Christian Religious Education

The reasons for why it is so important to attend carefully to the imagination in religious education are many. I will articulate three here. First, mental images constitute the core of all thought and for this reason must be engaged directly in any case where educators seek to promote meaningful change in their students' thinking and living. According to the best available cognitive research, thought begins from the senses when sensory and motor nerves carry signals from sensory receptors on the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin to neurons in the brain. The firing of neurons in certain patterns provides the physiological basis for mental "images".⁴ So long as one is awake or dreaming, one experiences a constant stream of images through one's consciousness. This stream of images, according to Damasio, is "probably the main content of our thoughts."⁵ The ability to generate, attend to, and mentally manipulate these images is what is meant by "imagination" in the most basic sense of the word.⁶

Beyond providing the material of thought and a basic interpretive lens for understanding one's sense experiences, imagination gives direction to our living. As Paul Ricoeur says, "One lives only that which one imagines."⁷ Famed educator Parker Palmer similarly asserts, "Our seeing shapes our being."⁸ Even executing relatively simple actions—for example, locating an object or walking to a particular destination—requires visualization of the action to be completed. In fact, it is especially in the case of day-to-day living and real-time thinking and deciding that we rely most heavily upon rapid acts of imagination rather than discursive reasoning.⁹ When further life experience and learning endow mental images with affective

⁴ In neuroscience the word "images" indicates "mental patterns with a structure built with the tokens of each of the sensory modalities—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and somatosensory" (Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2000), 318). Significant in this definition is the fact that the term "image" is not limited to the visual. One's recollection of a friend's face, a catchy melody, the smell of a favorite flower, the taste of a favorite fruit, and the feel of a loved one's touch would all qualify as "images" in this sense.

⁵ Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 107. Damasio is in good company in noting the indispensable role images play in human thought. Cf. Aristotle, "De Anima," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 431a, 16; Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica," trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New Advent, 2008, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>, I, q.79, a.4, r.3; Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 348; Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding, Volume 3*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 5th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1992), 33.

⁶ For a fuller account of the role of mental images in the generation of thought, see Damasio, *Descartes' Error*.

⁷ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 278. Ricoeur adds, "even Life is a symbol, an image, before being experienced and lived." In the same vein, David Tracy writes, "human beings need story, symbol, image, myth, and fiction to disclose to their imaginations some genuinely new possibilities for existence" (*Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996), 207. Maria Harris similarly notes that people are not moved by direct appeal to the will so much as by inciting their imaginations to hoping and acting (*Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 20).

⁸ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), xi.

⁹ See Robert Masson, *Without Metaphor, No Saving God: Theology After Cognitive Linguistics* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2014), 179-80. Psychologist Justin Barrett adds, "what we say we think and know and what we think and know in real-time problem solving sometimes are two entirely different things" ("Theological Correctness: Cognitive Constraint and the Study of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999), 325).

charge, variegated connotations, and existential significance, they become the sorts of “symbols” that constitute the foundation for the cognitive framework by means of which one interprets and navigates reality.¹⁰ In light of all of the above, it is evident why any instruction that makes a lasting impact on learners’ thinking and behavior necessarily engages them on the level of their mental images.

In reading the Gospels, we observe Jesus teaching in precisely this way, which suggests a second reason why Christian religious educators should practice an imagination-centered pedagogy. Jesus’ pedagogical use of story and symbol was essential to his mission, which is best understood as, not merely proclaiming the reign (or kingdom) of God, but inviting people to participation therein. Jesus found parables¹¹ to be particularly suitable mediators of his vision of the reign of God. Rather than merely illustrating information that could stand on its own, the parables prompt the hearer’s participation in the reality of the reign of God to which the parables refer.¹² The imaginative, non-discursive language of the parables requires the listener to make an active effort to understand and make sense of Jesus’ vision of reality.¹³

Jesus seems to have preferred this manner of teaching over more direct instructional methods, which, as any experienced teacher knows, tends to shut down learners’ thinking.¹⁴ A more participatory mode of learning was required because knowing God’s reign is not like knowing the multiplication tables or the capitals of all 50 states. We know the truth of the reign of God when we participate in it. As PHEME PERKINS explains, “we respond to a parable on many levels with our minds, with our feelings, and perhaps even with an unconscious resonance to its archetypal themes. Such levels of response,” she adds, “are the ground of any conversion.”¹⁵ Hence, when Jesus told parables, he did not tell his audience what to think about the reign of God but rather invited them to “come and see” for themselves (Jn 1:39).¹⁶ In this sense, the parables are better conceived as exercises of the imagination than fables with clear morals.¹⁷

This sort of engaged, participatory pedagogy is all the more necessary in an age when people’s imaginations are being daily overwhelmed by an excess of stimulation. This brings us to the third reason for the centrality of the imagination in contemporary religious education. In times past, Americans received information and heard stories from a limited number of sources. This ensured a relatively unified set of messages and meanings that served as the foundation for Americans’ social world (e.g., the Christian message as proclaimed from the pulpit by preachers). In the current era, however, the media sources have proliferated and so too have the

¹⁰ I define “symbol” as a multivalent, affectively charged image that bear an excess of meaning.

¹¹ C. H. Dodd defines a parable as “a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought” (*The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961), 5).

¹² Bernard Brandon Scott, *Jesus, Symbol Maker for the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 11.

¹³ Cf. PHEME PERKINS, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 23, 38.

¹⁴ Cf. Thomas Groome’s distinction between “closure” and “disclosure” styles of teaching (*Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (Harper San Francisco, 1991), 243-4.). This is not to suggest that Jesus never employed direct instructional methods. The Gospels attest to the fact that he did, e.g., in famous sermons like the Sermon on the Mount.

¹⁵ PERKINS, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus*, 4.

¹⁶ Cf. Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 149; Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 202.

¹⁷ Cf. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, 87, 117; Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 2nd Revised (New York: Scribner, 1972), 21, 169, 182; John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 68; PERKINS, *Hearing the Parables*, 39; José Antonio Pagola, *Jesus, an Historical Approximation* (Miami, Fla: Convivium Press, 2009), 126.

messages. Richard Kearney describes the situation thus: “All we have is a series of random and conflicting meanings which cancel each other out, leaving us with nothing but a flux of surface images.”¹⁸

The average North American now sees approximately 6,000 marketing messages each day,¹⁹ and, thanks to the proliferation of handheld electronic devices, young people now pack an average of 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of media content into 7.5 hours of consumption every day.²⁰ According to a recent Pew Forum survey, 24% of teens go online “almost constantly”.²¹ The advances in communication technologies that have made such prodigious media consumption possible have also provided Americans unprecedented exposure to diverse cultures, religions, and worldviews and multiplied exponentially the sources informing their thinking and imagining. This onslaught of conflicting messages and images undoubtedly presents a significant challenge to people’s efforts to form a coherent vision of life.²² However, new technology also presents new tools for inviting people into the vision of the reign of God preached by Jesus. Whether religious educators are combatting the fragmenting effects of image overload or employing technology for the sake of evangelization, it has become imperative that they intentionally address the imaginal factors that exert such a powerful influence on the minds, hearts, and lives of modern people.

An Imagination-Centered Pedagogy for Today

The need for serious attention to the imagination in religious education is clear. This increased attention can and should take multiple forms including greater commitment and exposure to Christian art and literature, deeper experiences of liturgy and liturgical catechesis, and giving Christian symbols at least as much weight as doctrine in religion curricula and materials.²³ For the purposes of this paper, I will leave these suggestions aside and focus on the potential of devoting greater attention to the imagination in religious instruction.

¹⁸ Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 381.

¹⁹ Valerie Scatamburlo-D’Annibale, “Beyond the Culture Jam,” in *Critical Pedagogies: Living and Learning in the Shadow of the ‘Shopocalypse’*, ed. Jennifer A. Sandlin and Peter McLaren (New York: Routledge, 2010), 224.

²⁰ Victoria J. Rideout, Ulla G. Foehr, and Donald F. Roberts, “Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds” (Kaiser Family Foundation, January 2010), 2.

²¹ PewResearchCenter, “Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015: Smartphones Facilitate Shifts in Communication Landscape for Teens” (Pew Research Center, April 9, 2015), 2, http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2015/04/PI_TeensandTech_Update2015_0409151.pdf.

²² In the words of theologian Ray Hart, “For an American Christian to see via satellite television the life-style of a self-immolating Buddhist priest in Saigon is for him to see another human being whose existence is ordered by radically different self-images” (*Unfinished Man and the Imagination: Toward an Ontology and a Rhetoric of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 199).

²³ Although I do not have the space in this paper to elaborate on these non-pedagogical opportunities for transforming learners’ imaginations, I encourage the reader to consider the possibilities in these areas. Given the foundational role imagination plays in our thought and behavior, one should not underestimate the influence of literary luminaries like C. S. Lewis and Flannery O’Connor. More than theologians, it is they who shape people’s thinking about faith at the deepest level, and we as a faith community would do well to encourage more people to devote themselves to artistic expression and to incorporate it more consistently in the life of the Church. For a similar argument about the importance of the imagination as it concerns liturgy, see James Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Baker Academic, 2009), and *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Baker Academic, 2013). Finally, for an example of how textbooks and other educational materials could be designed to make them more imaginatively engaging, see Nick Sousanis’s groundbreaking and wonderfully creative work *Unflattening* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).

As suggested above, most religious educators have some sense for the need to engage their students on the imaginative level. The real challenge is moving beyond the occasional use of audio-visuals to engaging learners' imaginations in a genuinely transformative way. In order to do so, teachers need more than scholarly arguments for the importance of the imagination and disconnected suggestions for imaginative teaching strategies. They need a cohesive pedagogical approach that is concrete in its implications, grounded in the best available research, and ready to be implemented in the classroom. It is my aim in the latter half of this paper to describe such a pedagogical approach, which proceeds in three phases summarized by the acronym "SEE"—(1) Stimulate the imagination, (2) Expand the imagination, and (3) Embrace a new way of imagining.²⁴

Phase One—Stimulate the imagination: The purpose of the first phase is to engage learners cognitively and affectively by stimulating activity at the level of their mental images. All thought originates in sensations and mental images, and our mostly deeply entrenched views and convictions are those that are tied most tightly to personally important mental images. For these reasons, teachers seeking to facilitate truly transformative learning must invite learners to activate their core mental images and symbols (i.e., of God, self, and world²⁵), critically examine those images, and take an active role in constructing new meaning around these (now potentially modified) images. We often see Jesus beginning his lessons in just this way, inviting his hearers to call to mind images and experiences that were intimately familiar to them like casting nets in the sea, laboring in a vineyard, baking bread, or shepherding sheep. Today a Christian educator might begin a lesson—for example, about the Eucharist—by facilitating discussion, an art project, or storytelling that helps learners to bring to mind familiar images of community (e.g., hanging out with friends or enjoying a family meal). The teacher would then invite learners to critically examine these familiar images, for example, by asking where they came from and whether there might be other ways to imagine community. Key to this phase is presenting images and questions that prompt learners to actively imagine reality *as they experience it* and encouraging them to give expression to their mental images in their own terms (not in those they think the teacher wants to hear).

Phase Two—Expand the imagination: Having stimulated learners' imagining in Phase One, Phase Two aims to challenge their current imagining so as to open them up to ways of imagining that are more adequate and more authentically Christian.²⁶ In this phase teachers

²⁴ This process and its three phases are designed to cohere with the natural cognitional processes by which sense experience gives rise to thought and thought leads to action. I have briefly described these cognitional processes above (see p.2), and I reiterate the relevant moments of these cognitional processes in my descriptions of each of the pedagogical phases below. The structure of the SEE process also conforms to the basic steps described in the literature of transformative learning theory as leading to radical transformations in people's thinking and meaning-making. (See, e.g., Jennifer Garvey Berger, "Dancing on the Threshold of Meaning: Recognizing and Understanding the Growing Edge," *Journal of Transformative Education* 2, no. 4 (October 1, 2004): 336–51.)

²⁵ Sandra Schneiders speaks of these three images as the "master images" that "in dynamic interrelationship, decisively control our participation in reality" (Sandra M. Schneiders, *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2013), 38.

²⁶ A person may be regarded as imagining in a more adequate manner to the extent that one can imagine one's experiences in a unified way, adapt one's imaginative framework to new experiences and information, and metacognize and exert control over one's imagining. While there are innumerable ways to be authentic to the Christian tradition, we must acknowledge some criteria that distinguish faithful discipleship from idolatry and error. These include—among others—openness to God's ongoing self-revelation in one's imagining (as opposed to an idolatrous close-mindedness) and imaging anchored in the core symbols of the Christian faith (e.g., Jesus, the cross, the Eucharist, Church).

facilitate questioning, engagement with Christian teachings, and/or activities that problematize or expose limits in learners' current imagining and invite learners to explore key symbols from the Christian tradition that offer greater promise. Producing some level of intellectual discomfort is often necessary because people typically resist accepting radically new views until their accustomed way of seeing things becomes problematic.²⁷ Disruption of this sort was a hallmark of Jesus' parables. Indeed, Scripture scholar Amy Jill Levine argues that, if we are to understand the parables, "We might be better off thinking less about what they 'mean' and more about what they can 'do': remind, provoke, refine, confront, disturb...."²⁸ Jesus drew in his audience by painting a familiar scene, like a priest walking the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, but then he would turn the tables with a provocative twist, for example, suggesting that not the priest or the Levite but rather the hated Samaritan was the true neighbor to the man on the roadside. A contemporary educator might do likewise by playing a song or video clip, telling a story, or asking questions that challenge learners to imagine the true model of community, not as a group of friends just like themselves, but rather as a Eucharistic communion of diverse, fallible people.

Phase Three—Embrace a more authentically Christian way imagining: After Phase Two has disrupted learners' inadequate ways of imagining and posed the possibility of more authentically Christian ways, Phase Three presents the opportunity and support needed to forge a new, more adequate imaginative synthesis. It is crucial in this final phase that teachers not presume to impose meanings on learners but rather encourage them to organically and creatively weave the Christian wisdom into their own frameworks of meaning. If the scholarship on Jesus' parables can be trusted, Jesus did not tell these enigmatic stories with the intention of conveying a single, clear-cut meaning.²⁹ He told stories in such a way that demanded the audience's effort to make sense of his meaning and elicited judgments and decisions about the vision of reality the parables present.³⁰ For example, in the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus challenges his hearers to judge which person was neighbor to the victim and to decide whether or not they will have the courage to act with compassion as the Samaritan did. In like manner, contemporary teachers can pose questions and facilitate activities that invite learners to think for themselves about Christian ways of imagining (e.g., the Eucharistic image of community), to render personal judgments about the adequacy of their own orienting symbols and those of the Christian tradition, and to make decisions about their lives based on those judgments. The more concretely learners can imagine the implications of their decisions, the more likely their learning is to translate into new behaviors and habits.

²⁷ See Berger, "Dancing on the Threshold of Meaning." Recognizing the pedagogical necessity of producing such intellectual discomfort, Paulo Freire writes about re-presenting learners' thematic universe to them in familiar but "problematized" terms (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1994), 90), Jack Mezirow writes about creating a "disorienting dilemma" (*Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 148), and Bernard Lonergan writes about prompting a "crisis" (*Topics in Education: The Cincinnati Lectures of 1959 on the Philosophy of Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1993), 101).

²⁸ Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), 4.

²⁹ See Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 5, 9, 99; Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker*, 11; Crossan, *In Parables*, 21; Chilton, "Kingdom of God," 517-8, 522; Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 277.

³⁰ Scholars in psychology of learning maintain that an appropriate level of challenge promotes greater engagement and more resilient learning—a principle referred to as "desirable difficulty" (Robert A. Bjork and Marcia C. Linn, "The Science of Learning and the Learning of Science: Introducing Desirable Difficulties," *The APS Observer* 19, no. 3 (2006); cf. Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel, *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2014), 98-9).

Further clarifications on the SEE process: This three-phase process is not necessarily intended to replace other pedagogical approaches but rather to enhance learners' imaginative engagement, whatever the pedagogy employed. For example, the SEE process integrates especially well with Thomas Groome's shared Christian praxis (SCP), supplementing the usual dynamics of SCP with activities that more intentionally promote development in learners' imaginative capabilities.³¹ A learning event conducted in accord with the SEE process may progress through the three phases within a 45-minute class or over the course of a week or even a semester. Although this process is distinctive in its capacity to meet the particular needs of postmodern learners, it is designed such that its basic movements accord with the invariant dynamics of human cognition, making the process suitable for nearly all learners, regardless of age or developmental level.³² It is also designed in such a way as to make its implementation feasible for teachers of varied abilities.³³

The movements of the SEE process are more appropriately described as "phases" than "steps" in the sense that the activities of the different phases frequently overlap and blend with one another. For example, the invitation in Phase One to identify patterns in learners' imagining may instantaneously generate awareness of the inadequacy of this manner of imagining, an awareness that is targeted specifically by the disruptive exercises of Phase Two. The language of "steps" is also less appropriate insofar as it suggests a linear process leading to a definitive endpoint. However, the success of the SEE process (and, I would argue, of any pedagogy in today's postmodern context) depends upon it being carried out in a recursive manner. That is to say that it will be most effective when learners become habituated to the process through repeatedly engaging in it over an extended period of time.

A recursive pedagogical process is necessary for several reasons. To begin with, healthy integration of the imagination requires relative stability in the core of one's symbol system, but postmodern criticism of metanarratives and embracing of plurality coupled with the incessant

³¹ While the two approaches are fully compatible, I describe the SEE process in three phases rather than simply adopting the five-movement structure of Groome's approach because this structure makes it easier for teachers to attend to the dynamics of imagination transformation that are consistently revealed in research in cognitive science, transformative learning and conceptual change, and in Jesus' teaching (and for other reasons that I have articulated elsewhere).

³² This imagination-focused pedagogy is appropriate for young children since the prominent use of images is more likely to attract and hold their attention than an approach that focuses on definitions and doctrines. Yet it is no less appropriate for adults in whose cognitional processes images continue to fulfill essential functions. Of course, as with any pedagogical approach, the effectiveness of this process depends to a degree upon the teacher differentiating instruction according to the needs of learners. For young learners, more time will be spent on examining images, telling stories, and undertaking artistic projects so as to respect the limits of their short attention spans and concrete manner of thinking. Adults, by contrast, possess longer attention spans and the ability to engage in abstract thought. In their case, learning experiences can and should incorporate more detailed presentation of Christian teaching and more sophisticated questions. In addition to differentiating instruction according to learners' age, teachers should adapt this approach according to the learners' social context and cultural background, emotional maturity, and comfort level with one another.

³³ In its most sophisticated form, the SEE process is designed to promote post-critical symbolic consciousness (i.e., imaginative capabilities enhanced by critical reasoning and metacognitive habits) in learners, which requires teachers themselves to be operating from a post-critical consciousness. After all, teachers cannot help learners to develop awareness of the way images function in their cognition and living if the teachers do not understand these dynamics themselves. However, when it comes to more basic forms of this approach (e.g., those used with children), it is less important for teachers to be post-critical thinkers since children are incapable of attaining post-critical consciousness. For younger age groups, this pedagogical process aims at forming imaginations in a Christian manner and deepening learners' understanding of and thinking about religious and existential matters but not promoting post-critical consciousness.

multiplication of fabricated images in our culture conspire against such stability. The influence of any formal education, no matter how rigorous, is dwarfed by the continuous formation people receive from television, the internet, movies, popular music, and advertising. Given this state of affairs, lessons about Christian teaching and symbols that are not repeatedly reinforced are doomed to be lost in the mix. Even dynamic educational approaches like Groome's shared praxis and my own SEE process, which produce more resilient learning on account of their experiential, engaging methodology, are inadequate to preparing learners for sustaining imaginal integration if they are conducted merely as one-off or occasional learning sessions.³⁴ In order to contend with the many competing influences, religious educators must go beyond exposing learners to Christian symbols to training learners to take control of their own imagining.³⁵ Such training requires more than occasional exercises in Christian imagining; it requires continuous formation.³⁶

The symbols that exert the greatest influence over people's imagining are those that carry the strongest emotional charge and that are most interconnected with other personally important symbols, invested with the richest meaning, and reinforced most consistently by experience. If Christian symbols are to constitute the core of people's symbol systems, those people must continue to discover ever new levels of beauty and meaning in them through education, liturgy, art, and other formative experiences. This is to say that, in today's context, Christian religious education will only succeed in forming disciples' imaginations for the reign of God insofar as it continuously revisits the central symbols of Christian faith, building more and more connections with other faith symbols and images from everyday life and giving learners reason to return to those symbols time and again.³⁷

Conclusion

There is little doubt in the world of religious education that the imagination is of paramount importance for the way we think, live our lives, and grow (or falter) in faith. What is needed most urgently at present is not more scholarly arguments about why the imagination is important but rather concrete pedagogical guidance that will help teachers to engage learners' imaginations in genuinely transformative ways. It has been my aim in this paper to offer some guidance of this sort, proposing a three-phase pedagogical process that takes into account how

³⁴ In *Sharing Faith*, Groome clearly envisions SCP as a process that can be used in an ongoing manner (see, e.g., p.293), but he does not make the case that conducting SCP in an ongoing manner is essential for achieving its aims as I do for the SEE process.

³⁵ This process of assuming control over one's own imagining can be understood as one facet of the work of "self-appropriation" described by Lonergan in *Insight*. Robert Doran's work on "psychic conversion" represents one scholarly effort to develop further the imaginative dimension of Lonergan's work on self-appropriation. (See, e.g., Robert M. Doran, *Psychic Conversion and Theological Foundations*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006).)

³⁶ Further research is needed to determine what period of time would be necessary to form learners in lifelong habits of Christian imagining. We can assert with confidence that the time period will vary depending on when the training begins. For young learners, whose mental habits are still highly malleable, one imagines that an extended period of training (perhaps three, five, or ten years) would be adequate. For adults, who are more set in their ways of thinking and imagining, a much longer (if not indefinite) period would likely be required.

³⁷ Of course, conducting the process in a recursive manner does not mean repeating the same content in the same way year after year. Rather, returning to the same topics repeatedly over time allows for deepening and nuancing of learners' understanding of those topics. An illustrative image for this dynamic would be an upward spiral as opposed to a flat circle. This "spiraling" approach to curriculum, originally advocated by Jerome Bruner, is a common approach among textbook publishers. (See Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education*, Revised (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).)

the human mind constructs meaning, that imitates Jesus' transformative pedagogy, and that meets the exigencies of educating for faith in a pluralistic, image-overloaded culture. My hope is that this proposal will be of immediate use to teachers of religion and spur further refinements and similar work by scholars of religious education.

Appendix

Illustration 1: Graphic Representation of Recursive Pedagogical Process

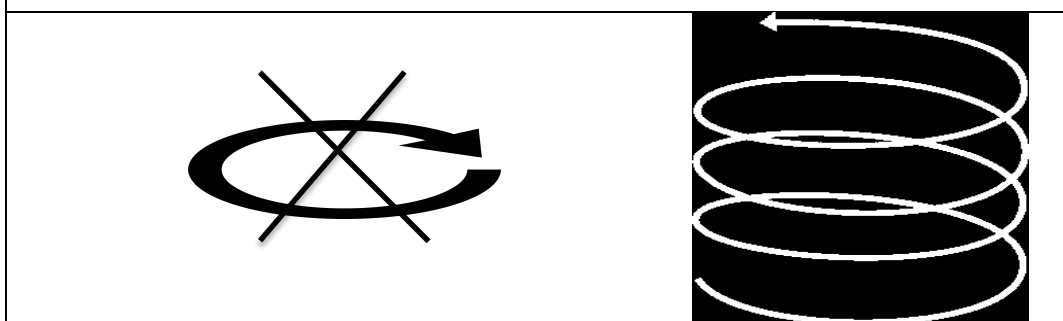


Table 1: Relationship of SEE Process to Groome's Shared Christian Praxis

<i>SEE Process</i>	<i>Shared Christian praxis</i>
Phase One	focusing activity
	movement 1
Phase Two	movement 2
	movement 3
Phase Three	movement 4
	movement 5

Table 2: SEE Process Overview by Age Level

The following chart provides a suggestive overview of how a learning event focused on the Eucharist and conducted according to the SEE process might be adapted for three different age groups.

Phase	Lower elementary	Junior high school	Adult
Phase One	Viewing and discussion of movie clip that illustrates dysfunctional community (e.g., Disney's <i>Lion King</i>). Learners share experiences/images of a group of people getting along well and then discuss: How do people learn to treat each other lovingly? Why do people sometimes not treat each other lovingly?	Viewing and discussion of movie clip that illustrates dysfunctional community (e.g., <i>Remember the Titans</i>). Learners share experiences/images of ideal community and then discuss: What would it take to form a community that's like that all the time? What gets in the way?	Viewing and discussion of clip from TV show that illustrates dysfunctional community (e.g., "New Girl"). Learners share experiences/images of ideal community and then discuss: What would it take to form a community that's like that all the time? What gets in the way?

Phase Two	<p>Key questions: Who taught you how to treat others lovingly?</p> <p>Optional diagnostic assessment of learners' form/manner of imagining.</p> <p>Viewing of clip from Disney's <i>Frozen</i> in which one sister continues to treat the other lovingly despite mistreatment (to challenge learners' vision of community as people who are nice to them). Tell story of Exodus 16. Simplified discussion of Eucharistic community. Simulation of Mass emphasizing community-forming aspects. Opportunity for traditional assessment.</p>	<p>Key questions: Where do your images of community come from? Does everyone envision community in the same way? How do your images of community (healthy and dysfunctional) affect your relationships with others?</p> <p>Optional diagnostic assessment of learners' form/manner of imagining.</p> <p>Viewing of video clip of L'Arche community (to challenge learners' vision of community as people like them who make them comfortable). Discussion of Exodus 16, Eucharistic community, doctrine of Eucharist (simplified). Mass simulation.</p> <p>Opportunity for traditional assessment.</p>	<p>Key questions: Where do your images of community come from? Does everyone envision community in the same way? How do your images of community (healthy and dysfunctional) affect your relationships with others? Optional diagnostic assessment of learners' form/manner of imagining.</p> <p>Viewing of clip of college student talking about dissatisfaction with "hook up" culture (to challenge views of community as mutual self-gratification). Discussion of Exodus 16, Eucharistic community, doctrine on Eucharist. Mass simulation. Discussion of symbols' function in human cognition, living, and religion. Opportunity for traditional assessment.</p>
Phase Three	<p>Discussion of Mass simulation: Did you realize that we do basically the same thing every Sunday at Mass? Do you think people would be more loving to each other if they had an experience every week like we just did? Activities for facilitating judgment (e.g., role-playing, artwork).</p> <p>Opportunity for decision-making (discussion, artistically expressing decision). Persuasive appeal by teacher (e.g., personal testimony, video of Christian community). Suggest an anchoring image of community for learners.</p> <p>Optional assessment of learners' growth in form/manner of imagining.</p>	<p>Discussion of Mass simulation: Did any of the parts of the Mass take on new meaning for you? What has your experience of Mass been like in the past? What would you and your community be like if you intentionally engaged in this sort of ritual on a regular basis? Would this be a change for the better, the worse, or neither? Activities for facilitating judgment (e.g., telling stories, role-playing, artwork).</p> <p>Opportunity for decision-making (journaling, discussion, artistically expressing decision). Persuasive appeal by teacher (e.g., personal testimony, video of Christian community). Opportunity to imagine an anchoring image of community.</p> <p>Optional assessment of learners' growth in form/manner of imagining.</p>	<p>Discussion of Mass simulation: Did any of the parts of the Mass take on new meaning for you? What has your experience of Mass been like in the past? What would you and your community be like if you intentionally engaged in this sort of ritual on a regular basis? Would this be a change for the better, the worse, or neither? Activities for facilitating judgment (e.g., telling stories, sketching personal symbol system, reflection on experiments in new roles).</p> <p>Opportunity for decision-making (journaling, discussion, artistically expressing decision). Persuasive appeal by teacher (e.g., personal testimony, video of Christian community). Opportunity to imagine an anchoring image of community.</p> <p>Optional assessment of learners' growth in form/manner of imagining.</p>

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Imagine God Emerging Here: Clearness Committees, Young Adults, and Hope

This paper examines the role of imagination within Quaker clearness committees, especially as they can be used with young adults discerning how their gifts, identities, and vocations play a role in the creation of a more hopeful and just future. By engaging the literature of the imagination alongside religious education scholarship, we provide a framework for current research with young adults discerning the future emerging through their own lives. Following Ricoeur's "productive imagination" and the Ignatian "gospel imagination," we argue that central to communal discernment is the exercise of imagination.

Free to play with the givens, to reject or distort input, at the interface between our senses and our selves, our imagination has a terrible power over our inner life, over the decisions we make... Educating the imagination is thus of primordial importance.¹

– Janine Langan

Contemplative practices engage the imagination, inviting participants to co-create new realities. We, the authors of this paper, regularly engage young adults in one particular contemplative practice known as the clearness committee (CC).² We believe clearness committees can contribute to “educating the imagination” in ways that are important for young adults discerning how their gifts, identities, and vocations play a role in the creation of a more hopeful and just future.³

Following the Ignatian “gospel imagination,” Paul Ricoeur’s “productive imagination,” and Willie Jennings’s description of “Christian imagination,” we argue that a central component of communal discernment is the development and exercise of an emancipatory imagination. That is, we understand hope to be an act of imagination, with despair arriving as the imagination is constricted. Resisting this despair, the CC can be a mutual “imaginative catalyst,” inviting participants into relationship with each other and with God as co-creators of a hoped for world. Given its function as a connective and catalytic practice, the CC is perhaps especially important for young adults who live in disruptive times and long to join God’s creativity.

In the following, we address the practice and theology of the CC then explore how theological imagination is the deep well of this practice.

“Waiting in the Spirit:” the Theology and Practice of Clearness Committees

The practice of the CC is grounded in the type of “holy listening” described by Douglas Steere when he wrote “to listen another’s soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for one another.”⁴ The CC draws together groups of people in prayerful expectation of the possibility that “way will open” and challenging questions or dilemmas will become clearer.⁵ Parker Palmer offers a description.

1 Janine Langan, “The Christian Imagination,” 65.

2 The “CC” is a practice of contemplative discernment and “holy listening” done in community, the origins of which are in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

3 We are midway through a two-year research project which will involve 350 diverse young adults taking part in CCs, follow up surveys, and interviews. We have introduced such gatherings for communal discernment in retreats for college-aged participants, a high school theology program, an integrated campus ministry, and a local congregation.

4 As cited in Patricia Loring, *Listening Spirituality, Vol 1*, 149. See also, Dori Baker and Joyce Ann Mercer, *Lives to Offer: Accompanying Youth on the Quest for Vocation*, (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2007)

5 While the CC is perhaps most popularly known via the work of Palmer and the Center for Courage and Renewal’s “circles of trust,” for the sake of brevity our attention will be primarily directed towards an understanding of the CC more directly tied to the faith and practice of the Religious Society of Friends, particularly the streams of which

[A CC begins with] a time of centering silence and inviting the focus person to break the silence, when ready, with a brief summary of the issue at hand. Then the committee members may speak – but everything they say is governed by one rule, a simple rule and yet one that most people find difficult and demanding: *members are forbidden to speak to the focus person in any way except to ask honest, open questions...* Nothing is allowed except real questions, honest and open questions, questions that will help the focus person remove the blocks to his or her inner truth without becoming burdened by the personal agendas of committee members... The only answer that counts is one that arises from your own inner truth. The discipline of the CC is to give you greater access to that truth – and to keep the rest of us from defiling or trying to define it.⁶

While elements of the practice are centuries old, the term itself is relatively recent. It originates in the Religious Society of Friends in the 1960s, near Philadelphia.⁷ Our concern here is not merely on the CC, but also on the practices that undergird it, namely the types of communal discernment vital to the worship and faith of Friends for hundreds of years.⁸

That a gathered group of prayerful and listening Friends could hear some measure of God's will is central to the denomination's very existence. Indeed, the name "Friends" itself comes from John 15:15, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Friends developed the practice of communal discernment in an attempt to learn "what the lord doeth" and how to best become part of it. Among early Friends, communal discernment was tantamount to what being a Friend *was*.

Early religious persecution meant that most Friends lived in close-knit, homogeneous neighborhoods or villages that created "social space in which different forms of existence are nurtured."⁹ Worship and discernment were not limited to a certain morning of the week or even to planned events. Due to close proximity and shared practice, Friends were easily able to seek each other out in prayer and counsel to become more clear on God's will at any time. Alexander Parkman, a Friend from the first generation of the tradition, offered this instruction about silent worship in 1660:

Innocently sit down in some place and turn in thy mind to the Light, and wait upon God simply, as if none were present but the Lord, and here thou art strong. When the next that come in, let them in simplicity and heart sit down and turn to the same Light, and wait in the Spirit, and so all the rest coming in fear of the Lord sit down in pure stillness and

strongly identify as Christian.

6 Parker Palmer, "The CC: A Communal Approach to Discernment"

7 Loring, *Spiritual Discernment*, 21. The CC was developed as part of a broader work in which Friends were figuring out how to teach practices of communal discernment to people outside of the Religious Society and often outside of religion entirely.

8 Jo Farrow. "Discernment in the Quaker Tradition."

9 Gay Pilgrim, "British Quakerism as Heterotopic," 53-69.

silence... Those who are brought to a pure, still waiting on God in the Spirit are come nearer to God than words are... though not a word be spoken to the hearing of the ear¹⁰

From the midst of these silent gatherings any person might rise, giving “vocal ministry,” an extemporaneous sermon brought forth in that moment. As one Friend from the 17th century wrote, “our worship consisted not in words so neither in silences as silence, but in a holy dependence of the mind upon God; from which dependence silence necessarily follows in the first place *until words can be brought forth* which are from God’s spirit.”¹¹ This same rationale follows in the CC as well: when participants are guided to ask only “real questions, honest and open questions,” they are being asked to bring forth questions from God’s spirit. These questions are God’s questions mediated through those listening for God’s movement.

Presently, and through much of the last century, Friends have rarely lived in homogeneous communities and often only gather together on Sundays, with worship far briefer than in centuries past.¹² An emphasis remains on the “still small voice” mentioned in 1 Kings 19:12, however occasions for spontaneous discernment in community are greatly diminished. Given these changed circumstances Friends developed the practice of the CC to explicitly call for the kind of gathered support that was more frequent earlier in the tradition. The process is still used today when people are considering marriage, becoming a member of a Meeting, and for other significant personal events such as buying a home, entering graduate school, or changing jobs. It functions not only to help individuals reflect on decisions to be made, but makes that reflection the occasion for community-building as well. That is, “while functioning as an instrument for discernment, it also helps recover the communal dimension of the spiritual life in relationships, in the vitality and authority that come of profound union in and commitment to God.”¹³

While Friends have experienced this in their congregations for centuries, something similar can happen among young adults today. As young adults gather in the quiet circle of a CC, they report community forming amid ethnic, racial, socio-economic, and gender diversity. As they gather, they draw out visions of the future from the deep wells of imagination.

Imagining with God

Imagination is sometimes associated with a line of argument presupposing that somewhere – e.g. higher levels of existence or in the Bible – there is a fixed and accessible Truth, Goodness, and Beauty and that we do it a disservice when we imagine things that don't live up to It. The following passage succinctly portrays a contemporary picture of this position.

10 Alexander Parker, *Letters of Early Friends*, ed. A.R. Barclay (London; Darton and Harvey, 1841): 365-66.

11 Robert Barclay. *Theses Theologicae and An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, The Eleventh Proposition, § IX. Emphasis added.

12 It should be noted that even among Friends only 10% or so still worship in the silent, expectant worship. Most congregations are part of branches of the tradition that have been influenced by Wesleyanism and the Holiness movement and have gatherings that include sermons, hymns, and a prepared order of service.

13 Loring, *Spiritual Discernment*, 21.

People have come to see the imagination as frivolous, playful and essentially disconnected from the real world... Daydreaming and fantasizing are equated with wasting time and laziness. When others' ideas seem disconnected from worldly reality we say, with an ironic tone, that they have a "vivid imagination." The implication is clear: the imagination may be creative and entertaining, but it cannot be trusted.¹⁴

We believe the imagination of the daydreamer – rather than signaling laziness or wasting time – may be trustworthy and important. While the imagination can just be "disconnected" it can also be about a new vision of the current situation. Indeed, Jung differentiated between pleasure-oriented imagination (*phantasia*) and reality-prone imagination (*einbildungskraft*), relating only the latter with spiritual growth and discovery.¹⁵ Drawing out this kind of "reality-prone" imagination might be a needed corrective to the kinds of education most young people encounter in public schools, social media, and consumptive capitalism. Ignatian spirituality, Paul Ricoeur and Willie Jennings help us describe the power and contours of this type of imagination.

Ignatian Perspectives

Imagination is a vital component of the "Spiritual Exercises" of Ignatian practice. In fact, Ignatius himself first converted to Christianity as a result of a prolonged period of bed rest, during which he regularly read and daydreamed about the lives of saints and what it might be like to be one.¹⁶ As he came to envision what that life might be like, he was gradually transformed. The "possible world of his imagination" was "made real by action."¹⁷ Ultimately, Ignatius would come to see "the products of the imagination as vehicles that transport us to an understanding and experience of higher realities in ways that linear discourse cannot carry us."¹⁸

In the Spiritual Exercises, retreatants engage in a prayerful experience of scripture called "Gospel Imagination" in which they read a piece of scripture and allow themselves to "become onlooker-participants and give full rein to the imagination."¹⁹ Rather than reading *about* Jesus, this is an invitation to imagine the embodied fullness of the story. Ignatius ...

chooses scenes of Jesus acting rather than Jesus teaching or telling parables. He wants us to see Jesus interacting with others, Jesus making decisions, Jesus moving about, Jesus ministering. He doesn't want us to think about Jesus. He wants us to experience him. He wants Jesus to fill our senses. He wants us to meet him.²⁰

Ignatius does not go so far as to say that what the imagination produces in Gospel Imagination is actually (critical-historically speaking) what happened. He does, however, think that formation can result from immersing ourselves in that narrative and allowing the Spirit to

14 Chris Webb, *The Fire of the Word: Meeting God on Holy Ground*, 120.

15 David Loomis, "Imagination and Faith Development," *Religious Education* 83.2 (1988): 255

16 Ignatius of Loyola, *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius*, 24

17 Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 149.

18 Thomas Lucas, S.J. "Grandeur of God." *Company* 13.2 (1995):18

19 David L. Fleming, SJ., *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?*, 57

20 Ibid., 58.

help guide our imaginative journey. The Jesuits who lead retreats suggest that “this type of imagining helps us... take on God’s qualities of love, compassion, and understanding.”²¹ We think a similar kind of imagining takes place in the CC.

When participants gather “in a holy dependence of the mind upon God... until words can be brought forth which are from God’s spirit,”²² they are actively and imaginatively listening for God’s movement. They are imagining, because where God is concerned, there is no choice *but* to imagine. If God’s ways and thoughts are more than humans can fully comprehend with reason alone,²³ our only option is an imaginative and faithful act. As Jesuit J. Robert Barth writes, “it is only the imagination that can bring us ... to the full encounter with religious reality, because it is only the symbolic language of imagination that can resist the human drive for simple clarity and determinateness.”²⁴

Imagination is a messy, playful, and embodied practice, *and* it can be done in the service of faith. Moreover, imagining God bringing forth questions that help bring someone to greater clarity does not preclude that *God is already actually doing this* and that our imaginative act is a participation with the movement of the Spirit.

Ricoeur

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur also distinguished between two types of imagination. He called the imaginative capacity that creates a degraded mental photo-copy of something the *reproductive imagination*. A second type of imagination is actually generative and is a way by which novelty enters the world by means of human action and reflection. This type he called the *productive imagination*. Ricoeur wished to recover of a sense of imagination that is not rife with connotations of falsity, distrust, and insufficiency, but one through which humanity engages with that which has yet to be. Imagination, thus, is a source of human freedom. Richard Kearney, who studied under Ricoeur, writes:

The metaphors, symbols, or narratives produced by imagination all provide us with “imaginative variations” of the world, thereby offering us the freedom to conceive of the world in other ways and to undertake forms of action which might lead to its transformation ... The possible worlds of imagination can be made real by action.²⁵

We suggest that people in discernment are participating in God’s movement in the world, listening for “imaginative variations” and, upon hearing them, feeling called to action and transformation. Thus, we educate (from the Latin *educare*, to draw out) the productive imagination when we lead people into contemplative practices. In such practices, we create

21 Ibid., 57.

22 Robert Barclay. *Theses Theologicae and An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, The Eleventh Proposition, § IX. Emphasis added.

23 See Job 26:14, Isaiah 55:8-9, Ephesians 3:20, et al.

24 J. Robert Barth, “Mortal Beauty,” 69.

25 Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 149.

conditions that *draw out* questions, metaphors, symbols and narratives in ways that suspend judgment, turn to wonder, and invite freedom.²⁶

Jennings

An especially important word about the capacity of imagination to create harmful reality illuminates the word “terror” as it appears in the epigraph of this paper. Theologian Willie Jennings’ historical narrative shows that, from late medieval times, the modern Christian imagination grew hand-in-hand with colonial socialization: the result is deeply embedded racial categories that the church is implicit in creating. Here the “productive imagination” inadvertently resulted in the segregation of societies into racial categories. Jennings argues that this is a direct outcome of the European Christians who arrived on African and American soil and began to imagine the land and the people as possessions. Taking root in the Western mind, this cultural fragmentation consistently shows up in history as Christian nation-building and conquering, rather than an ethic of neighborliness and love that *could have* been Christianity’s gift to history. Jennings states:

Christian social imagination is diseased and disfigured ... This loss points not only to deep psychic cuts and gashes in the social imaginary of western peoples, but also to an abiding mutilation of a Christian vision of creation and our own creatureliness ... I want Christians to recognize the grotesque nature of a social performance of Christianity that imagines Christian identity floating above land, landscape, animals, place, and space ...²⁷

Jennings’ offers a slender hope: “Theological reflection also opens up the possibility of a conversation that has yet to happen: a Christianity born of the colonialist wound speaking to itself in its global reality, pressing deeply inside the miracle of its existence, battered, bruised, marginalized, yet believing, loving, Christian.”²⁸

Jennings sees hope emerging in the form of interdisciplinary conversations that take seriously land, borders, natural resources, and living spaces – subjects to which the young adults with whom we work are deeply drawn. Jennings imagines “those deeply involved in the formation of space and those concerned with identity formation – urban planners, ecologists, scientists, real estate brokers, developers joined in conversation with theologians, ethicists, literary and postcolonial theorists, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians.” The aim of such conversation is nothing short of imagining reconfigurations of living spaces that promote more just societies.

As we gather young adults into circles of quiet reflection, we summon Jennings’s slender hope, try to engender its growth, and name its fulfillment in a reformed Christian imagination. In our participants’ imaginations thrive inchoate urgings to change the world through professions as

26 The language here echoes the Covenants of Presence we use to establish group norms at the beginning of a CC. These covenants are modelled after the Touchstones used by the Center for Courage and Renewal and can be found at <http://fteleaders.org/resources/fte-guide-to-vocationcare>

27 Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, 293

28 Ibid., 291.

diverse as those Jennings cites in his wish list. Is it yet possible to believe that religious educators create spaces in which we invite people to imagine God emerging?

Religious Educators and Emancipatory Imagination

As religious educators, we cross disciplines, engaging best practices of pedagogy with emerging theologies so that human capacities might flourish. Taking Ignatian, Ricoeur, and Jennings as sources, we turn to colleagues in religious education whose work supports our claim that contemplative practices in general, and CCs in particular, hold hope for educating the imaginations of young adults discerning vocation.

Scholars of religious education document the “primordial importance” of educating the imagination. Mary Elizabeth Moore writes “imagination is not one thing; it is an action, indeed a medley of actions, exercised in relation to a context and in a singular effort or a collaborative effort with others.” Using the metaphor of canoeing, in which different strokes and strategies are used for differing fluid contexts, she says, further: “The purpose of imagination is finally to move creation through time and space. In the case of human educational systems, its purpose is to move the learning community and the communities with whom they relate to into the future.”²⁹ We see the CC as doing just this, drawing people together to take seriously the questions most powerfully resting on their hearts, providing them with a space and place to nurture their response to those questions, and affirming that they may point to vocation.

In reference to Freire, Daniel Schipani argues – in a tone that resonates with Palmer’s “inner truth” – that liberation comes about as “learners rediscover their own words and expand their capacity for self-expression by the development of their creative imagination.”³⁰ Indeed, Schipani critiques Freire’s early critical pedagogy for not granting affect and imagination the same “privileged status of reasoning and thought processes.” Schipani concludes that “the conscientization approach overemphasized cognition”³¹ and that a fuller approach would emphasize embodiment, affect, and imagination. Moore summarizes these affirmations when she writes “what is most needed now is a vision of flourishing, formed and continually reformed by a collaborative exercise of imagination.”³²

CCs can contribute to the development of this vision, and we go so far as to suggest that contemplative practices offer religious education a way toward fostering “emancipatory imagination.” Evelyn Parker coins the term “emancipatory hope” in her study of African American teenage girls. For her “Wishing is associated with fantasy, the magical, fairy talk, and the dreamy. Hope, on the other hand, is associated with expectancy, confidence, assurance and faith.”³³ Citing numerous movements of freedom from domination, including the Civil Rights Movement in which she herself participated as a young adult, Parker writes “Hope is decidedly Christian and rooted in the experiences and beliefs of African American women, children, and men. It is expectation of deliverance from economic, political and racial oppression through the

29 Mary Elizabeth Moore, “Imagination at the Center,” 195. See also, Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching*.

30 Daniel Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*, 15

31 Ibid, 23

32 Ibid., 199.

33 Ibid., 14.

power of God, which requires one to *live in the present as an agent of change for God's justice*.³⁴

Figuring out how to “live in the present as an agent of change for God’s justice” is a task young adults face. Mindful of ecological degradation, massive instability among the world’s most vulnerable populations, and the persistent hegemony of race-based cultural fragmentation, they eschew organized religion but seek spiritual oases from which to draw sustenance and create lives of meaning and purpose. Our research seeks to empower religious educators to continue repurposing spiritual tools that might help young adults enter regularly into deep wells of emancipatory imagination.

An Invitation to Hope

Initial findings suggest that this theoretical framing plays out in practice,³⁵ with our participants acknowledging that, “at first [the CC] feels forced and unnatural, but near the end you begin to see how it works. It becomes more natural and you start to enjoy it.”

A general observation across the numerous CCs we have facilitated in the past two years is that in the sparse hour in which the practice occurs, community catalyzes. Even in retreat settings in which there is a great diversity of perspectives theologically, racially, and politically, participants report feeling connected and “seen” in that space. One reported, “I felt like I was engaging in a sacred practice with other folks as we attempted to hear what message God was trying to impart to us through the CC. I felt very close to God and the other people there.”

Our ongoing research aims to document that tiny little time-bound intentional communities of contemplative discernment open up new ways of seeing the world and one’s place in it. If “hope is an act of imagination” and “despair arrives as the imagination is constricted” as psychologist Steven Cooper claims,³⁶ we believe that CCs provide a way to engender resistance to despair. When we invite young adults into spaces carefully designed to call forth their emancipatory imagination, we invite hope, imagining that God is there.

34 Ibid., 16. Emphasis added.

35 For a more in depth exploration of initial data see “Clearness Committeess Revisited: Gathering Young Adults for Contemplative Discernment” in *The Prophetic Voice & Making Peace: Research in Collegiate Ministry*, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, United Methodist Church, forthcoming 2016.

36 Steven Cooper, *Objects of Hope*, 19.

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Imagining the Unheard – Performing Stories, Fostering Empathy

Abstract:

This paper explores the dynamic interplay between imagination and empathy, with a focus on the experiences of performers at “Voicing the Unheard,” an event held last academic year at Boston College to have students and faculty reflect on the connection between narrative, identity, and ministry. Drawing on Judith Jordan’s concept of “relational being” in “empathic knowing,” as well as Maxine Greene’s insights on imagination, I consider how we might begin to articulate the dynamics of what it means to carry someone else’s story in performance, and its impact on the ways we (re)-imagine our personal identities.

“I felt that I was carrying the story, and saw the ways in which I’ve failed the people in it.” A theology student made this comment as she reflected on her participation as a performer of a narrative poem written by a fellow student for the School of Theology and Ministry (STM) Dialogues at Boston College. Initiated by *Gaudete* - an LGBTQ-Allies student group, the STM Dialogues was an opportunity for students and faculty to reflect on the connections between narrative, identity and ministry. Last academic year, *Gaudete* collaborated with two other student groups - *Faith and Justice in Action* and the *Women’s Group* - to organize this event around the theme “Voicing the Unheard.” As someone involved in selecting the pieces and rehearsing with the performers, I was struck by how the STM Dialogues had been a transformative experience not only for the audience, but also for the writers and performers. Many came to recognize and re-imagine their personal sense of self in relation to the STM community, as well as with the church at large.

In this paper, I focus on how performers experienced the STM Dialogues. What does it mean for them to embody and carry someone else’s story when reading it publicly? How might we begin to articulate the dynamics of what is going on, and its impact on the ways personal identities are being (re)-imagined? My suggestion is that between the writer and performer, a dialogical space is created for what Judith Jordan calls “empathic knowing.”¹ In reading someone else’s story, the performer steps into this empathic space not simply to try on a different perspective as if it were separate and distinct, but to grow in awareness that this story is as much her or his own. Noteworthy in this process is the dynamic interplay between imagination and empathy, which shifts and deepens how one comes to experience the constructed-ness of self.

Empathy, Imagination and Relational Being

Empathy, according to Arthur Ciaramicoli, is “the capacity to understand and respond to the unique experiences of another.”² While being an “innate ability,” empathy is also “an intelligent, deeply respectful exploration of what lies beneath the surface of the world.”³ So although we may be biologically wired for empathy, its practice in the context of relationships requires cultivation. For this reason, I prefer Jordan’s use of the term ‘empathic knowing,’ where the focus is on “the dynamic cognitive-affective process of joining with and understanding another’s subjective experience.”⁴

Writing in the field of feminist psychology, Jordan situates empathic knowing within her conceptualization of “relational being”⁵ as an alternative to the predominant tendency in Western psychological theories of development to extricate the self from context as “contained and separate.”⁶ This dominant emphasis on “an autonomous, individuated self” is a reflection of

¹ Judith V. Jordan, “Clarity in Connection: Empathic Knowing, Desire, and Sexuality,” in *Women’s Growth in Diversity*, ed. Judith V. Jordan (New York and London: Guilford Press, 1997), 50.

² Arthur P. Ciaramicoli and Katherine Ketcham, *The Power of Empathy* (New York: Plume, 2001), 4.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Judith V. Jordan, “A Relational Perspective for Understanding Women’s Development,” in *Women’s Growth in Diversity*, ed. Judith V. Jordan (New York and London: Guilford Press, 1997), 15. My use of the word ‘empathy’ in this paper has this more specific sense.

⁵ Ibid., 20. Jordan prefers the term “relational being” to “relational self” or “self-in-relation.” According to her, the “ambiguity of the term *being* (noun or verb, structure or process?) nicely captures the paradox of the process-structure-interface.”

⁶ Jordan, “Clarity in Connection,” 50.

male bias in developmental psychology that has “limited applicability” to the experience of women, she contends.⁷ The concept of ‘relational being,’ however, emphasizes “the importance of the intersubjective, relationally emergent nature of human experience,”⁸ where the self comes more fully into clarity of its identity not in separation from, but in connection *with* the other in mutual reciprocity. Within an empathic mode of knowing that stresses relational being, the other is conceived as subject and not object:

You are experienced as having your own subjective needs, values and intentions which may or may not be in harmony with mine. If they are not, the differences are acknowledged and some work on areas of conflict is necessary. In this mode, understanding the self and other is achieved through interaction, not through separation and abstraction. One is responsive and listening. Feelings are valued as a means of knowing, as a basis for communication and action.⁹

Instead of being regarded from a distance as a threat to the self, the other is embraced as gift that challenges and expands the horizon of one’s being. Hence, in empathy, “the distinctions between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ blur ... The other’s subjective experience becomes as one’s own; this is at the heart of ‘relational being.’ Action, creativity, and intentionality occur within this context.”¹⁰

Relational being is also the ground for the interplay of empathy and imagination. Empathy requires imagination, as Maxine Greene would say: “imagination is what, above all makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called ‘other’ over the years.”¹¹ Imagination enables empathy as it summons us to reach out of ourselves to experience the other, not only to feel *with*, but also to possibly stand *in* the place of the other that potentially changes us. The STM Dialogues, I suggest, provided a structured environment that helped catalyze this movement. As my analysis in the next section will illustrate, the performance of stories are an imaginative pedagogical strategy that invites participants to decenter themselves in empathic knowing, which in turn allows for a re-imagination of their own identities.

Performing Stories at the STM Dialogues

Description of the Process

All students and faculty members were invited to submit original writings in prose or poetry related to the theme “Voicing the Unheard.” Writers had the option of remaining anonymous in their submissions. Performers were also not allowed to read the pieces that they wrote (if any). And unless the writers chose to disclose themselves, they remained anonymous to the performers. Writers could indicate in their submissions to the organizers how they would like their pieces to be read. During the rehearsals, I asked performers the following questions as they prepared to read the pieces:

⁷ Jordan, “A Relational Perspective for Understanding Women’s Development,” 9.

⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁹ Jordan, “Clarity in Connection,” 55-56.

¹⁰ Jordan, “A Relational Perspective for Understanding Women’s Development,” 15.

¹¹ Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 3.

- i) What is the unheard that you hear being expressed in this piece?
- ii) How do you hear the writer giving voice to this unheard subject?
- iii) How do you hear your own voice in relation to the writer's?
- iv) Who do you imagine yourself reading this piece to?

Based on a general evaluation conducted after the event, the performers found these questions to be helpful in connecting them more deeply with the pieces.

This paper focuses on the comments of Rose Miola, who performed the piece *Pre-Tending* (see Appendix A).¹² In this piece, the writer, Rachelle Simon, narrates her own struggle to make sense of her call to the ordained priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. It discloses an inner wrestle that moves from a guilty recognition of the call to its repression, and from repression to a hopeful compromise that looks forward to the women diaconate but not expecting it to happen in her lifetime. Rose is in her twenties and a graduating student in the MTS program when she participated in the event. She also knew Rachelle “as a friend who had trusted her.” Before the STM Dialogues, Rachelle had confided in Rose about her call to the priesthood. Rachelle had also actually shown the piece to Rose before submitting it. My purpose in providing this background is to emphasize the fact that the narrative text of *Pre-Tending* did not stand in a vacuum. Rather, its meaning was already being negotiated in the context of an ongoing relationship of trust between the two women that set the baseline for empathic knowing. The STM Dialogues offered a structure to make that process of meaning making intentional and visible.

“I am a priest at that moment.”

Initially, Rose saw *Pre-Tending* as Rachelle’s story, even as she found herself “thinking about [her] sharing in it.” “I am more sure about Rachelle’s call than mine own ... but I also can identify with it,” she commented. She also met Rachelle and had wanted her to read the piece to “copy” her style. However, Rachelle said to Rose that she had “surrendered this piece” to her, and that she “should make it [her] own.” Upon hearing this, Rose described her feelings as follows:

I remember leaving the library and thinking “Oh my God!” – It’s much harder – now I can’t ... I have to allow the piece to engage me instead of saying that this was acting ... but it was not acting at all when I was up there. That conversation with Rachelle shifted things for me as I knew that I had to let it in. I can no longer hold it at arm’s length. I have to get in character.

To make the piece hers required imagination, which Rose experienced as interruptive. Yet, this interruption also confronted her to pay attention and see more clearly that Rachelle’s story, though particular, was as much hers. The “character” that Rose had to get into was ironically “not acting at all.” The narrative text became a place of encounter, where both women found themselves in relation *with* as “connected knowers,” who, as Belenky et. al. explain, “learn

¹² These comments are from a group conversation I had with the writers and performers of two particular pieces. Prior to his conversation, the writers had agreed to disclose their names to the performers. For this paper, I am grateful to Rose Miola and Rachelle Simon for giving me permission to mention them by name, as well as to reproduce their comments.

through empathy.”¹³ For connected knowers, “the only way they can hope to understand another person’s ideas is to try to share the experience that has led the person to form the idea.”¹⁴ As Noddings says, in empathy, “I receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other.”¹⁵ In making the piece her own through performance, Rose was not simply ‘trying on’ the role and perspective of the other, but receiving her self with clarity in the story of the other. What became clear to her was a personal connection with the issue of women’s ordination.

The next shift in Rose’s sense of identity was recognizing her own position within the discourse on women’s ordination. Rose wrestled with the resolution in Rachelle’s narration, which she felt “it’s like making do”:

The piece starts with a call to ordination. It ends with hope for someone else’s ordination to the diaconate that would not happen in this lifetime and for you ... Yeah that’s what I’m not satisfied with – hope for the women’s diaconate is not the same.

On the one hand, Rose was indignant about what she felt to be a compromise at the end and resisted it. “Part of me as Rachelle’s friend is pissed at the injustice of it all,” she said, “[and] I really wanted to audience to be unsatisfied with the ending, and wanted them to know the injustice, and to feel the pain of being caught in-between.” On the other hand, Rose also wished to respect the integrity of Rachelle’s position: “But if I’m all fire and brimstone about it – how would Rachelle take it?” Noteworthy here are the levels of listening that empathic knowing involves, and this listening to perform is imagining. In listening to Rachelle, Rose was also listening to herself and had become aware of her difference in position with regard to the text’s ending. As Greene has suggested, imagination “allows us also to experience empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with ours.”¹⁶ The challenge for Rose, then, was how she could hold her own voice in tension with Rachelle’s while performing the ending. Between the performer and writer, the narrative text is broken open for mutual co-construction.

In the midst of this co-construction, Rose experienced yet another shift in self-identity when she began to recognize a voice that no longer just spoke for and to Rachelle, but to Catholic women *and* men as a collective. The narrative text was no longer a private disclosure from a friend to another. Rather, the text-in-performance became a public confession that ought to hold a community accountable. Rose was able to relocate the text-in-performance within a larger ecclesial discourse on women’s ordination, and realized that it wasn’t to be the final word on this issue. It did not have to. Although both women recognized their sharing in the text, they also came to relinquish their possession of it, releasing it to the audience at the event for its re-interpretation as a community of listeners. Rose shifted from wanting to control the text to letting it go. She described this experience as paradoxically “surrendering to a ride that I was driving”:

Each time I read it, it was different. It wasn’t premeditated for me. I did not practice it too much though I knew when to sit and stand. Generally, I allow it [the text] to move me and I’m so grateful – to have my raw emotions shown and to doing this piece justice, and

¹³ Belenky, Mary Field, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 115.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁵ Noddings, cited in Belenky et. al., 122.

¹⁶ Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 31.

doing you justice. I did feel a sense of responsibility to people whom I don't know but feel that way. A tremendous responsibility to you too, but you also freed me from that.

Rose also spoke of her performance as being liberated to be “a priest there.” She did not see herself as playing the role of the priest. She *was* priest:

To perform, you are / I am a priest there. Everyone is thinking about this [issue] and I'm a vessel for this. How incredible and how much of an honor that is! I'm a priest in that moment. Performers are like vessels of grace. Voices are sacramental. [To] these very limited bodies and voices, we're all coming, and it's only us bringing [ourselves] to the people – it's like being bread to others.

This imagination of herself as priest wasn't fictitious, but had an existential impact on how Rose saw her place in the school community after the STM Dialogues. “It changed the way I saw myself as a Eucharistic minister,” she said. At mass, she recognized the faces of people who had attended the Dialogues, and felt that they were looking at her differently, in a way that was “hard to describe.” “I wept as I was giving the Eucharist. I was weeping and smiling. It's my location in the community that has been different since performing it,” shared Rose.

In summary, Rose's experience as a performer illustrates the dynamic relationship between imagination and empathy. By imagining the voice of the unheard articulated by Rachelle, Rose crossed over into a space of empathic knowing, which in turn shifted the ways she experienced and re-imagined her identity. It isn't just that imagination enables empathy, but that empathy ignites and deepens imagination in the context of selves as relational beings. Greene is thus correct to suggest, “Imagination may be a new way of decentering ourselves, of breaking out of the confinements of privatism and self-regard into a space where we can come face to face with others and call out, ‘Here we are.’”¹⁷

Carrying Rachelle's story through performance has expanded Rose's understanding of what it means to be a Catholic woman identifying with women's ordination. It is no longer just an issue on account of her personal friendship with Rachelle. It isn't even just an issue for women struggling to make sense of their call. It is an issue about what it means to be a Catholic woman in relation to all as the baptized people of God who are hearing this story. Theologically speaking, it would seem that the text-in-performance is also the holy ground for personal vocational discernment. “Vocation is my story amidst other stories, as all of these stories unfold within the story of God.”¹⁸ In a sense, performing stories to foster empathy orients one's life narrative open to the interruption of the other.¹⁹ Performance as carrying the story of the other in empathic knowing further breaks open the imagination of vocational possibilities that one could begin to embody.

Concluding Remarks

¹⁷ Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 31.

¹⁸ Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Awakening Vocation: A Theology of Christian Call* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 161.

¹⁹ I am drawing on Hahnenberg's argument that vocational discernment depends on “conversion that comes through openness to ‘the other’” (160). This involves “a willingness to be interrupted by those who exist on the edges of our dominant narratives” (174) which, to my mind, calls for an ongoing cultivation of empathy to “hold our narratives open to the narrative of others” (161).

Rather than being a burdensome weight, carrying someone else's story is about being "called to depth," remarked another performer. I find this comment to be evocative. It invokes Jesus' command to Simon Peter, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4).²⁰ To perform is to cast the nets of our imagination into the deep, to perceive beyond so as "to awaken, o disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected."²¹ Being "called to depth" also recalls for me the gospel account of Peter walking on water in Matthew 14:22-33. In performing someone else's story, we step out of the boat of our enclosed narrative to meet the deep waters of other-ness, waters that seep through the boundaries that we draw to contain and control our selves. Imagination casts us out into the sea of empathy²² with the promise that God will encounter us in the depths of other-ness experienced. To carry the story of another person is to search for the fullness of my-self in the story of the other, not in abstraction but in connection with. It demands courage, encourages curiosity, and invites creativity.

(2728 words, without footnotes)

²⁰ *The New Interpreter's Study Bible (New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha)*

²¹ Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 28.

²² It is striking that Ciaramicoli begins his book on empathy with a description of the ocean. "As the tides direct the ebb and flow of the ocean, so does the power of empathy surge within us," (3) he writes.

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Appendix A

(Reproduced with permission from author only for REA 2015 Annual Meeting)

Pre-Tending (read by a woman)

I have never been very good at pretending.

When I was little, I would play pretend with my brother. I will never forget this one time we were playing at my aunt's house. I was the mom and he was the son. Our "house" was behind a rocking chair. I was at home and my brother/son had gone out shopping. I had just found out that my husband had died. About that time, my aunt came into the room and immediately pulled the chair away from the wall and in a very concerned voice said, "Oh my gosh, what happened? Why are you crying?" I was weeping behind the chair. I stopped and explained to her we were only playing. She said, "But you are really crying." I remember being so confused as I explained that my husband had just died. And that was really sad. My aunt replied, "Your tears are real. Just remember you are only pretending. It's not real."

It was my first clue. I do not pretend very well.

A few years ago I started to feel the gentle prodding of God around ordination. It took me by surprise because I had known about women's ordination for years but this was new. I pretended it was not there for several months. I hated it. It's no secret that the Roman Catholic Church does not ordain women. And I not only worked for the Church but I have a deep desire to be in the Church for my whole life. For me, this "gentle prodding" felt completely unfair. I don't believe in a God that would make me choose between following a calling or remaining within the Church. I didn't understand it. It did not make any sense. I wanted God to leave me alone. I did a pretty good job of stiff-arming God for a while.

When my faith no longer allowed me to ignore God, I did what all good theology teaches us. I started making deals with God. (smile)

"Ok God, if this is really somehow what you are calling me to do then the first step would be studying theology. So I want to say yes to you. I will say yes by applying to theology schools. It's up to you after that. If you really want me to do this, then you will clear the path: get me in, make it financially possible, etc."

And all that happened. So then I became very clear with God. "This only means I am saying yes to studying theology. Nothing else. So don't get excited."

So I prepared to come here. That's when the pretending really began. In the months before moving to Boston, When I told people I was planning to study at the STM, I heard so many interesting comments...

A Daughter of Charity sister exclaimed joyfully, "Oh maybe you will become a priest. You would be such a wonderful priest."

My friend's faithful Catholic mother said excitedly, "I bet you will be the first woman priest."

I pretended these comments meant nothing. I brushed past the affirmation and ignored them. I needed to ignore them. I could not entertain the question of "What does it mean when your faith community affirms a calling that can never be truly followed?" And even worse, "What kind of God perpetuates this sickening reality?" So I didn't ask the questions. I just keep moving forward.

Then I came to the STM. And here the pretending skyrocketed.

A professor asks me on the very first week of being here, even before classes start, "You don't want to be a priest, right? That's not something that is moving within you?" I avoid the question the first time. The professor asks again. And just like Peter's denial, I pretended the Holy Spirit is not moving within me. I clearly and directly say no.

I sit in classrooms and hear about the church's teaching on women priesthood and I pretend it's a completely distant and ecclesial issue that doesn't affect me personally.

I talk to a Jesuit friend about vocation and pretend that we don't share the same one.

I let the tears roll down my cheeks during liturgy and pretend it has nothing to do with the constant mourning which holds the space between beautiful desire and absolute rejection.

And the worst pretending that I do is with other women.

I share with other women who are angry about this sexist injustice in the church and I pretend to be angry with them. I hide the deep sadness and aching pain. I pretend I don't have the responsibility to speak up. I pretend to not be a coward full of shame.

I pretend I understand why I am here and what I am doing with my life. I pretend this small yes to God matters. I pretend so much in my day that it seems that's all I am left doing.

What happens when pretending becomes reality? They become blurred so easily for me. I have never been very good at pretending. It's not authentic and I hate it.

So I force the pretending into Hope. I make it fit out of necessity. I try to give it to God and trust that it can be transformed to mean something.

I bring all I am to the STM community. I try to live the joy of the Gospel. And I hope that is somehow being true to my vocation. I hope somehow that makes me authentic in the eyes of God. I hope the Trinitarian God is not disappointed in me. I hope I can figure out how to say Yes fully to God.

But the hope is still hollow in some way. I can't do this. It's too hard. I'm tired and frustrated. And I'm defeated. This hope is not rooted in love and it feels like I'm just grasping.

I ask God “What else could this pretending be about?” and I listen. Huh...maybe it’s exactly how it sounds. It’s the Pre-Tending. This time is somehow what has to happen before. It’s the tending to the soil of my soul, preparing me for the unknown of what is going to come after. And maybe my pretending will be my whole life. While that sounds exhausting, perhaps my life is the Pre-Tending that the world and the church needs now. What I am able to bring, who I am, and how love can move through me is somehow going to lay the foundation for the work to come. Maybe that’s the hope.

The hope is that the women’s diaconate will happen, not necessary in my lifetime but it will happen. And for now, I can continue to serve the people of God and the Church. And I hope one day I can figure out a way to live out my calling without it feeling like pretending.

Because I have never been very good at pretending.



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**Connecting, Disrupting, and Transforming Stories through Imaginative Weaving:
Asian and Asian American Women's Power of Imagining in Their Postcolonial and
Diasporic Reading of the Bible**

Abstract

The Bible has stories to be read along with other stories and we can weave imaginatively stories of our own heart into our reading of the Bible. This paper examines Walter Brueggemann's understanding of biblical imagination, provides examples of Kwok Pui-lan's imaginative story-weaving, and intends to model how Asian and Asian American women connect, disrupt, and transform stories, both biblical and other, in their postcolonial context and diasporic social location. It is this paper's contention that Kwok's use of "critical incidents" and her "parallel processing" reading strategy will offer a theoretical as well as practical roadmap for the development of narrative religious education.

"The heart of teaching is imagination." With this bold statement, Maria Harris starts her reflection on the theology of teaching that sees teaching as "not only an act of the imagination, but of the *religious* imagination" (Harris 1987, 3, 10). "Practical theology and theological education as a whole, rightly conceived and well practiced," states Craig Dykstra, "draw on and serve in profound and powerful ways both pastoral and ecclesial imagination" (Dykstra 2008, 59). To put it in a nutshell, education in general and religious education in particular, *critically understood and creatively practiced*, cannot do without imagination.

Then my question is: what kind of understanding and practice of imagination would be required of the religious education, especially teaching the Bible, in the postcolonial and diasporic context?

To answer this question, I examine the meaning of biblical imagination and the method of story-weaving, paying attention to a biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, and a feminist theologian, Kwok Pui-lan.

Walter Brueggemann's Understanding of Biblical Imagination: Prophetic Imagination

Brueggemann contends that the Bible, of which life-world(s) or, better put, story-world(s) is extremely strange and fundamentally confessional, does not make sense to outsiders but only to insiders and, accordingly, that it is necessary to cultivate a *historical imagination* in order to read, study, and interpret the Bible meaningfully as an insider. By historical imagination he means "not just any innovative thinking . . . [but] inventiveness driven and shaped by particular historical experiences," while acknowledging the dialectical relationship between historicity and imagination, which "must be kept in tension, always correcting each other" (Brueggemann 1977, 33). He takes historical imagination to be the Bible's own imagination, for biblical symbols are "firmly rooted in history, but inviting full play of imagination," and, what is more, "the process of the Bible itself is a *process of historical imagining* exercised on [what he calls 'the *primal narrative*']" (Brueggemann 1977,

42, 35[45ff], my emphasis). In other words, biblical imagination is an imagination shaped by the historical traditioning process of “the root story which is most deeply and consistently believed and recited” by the community of faith (Brueggemann 1977, 46, à la Gerhard von Rad). Throughout this process, “the *old primal story* is [retold and] supplemented by an *ongoing tradition*” (Brueggemann 1977, 53).

Brueggemann illustrates this ongoing biblical *practice* of historical imagination with the uses of one of the root stories in the Bible: the story of the bread in wilderness (Exodus 16). He maintains that the manna narrative was “remembered imaginatively” by the hopeless Israel in exile who were “starved for the faith as well as for the bread” (Isaiah 55:1-3) and by the earliest disciples when they reported on Jesus’ feeding of the hungry multitude in all four Gospels in such ways that this primal narrative could make *connections* with stories of the hungry and the hopeless, *disrupt* “every presupposition and self-interest they [had],” and *transform* their “situations from hunger to fullness, from death to life” (Brueggemann 1977, 34-43, quoted respectively from 37, 36, 38, 39). In terms of connecting, disrupting, and transforming stories in the Bible, he notes that “all parts are related to and informed by the primal narrative,” that “our hardness of heart (cf. [Mark] 6:52) sometimes blocks us from full appreciation of our historical imagination,” and that “serious Bible study done by insiders expects these texts will affect our lives so that we see things differently and are required to make fresh decisions about our values and priorities, about our fears and hopes” (Brueggemann 1977, 57, 38, 39). In the face of the dominant narrative of scarcity that dismisses God and disregards neighbors, he observes, “it is *the work of endless reperformance* to continue to make this alternative account of reality available and persuasive” (Brueggemann 2012, 13, my emphasis). In this regard, one could argue that our historical imagination concerns an art of weaving the contemporary narratives into the primal narrative and, as Brueggemann sees it, the foremost biblical artisans of historical imagination are “the prophets who insist that the primal narrative has power, authority, and relevance in all kinds of new situations” (Brueggemann 1977, 57).

The prophets, biblical or not, are those who are “imagining possibilities” and it is the power of imagining an alternative world that makes us “[act] as prophets of our own existence” (Harris 1987, 3, 10, à la Paul Ricoeur). The contribution by the biblical prophets to the prophetic task of imagining what is humanly possible, notably, is their “very practice of remembering” that “gives Israel power for a faithful life in a context of accommodation” (Brueggemann 1982, 38) and their concurrent “epistemological break with the assumed world of dominant imagination” (Brueggemann 2012, 39). The biblical prophets’ *imaginative remembering of the primal narrative* aims at power encounters through the dispute between narratives; the power of the primal narrative in the Bible *speaks to, challenges, and transforms* the power of the dominant narrative of the present world (Brueggemann 2013, *sic passim*). As Brueggemann puts it, “the Bible itself is a sustained contestation over truth in which conventional modes of power do not always prevail” and, subsequently, its readers and interpreters are “always contestants [for truth], whether [they] recognize [themselves] as such or not” (Brueggemann 2013, 6, 8).

Among other things, the task of the contesting biblical prophets and subsequent prophetic preachers in history is to make “a sustained effort to imagine the world as though YHWH were a real character and the defining agent in the life of the world” (Brueggemann 2012, 132, cf. 2, 23, 45, 71) and “to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around [them]” (Brueggemann 2001, 3). Faithful to the primal narrative in which YHWH reigns and “[bearing] witness to reality that falls outside the purview of the [dominant ideology],” they contest the dominant imagination’s false consciousness, i.e., “a misconstrual of reality to serve particular interest,” which has “narcotized its adherents to the realities of life in the

world around them” (Brueggemann 2014, 17, 7, 15). They are, above all, “voices of unrelenting realism in the face of deceiving ideology” (Brueggemann 2014, 19).

What Brueggemann emphasizes in his study of *prophetic imagination* is that the Bible is, by nature, is countercultural. Consequently, his reading of the Bible is a countercultural reading. In his recent book, *Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks* (2014), he parallels the story of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. to the story of September 11 in 2001 C.E. and finds a compelling analogy between these two stories: the prophets/poets/artists, old and new, are called to counter the ancient ideology of Jewish chosenness as well as the contemporary ideology of American exceptionalism. He argues that prophetic imagination debunks false consciousness promoted by the governing ideology, helps the disrupted reader to grieve over the loss of the distorted reality created by this deceiving ideology and to get connected with the reality of the lived “real” world, and, in the midst of despair, envisions hope for a transforming future that comes only from God.

Kwok Pui-lan’s Practices of Postcolonial Diasporic Feminist Imagination: Story-weaving

Like Brueggemann’s prophetic imagination, Kwok Pui-lan’s postcolonial diasporic feminist imagination is critical of the dominant ideology both in the Bible and in the contemporary society, pastoral to the deceived and the oppressed, and affirmative of the hope found in Jesus Christ. Kwok’s contribution to biblical imagination, I dare say, is to make genuinely balanced Brueggemann’s position that “the Bible is not a closed object [for us to study] but a dialogue partner whom we must address *but which also takes us seriously*” (Brueggemann 1977, 153, my emphasis).

Let me show three examples of her story-weaving:

First, Kwok began a sermon, preached in December 1991, with the following words: “I will retell the story of the promised land, while adding a few stories of my own. I invite you to think about your stories too” (Kwok 1995, 96). The contemporary stories that challenged her to reread this primal narrative are three. Two of the stories are related to historical events: the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre and the United States bombing in the Gulf War in that year. And the third comes from a book: *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* written by Paul Monette, whose lover Roger died of AIDS. In Kwok’s storytelling, these stories became what Kathleen Talvacchia calls “critical incidents, an educational tool for uncovering assumptions and acknowledging the emotionality of learning.” “Critical incidents,” Talvacchia holds, “foster analysis of [one’s] experiences in concrete, contextually specific ways that can serve to highlight the possible contradictions between the assumptions that one brings into a learning context and the realities of what is present” (Talvacchia 2003, 14). The sufferings of Chinese people, coupled with those of war victims and AIDS patients, challenged the way she had read “one of the most powerful symbolizations of hope in the religious traditions of humankind” (Kwok 1995, 99) and enabled her to have a new reading of it. She said, “I could never read the Bible in the same way again. . . . It is when we can no longer read the Bible in the same way that all of a sudden we discover something new, something fundamental, that we had not seen before” (Kwok 1995, 96, 97).

What she uncovered from her new reading of this biblical story with her non-biblical, postcolonial, and diasporic eyes was the awareness that different “ways of being” necessitate different “ways of reading” (Foskett and Kuan 2006). In the light of her critical incidents, Kwok began to read the liberative Exodus story not with Jewish eyes but “with Canaanite eyes,” not with the eyes of the conquerors but with the eyes of the vanquished. Postcolonial readings of the Exodus story from the perspective of the tribal people in Taiwan, the Maoris in New Zealand, the Aborigines in Australia, the Native Americans, and the Palestinians “all

of a sudden” made sense to her. She confessed ashamedly, “I had never read the story from the perspective of the Canaanites, and the experience was shocking to me” (Kwok 1995, 98). As she concluded her sermon, Kwok proposed that we should move beyond the traditional Jewish and Christian understanding of the promised land as a symbol of hope, see the “future of our hope” in the light of a universal vision of “a new Exodus” in Isaiah 55 that includes all people, and “make a new covenant with one another and with God” to “prepare ourselves for this new Exodus” (Kwok 1995, 99, 100). With this sermon, she helps us to see that certain stories that we call “critical incidents” can not only help inform us about the Bible and our faith but also help us form a better understanding of the Bible and our faith.

Second, in a dramatized Bible study she offered on the theme of “God’s mission among the suffering and struggling peoples of Asia” at the 1989 Asian Mission Conference in Indonesia organized by the Christian Conference of Asia, Kwok masterfully weaves the biblical story of the women in the ministry and passion of Jesus with the political story of the 1989 massacre of Chinese students at Tiananmen Square. Believing that biblical interpretation is “conditioned and influenced by our backgrounds,” she attempts to “reread the gospel story in light of the historical crisis of [her] people” and asks her audience “to listen, not only with your ears, but also with your hearts in order to discern what the gospel event means for us today” (Kwok 1995, ix).

After making a brief socio-political analysis of the critical incident that she calls “the Chinese Crisis” and identifying women’s influences in the identity-formation of Jesus who was described as being “repeatedly challenged by the women he met during his ministry” (Kwok 1995, xii), Kwok moves to a retelling of the story of Jesus’ Passion *in parallel with* the story of the Beijing students’ passion. This reading strategy is an elementary form of what she calls elsewhere “parallel processing, taking the cue from computers which are linked up to process vast amounts of data.” This reading strategy requires the reader to read the Bible from multiple perspectives rather than from a single perspective. Kwok regards this reading strategy as “one of the most effective ways to debunk the authority of the [colonial] ‘master’s’ framework” in biblical interpretation. Its purpose is to “challenge the arbitrariness of assigning one interpretation as the normative one” or to show that “alternative readings are indeed possible” (Kwok 1998, 80-81).

Moving back and forth between the two paralleled stories, Kwok opens a space for our creative imagination with regard to reading the passion story with the eyes of the mothers of the Beijing students. Those women in the Bible story, who were, like all mothers at home in Beijing, busy preparing the last supper meal for Jesus, might have asked, *Why would Jesus risk his life?* Kwok finds a probable answer to this question in the “Declaration on Hunger Strike” written by the Beijing students on May 13, 1989: “We do not want to die; we want to live, because we are in the golden period of our youth. . . . But if the death of one person, or a group of persons, can make the lives of people better and the motherland more prosperous, we do not have the right to live” (Kwok 1995, xiv). *What, then, would Jesus’ mother Mary have said to her beloved son as he struggled to “stand up to the test” for “the cause of the people”?* In this regard Kwok refers to what the mothers of the Beijing students said with heartrending cries: “Children, we wish to keep you at home. Do not go to Tiananmen Square. Yet we understand that you must go” (Kwok 1995, xv).

Third, we have seen that, moving freely back and forth between the scenes of the biblical world and those of the contemporary world, Kwok weaves stories of her heart on the loom of her critical and creative imagination. The biblical passage about Jesus’ encounter with a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30) is another case in point.

In a homily preached at Harvard Divinity School’s noon worship in 1986, Kwok, together with three other Asian women, artfully wove stories of “the multiply oppressed people in the Third World” with the story of a Canaanite woman (Kwok 1994). The main

question of this homily, from the beginning to the end, is not “Who is this Jesus?” but “Who is this Canaanite woman?” This woman is a foremost witness (Sadako Kurihara) to “the Hiroshima Tragedy” who would go anywhere in the world in order to proclaim and protest its misery and sing forever “no more wars on the earth.” She is a prayer warrior (Kurinji Thennavan) who pleads with God/Goddess: “Hearest thou not this pitiful crying echoing through these valleys and hills? Babies sucking at breast without milk. Thousands of little ones calling thy name; come now as their mother and save them at thy feet we humbly pray” (Kwok 1994, 238). She is a hopeful theologian/poet (Elizabeth Tapia from the Philippines) who speaks proudly of her integrity as a person:

I am a woman

I am alive

I am struggling

I am hoping.

I am created in the image of God just like all other people in the world.

I am a person with worth and dignity.

I am a thinking person, a feeling person, a doing person.

I am the small *I am* that stands before the big I AM.

...

I am hoping

I am struggling

I am alive

I am Filipino [*sic*]

I am a woman. (Kwok 1994, 240-241)

And she is a grateful theologian/song writer (Kwok Pui-lan from Hong Kong) who holds the hands of African American writer Alice Walker who “flew to see us” in China, “ten thousand miles away.” She listens to the latter’s poem “Song” with joy and gratitude. “Immersed in the sea of yellow faces,” Kwok sings, “happily [Walker] sang: Colorful people, people of color, Tra-la-la-la-la.” Kwok continues to sing,

Across the ocean I came,

To see people like her,

Fierce fighters for justice,

Yet a mother,

In search for the mothers’ gardens.

Today we have met,

A moment is eternity.

Witness a new force,

A new bonding forming.

We are sisters, black, brown and yellow,

Tra-la-la-la-la. (Kwok 1994, 241-242)

To the list, she could have added other Third World women and minority women whose social locations and lived experiences of suffering in hope would shed new lights on the question of who the Canaanite woman was, is, and will be, and the question of who Jesus was, is, and will be in relation to her self-understanding.

Towards the Transforming Narrative Religious Education

In conclusion, we should pay full attention to what Brueggemann calls the “*primal mode of education* in the church, derived from the Torah” (Brueggemann 1982, 22, my emphasis): story. Due to its “narrative particularity,” the biblical story cannot be told once

and for all. Brueggemann says, “One can only tell the [biblical] narrative again, each time with yet another act of *interpretive* imagination” (Brueggemann 2013, 149, my emphasis). Kwok regards our biblical storytelling as an act of *transformative* imagination (à la Karl Marx). In order to transform the readers of the Bible, our biblical imagination need to be transformed first, for “people are changed, not by ethical urging but by transformed imagination” (Brueggemann 1986, 25, à la Paul Ricoeur).

It is my contention that, by her practices of story-weaving, Kwok shows us a way of transforming imagination. Kwok’s story-weaving practices suggest that postcolonial diasporic feminist imagination should incorporate *new modes of discourse* into scholarship as more scholars attempt to *connect, disrupt, and transform* stories daringly and artistically. What is needed most for the field of religious education for Asian and Asian American women is a scholarly, imaginative story-weaving art that relates Asian and Asian American women’s social construction of multiple narratives to their theological construction of Christian narrative identity.

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Building Bridges of Hope: The Church's Role in Reaching Disconnected Black Youth

Abstract

The research paper presents outcomes of a national study on Black teens' disconnection from organized religion, profiles of these youth, meanings assigned to the term, "disconnected youth," often called "unchurched youth," and ministry paradigms that successfully build bridges of connection between them and churches. Study findings reveal teens' views of shortcomings of faith communities; their needs, hopes and specific recommendations for churches; and the importance of reversing inattention to youth and giving them voice.

Introduction

The role of the historic Black church was to assure that young people survived and thrived as hope-filled and hope-giving Christians along oft-times difficult life circumstances. Continuing this role is critical in this era of upheaval, racial division, and sense of hopelessness, lovelessness, and powerlessness. Frankly, the situation is tough! With each successive generation, the rate of Black youths' defection from the church has risen. It is noted in follow-up contacts with 100 graduates of the Youth Hope-Builders Academy, a Christian leadership formation program for high school youth at Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia. All were church-connected in their teen years. Yet, currently, forty per cent (40%) of them are minimally church-connected by virtue of their church attendance of no more than one to two times monthly or irregularly.¹

In the book, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, Lincoln and Mamiya highlight the tenuous hold of Black churches particularly on urban youth and young adults. They urge church reconnection for the sake of forging a better future for youth and the church.² The current-day role must also be carried out amidst observations of a general lack of youths' connection to mainstream society, that is characterized as disengagement from activities that build human capital.³ However, the view also exists of society's and the church's disconnection from them. Youth leaders report a dual unreadiness of youth for church and the church's unreadiness for them.⁴ Yet, little has been done, empirically, to ascertain who constitutes

¹Church attendance of graduates of the Youth Hope-Academy (YHBA) is one aspect of a larger follow-up initiative called "My Hope Is Built," carried out by Pamela A. Perkins, YHBA Program Coordinator.

²C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 345, 382-383, 404.

³Besharove, Douglas J. And Karen N. Gardiner, "Introduction: Preventing Youthful Disconnectedness." *America's Disconnected Youth: Toward a Preventative Strategy*. Douglas J. Besharov, ed. (Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 1999), 3-4, 1-30.

⁴Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, Sandra L. Barnes, Karma D. Johnson, *Youth Ministry in the Black Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2013), 113.

disconnected youth, what their views are about church, and how churches may reach and serve them in hope-bearing ways. The research project centers on uncovering this information.

The Research Effort

The research effort sought to uncover and illumine profiles of disconnected Black youth and ministry paradigms that build bridges of connection between these youth and churches. An ITC and field-based research team undertook a national survey of four-hundred (400) youth ages 13-18 across the four geographic regions of the U.S. (See Table 1).⁵ The effort has taken seriously the voices of Black youth—to hear them out—rather than to rely on what adults say about them.⁶ The survey invited youths’ reports of their church participation, issues they face for which they assign responsibility to the church, personal issues they face and sources of assistance, the church’s overall role in the lives of today’s Black youth, and advice they would give to churches that would bridge the gap of disconnection. The research effort not simply asked why youth are disconnected from the church, but what church models or “best practices” exist that succeed in creating hope-filled bridges of connection with youth. The ensuing sections present key findings.

Table 1. National Survey Population

Ages	South	West	Northeast	Midwest	Total
13 Male	11	11	1	0	23
Female	15	14	5	2	36
14 Male	7	6	1	0	14
Female	11	13	1	2	27
15 Male	5	11	1	1	18
Female	3	9	4	3	19
16 Male	8	6	1	4	19
Female	2	10	2	3	17
17 Male	12	4	3	1	20
Female	4	10	2	6	22
18 Male	36	3	31	13	83
Female	33	11	37	21	102
Totals	147	108	89	56	400

⁵The on-base research team included Anne Streaty Wimberly, Pamela Perkins, Casina Washington, and Sara Farmer as well as field-based ethnographers.

⁶Focus on the voices of Black youth derives from acute awareness of the invisibility and muteness of these youth and the lack of attention that both larger society and faith communities given them. See: Gregory Ellison, *Cut Dead and Still Alive: Caring for African American Young Men* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013), 3-7.

Patterns of Teens Church Participation

Survey results show 260 (65%) of the 400 survey respondents are in the broader category called “disconnected youth.” However, the analyses reveal four specific church “disconnection” types according to participation rates, including *purely unchurched youth*, *de-churched youth*, and *non-churched youth*. These categories and numbers of survey participants in each are included in the first three descriptions below.⁷ A fourth category, *selectively churched youth*, is added for participants who did not reflect any of the other types.

- ✓ 31 (7.8%) of the participants are *purely unchurched youth* or those outside church who never attended.
- ✓ 68 (17%) of the participants are *de-churched youth* or those who previously attended church worship and/or other aspects of church life but have ceased attendance.
- ✓ 139 (34.7%) of the participants are *non-churched youth* or the minimally churched who attend church and/or other aspects of church life unpredictably or infrequently, typically no more than 1 or 2 times monthly or only on special days/holidays.
- ✓ 22 (5.5%) of the participants are *selectively churched youth* or those who move back and forth or variously between periods of infrequent and frequent attendance in church worship and/or other parts of church life or who participate in selected activities on a regular basis.

Assignment of Church Responsibility for Addressing Teen Issues

Survey participants were asked to identify from a list of current-day issues, which ones they think the church should address. More than fifty-percent of the total group assigned the greatest church responsibility for addressing the following:

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|--------|
| ✓ | Spiritual life | 59.5 % |
| ✓ | Suicidal thinking or attempts | 57.5% |
| ✓ | Grief/death/sadness | 56.2% |
| ✓ | Substance abuse/Drugs | 52.2% |
| ✓ | Crime/Violence Issues | 51.2% |

Personal Issues of Teens and Sources of Assistance

Teens’ issues clustered in the areas of personal, relational, spiritual, educational economic, physical and mental health, and wider societal challenges. Survey results show the highest number of issues, in descending order of prominence, in the relational, personal, physical and mental health, and educational categories. *Relational issues* ranged from family concerns and conflicts such as divorce, abandonment or being kicked out, drug addiction, and family members’ incarceration, to dating, bullying, abuse, peer pressure, death of family and friends,

⁷See: Lenetria Fix and Jeffrey Wallace, *Everybody’s Urban: Understanding the Survival Mindset of the Next Generation* (Group Publishing House, Inc., 2013); and George Barna & David Kinneman, General Eds., *Churches Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect With Them* (Tyndale Momentum, 2014), viii.

and as an 18 year old wrote: “Being concerned for my safety everyday I walk out the house. . . and not understanding the strikes I already have against me.” They identified *personal issues* of self-esteem, self identity, and appearance; life decisions, direction, and finding themselves; sexuality; attitudinal issues of anger, laziness, accepting change, motivation, and understanding the world; jail, and simply growing up. *Physical and mental health issues* centered on anxiety/stress, depression, loneliness, heartache, grief, suicidal thinking, thoughts about death, self-harm, trust, and keeping optimistic. Teens cited *educational issues* from keeping up with studies, discipline and study habits, grades, and failure, to staying in school including doing so after the death of parents, teacher meanness, preparing for college, and money issues.

The numerous issues cited by teens clearly call for available “protective strategies” and “stress buffers.”⁸ The need is for faith communities to show them love and acceptance, give affirmation and support, model stability, provide anchors of faith, and point them toward a sense of hope.⁹ Yet, teens were least likely to identify the church, pastors, youth leaders, mentors or church groups as sources of help. Moreover, nearly a quarter (24.6%) of the total survey group sought no one for help.

Role of the Church in the Lives of Teens

Because of findings of teens’ tendency not to seek church assistance in addressing their issues, there was anticipation of a negative response to the question, “Would you say the church needs to be part of the lives of today’s Black youth? However, to the contrary, nearly 90 percent (89.7%) answered “Yes,” 3.2% said “No,” 2% indicated both “Yes” and “No” with an added response that “It just depends.” An added 4.7% gave no answer, and one teen entered “Don’t know.” The “Yes” answers were affirmed by statements such as “We need all the help we can get”; “It may change a kid’s thoughts and their decision-making regards to being on the streets and being around negative vibes;” and “Youth need figures who can support me in a time of need.”

Survey participants also responded to the invitation to give advice to churches on reaching today’s youth. In numerous statements, youth pointed toward the church’s vital role as a hospitable, unified, affirming, listening community that involves youth and uses their gifts; a spiritual guide that is not afraid to tell faith truths and give positive direction for life even when teens resist it; an assisting and sometimes intervening presence that responds to current realities; a people willing to “go to the streets” and “be available where youth are”; a place that “shows its strength when it serves people in need, . . . gives out book bags and school supplies. . . and gives free food “; “leaders with a focus on relevance, who “help me understand why I should attend church,” have a hope-filled and transformative view that “the church will be able to change most of the Black youth’s mindset,” with some “fun too;” and a people who live the words: “Don’t be lazy,” “Stay in our lives,” and “Don’t give up on us.”

⁸See the discussion on “protective strategies” and “stress buffers” in: Carole Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

⁹Chapman presents evidence and descriptions of these needs of children in: Kathryn N. Chapman, “What Children Need From Significant Adults,” 43-55 in Andrew D. Lester, ed., *When Children Suffer: A Sourcebook for Ministry with Children in Crisis* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 44-47.

Model Programs

The need for youth today is for the church's embrace of a journey toward disconnected youth that acts on the biblical calling found in the Great Commission and the African proverbial view: "I am because you are, and because you are, I am." Thankfully, churches exist that address head-on the very social, emotional, and spiritual issues associated with disconnection to which youth in the study point, by engaging in concrete practices of connection. This section presents ways churches have succeeded. Based on interviews and participant observations of ten churches located across the four U.S. geographic regions, the findings offer "best practices" that hold potential for enabling churches to effectively reach out to disconnected youth. Specifically, five models of connection will be described including: wrap around ministries, gap ministries, shepherding ministries, community infusion ministries, and journeyer ministries.

Gap Ministries. Gap ministries provide a bridge from the community to the church. While youth may not ever go to a particular church, the experiences of mentorship, nurture, and social services combine to show concretely an image of God's love. These ministries primarily emerge from responding to a specific need in the community. Ministries in four churches demonstrate this model. Bethany Church in West Orange, New Jersey, provides a safe place for youth, particularly Black males, to play. The church's outreach to disconnected youth exploded when the pastor realized that children from the school that sits across from the church, walk through the church parking lot to get home. In a moment of exploration, the pastor placed water bottles outside to see if children would take them. They did. The pastor began to take notice of needs of youth in the community. A "Hoop Ministry" evolved from recognition that youth had nowhere to play basketball. Zachary Guyton, pastor of Bethany, believes there is a preferential option for disconnected youth. God gives priority to youth who are disconnected from the Body of Christ. He believes the church is the answer. The church has fifty-five members, but he sees five hundred boys yearly through his basketball program.

Like Bethany Church, Mt. Airy Church of God in Christ (COGIC), a mega church located in the heart of Philadelphia, also functions as a gap ministry. It is a worshipping body that provides ministry opportunities for over 742 on the roll and 400 active youth. Its focus is on outreach to disconnected youth and programming and events that draw them such as fashion shows, spoken word nights, a scholarship ministry, and basketball plus informal conversations on relevant events. They also offer dual programming for both parents and youth.

Positioned between an affluent neighborhood and an area of low-to-moderate income people, Calvary Baptist Church serves as a gap ministry. It both seeks to connect with those disconnected from the church as well as to reconcile the vast disparities between the wealthy and the poor. Affectionately identified as the "lily pad in the middle of the swamp," the ministry reaches out to people from the lofts and the streets. A primary function of this gap ministry is the community wellness center, which provides a fitness facility to all ages and teen a program called HYPE (Helping Youth Plan for Excellence) that uses art as an expressive tool for youth to share their concerns. Currently, the community surrounding the church uses the community wellness facility more than church attenders.

New Direction Ministries in California is a non-denominational church that partners with

CeaseFire to engage in activities such as night walks and rallies to help transform crime-infested areas. It seeks community buy-in and action on behalf of peace and safety. The ministries also offer resourcing events to introduce service providers to the community and their role in that community. The church functions like a church without walls. The major task of Donnell Jones is his desire to galvanize local clergy to respond to community issues of crime and violence.

Wrap-Around Ministries. Wrap-around ministries are the most difficult to develop from a church because they typically require resources beyond the church. Because of the need for cross-sector collaboration that comes from both private donors and government resources, these ministries often function as a non-profit entity. Two ministries—Greater Life Fellowship Church through Greater Life, Inc. in Newark, New Jersey and Grace Bible Church through Hope Development Corporation, in Charleston, West, Virginia—operate from a community development corporation base.

Greater Life Fellowship, where Rev. Michael T. and Rev. Maria Westbrook provide pastoral leadership, serves as a wrap-around ministry through the Greater Life, Inc. non-profit organization that provides a community outreach center, a metropolitan urban family institute, camping experiences and juvenile detention outreach. Their focus is to do “on the street” outreach that creates an unbroken circle of support. Grace Bible Church, whose pastor is Rev. Matthew Watts, is a wrap-around ministry that provides educational and spiritual renewal opportunities that, through its Hope Development Corporation, aim to interrupt harsh conditions many youth experience.

Chester Eastside Ministries (CEM), in Chester, Pennsylvania is a wrap-around ministry, providing a series of social services in the community. Led by Rev. Bernice Warren, programming includes a peace camp where junior and senior high school youth are hired to work, a parenting program, pantry, movies, dinner discussions, and cultural enrichment trips. This faith- and community-based ministry seeks to connect youth to opportunities to see beyond their local context and instill hope.

Shepherding Ministries. Two churches carry out shepherding ministries. Both Friendship Community Church in College Park, Georgia, and Glen Addie United Methodist Church in Anniston, Alabama embrace Christian nurture as part of their mission. However, in these ministries, the leaders understand that nurture and discipline go hand-in-hand. The tools of a shepherd are both the rod (of discipline) and the staff (of guidance and support) from which youth feel both challenged and nurtured. In this sense, outreach into the community as shepherding ministries welcomes disconnected youth knowing that they will be challenged by the guidelines that undergird the ministries.

Friendship Community Church, whose pastor is Donald Earl Bryant, carries out a shepherding ministry through its involvement of youth in the expressive activities of the youth choir and participation in the worshipping community. To participate in it, parent and youth must adhere to a dress code. This practice is not intended to deter youth from coming but to emphasize God rather than external looks as a priority in ministry. This form of shepherding ministry prepares youth to live in a society that has acceptable and unacceptable behavioral norms by assisting their formation of critical thinking, and decision-making skills. In a different manner, Glen Addie United Methodist Church whose pastors are Drs. Tiwirai and Adlene Kufarimai, represent a form of shepherding ministry that sets forth an image of parental love and

authority. Rules of conduct are established in conversation with youth, agreed upon by them, the pastors and parents. These rules guide youths' involvement in choir, liturgical dance, other worship leadership activities, study halls, and youth group meetings. Youth who disobey the rules are not permitted to continue. Yet, invariably, these youth find their way back to this ministry because they see the rules as means of protecting rather than hurting them and communicating a message of worth and value to youth who may not receive the same discipline at home.

Community Infusion Ministries. Impact Church, a United Methodist Church in Atlanta, Georgia where Olu Brown is pastor, is rightly called a community infusion church because it is not simply interested in the community surrounding the church but the community within the church. One of its direct links into the community is through its connection with the schools. Their innovative strategy of adopting a school seeks to meet the needs of students and teachers while also communicating the church's desire to be actively engaged in building and nurturing the community in which it resides. Intentional decisions about and uses of church environmental space, technology, and community outreach demonstrate the desire both to connect with and be relevant to youth who lack confidence in the church. The way Impact Church functions reflects its motto—"doing church differently."

Journeyer Ministries. Journeyers honor the relationship at all ages and stages of youth development. Phil Jackson is pastor of The House, a hip hop service offered to youth and young adults two Saturdays a month. Pastor Phil also directs The Firehouse Community Arts Center located in the North Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. The Firehouse Community Arts Center resides in a refurbished fire station. Born out of the desire to see kids discover and share their gifts, the building itself is symbolic of its mission—"putting one fire out at a time." While introducing youth to Christ, the emphasis is meeting youth where they are and providing a safe space where they can engage truth. The starting point to building relationships with youth is art that, in its creation and fulfillment by youth, is viewed as redemptive transformation. The activities are means of building bridges that help create questions about identity and vocation, of gaining rapport with youth through consistent presence and support, and establishing trust and gaining the ear of youth in communities where instability is the staple.

Plugging Back In: Implications for Building Bridges of Hope Through Reconnection

Teens' open and honest survey responses stand as wise counsel to churches and their leaders. Their entries must surely prompt action to connect with youth who, on the one hand have disconnected from the church in various ways and, on the other hand, who have targeted the importance of the church in their everyday lives.

While the model ministries diverge from each other in distinct ways, they also share aspects that provide insights for any church seeking to connect with disconnected Black youth. Their wisdom converges with the research findings and narrative responses youth entered on the surveys. It is clear that not simply are youth plugged into other activities that captivate their attention by which they are unplugged from the church, but the church is unplugged from youth. Churches that have been able to maintain connection with youth share significant strengths. These churches offer four core messages and practices for use in the Black Church (in particular) and the church (in general) in expanding their ministry to disconnected youth. Strength resides in

the ministry's ability to: (1) provide holistic care to a generation that often lives fragmented lives; (2) provide a relational presence to a generation that often experiences absence and loss; (3) provide sites of affirmation and reclamation to a generation that feels the pressure to conform because of an identity that is contested for being young, Black, (and Christian).

The Imagination of the Prophets: Reading the Word and the World with Adolescent Girls

At its best, religious education is an education for faith that is liberating and just. This is also the task that the biblical prophets took up – calling the people of Israel to participation in God’s justice. They engaged in an educational project of consciousness raising – of forming the imaginations of the people. For adolescent girls, as a particularly marginalized community within the church, the prophetic call for justice can engage their imaginations. By putting the biblical world of the prophets into conversation with the sexism and ageism of their experiences, girls can cultivate their own prophetic imagination and, ultimately, their prophetic voice.

In the movie, *Whale Rider*,¹ a young girl named Paikea struggles to reconcile a tradition that excludes her with what she knows she has to offer to her people. A member of a Maori community in New Zealand, Paikea’s people trace their history to an ancestor, also named Paikea, who was saved from drowning and came to their land on the back of a whale. Since then, all the leaders of the community were direct male descendants of that first ancestor. In our Paikea’s generation, however, there is no male to take on the leadership role and Paikea, while passionately committed to her community’s history and traditions, is not permitted to be her people’s leader because she is a girl.

Paikea’s grandfather struggles with his responsibility to pass on the traditions to a new male leader. In a conversation with her father, Paikea realizes that what her grandfather is searching for is a prophet. Her father says, “In his head, your koro [grandfather], he needs a prophet... somebody who's gonna lead our people outta the darkness and who'll make everything all right again.” For Paikea and her family, the prophet is someone who can know the traditions of the people and who can, by bringing those traditions into conversation with the present reality, help to change that reality. So Paikea learns the traditions of her people, largely in secret and against her grandfather’s wishes, and finds a way to become the leader that her people need. Paikea learns from her traditions and brings them into conversation with the new realities faced by her people; she becomes the prophet her people need and finds a new path for her people.

Just as for Paikea, the biblical prophetic tradition in the Christian church² can also be brought into conversation with the new realities faced by the church today. By investigating the context in which the prophets worked, we can better understand them as teachers who read their word and world and who posed problems to those to whom they preached. This paper will explore how the biblical prophetic texts are conscientizing texts that can provide a model for empowering adolescent girls to read the word and world of their lives. Paulo Freire will provide

¹ *Whale Rider*, DVD. Directed by Niki Caro (Auckland, New Zealand: South Pacific Pictures, 2002).

² In the context of this paper, the particularity of the experience of adolescent girls in the Roman Catholic Church is taken up. This is not only because it is the author’s tradition and experience, but also because, as a church that does not ordain women and that does not generally admit women into positions of senior leadership, the challenges of sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy that face adolescent girls are especially pronounced. It is hoped, however, that the reflections in this paper will have implications for young women in other Christian traditions.

us with the language to understand the interaction between the biblical text and our contemporary world. And then we can bring our own question to the text: How do we educate girls for faith in a church and world that can be unjust in a way that enables them to develop their own prophetic imagination and voice?

Reading the Word

In our modern imagination, a prophet is someone who stands up for and calls the rest of us to the work of social justice. A prophet helps us to see what is wrong with our world and challenges us to fix it. A prophet shows us our sin – the sin in our own lives and the ways that sin has been structuralized into our society. Having shown us our sin, a prophet calls us to be our best selves, to be fully human, and to ensure that all people have the opportunity to live fully human lives.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire would argue that the role of the prophet is to educate for freedom and justice, to educate for conscientization. According to Freire, conscientization involves an educational system in which people, especially those who have traditionally been at the margins of society, learn how to name and change the reality of the poverty and oppression in their lives. By learning to recognize the situations of oppression and dehumanization in their lives, the poor become able to change these situations of injustice, transforming their lives and the whole of their world.³

For Freire, an important part of the process of conscientization occurs in the dialogue that happens between the content of the curriculum and the historical situation of the learners. Freire refers to this as a dual process of “reading the world and reading the word.”⁴ In this process, the concrete, historical, political, social, and religious context in which the learners are situated is taken as a profoundly important interpretive lens through which the content of the curriculum is viewed. The content of the curriculum can become liberative because it is understood in dialogue with the context of the learners. These two movements work together⁵ and each movement shapes and grounds the other. Students learn to “read the word and read the world” – to see the content of the educational process in dialogue with their present realities. In doing this, they come to see that the way things are is not necessarily the way things must be. And in this understanding is born the struggle for change and justice.

For Christians, reading the word and the world means turning to the resources of our tradition and bringing them into conversation with our concrete lived experiences. Key to reading the word is our reading of the Bible and key to our reading of the Bible is our reading of our world. The study of the Bible provides us with a particular content which can be a dialogue partner as we bring it into conversation with our world; in this process, the biblical text ceases to

³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1989), 100. Freire identifies the teacher as playing a crucial role in this process of conscientization. The teacher can be someone who maintains the established order, thereby keeping the poor in their poverty and oppression by seeking merely to deposit information in students and form them into people who will uncritically accept what they are told and will meekly step into the roles prepared for them. For Freire, a revolutionary teacher is the one who rejects this “banking education” and engages students in the process of problematizing, asking questions, dialogue, and conscientization.

⁴ Paulo Freire, “Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed” in *The Paulo Freire Reader* ed. Ana Maria Araujo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (New York: Continuum, 2001), 238.

⁵ Freire, “Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed,” 260. Freire argues that understanding the historical context of the students has to precede the turn to the curriculum. At the same time, the curriculum and the students’ context must be held together throughout the educational process with the goal of allowing each to inform our understanding of the other. See also, Paulo Freire, “Letter to a Young Theology Student,” *LADOC* II:29b (1970).

be merely a historical document – something that once had life and meaning but is now just a record of that past experience. It becomes instead a living partner in dialogue.⁶

This is especially true when the text in question deals explicitly with issues of justice and when we are approaching those texts with people who are experiencing the world as one that is unjust. Liberation theologians have reminded the church that the biblical prophets served as voices of justice, calling Israel to remember their covenant with God and to enact the relationships of justice, righteousness, and loving-kindness that the covenant requires. Understanding the social, political, and religious background of the biblical prophets and the literary trajectory of the prophetic books helps us to see how those prophets read the word and the world of their historical situation. This, in turn, enables us to find in those books a dialogue partner that can speak to situations of marginalization in the modern world. Specifically, the prophets provide a word for us to read as we try to read our own world.

The Dissident Imagination of the Prophets

The prophetic tradition reflects an ongoing process of mediation between the divine and the people.⁷ We have stories of seers, diviners, people who enter ecstatic trances, people who work in the temple complex, people who challenge the cultic prophets, people who challenge the monarchy. Broadly speaking, the prophets were concerned with injustices resulting from the demographic, political, and economic shifts that were happening in Israel. With the rise of the monarchy, Israelite society had shifted away from an agrarian subsistence economy organized in a loose tribal confederacy and to a centralized state with taxes, a standing military, forced labor, and a centralized bureaucracy.⁸ At the same time, the religious practices were shifting from local cultic centers supported by the surrounding area to the centralized worship in Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom and in Samaria, Dan, and Bethel in the Northern Kingdom; these centralized temples required more priests, a larger bureaucratic network, and a stable form of income.⁹ With increased religious and political centralization came increased wealth and trade; however, this also meant a greater disparity between rich and poor as well as increasing incidents of people losing their land or selling themselves into slavery to pay debts.¹⁰ It was into this social reality that the prophets came to preach. Joseph Blenkinsopp provides us with a way of understanding how the prophets functioned in their historical and cultural context. The prophets saw themselves as engaged in a common activity rather than as belonging to a specific profession... Perhaps the closest we can come... is to describe them as dissident intellectuals. What this is meant to say is that they collaborated at some level of conscious intent in the emergence of a coherent vision of a moral universe over against

⁶ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza argues that, by insisting that biblical studies must be scientifically objective and disinterested, the church is doing a disservice both to the text and to its readers. We do not allow it to serve as our teacher – to be a problem poser, a question asker, a dialogue partner. We do not read it as a word that can be in dialogue with our world. However, the historical and cultural background of a biblical author and the literary, textual, and editorial processes that shaped the text are important because they help us understand how the text functioned in the past. But for the text to function for us today, we need to also bring our historical and cultural context to the process. We need to engage the text in a dialogue and allow it to serve as a teacher for us. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 16-18.

⁷ See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 1-6.

⁸ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 5.

⁹ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 89.

¹⁰ Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 71.

current assumptions cherished and propagated by the contemporary state apparatus, including its priestly and prophetic representatives.¹¹

The preaching of these dissident intellectuals was primarily focused on a denunciation of the ruling elite, but also included suspicion of urban life, government bureaucracy, and organized religion.¹²

The prophets were reading the word of their religious heritage in conversation with the world of the Israelite monarchy. God's word provided them with a tradition that allowed critique of the abuse of wealth and power and their historical situation was one of manifest and multiplying injustices. Reading their world and the word called them forth as dissident intellectuals or what Freire would call revolutionary teachers. These revolutionary teachers have a responsibility to both denounce and announce; they are to denounce the injustice that they see and experience and they are to announce the ways that the world can be changed.¹³ In the process of asking questions, posing problems, and engaging in dialogue, the prophets examine their world, read that world, and commit to changing it.

A Pedagogy of Prophecy

The biblical prophets, as dissident intellectuals, provided a critique of their world that drew upon the traditions that they had inherited. They had read the word of their tradition and saw how that word problematized their world. The world of adolescent girls, like the world of the biblical prophets, is also one where girls feel marginalized, silenced, and excluded. How, then, do the biblical prophets provide us with a word to read – a tradition and a dialogue partner that calls for our attention – as we attempt to read *this* world?

First, using the biblical prophets as a problematizing word that we can bring into dialogue with our world enables educators who work with adolescent girls to engage those girls in a powerful exploration of their faith and its call to act for justice. Because the world that the prophets were engaging and criticizing had some of the same social issues as does the world of today's adolescent girls, the biblical text can become a dialogue partner for them. Looking to the world of the prophets will enable girls to see the injustices of their world. But, even more importantly, it will empower them to read their own reality in light of the prophet's call for justice. The words of the prophets can help adolescent girls to problematize their experiences of marginalization and oppression. By reading the prophetic denunciations of, for example, the exploitation of the poor and the mistreatment of widows and orphans, adolescent girls can make connections with their own experiences. The prophets, then, serve as a conscientizing word for these girls.

Second, the biblical prophets provide us with a denouncing and announcing word to read as we engage in the process of reading our own world. The prophets show us that God is a God of justice, mercy, and love and that God is calling each of us to remember our covenant relationship with God and to act with God's justice in the world. For example, in confronting the

¹¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 144.

¹² Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet*, 154. The prophets' denunciation of organized religion was not focused on the spirituality of the people or an assumed tendency to understand sacrifice as a way of magically controlling the deity. Rather, it was a critique of the state-sponsored cult as a part of the systematic apparatus of state control and of the priests and prophets of the cult as mouthpieces of the state. Blenkinsopp also remarks, "It is remarkable that no other ancient Near Eastern society that we know of developed a comparable tradition of dissident intellectualism and social criticism" (p. 154).

¹³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 40.

very specific historical circumstances of the Northern Kingdom of the mid-eighth century BCE, Amos and Hosea provide us with the language to speak about infidelity to God, to the dangers of centralized governmental decision-making, to the increasing gap between rich and poor, to the silencing and marginalizing of the poor. In reading their call for their own people to return to God and God's justice, we can see more clearly the places in our own world where we are failing to listen to God and to enact God's justice. The problems faced by the Israelite prophets are not all that different from our own. They call us to be the dissident intellectuals – the ones who know the past and the present and can call the community to a new future.

Adolescent girls, in particular, are called to read the word and the world, to denounce and announce. They hear from the church that God is a God of love, justice, and equality; but their life experiences are ones of being marginalized because of their age and their gender. As women in the church, they are barred from leadership and many hear the message that they are valued only as wives and mothers – only in relation to men. As adolescents, they are segregated from the local community – often sequestered in church basements with other teens – and not allowed to have a voice or a role in the worship or service life of the parish. Adolescent girls, then, are in a unique position to bring a powerful critique to their world, a critique grounded in the prophetic call for justice for the marginalized.

Finally, the biblical prophets can serve as a model for engaging in critical reflection on situations of injustice and for communicating that reflection to the rest of the community in a way that calls them to act. As dissident intellectuals, the prophets were particularly well suited for engaging in the kind of reflection that was needed. The prophets read their word: they knew the religious and social traditions of the Israelite community, they knew what the covenant with God called them to, and they knew that the God who had brought them out of Egypt was a God of power and justice. And the prophets read their world: they saw political corruption, they saw increasing disregard for the covenant, they saw the rising power of the centralized, bureaucratic state, they saw increasing concentrations of wealth among the rich, and they saw the poor becoming poorer. Reading their word and their world, the prophets spoke out with a dramatic denouncing of this world that the Israelite elite had created and an announcing of the coming of God's judgment and justice. Following their model, we are called to read the word of our religious tradition and to remind ourselves of what God has called us to be – to be a community of faithfulness, mercifulness, loving-kindness, and justice. And we are called to read our world and to see the places where we have failed to enact this call.

Adolescent girls, as members of God's people, are also called to this critical reflection on the word and the world. And they bring particular perspective to this reflection: marginalization because of age and because of gender. Like the prophets, they function on the periphery of the community and, from that peripherality, they are able to bring a critique that is not possible from those who have found the comfort of the center of the community. Their world, as a more peripheral one, needs to be brought into conversation with the word of God's love and care and adolescent girls are called to be the dissident intellectuals that provide that critical reflection.

Adolescent girls, like all human beings, lead rich and varied lives; however, we can look to one aspect of their experience to see how this prophetic approach might empower girls to name their world and change the injustices that they find there. Reading the Bible with girls means that they will see that the text is profoundly male oriented. The vast majority of the text reflects the perspectives and interests of the presumably male authors of the text.¹⁴ The concerns

¹⁴ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 3-5.

of women are rarely raised and, when women do play a central role in the narrative, it is often as an unreachably perfect model or as a negative example.¹⁵ By critically reading these passages, girls can identify the sexism that underlies the writing and history of interpretation of the biblical texts. This perspective then allows them to look to their own world and to critique the sexism and ageism that they find there. For example, they will look to the church and see that they are intentionally excluded from most forms of official ministry. They will read the church's documents and see that the adult male is still held up as normative of humanity. They will look to the public statements of the church and see that the male hierarchy is largely concerned with preserving a cultural tradition that does not value the voices and actions of women, children, adolescents, and the elderly. And, once they see the oppression that still exists in the church, they can denounce it and announce a new way of living the Christian life that honors women and men of all ages as human beings created by God.

Engaging in conversation with girls about the Bible provides them with the opportunity to find their own prophetic imaginations. However, given the chance to talk about their own faith, as they live it in their particular contexts, girls find that they have something profound to say. And in the dialogue between the Bible and their lives, adolescent girls can see the instances of injustice in their lives and envision the world that they want to create. In the process of conscientization that happens when the word and the world are brought into dialogue, girls see that they are able to name and change their reality.

Like Paikea, in *Whale Rider*, adolescent girls can learn to take a tradition that has excluded them and find, in that tradition, the tools they need to change their world. Paikea read the word of her ancestral founding story and the resulting custom of male leadership and she used that word to read her world. She saw that the tradition of her people called them as a special people, but that they were allowing that tradition to limit them in the new world in which they lived. She became a new whale rider and claimed a new reading of the word, a new reading of her people's tradition. Adolescent girls today, like Paikea, can similarly look to the biblical prophets and see how this word can be a word of freedom and justice; and they can look at their own world and see how this word calls them to understand their world in new ways.

¹⁵ Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 31-34. Consider, for example, the ways that the matriarchs of Genesis are interpreted – as faithful, loyal, unquestioning, hardworking; or the traditional interpretations of the women who take up roles usually given to men – Deborah, Miriam, Jael, and Abigail. Traditional interpretations of women such as Eve, Tamar, Hagar, and Gomer stress their sinfulness and guilt. The law deals with women as potential sources of ritual impurity or as property to be cared for and disposed of.

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**A Way Forward:
Nurturing the Imagination at the Intersection of Race, Class, Gender, and Age**

Abstract

Those who are oppressed often find themselves internalizing voices that limit their ability. This paper focuses on a population that falls on the non-hegemonic side of intersectional of race, class, gender, and age: Black girls from poor and working class backgrounds. From my work with youth, I have noticed that internalizing these limiting voices will lead to a sense of personal hopelessness. I suggest that Christian educators combat personal hopelessness by nurturing the theological imagination of their youth.

Introduction

The opening of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, lays out an understanding of gender differences in how one lives out one's dreams. As Hurston writes about Southern Black American life, she contends that some Black men receive their dreams while some are mocked by dreams that will forever be out of reach. Black women, however, see their dreams differently. The more common reading of this passage is to view it within a feminist lens and conclude that while men yearn, women chase their dreams until they become the reality. I read this a little differently and present a second interpretation. While I believe that the first interpretation is where the text ends, it is not where it begins. This quotation can also be interpreted to say that Black women—who are later referred to as “the mules of the earth”—deal with their reality and make their dreams what they already have. They settle. This is a limitation that prevents growth. For if you only remember what you want to remember, you can't grow. You *have to* be satisfied with what you have. While the men look at the ship and yearn, they at least know what they want. The women convince themselves that what they want is what they have. In this second interpretation, neither gender swims out to the ocean and grabs their dreams from the ship, but women don't even see theirs. Those dreams are too painful for Black women to see, for they know that they can only deal with their own reality. In my interpretation, the text does not view this as a welcomed reality; in fact it goes on to speak of Janie, the protagonist, who sheds the limitations placed on her by the world. But this opening does represent a reality for many of the people Hurston lived around and for many of the youth with whom I have worked. At a younger age, the gender lines may not be so divided. I have seen girls who can still see their hopes and dreams on that ship – they have not been taught how to swim, so their dreams remain within sight even if out of reach. What is it that keeps these dreams at a distance or, worse, too painful to even see? And how can we get girls from interpretation number two to interpretation number one so they make their dreams a reality?

Some would argue that the answer lies in one's nature. They argue that some people will get those dreams and some will not, and the only reason they will not get their wish is because they are too lazy to swim. I do not discount that certain people are born with certain dispositions that help them overcome odds, but I do note that there are odds to overcome that are often placed by a society that benefits from keeping certain people out of the water. Historically, the poor, cultural minorities, women, and the young have all been kept on the shore. But those that

embody all of these identities at once live in a society that constantly sends the message that they shouldn't even be near the ocean.

As a Religious educator, I seek to develop a paradigm for a particular group that have often found themselves blocked from the ocean—Black teen girls from working class backgrounds. I begin by identifying some of the ways society sends a confining message. When the girls believe these messages, they internalize personal hopelessness and a grim sense of their future. I will then introduce a foundational framework based in theological imagination aimed to combat the problem of personal hopelessness. Before that can be achieved, addressing the concerns of Black girls from poor and working class backgrounds must be done with the knowledge of *intersectionality*.

Keeping Girls on the Shore: The Miseducation of Poor Black Girls

Children are naturally inquisitive and full of wonder. They constantly question how things work and why they work the way they do. Yet, as bell hooks contends, “Sadly, children’s passion for thinking often ends when they encounter a world that seeks to educate them for conformity and obedience only.”¹ Passion for thinking opens up a world of possibilities for a child; educating solely for obedience and conformity closes that world and forces youth to believe that the world only holds a small place for them. One’s place in US culture is influenced by one’s race, class, and gender; and youth learn “their place” from a variety of sources, not least from their local neighborhood schools. While in school, children learn many things beyond academic subjects—they learn how to construct their reality. They not only learn what they ought to know, but who they ought to be. Yet many Black girls from poor and working class communities learn that what they are is limited.

In her text, *How Black Disadvantaged Adolescents Socially Construct Reality: Listen, Do You Hear What I Hear?* Loretta Brunious presents an ethnographic study with twenty African-American youth living in poverty in Chicago. First, Brunious notes that while one’s reality is subjectively created and personally meaningful, it is not completely internal. One’s own reality is affected by the perception of those around her. For Black children in a lower socio-economic class, this is a particularly critical factor in how they see themselves, the world around them, and how they see themselves fitting into that world.

When interviewing the students about the importance of school, Brunious notes that many of the youth perceive schooling as a means to social and economic advancement in a very vague sense. In addition, they do not connect schooling with social empowerment, civic responsibilities, or as a means to a brighter future. Students were able to express the cultural understanding as to what school is “supposed” to be for (as in a passageway to college and future employment), but did not necessarily believe it to be true for them. “While the students can articulate the ‘correct’ cultural ideology about the value of education, they appear to be oblivious to their oppressed state.”² Brunious refers to the education received as “the pedagogical machinery.” The use of the term “machinery” connotes her feelings that education, as it stands, reproduces the social order of things and continues the dominant ideology.

Julie Bettie further adds to this conversation with her discoveries as expressed in *Women without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity*. Bettie presents an ethnographic study she conducted in

¹ bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 8.

² Loretta Brunious, *How Black Disadvantaged Adolescents Socially Construct Reality: Listen, Do You Hear What I Hear?* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1996), 105–106.

California's Central Valley with working class girls in their senior year of high school. Like Brunious, her work examines how youth construct their social reality and, like Brunious, Bettie speaks about the role of the school system to shape these girls' realities. She notes that many of these girls had been tracked into a vocational curriculum. She travelled with the seniors on a field trip to a nearby vocational business school. She noted how the representative explained to the students that instead of attending college, a more realistic goal for them was to get more vocational training. In her critique, Bettie notes, "I never heard students at Waretown High [the school where she did her study] informed of or protected from the questionable recruitment practices of such schools that disseminate misleading information."³ Both the vocational track at the high school and these vocational schools play on the strained economics of these girls. They claim to offer them a cheaper alternative to college and instead offer them a certificate that will land them jobs that may not pay enough to support themselves. These youth are directed towards jobs that perpetuate the class status quo.

These girls have been placed in a precarious situation because of the decisions of others. Yet, instead of having adults walk alongside them and aid them in imagining a variety of options for their lives, they are steered further on to a path that will keep them within the poor working class. At no point do I intend to suggest that there is something wrong with being working class; I, do however, believe that there is something wrong with girls being taught that working class is their only option. I object to *any* kind of teaching that closes doors instead of opens them. The more students hear that there are only certain things they can achieve, the more they believe and internalize it, the more they get a sense of personal hopelessness, and the more their perception of the future is crippled.

Some students in the Brunious study expressed their desire to attend a different school, but among other things, gangs and gang affiliation limit where they can travel safely. This limits school choice. Nearly 80 percent of public school students attend the school closest to their home. Therefore the problems that plague their schools often speak to problems within their neighborhoods. Another aspect of poor Black youth's construction of social reality is the fact that they often come of age in such violence plagued communities. Being nurtured in a violent world creates a distinctive sense of self, sense of reality, and sense of what is possible. Imagining a different future for themselves is far removed from learning how to survive enough to get through the next day.

These factors, among many others, lead to youth feeling very isolated. Gang violence physically limits where youth feel safe enough to travel and serves as a method of isolation. "Isolation has a resounding effect on the social construction of reality for black disadvantaged adolescents."⁴ Brunious asked the students about known landmarks in Chicago. Many of them had not been to nor heard of several of the historical landmarks in the city where they live. Economics combined with violence cripple youth from exploring the world around them.

Brunious contends that overall, "this study reveals that the children in these communities are recipients of negative labeling processes, and as such, they have low-self worth and their lives are plagued by negativism and inferiority."⁵ It is from this standpoint that they construct their reality and learn what is possible in their lives. However, in order for people to enact their own agency, they need to see themselves worthy of that power. bell hooks argues that a low self

³ Julie Bettie, *Women Without Class: Girls, Race, and Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 76.

⁴ Ibid., 141.

⁵ Ibid., 192.

esteem is one of the major factors that still stop African Americans from fulfilling their true potential. “Without a core foundation of healthy self-esteem we cannot practice self-love.”⁶ And without self-love we do not know what we are capable of; we can be convinced to remain small. “Among poor children in our nation, especially the black poor, the message is taught early, ‘Your life has no value—you are doomed.’”⁷ When internalized, these thoughts become the basis of a personal hopelessness and limited view of their future.

Teaching Girls How to Swim by Nurturing their Theological Imagination

To combat the problem of personal hopelessness partially caused by a limiting education, isolation, and poor self worth, the response must be an emancipatory education, community, and a strong sense of self. But to bring all of these things together, I suggest grounding it in the notion of nurturing a liberative theological imagination in girls. In its most simplistic form, theological imagination is a journey one goes through with God with the belief that things can be different and limitless for one personally. This theological imagination not only recognizes that God can fix *the* world, but God can also fix *my* world and *my* community and work with me as an agent of that change. I use the term nurturing, because the girls I worked with already possessed imagination. They did not need anyone to give it to them. However, without nurturing, ideas for the future become wishes on a ship at a distance. Nurturing includes giving girls the tools needed to make their future wishes a reality. By nurturing their theological imagination, girls are not asked to wait until their ships come in or simply to adjust to reality. Instead, they are taught the skills they need to swim out to their dreams.

To further define theological imagination, I build on the work of Delores Williams and her use of the biblical story of Hagar. Through the retelling and analysis of the story Williams explores various notions of the wilderness experience and argues for naming the experience of Africans in America as the Survival/Quality-of-Life Tradition. When discussing the wilderness experience, Williams notes that there are two historical understandings within different historical periods in African-American culture: the wilderness as sacred space and the wilderness as hostile, unfriendly, and threatening. Both expressions of wilderness came together in the story of Hagar. The retelling of the Hagar story is helpful to my work with girls. The social reality they are forced to construct is a wilderness experience. These youth exist in a place of physical isolation where they live in fear because certain parts of their environments are often hostile, unfriendly, and threatening. Gangs manifest as a way of seeking to conquer this wilderness and obtain some sense of control. As the pioneers did, in an attempt to conquer and control the wilderness, they destroy others in their wake. Youth are then forced to suffer the circumstances in this wilderness. Williams’ analysis of the Hagar story gives hope and aids in understanding how one survives this wilderness experience, because in the end Hagar finds her means of survival in the wilderness. Williams credits Hagar’s survival to a “new vision” that she receives from God. After her experience with God, she sees a well she had not seen before. This well is the God-given source of her survival. I argue that for girls living in the wilderness today, theological imagination can serve as their new vision—an additional source of survival.

As poor and working class Black girls continue to find their way in the wilderness, it is within the responsibility of the body of Christ to help these girls to collectively see their new

⁶ bell hooks, *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self Esteem* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2003), 19.

⁷ Ibid., 193.

vision. I view this task of the Church as nurturing a theological imagination that is liberating and transformative. In being conditioned to construct a problematic reality, these youth have been stripped of the power of their imagination. bell hooks notes, “in dominator culture the killing off of the imagination serves as a way to repress and contain everyone within the limits of the status quo.”⁸ Having suffered the killing of one’s ability to imagine a different life, one is left with the belief that one’s perceived reality is not only an acceptable option, but the only true option. Therefore, to see a new vision, this imagination needs to be rekindled. “Imagination is one of the most powerful modes of resistance that oppressed and exploited folk can and do use.”⁹ Imagination gives agency. Imagination gives hope. Imagination allows people to see their faith in new ways. Imagination decolonizes the mind, replaces what has been stripped, and rekindles a natural inquisitive exploring tendency found in children but removed as children get older. bell hooks argues that we live in a world where children are asked to imagine, draw, create games, have imaginary friends, but when they get older, “imagination is seen as dangerous, a force that could possibly impede knowledge acquisition.”¹⁰ Indeed imagination *does* impede the acquisition of passive receiving of knowledge. Imagination encourages students to challenge, question, and ask how things can be different. Engaged with critical thinking, this imagination can lead one to then enact this differently imagined world.

⁸ hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, 60.

⁹ Ibid., 61.

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What's So Offensive About a #womanwholikesherself?

ABSTRACT

Women in the United States today are exposed to constant reminders via social media, television, films, and books that they must always be working on bettering their bodies, monitoring their feelings, and being nicer and more pleasant. Many of these women are also part of a religious subculture that reinforces the same, often oppressive values. In this paper I explore what it means to be a woman who likes herself in today's culture and whether there is a place for liking one's self within Christian religious communities. I ask the question, can we imagine a Christian religious identity that can coincide with a radical self-love and self-like that resists the pressures of society to constantly conform to a standard that is often oppressive?

When I first heard about comedian Amy Schumer's tweet, "Woman who likes herself,"¹ I was immediately transported back to middle school, where the worst character trait a girl could possess was being someone who "liked herself." To like yourself meant that you were stuck-up, that you thought you were better than everyone else. To like yourself was considered rude and offensive. Because you liked yourself, you couldn't possibly like other people.

Schumer's tweet included the hashtag, #offendeveryonein4words. I began to wonder, what does it mean that liking one's self, as a woman, is still considered offensive? What does it mean today to say that you like yourself? As someone with deep roots in the evangelical Christian subculture, I also began to wonder what liking yourself means in a community that tends to encourage a diminishment of the self in order to bring attention to God?

As I researched this idea of liking yourself as a woman, the most prominent places I found where women embrace self-love and self-like are in relation to body acceptance, specifically as it refers to thinness and beauty, and in online communities where stories of women's experiences, no matter how strange or provocative, are accepted. As I spent hours poring over interviews with Schumer and watching her video parodies, so much of her feminist vision and critique revolved around her own physical appearance and willingness to comment on the absurdity of the expectations placed on women today. It seems that the heart of self-like, for women like Schumer and others, is no longer related to esteeming one's self more highly than others, but is rather in learning to accept and embrace the body and personality that you have.

Author and advice columnist Sara Eckel writes that contemporary women in the United States are constantly hearing "alternating voices of cheerleading and shame continually urg[ing] us to better ourselves."² We are bombarded with contradictory messages about what it means to be a "good" woman and how we are to carry ourselves through the world—be sexy, but innocent; be exceptionally pretty, but like you "woke up this way;" be healthy, which is equated with looks more than actual physicality, not to mention any reference to mental health; be nice, be thin, and

¹ Amy Schumer, "Woman who likes herself," [www.twitter.com @amyschumer](https://twitter.com/amyschumer), March 1, 2015 (accessed 9/16/15).

² Sara Eckel, *It's Not You: 27 (Wrong) Reasons You're Single* (New York: Penguin, 2014), xv.

be beautiful. When the messages are this confusing, and often contradictory, is it any wonder that women today feel constant pressure to better themselves, if only just to keep up?

Postfeminist critical scholarship has found that as women are gaining more opportunities in society, they are also encountering a strong emphasis on self-improvement and taking control of one's life as the means to self-fulfillment and "living your best life." The kinds of self-improvement that women are encouraged toward are similar to the maintenance tactics that women have always been expected to follow. This new understanding is that self-improvement is not for the benefit of others (such as a male spouse), but for your own benefit as a woman. The postfeminist ideal is a woman who embraces a model of womanhood where performance of the same kinds of maintenance rituals that women used to do to please the patriarchy or solidify their position in society are seen as means of self-expression and wholeness.

Media scholar Rosalind Gill writes, "Notions of choice, of 'being oneself' and 'pleasing oneself,' are central to the postfeminist sensibility that suffuses contemporary western media culture. They resonate powerfully with [an] emphasis on empowerment and taking control..."³ These notions include "femininity as a bodily property" (defined as "an obsessional preoccupation with the body"), "self-surveillance and discipline," and "individualism, choice, and empowerment."⁴ In other words, women are now empowered to choose for themselves, and they are "choosing" often physically punishing and emotionally draining regimes of constant self-improvement under the guise of wellness, healthfulness, and living one's best life.

These same messages have made their way into Christian faith communities via explicit and implicit curriculum (materials, sermons, programs, and a general "spiritual wellness" ethos) that tells girls and women what it means to be a "good Christian woman." On a popular Christian book website, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors), there are 147 titles that come up on a search for "Weight Loss." Titles include: *The Lord's Table: A Biblical Approach to Weight Loss; Bod 4 God*; and *The Maker's Diet for Weight Loss*.⁵ One of the most popular, and controversial, of the Christian dieting programs is *The Weigh Down Diet* by Gwen Shamblin. "With Shamblin as its most popular guru, the industry has exploded," says author and Episcopal priest Lauren Winner.⁶ In programs such as Shamblin's, overeating, and therefore "fatness," is equated with sin and thinness with godliness.⁷ Shamblin has taken women's sincere desires to be disciples of Jesus and the biblical notion of the body as a temple and has turned them against women by using a contemporary notion of thinness to convince women that they are not truly following Jesus. Author Naomi Wolf equated thinness with *obedience* in *The Beauty Myth*:

...female fat is the subject of public passion, and women feel guilty about female fat, because we implicitly recognize that under the myth, women's bodies are not our own but society's, and that thinness is not a private aesthetic, but hunger a social concession exacted by the community. *A cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty but an obsession about female obedience* (emphasis mine).⁸

³ Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," in *The Gender and Media Reader*, ed. Mary Celeste Kearney (New York: Routledge, 2012), 139.

⁴ Ibid., 139-141.

⁵ See website cbd.com

⁶ Lauren F. Winner, "The Weigh and the Truth," ChristianityToday.com, August 25, 2000, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/september4/1.50.html?start=2> (accessed 9/16/15).

⁷ Marie Griffith, "The Christian Diet Craze," beliefnet.com, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Entertainment/2000/02/The-Christian-Diet-Craze.aspx> (accessed 9/16/15).

⁸ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 187.

Shamblin has taken Wolf's observation and made a Christian teaching out of it: women's bodies are not their own (they belong to God) and Christian women are called to obedience to Christ, so therefore Christian women are called to thinness.

Feminist body theologian Lisa Isherwood, in discussing a 1957 book, *Pray Your Weight Away* by Charlie Shedd, says the author "says that God did not ever imagine fat and his justification for this statement is that the slender are those who succeed in the world."⁹ Being slim as a means of discipline is "part of what good Christian womanhood implies":

This movement ["Christian" or spirituality-based dieting] is particularly popular with women and becoming slim for Jesus appears to be almost *part of what good Christian womanhood implies* in some circles (emphasis mine).¹⁰

Constant monitoring of the body is not the only area that materials for Christian women and girls emphasize. Self-surveillance of feelings and emotions also plays a crucial part in obedience to God. Authors of Christian young adult books and curriculum Justin Lookadoo and Hayley DiMarco make clear that emotions have tremendous power in the life of a young person: "The desires you have deep inside you can propel you to greatness or destroy your life in a single spark. If you can't control your passion, you can't control your future."¹¹ Throughout their book, titled *Dateable*, Lookadoo and DiMarco continually challenge young women to control their emotions as a means of controlling their lives. They tell girls to "Fight the urge to go with your emotions. Then you will be the prize every guy wants."¹²

Megan Clinton, author of *Smart Girls, Smart Choices*, also charges girls to rein in their emotions. She writes, "When we don't keep our emotions in a healthy balance with our brains, we often... listen to ourselves more than we do to God... focus on what we want and not on what we know."¹³ For Clinton, making smart choices involves *not* listening to ourselves, and *not* giving much credence to what we want. Clinton sets girls up in opposition to God—that girls' own voices are in competition with God's voice. A girl cannot both want what she wants and want what God wants, which is implicitly saying that what girls want must be bad. What is particularly insidious about these messages is that they not only reinforce a self-monitoring of the body, feelings, and emotions in order for girls and women to be considered "good", but also that self-surveillance is required in order to be acceptable to God. It is not just that slenderness and keeping one's emotions in check is a societal expectation, it is also the manifestation of obedience to God.

Can we imagine a religious education that encourages girls and women to like themselves—their bodies, their feelings, and their voices? Is it possible that Christian education can encourage girls and women to listen to their own wants and desires as part of what it means to follow Christ—not as components of their lives that are in opposition to obedience, but that are *part of* obedience? What would it look like if liking yourself – your body, your feelings, your voice, your personality, all of the things that are uniquely you, is *what good Christian womanhood implies*? Liking one's self, as exemplified by Schumer and others, is a conscious resistance to the ways that a culture of peers requires you to conform when those ways encourage

⁹ Lisa Isherwood, "The Fat Jesus: Feminist Explorations in Fleishy Christologies," *Feminist Theology* 19, no. 1 (August 2010):27.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹ Hayley DiMarco and Justin Lookadoo, *Dateable: Are You? Are They?* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 2003), 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 82.

¹³ Megan Clinton, *Smart Girls, Smart Choices: Avoiding the 10 Biggest Mistakes Young Women Make* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2010), 29.

a kind of self-surveillance, body hatred, and/or oppressive means of limiting one's personhood. Can we envision a religious education that embraces uniqueness in girls and women and does not have a pre-existing standard of "good" womanhood that requires conformity and constant maintenance? In other words, can we imagine that a religious identity could coincide with a radical self-love and self-like that resists the pressures of society to constantly conform to a standard that is often oppressive?

It seems to me that in setting up specific expectations for behavior, as evangelical or conservative Christian communities tend to do, the possibility of uniqueness is diminished. This is not only my observation—I've had several conversations where we've thought aloud about this phenomena. Such communities exist within a subculture where the primary vision is claimed to be about spreading the good news of Jesus and living counter-culturally in a media-saturated world, but where the warp and woof of daily life is actually more akin to whatever the current obsession is right now. If dieting is big, the subculture will create some "Christian" diets. If yoga or aerobics are popular, a "Christian" version will appear. A cursory glance at Christian self-help books reinforces my suspicion—these materials are the same as any other self-help books, they just incorporate a few religious themes and more clothes. The general message is the same: you can fix yourself in order to be better if you just try harder, and with God's help.

When there is a rigid, yet culturally-bound picture of what it means to be a "good" woman, there is no room for uniqueness of personhood. A personal disposition is viewed as a character flaw. "Iron sharpening iron" often translates into shaving off the edges of one's actual self to create a diminished person who is obedient but no longer shines. I suggest here that radical self-love and self-like is a deeply Christian value. We know we are to love others as we love ourselves—how is that possible if we subtly (or not) participate in practices that encourage self-hatred? It is hard for me to believe, when I hear a Christian friend complain about how much she hates her double-digit size body, that she could then truly accept, much less love, my double-digit body, and as an extension, me. We are our bodies, our personalities, our quirks, our rough edges and our round ones.

As someone formed within evangelical Christianity, I've memorized certain Bible verses to use in evangelistic outreach—verses like, "I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). At the height of my confusion about following Jesus and feeling that the yoke was a burden, not something that was light (Matthew 11:28-30), I began to think about having an abundant life. Abundance, for me, was not material, but was found in fellowship with people who loved me as I am, and who I loved for who they were. Struggling to be better and try harder was not filling my life with abundance. Feeling like I needed to tamp down my voice and my emotions felt like an unbearable yoke. And hating my body became something I just didn't want to spend my life doing.

Following Jesus as a person who embraces and practices (to the best of my ability!) radical self-acceptance, self-love, and self-like has opened those verses up in ways I couldn't have known before. It has also opened up a whole new space and ability for loving and accepting others that seems to me to be at the heart of the Christian gospel. As I have grown to like myself, I have grown to more deeply like, and love, others.

In a world where women are encouraged to be competitive with each other, the hallmark of goodness is self-deprecation, and women are trained to bond with each other over their own self-hatreds, it is indeed radical and offensive to be a woman who likes herself. But it is the kind of radical and offensive that the world needs. Jesus was pretty radical and offensive; perhaps Christian women ought to be free to be the same.

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**Coat of Many Colors:
Dolly Parton, Julia Kristeva, and Rural Discipleship**

Abstract

Dolly Parton's song "Coat of Many Colors" paints the picture of a mother who sews a coat for her daughter while telling the story of Joseph's many colored coat, bringing the daughter great joy. Steeped in the rural values of stewardship, knowledge of place, and making do, Parton's song pairs well with Julia Kristeva's understanding of Christianity's potential to refine suffering into joy through addressing the suffering present in life. This fusion becomes the pattern for a rural Christian practice of blending scripture and craft to respond to the struggles of rural working-class life.

"Back through the years / I go wandering once again / back to the seasons of my youth," begins Dolly Parton's famous autobiographical song, "Coat of Many Colors."¹ The song describes an impoverished mother who uses a box of rags to sew a coat for her daughter. While she sews, she tells daughter the story the of Joseph's many-colored coat from the Bible in order to empower her daughter as she wears a coat made of fabric scraps. The daughter, very proud and excited about her coat, sings in the refrain of the song: "Although we had no money/I was rich as I could be / In my coat of many colors / My momma made for me."² As the song continues, the daughter wears the coat to school and the kids make fun of her for her coat. In response to the children's teasing, she tells the story from scripture and about her mother's love for her.³

Parton's song provides an example of what Michael Corbett calls the rural virtues of stewardship and "making do" as one see's fit. He writes, "Rural practitioners take up each of these discourses—ways of using land, tools, time, and space—to do identity work and build and develop regimes of self-care that allow for independence."⁴ However, more than simply "making do," the mother enacts what Julia Kristeva calls the Christian genius of pushing past oneself to

¹ Parton, Dolly. "Coat of Many Colors," in *Coat of Many Colors*, RCA Nashville, 1971, Vinyl Record. Full lyrics available at <http://dollyparton.com/life-and-career/music/coat-of-many-colors-album/908>. Accessed 6 September 2015.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Corbett, Michael, "Social Class, the Commodification of Education, and Space through a Rural Lens." In *Dynamics of Social Class, Race, and Place in Rural Education*, edited by Howley, Craig B; Howley, Aimee, and Johnson, Jerry D. 19-37 (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Press, 2014), 33.

creatively refine suffering into beauty and joy.⁵ The germination of this from the seed of “making do” into an expression of Christian discipleship lies in the mother’s use of scripture in order to fertilize the coat of remnants with a spirit of imaginative hope; providing not only a material need, but a spiritual-emotional sense of worth and value within the reality of rural poverty. I see, within these song lyrics, the roots a pedagogy of rural discipleship; which, through the use of scripture as leaven, enables person’s practices of “making do” to reveal the realm of God in within their communities. Therefore, this paper intends to briefly describe rural life and value, the potential for Julia Kristeva’s Christian genius, and the use of scripture, in order to enable a practice of faith familiar with the back roads, fields, and woods of the rural United States.

“Back through the years I go wandering, once again.”

Driving home from my parents’ house on Highway 18 from Earl to Glen Alpine, through the foothills of the North Carolina Mountains, I pass by the rural landscapes of my memories. I drive past fields, some full of soybean and others grown over with kudzu. Farm stands brim with produce next to weathering old barns and sheds. New car dealerships and box stores overshadow the empty factories of the once strong furniture and textiles. Churches advertising chicken pie suppers and fair grounds prepping for their fall events dot the roadsides as the sun goes down.

This is my experience of the rural. It is one particular experience. If I ask someone from West Virginia about rural life, they might speak of coal mines, someone from the coast of Maine might speak of fishing, and central Alabama residents may speak of logging and paper mills. The communities outside the urban areas of the United States are diverse and unique. Still, through this diversity, Jerry Johnson identifies several durable issues most rural places face, particularly within their educational world.⁶ These include outmigration and population decline, and continual concerns about both economic vitality and social-cultural reproduction.⁷ He begins to address the needs and potentials for addressing these durable issues, and particularly in regards to community and economic viability, states, “A rural future requires imagination,” and references the potential an educational approach centered on community- based schooling approach grounded in place and purpose, as opposed to a model which trains to students to believe a non-rural existence is the best (if not only) option.⁸

Grounding education, or in my case, Christian formation, within the rural realities of space, time, and culture necessitates an assessment of the nuances of rural life, belief, and values crucial for the fostering an imagination within the kudzu fields and broken down barns. Michael Corbett names three of these virtues as “Stewardship, deep place-sensitive knowledge, and

⁵ Kristeva, Julia. *This Incredible Need to Believe*. Trans. Brahic, Beverley Bie. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000) 30-47, 81-85.

⁶ Johnson, Jerry D. “Durable Issues in Rural Education.” In *Dynamics of Social Class, Race, and Place in Rural Education*, edited by Howley, Craig B; Howley, Aimee, and Johnson, Jerry D. (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Press, 2014). 325.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. 333.

making do as one sees fit on known and loved land and sea.”⁹ The mother in Parton’s song utilizes these virtues and allows her imagination to imagine a coat for her daughter when she only had rags. However, beyond simply “making do” the mother further enables this act of craft and necessity to become an act of love, compassion, and discipleship through her use of scripture and intention as she makes the coat and shares it with her daughter.

“And I didn’t have a coat. And it was way down in the fall.”

From the very beginning, Parton’s song is an act of confession, bringing to light the struggles of a rural family. This is possible, in part, because as Julia Kristeva argues, Christianity reveals a deep and important recognition to the right to pain.¹⁰ She lifts up the beatitudes, particularly “Blessed are those who weep,” as Christianity’s extraction of suffering from secretiveness and shame. In lifting suffering from the well of humiliation and guilt, Christianity creates the potential for dealing with suffering in creative and communal ways.

First, it allows for confession. Not confession of sin or wrongdoing, but confession of reality. For Kristeva, confession, that is, speech addressed to the other, is pain-full.¹¹ She writes: “Communication brings my most intimate subjectivity into being for the other; and this act of judgment and supreme freedom, if it authenticates me, also delivers me over to death.”¹² This death is one of the recognition of humanity and reality. Yet it brings a sort of salvation. This Christian salvation, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, is the dissolving of false worlds and realities, it is a restoring of persons to the actualities of their lives, and from Kristeva’s perspective, Christianity allows for a sharing of pain with others in community.¹³

This salvific sharing in the suffering of others does not end simply in acknowledging pain. Kristeva illuminates Christian shared suffering as one in which humans seek possibilities for relieving this suffering, only on the condition that “they can look it in the face, give it a name, and interpret it.”¹⁴ Parton reveals the lack of money and the need for a coat in the late fall.¹⁵ The mother work’s toward relieving this suffering through an act of what Kristeva names as Christian genius. For Kristeva, Christian genius is putting into action the divine gift of love for the other.¹⁶

⁹ Corbett, Michael C. “Social Class...Through a Rural Lens.” 35.

¹⁰ Kristeva, Julia. *This Incredible Need to Believe*. Trans. Brahic, Beverley Bie. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000). 81.

¹¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Roudiez, Leon S. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982). 129-130.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity I*. Translated by Bergo, Bettina (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008) Kindle Location 1677. & Kristeva, Julia. *This Incredible Need to Believe*. 90-91.

¹⁴ Kristeva, Julia. *This Incredible Need to Believe*. 90-91.

¹⁵ Upon further exploration the causes and concerns related to this suffering might be found, but in the song we only have an acknowledgement of suffering, named as a lack of money and a need for a coat.

¹⁶ Kristeva, Julia. *This Incredible Need to Believe*. 31.

That is, faith, is the acting on of love, which, Kristeva writes, “pushes into Christianity’s orbit this loving desire to surpass oneself.”¹⁷

Exploring the notion of genius further, Kristeva identifies the feminine and maternal genius as connected intimately to the Christian genius. The feminine genius is rooted in women’s constant connectedness to the other and living as living for the other.¹⁸ Maternal genius, an extension of feminine genius is shown in the mother’s sublimation of her own suffering in order to care for and support the creative growth of her child.¹⁹ Christian-feminine-maternal genius is the way in which Christians engage suffering. Kristeva pushes further to reveal through this genius of engaging in the reality of suffering, seeking to relieve it, Christianity refines suffering into joy.²⁰ The mother’s act of creating a coat from scraps of fabric in order to care for her daughter is an act of genius. But more significant is that the mother does not simply alleviate the physical need of a coat—which would be an act of “making do”—she inspires a sense of joy and happiness in her child. She does this through sharing the scripture story of Joseph’s many colored coat as she creates a coat of many colors for her child.

“As she sewed, she told a story from the Bible, she had read”

This intertwining of scripture and the creative act of engaging the realities of life reveals within the making of a coat into an act of discipleship. This use of scripture brings to mind a parable of Jesus: “He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.’”²¹ Amy-Jill Levine notes several significant facts about this parable.²² First, the active ingredients in the story are the domestic products of yeast and flour, not fancy expensive items.²³ The notion of pieces of scripture as leaven, hidden within common everyday activities, allowed to grow, rise, and work its way through life in order to reveal something new holds potential for the kingdom of God within the empty factories and overgrown fields of the rural United States. Levine even note that perhaps, “Despite all of our images of golden slippers and harps and halos, the kingdom is present at the communal oven of a Galilean village when everyone has enough to eat.”²⁴ The use

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. 39.

¹⁹ Ibid. 45.

²⁰ Ibid. 84.

²¹ Matthew 13:44, New Revised Standard Version.

²² Levine, Amy-Jill. *Short Stories By Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2014) Kindle Location 2156.

²³ Levine, Amy-Jill. *Short Stories by Jesus*, Kindle Location 2244.

²⁴ Ibid. Location 2273.

of scripture-leaven does not require expensive pearls, halos, or huge banquets. It is easily kneaded into the everyday tasks.

Second, the actor in the story is a woman who mixes (or as Levine translates, hides) yeast into between forty and sixty pounds of flour; the dough is more than the woman can handle and the bread more than one family can consume.²⁵ The scripture does not tell us why the woman hides the yeast in the enormous amount of flour. However, Levine speculates, she may be subversively producing more bread than any one person or family can eat, in an act of extravagant hospitality, generosity, or compassion. In this case, the woman's act seem self-surpassing, much in the way Kristeva describes the feminine-maternal genius. If scripture is to become the leaven of the reign of God, perhaps it must be both a subversive act—the child in Parton's song finding joy and delight in the simple fabric scraps her mother stitched together—and an act an extravagant act—the child not simply being warm, but celebrating the wealth she held in this coat, so much so she shared the value of the coat with the children.

Finally, the parable hearkens back to the story of Abraham and Sara, of surprise pregnancies, and of new life from what was once barren.²⁶ Throughout scripture we see God bringing life where only chaos, barrenness, and death exist. The entirety of creation, the children of Noah, the births of Isaac, a new future for Ruth and Naomi, and the delivery of Israel from the brink of destruction all bear witness to the creation of life where no life is possible. Rural communities often feel barren or in chaos. Often it seems the only means of escape from these depressed places is outmigration.²⁷ If members of the community are unable or do not desire to leave, these persons may struggle to maintain work. They are also often judged as morally inferior—more so if they receive any government aid—by long term and “successful residents.”²⁸ Scripture-leaven must work to end this barrenness. The joy and delight in the fabric scraps from the song provide life to a pile of leftovers and hope to a small child in the midst of the struggles of rural life.

“And I told ‘em all the story Momma told me while she sewed”

A pedagogy of rural discipleship must travel the back roads of the rural world. It must hear the stories of lumber mills, farms, and fishing villages. It must know the skills and abilities of rural people, and it must seek to season those skills with a Spirit of hope. I take inspiration for my rural pedagogy from the work of Tex Sample and his understanding of the craft tradition of discipleship; particularly his understanding of craft tradition as not knowing about, but knowing

²⁵ Ibid. Location 2205.

²⁶ Ibid. Location 2253.

²⁷ Sage, Rayna and Sherman, Jennifer. “There are No Jobs Here: Opportunity Structures, Moral Judgment, and Educational Trajectories in the Rural Northwest,” In *Dynamics of Social Class, Race, and Place in Rural Education*, edited by Howley, Craig B; Howley, Aimee, and Johnson, Jerry D. 67-93 (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Press, 2014). 88-91.

²⁸ Ibid.

how to do something.²⁹ Furthermore, Sample's notion of biblical craft as knowing how to use the Bible and live the Bible in community becomes particularly important as I attempt to use scripture as leaven in rural life.³⁰

As I explore the potentials of this pedagogy, I highlight within Parton's song and Kristeva's writing a need for confession of reality which acknowledges the suffering, oppression, needs, and hopes of the rural community. Furthermore, it must shake off any disguises communities place on the suffering and pain present in their midst. I further find the need for this confession to be specific and personal, noting particular concerns in the lives of individuals and community.³¹

As the confession is heard, a response become necessary. Communities often celebrate Corbett's virtues, expressed in skills and crafts, through fairs, festivals, and church activities.³² However, instead of celebrating the craft for its own sake, a pedagogy of rural discipleship works to enable acts of "making do" and the use of crafts to work toward a Christian genius of surpassing self in hopes of connecting and caring for the others in the community. Leaven is necessary for this to become an act of Christian genius. The songs use of Joseph's Coat as leaven paints an example of using scripture to move from rural virtue to revealing the reign of God. While this study of scripture may utilize scholarly interpretation from a variety of choices, it will primarily seek stories, excerpts, and verses designed to inspire all involved in the response through the use of the ordinary items of everyday life to provide a sense of extravagance and the potential for new life.^{33, 34}

²⁹ Sample, Tex. *Blue Collar Resistance and the Politics of Jesus: Doing Ministry with Working Class Whites* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006). Kindle Location 1027-1028.

³⁰ Ibid. Kindle Location 1133-1144.

³¹ I operate under the assumption that any act of confession requires a level of trust, safety, and confidentiality. This is especially true when persons are sharing in community about themselves or their greater community.

³² Corbett, Michael C. "Social Class...Through a Rural Lens." 33.

³³ In developing this pedagogy, I find it important to note that care must be taken to not provide trite and belittling phrases and actions which either minimize the reality of those suffering or only provide "hollow grace," which does nothing more than make the contributor feel good about themselves. My hope is that my description of the "Leaven" will deter potential practitioners from doing harm under the guise of doing good. Furthermore, As the leaven works its way through the response, participants must persistently acknowledge the realities of the issue at hand and its existence with the rural community. Observation and continual reflection become important pieces of rural discipleship. As seasons change, as the particularities of a situation change, so must the response, and in many cases so must leaven.

³⁴ For the sake of space I provide only one other potential example. Several churches I know hold regular food collection drives and some even hold regular food pantries each month. The churches have at least somewhat acknowledged the issue of hunger and food insecurity in the community, and are attempting to help members of the community "make do." However, if the church took time to really seek and confess the suffering in the community, it may respond differently. Furthermore, along with confession, the careful discerning of a leavening agent for the response, even in the shape of a food pantry may change. Perhaps the community might choose to explore the story Elijah and the Widow (1 Kings 17) or of Jesus feeding the 5000 (Various Gospels). When worked into the responses, either of these scriptures can provide the potential for extravagant responses. The story of the widow may inspire a community seek out ways to provide sustainable and continual responses to hunger, and even to explore and engage the causes of persistent hunger. The use of Jesus feeding the 5000 may encourage persons and

“Now I know we had no money, but I was as rich as I could be”

As I serve as a Bible story leader for our church afterschool program in a rural community with a child poverty rate of roughly 30%, I consider what to choose as leaven.³⁵ Of course I will teach the stories of Creation, of The Flood, of Ruth, of David, of Sara, and of Jesus, but how and why I will teach them become crucial. Leaven is not simply a memory verse or a mission statement, leaven works its way into the activity becoming integral to the nature of the product. And, if I am to take Parton and Kristeva seriously, my leavened response must constantly work to transform suffering and pain into joy through the revealing of the Kingdom of God.

communities to take on extravagant acts of feeding even when resources are scarce or limited. This may move beyond a few cans of food, to education, community responses, and acts of justice.

³⁵ “Economic Data: Burke County, North Carolina,” Rural Data Portal: Taking Stock of People, Poverty, and Housing in your Community, last modified 2014. Accessed 15 September 2015.
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Imagining a Different Path: Religious Education and the Pilgrimage of Motherhood

Abstract: Motherhood is a complex experience that can be transformative, offering women opportunities for personal enrichment and spiritual development. However, when women travel the path of motherhood, they find themselves at the confluence of many powerful streams of imagination. Besides imagined days of caring for the child, they may be influenced and burdened by the assumptions of western culture and Christian tradition, which often ignore the complexity of their experiences. A richly re-imagined religious education can fashion a context that can support and enliven women in their motherhood.

When women travel the path of motherhood they can find themselves at the confluence of many powerful streams of imagination. As the imagined days of patiently caring for their child lose their pristine simplicity in many long and sleepless nights, other pathways of thought may tug at mothers' equilibrium and feed into their growing sense of doubt, ambivalence, and loss of self. These pathways of thought arise from the assumptions of western culture and Christian tradition, which have *imagined* that women mother naturally, happily, and competently. Though motherhood can be an experience of great joy, personal enrichment and spiritual growth, these troublesome assumptions of culture and religious tradition belie the complexity of motherhood and often work to hinder women's development.¹

The literature on motherhood consistently employs the term journey to describe the experience of becoming a mother, reflecting women's sense of moving away from the familiar towards something unknown, difficult, yet potentially transformative. This metaphor can be a

¹For discussion of both the joys and challenges of the experience see for example, Rachel Cusk, *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother* (New York: Picador USA, 2001); Melissa Gayle West, *If Only I Were A Better Mother* (Walpole, NJ: Stillpoint, 1992). For discussion of the influence of culture and religious tradition see for example Tina Miller, *Making Sense of Motherhood: A Narrative Approach* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005); Susan Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood: How Becoming a Mother Changes Everything and Why We Pretend It Doesn't* (New York: New Press, 2000); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Making of the Modern Family: Ruling Ideologies, Diverse Realities* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Bonnie F. Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994). For examples on the spirituality of motherhood see Aurelie M. Athan And Lisa Miller, "Spiritual Awakening Through the Motherhood Journey." *Journal of the Association For Research on Mothering* 7 (1) (2005): 17-31; Trudelle Thomas, "Becoming a Mother: Matrescence as Spiritual Formation," *Religious Education* 96 (1) (2001): 88-105; Ellyn Sanna, *Motherhood: A Spiritual Journey* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997); Ann Tremaine Linthorst, *Mothering as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

useful opening for religious educators, but it needs to be used with care. Because a journey can suggest a lonely or unfocused path as well as one that fosters self-transcendence and communion, it is important to establish the *kind* of journey that can create a path most accessible to the journey's transformative potential. Within the many secular and religious journey metaphors,² this paper suggests that the metaphor of pilgrimage contains striking parallels with the five educational "forms" of church life identified by Maria Harris.³ Imaginative fashioning of these forms through the lens of pilgrimage wisdom can help women to perceive their experiences of motherhood as an invitation to spiritual growth.

The "Forms" and Pilgrimage

Harris identifies five educational "forms" within the diversity of church life: *koinonia* (community), *leiturgia* (prayer), *didache* (teaching), *kerygma* (proclamation), and *diakonia* (service). She argues that education occurs through these forms and towards these forms e.g., we educate to prayer by engaging in prayer and worship; we educate to service by becoming involved and committed to serving others. Each of the forms requires fashioning in the sense of intentional, creative, and thoughtful design based on the context of the community.

Harris's articulation of the educative curriculum of the entire church flows out of the image of the church as the People of God, presented in the Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium*⁴ as the primary metaphor for the church. *Lumen Gentium* also images the people of God as pilgrims, journeying together and as one to our heavenly home (#7, #48). Thus, built into the church's very identity is the metaphor of religious journey.

Religious educators such as Dwayne Huebner and Thomas Groome use the metaphor of pilgrimage to describe the activity of religious education.⁵ However, Brett Webb-Mitchell suggests that the use of the metaphor of pilgrimage for religious education must first be

² See Corelyn F. Senn, "Journeying as Religious Education: The Shaman, The Hero, The Pilgrim, and the Labyrinth Walker," *Religious Education* 97 (2) (2002): 124-140; Iris M. Yob, "The Pragmatist and Pilgrimage: Revitalizing an Old Metaphor for Religious Education," *Religious Education* 84 (1) (1989): 521-537; Brett Webb-Mitchell, "Leaving Development Behind and Beginning Pilgrimage," *Religious Education* 96 (1) (2001): 136-151. Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, (New York: MJF Books 1998); Edward Sellner, *Pilgrimage: Exploring a Great Spiritual Practice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Sorin Books, 2004).

³ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989).

⁴ Second Vatican Council, "Lumen Gentium" [The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church]. In *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* new rev. ed., edited by Austin Flannery, (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company (1964) 1992).

⁵ Dwayne Huebner, "Toward a Remaking of Curricular Language," in *Heightened Consciousness, Cultural Revolution, and Curriculum Theory*, edited by William Pinar. (Berkeley CA: McCutcheon, 1974); Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980) and *Will There be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

grounded in educating the people of God to see themselves *as* pilgrims in the deepest sense of this image, which involves beginning from, being formed by, and being returned to a community.⁶ Webb-Mitchell suggests that the way towards understanding one's identity as a pilgrim is through the wisdom inherent in the characteristics of pilgrimage. In this sense, religious education does not just image the rhythm of pilgrimage; it explores and engages in the various aspects of pilgrimage in order to create pilgrims. To paraphrase Maria Harris, it educates to pilgrimage through the form of pilgrimage. This may mean devising religious education endeavors around a physical pilgrimage.⁷ But that is not always plausible, especially in relation to the everyday experience of mothers. However, educating through and towards pilgrimage can also mean viewing what is already present within theories of religious education through a different lens. To that end, Harris's educational forms of church life contain within them many of the characteristics found in pilgrimage wisdom. With thoughtful and creative fashioning, these forms can help instill a pilgrim identity within the everyday contours of the community's life. And since so many mothers already speak in terms of being on a journey, encouraging them towards a pilgrim identity may help to change the tenor of their traveling.

Some Parallels

One of the most important aspects of pilgrimage is the role of the community. While the hero and the shaman experience their journey in isolation from the community, the pilgrim's community provides motivation, encouragement, companionship, direction, and welcome upon return.⁸ In parallel, Maria Harris speaks of koinonia as the "initial educational ministry."⁹ The effort to fashion the church's educational ministry cannot happen unless the community first exists. Webb-Mitchell writes, "Oftentimes, what is most important about being on pilgrimage is being conscious that we exist among others in the body of Christ."¹⁰ Like the community of a pilgrimage, the form of koinonia understands the need and benefit of being in communion with one another and educates towards that purpose.

Pilgrimage also contains parallels with leiturgia in its use and honoring of gestures and rituals. Webb-Mitchell notes, "The constant, repetitious use of gestures in our lives, which begins as novel, soon after becomes more or less a part of our lives."¹¹ This is the same rationale in viewing leiturgia as an educational ministry of the church. The church hopes for incremental growth and gradual identification with Christ "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup" (1 Cor 11:26).

Pilgrims depend upon the community's wisdom and experience as they embark upon and endure the journey. Indeed, resisting the community's knowledge may create dangerous conditions for the traveler.¹² The community provides its travel directions, not in order to dominate, but to enrich the experience for the journeyer. Likewise, the church form of didache, at its best, instructs out of loving concern.

⁶ Webb-Mitchell, 2001, 137

⁷ See Brett Webb-Mitchell, *School of the Pilgrim: An Alternative Path to Christian Growth*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2007).

⁸ (Senn, 125-136; Webb-Mitchell 2001, 145-146; Yob, 521-522; Sellner, 154).

⁹ Harris, 75.

¹⁰ Webb-Mitchell 2007, 27.

¹¹ Ibid, 38

¹² (Senn 2002, 131-134; Webb-Mitchell 2007, 32).

Pilgrims learn through the physical experience of pilgrimage. One experiences the journey through one's bodily movements. Even when not physically engaged in pilgrimage, they learn to pay attention to their "ordinary lives with extraordinary awareness."¹³ This wisdom comes from the discipline of pilgrimaging, but it also exists because there is an a priori knowledge of the sacred nature of the body. At the heart of the kerygma of the church is this same vision of the goodness of creation. It is thus called to speak out against any claim or stance that belittles the embodied nature of revelation and to advocate for recognition of the locus of revelation in the ordinary, lived experience of each of its members.

Pilgrimage is not a haphazard or impulsive event. Pilgrims knowingly embark on the journey, moved by their own sense of dis-ease or their community's encouragement of the experience. Because it is intentional, pilgrims prepare for the journey. The community facilitates the preparation as a loving service of enablement. In the same way, the church's curriculum of diakonia looks to prepare and ease the road for others.

The Pilgrim Mother

The broad parameters of a religious journey or pilgrimage involve the movements of beginning, being on, and returning.¹⁴ In order to ensure a religiously educative experience, the beginning of the pilgrimage must take into account the end or goal, the being on must give full attention and honoring of the experiences of the road, and the return needs to impact the community and the wider world of the journeyer. In order to appropriate the pilgrimage metaphor for the religious education of mothers we can now imagine how the forms of church life, functioning within these movements, could enhance mothers' path. This includes a discussion and enlargement of Trudelle Thomas's suggestions to support mothers through community prayer, education, advocacy, and parent preparation.¹⁵

The Beginning

There are many reasons why a person would go on pilgrimage but it most often stems from unsettlement in one's life.¹⁶ The pilgrim is motivated by a need to perceive deeper meaning and has been assured by the community that the path ahead can offer insight. But pilgrimage is not an aimless path. It has an orienting principle. As Webb-Mitchell notes, "In pilgrimage, the telos, the point of the journey, defines the method and the journey itself."¹⁷ Thus in order to reimagine the woman's journey of motherhood as a pilgrimage, the religious educator must first ensure that the journey has a goal or an orienting principle, which provides direction to the traveling. This direction is communicated through all the forms of church life but it begins with and flows from koinonia. The community must first exist and lovingly attract in order to provide direction. This presumes the community's hospitality, which would include an awareness of the often life-altering realities of motherhood.¹⁸ If a pilgrim is a traveler who is taken seriously¹⁹

¹³ Webb-Mitchell 2007, 33

¹⁴ Edward Sellner describes these stages as separation, transition and incorporation, 100-103.

¹⁵ Thomas, 103-105.

¹⁶ Yob, 521. Cousineau, 15.

¹⁷ Webb-Mitchell 2001, 148.

¹⁸ Maushart, 36; Athan and Miller.

¹⁹ Webb-Mitchell 2007, 11

then the pilgrim mother's experience needs to be appreciated by the community in all its complexity.

The optimal situation for mothers would be to make a connection prior to pregnancy and childbirth so that the loving arms of the community could point the way and prepare them from the very beginning of their journey. Through the diakonia of parenting preparation and the didache of Christian formation, women would already be aware of the challenges that await them and the insights that could provide meaning to the challenges. As Thomas asks, "What if young people grew up hearing about the spirituality of mothering?"²⁰ Through the community's leiturgia and kerygma, women would already have experienced rituals highlighting the needs, fears, and delights of pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting, and heard preaching and teaching about these realities. Because these experiences were made visible through the leiturgia and kerygma of the community, the beginning of their own journey of motherhood could acquire a deeper sense of being called and encouraged towards an opportunity for rich personal and spiritual development.

However, it is often the case that the first contact with the community occurs during baptismal preparation.²¹ Depending upon the community's approach, baptismal preparation can be a discrete element of its life (something that the community *does*) or an integral element of the community's identity or vocation (something that it *is*). Throughout the preparation, the deeper question involves how the educational forms of church life are operating within the preparation and how they are inviting the mother to pilgrimage. For instance, what is her experience of koinonia? Does she experience the loving attention of mentoring women or other couples who do not ignore her doubts and questions? What is the kerygma she hears? Does she hear claim to the sacred nature of her physical experiences?²² What and how does she experience the community's didache? Does she understand the Christian tradition as her guide and not her burden? How does the mother experience the community's diakonia? What is the community's promise to her? Will they support the mother along her path? Does she feel enabled to make the journey? And finally, how does the community's liturgia touch her? Do the gestures, rituals, and elements of baptism draw her into a sense of mystery? Does she recognize that mystery, not clarity, will be her most common companion during motherhood. Can she be strengthened to accept this reality as she begins her journey?

Being On

Although there can be much time and effort expended in preparation for the journey, the locus of the activity of pilgrimage takes place on the way. The pilgrim knows that a promised sacred destination lies ahead, but is encouraged to find the sacred promise of the journey itself. A pilgrim must learn not to rush through the landscape like a tourist, but to slow down the pace and focus on walking and seeing. Although the community proscribes the route and can offer valuable advice about the road, the pilgrim's own thoughts, anxieties, and personal "baggage" impacts the pace or the path.²³

²⁰ Thomas, 104.

²¹ See also Dawn Michelle Alitz. 2009. "The Spiritual Formation of Adults in the Advent and Event of Parenting." (PhD diss., Luther Seminary, 2009). 197-202.

²² Thomas, 103.

²³ See Yob 1989, 522).

Most of the language about a mother's journey arises from the long stretch of actually "doing" mothering, which in reality never ends. During this time, the community's kerygma can remind the pilgrim mother to pay attention to her life. It is in her embodied existence, in the touching, feeding, cleaning, crying, loving and hating of her daily life, that God calls and is revealed. As Melissa West asks, "What if all ground is holy? What if all bushes are burning, as well as trees, stones, creatures, our children, ourselves, and all the spaces between?"²⁴ The community can communicate its appreciation for the revelatory potential of motherhood, in a number of ways. Trudelle Thomas notes that the Christian community needs to hear about the realities of motherhood, "not just on talk shows and in "women's" magazines—but also from the pulpit and the podium, in Bible studies and classrooms; not just in childbirth education classes, but also in religion classes and in theological tomes."²⁵

The community's leiturgia can also make both the joys and the struggles of motherhood more visible and more an occasion for prayer. The more that motherhood can be spoken of and celebrated as an extraordinary undertaking that must be learned, rather than as a natural role that must be assumed, the ups and downs of the journey will not come as such a surprise to the pilgrim mother. Harris speaks of the importance of making resources on prayer and spirituality available to the community.²⁶ Some communities already send periodic literature attuned to the child's development. Furthermore, there is a plethora of well-done essays and reflections on the spirituality of motherhood.²⁷ Besides creating a book list for young mothers, the community can gift the mothers with such literature, at various times throughout the early years of mothering.

Though the community indicates the pilgrimage's direction and *raison d'être*, pilgrims can quickly forget their beginning as they endure the unexpected realities encountered during the "being on." Like the difference between the happy mother-to-be at her baby shower and the cranky, scared, mother longing for sleep a few weeks later, the journey deviates from expectation and can feel directionless. However, because the pilgrim mother has embarked upon a *religious* journey, she needs to be reminded that growth is not synonymous with forward progress and that indeed, coming upon one's limitations can be a graced experience. The community can provide opportunities for the mother to name her struggles and her joys honestly through its *koinonia*. By encouraging the formation of mothers' sharing groups, or mother's bible study or prayer groups, the community creates a hospitable environment where women can feel the support and camaraderie of other journeyers.²⁸

The community's *koinonia* needs to extend to the Internet. Indeed, seeking support and information online is often the first instinct for young women and the list of mothers' blogs and websites is long. As the mother faces her limitations of patience, courage, and wakefulness in the middle of the night, finding the faith community's presence and interest during her online searching can offer consolation and perspective.

²⁴ West, 105.

²⁵ Thomas, 104.

²⁶ Harris, 105-106)

²⁷ See for example Rachel Barton, *4 A.M. Madonnas: Meditations and Reflections for Mothers and Mothers-to-Be* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori, 2007). Besze Wallace, ed. *Always There: Reflections for Moms on God's Presence*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Revell 2012); Jennifer Grant, *Wholehearted Living: Five-Minute Reflections for Modern Moms* (Loyola Press 2014).

²⁸ (Thomas, 102).

The community's *didache* can be fashioned to help mothers become more adept in understanding the religious translation of their experiences. However, in the busyness and confusion of their days, and the possible marginalization of their religious involvement, they will not usually be prone to attend organized classes on spirituality. But just as pilgrims often depend upon a pilgrim guide to help them navigate the way²⁹ so many mothers can find direction in the companionship of a mentor mother whose own living faith can provide the greatest instruction.

Many women experience diverse and sometimes dire circumstances as they travel on the journey of motherhood. The isolation of mothers with post-partum depression, the distinct experiences of lesbian couples, the difficulties of single working mothers, the challenges associated with a child's illness or special needs, and the hopelessness of those mothering in poverty present difficult traveling conditions. The community's *diakonia* can be a vibrant presence along the journey, noticing and responding in loving service to the pain or the particular trials that many mothers endure.

The Return

The common resolution of a religious journey involves a rebirth of self; the journeyer gains new understanding and new capacities, which must somehow be integrated into the community. In a pilgrimage, the community knows about and desires the journey for the pilgrim. It senses the pilgrim's eagerness to explore and question and it sanctions the leaving. But it longs for the return and listens for the pilgrim's acquired insights.

The first two movements of the young adult mother's pilgrimage of motherhood, beginning and being on, are not difficult to overlay on her physical experience. Motherhood always has a beginning, and it clearly has a passage. But how can we speak of a return? Pilgrims end their journey and return to a community that eagerly awaits and delights in the pilgrim's new insights. But mothers cannot and do not end their journey, especially when in the midst of the immediate demands of little children. And even when these demands disappear into a hazy past, the connection that caused the journey, that intimate love that was once so physically encompassing, often remains as a psychological and emotional stamp or seal, which accompanies the mother's movement even in her separateness. Thus, when we speak of a return, it is more helpful to overlay the image on various *stages* within the pilgrimage of motherhood, conscious that the changes inherent to mothering create an ever-evolving journey. A mother comes up for air, as it were, at various times during her motherhood and in the process, essentially returns to herself, albeit a transformed self.³⁰ It is these moments that can be understood as a return from a stage of pilgrimage. How the community greets the mother's transformed self, how it helps her to discern the meaning of her experiences, and how it prepares her for the next stage of mothering (and life) is the task of religious education. Religious educators can examine how the educational forms of church life can both receive the mothers into the community *and* reequip them for further traveling.

If the church has fashioned its educational forms to support and enrich the "being on" the journey, then its *koinonia* has already encouraged mothers' faith sharing groups and will continue to foster honest conversations about mothers' journey. Its *leiturgia* has already given liturgical and prayerful expression to mothers' experiences and will continue to incorporate mothers' voices and consider their needs in its gestures and rituals. Its *kerygma* has already

²⁹ Webb-Mitchell 2007, 85-86.

³⁰ Sanna, 56-57).

proclaimed and encouraged conversation about the revelatory nature of motherhood and will continue to speak prophetically against injustices towards women and children in the world. Its didache has already sought ways and language to connect Christian teachings with postmodern culture and the realities of mothers' life experiences. It will continue to question theological and cultural assumptions about women. Its diakonia has already found ways to care for mothers' many and diverse needs. It will continue to seek ways to enable mothers to ease the burdens particular to many mothers' lives. As these educational forms interrelate, the community can better fashion a true experience of the return, which recognizes the pilgrim's travails, applauds the pilgrim's courage, and makes room for the pilgrim's insight. In other words, the mother returning from a stage of her pilgrimage can be supported by the existing forms and can add to their refashioning.

Many mothers are surprised when they encounter the profound joys and intense difficulties that course through the experience of motherhood. Yet within their narratives and blogs, the desire to speak about what they have learned is even more pronounced. Similar to pilgrims who "use their experience to adjust to and strengthen the current structure of society,"³¹ mothers can add new found insights to the community's wisdom if the community has been educated to listen expectantly to these pilgrim's stories.

Our faith communities have the responsibility and means to help mothers perceive the religious dimension of their motherhood. This can be facilitated through a broad understanding of religious education, which fashions each form of church life in order to call forth the mother's spiritual potential. By relating the forms of church life to an understanding of pilgrimage, religious educators can help the mother grow into a pilgrim identity. This identity, by its very nature, learns to recognize that the realities of the road hold the potential for "thin places"³² (Forest 2007, 70) where God's presence can be perceived and where the attempts to respond to this presence can begin.

³¹ Senn, 133.

³² Jim Forest, *The Road to Emmaus: Pilgrimage as a Way of Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

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**For All the Saints:
The Cult of Saints and Theological Imagination in the Art of Liberal
Protestant Youth Ministry**

Abstract: Liberal Protestants have historically neglected or avoided the cult of saints. However, many saints, such as St. Perpetua, present relevant and challenging stories. Engaging adolescents in these stories poses the possibility to contribute to their theological, religious and intellectual development. This article will propose a foundation for engaging the saints in liberal Protestant youth ministry.

While on a week-long high school mission trip last summer I noticed *The Walking Dead*, *The Avengers 2* and *Game of Thrones* were among the most common topics of conversation. The first is a show about a small nomadic community, in a world fraught with the “walking dead” struggling daily to maintain their humanity. The middle is a story of an artificial intelligence originally created to protect the earth, now bent on human genocide in the face of human evil as the only real way to fulfil its mission. The final a dizzying story of political positioning, betrayal and war as competing parties vie for total control of Westeros. All three narratives are composed of various communities, co-operating or competing for their own existence. The conversations of the high school youth, though often ominous, none the less were seeking imaginative sources of hope for the future in a challenging world. It led me to wonder what resources the Christian religion has in this climate to engage young people.

Into this yearning I wish to propose a 2000 year old resource as a new pedagogical approach to generating imagination in liberal Protestant youth ministry; namely the cult of saints. I will show that the saints and martyrs provide a rousing opportunity for the imaginative transformation of consciousness. They historically embodied an imaginative resistance to the powers and of their day through earthly lives.

In *The Violence of Organized Forgetting: Thinking Beyond America's Disimagination Machine*¹, Henry Giroux describes with dramatic clarity the public social crisis that has taken hold of the public consciousness in America. This crisis of consciousness results in the real dismantling of any shared vision of a good and flourishing society for all but a swiftly declining group of privileged elites. The result is masses of Americans, left an adrift in a commodified consciousness that “embraces a radical selfishness that celebrates a consumer-oriented person whose actions reflect mostly their material self-interests.”²

¹ Henry A. Giroux, *The Violence of Organized Forgetting: Thinking Beyond America's Disimagination Machine*, City Lights Open Media (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2014).

² Ibid., 922, Kindle.

These concerns are not out of step with the yearnings expressed in the aforementioned cinema. While the three films listed are all fantastically fictional narratives, the popular draw in all three is an imaginative response to a perceived need for leadership and action in the face of a dire human social crisis. I wish to specifically engage this call from my perspective working with young people in liberal Protestant Christian religious education. I suggest that because the loss of a shared civil good does such toxic and repressive damage to the earth, to the vulnerable and to the world's children, it should be generally understood as an urgent religious concern. It is no doubt a concern for Christian religious education because Jesus taught that whatever is done to the naked, the starving, the imprisoned and the homeless is done to Him (Matthew 25: 31-46). It is this witness that this paper hopes to reclaim for the sake of liberal Protestant young people in order to rouse imagination and invite young people to critically view the imprisoned conscious described above by Giroux.

Thought and Adolescent Development

The move from childhood to adolescence is marked by an increased comprehensive complexity in abstraction and conceptualization³. Lev Vygotsky theorized that a child's thought world consists of a complex of words and corresponding concepts that the child inherited from speaking with adults. These "pseudo-concepts...predetermine" the nature and content of the child's inner-world⁴. Children parrot rather than construct what they say and know, and thus their inner-worlds are deeply formed by the adults who scaffold their development.

In adolescence, youth begin the imaginative reconstruction of inherited thought complexes, thinking beyond words or groupings that they have been given, in order to conceptualize their own inner world in their own voice. In the earliest development of abstract and conceptual thinking, the adolescent can both correctly create and apply a novel concept in a "concrete situation". However, when asked to describe or define such a concept they "will find it strangely difficult to express that concept in words"⁵ and will often offer a thinner and less satisfying definition in comparison.

Developing theological abstraction and conceptual thinking involves separating the complex of received assumptions handed to them by their adult mentors, in order to distinctly analyze the pieces and re-conceptualize them⁶. In order for emerging adults to engage this imaginative process of reconstructing their religious and theological worlds, and to re-conceptualize them in their own voice, they must imaginatively play with the inherited ones. This requires an object that can imaginatively scaffold the deconstruction and reconstruction of inherited language complexes.

³ L. S. Vygotskii et al., *Thought and Language*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012), 103-55.

⁴ Ibid., 129.

⁵ Ibid., 150.

⁶ Ibid., 144.

In order to reconstruct assumed inner-worlds through imagination, I propose that the adolescent educative process requires religious resources that have three characteristics. First, said resource must be concrete enough to scaffold concept formation and application among youth through imagination. Secondly, it must rouse the imagination such that it is able to separate and critique aspects of the worldview in order to abstract new concepts. Third, it must be able to directly address the world today in similarly concrete fashion in order to ensure that novel conceptualizations are connected with earthly need and reality. It is to this pedagogical challenge that I propose the cult of saints as a generative pedagogical resource in youth ministry.

The Cult of Saints and Theological Imagination

The cult of the saints arose from an “imaginative dialectic”⁷ that broke open the minds of ancient Mediterranean people⁸. The witness of the saints encouraged those struggling in the midst of a difficult time to believe that God was acting to raise up those who had overcome the world. Christians took comfort and strength in the saints who had given their entire existence to the love of God they encountered in Jesus. Together they imagined that the saints had truly overcome the world by praying to them, gathering in the places of their death and imitating their spiritual and vocational lives. A specific saint, and the communal honoring of that saint, became a way to concretely imagine what a life lived faithfully to God might look like.

I find in Joyce E. Salisbury’s study of St. Perpetua⁹ an example of a saint who engaged her own time in ways that honor the three criteria I have proposed above. Perpetua was a typical young woman of third century Carthage. Her story, including her martyrdom, is richly formed by her culture and family life and the social and political power struggles therein. At the time of her arrest Perpetua was engaged through the catechetical process of Christian community to live her life according to the Christian faith¹⁰. This process stressed living as a Christian first and foremost; to confess Christ as Lord was to live as such¹¹. Perpetua’s martyrdom is thus an extension of shared imagination of her community’s life in which “orthopraxis as well as orthodoxy were always a part and parcel of salvation”¹². The Roman society in which Perpetua and others would come to be celebrated and remembered as “saints” by those who would follow in their path was a society “formally and informally divided into hierarchical distinctions and

⁷ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints : Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Enlarged edition. Second edition. ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 109.

⁸ Ibid., 1-5.

⁹ Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion : The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., 74.

¹¹ Ibid., 72.

¹² Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich : Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 75.

categories”¹³. Before she demonstrated the martyr’s courage Perpetua was formed in a Christian community where she palpably experienced God at work¹⁴.

Perpetua’s specific witness serves as an exemplar of the saints in several ways. First Perpetua’s martyrdom was a religious and theological act of resistance. Roman hierarchy was directly supported by Rome’s polytheism. For every different space, season and action Rome held a different god in mind¹⁵. In order then to appease the gods, one needed to make sacrifice to that god. This understanding directly correlated with a Roman social-hierarchy enacted through patronage. As patron, wealthy Roman citizens could buy off the envy of the poor by throwing lavish feasts for the jealous, “ostentatiously flirting with bankruptcy in bouts of public giving.”¹⁶ This giving was never out of simple generosity. Rather, the wealthy always offered patronage to those who could help them out of the intent that favor would later be indebted back to them. Perpetua was formed by a community that passionately served the poor, the orphans, widows and the sick, because together they imagined an “alternative reality by which the present world would be judged”¹⁷. Perpetua’s radical resistance to the gods of Rome poses a challenge every bit as relevant to our youth today as in Perpetua’s time, to imagine ways they might daily embody resistance to cultural hierarchies that benefit a few while excluding the many; even when complicity may benefit them.

Secondly, the Roman cult of honor placed daughters under the authority of their father¹⁸. Perpetua writes of the anger of her father at her refusal to sacrifice to the gods, and more so her disobedience to him. Through her conversion Perpetua has re-conceptualized her own agency so that it was no longer subject to the will of the *pater familias*.¹⁹ Perpetua extends a relevant and empowering witness to young people to examine ways that contemporary society fails to honor the full humanity of women, and imagine ways they might live out of a different consciousness. Similarly, Perpetua speaks of the pain of having to give up her child²⁰. Within her own city of Carthage persisted the memories of a long history of infant sacrifice²¹. She invites young people to imagine living lives that value the most vulnerable, and to see the faces of those globally sacrificed for the gain of other. The saint’s witness evokes an imagined-cosmos where no god would ever request the sacrifice of her child, where all are true agents, and average lives can overcome the obstacle of empirical power.

Beyond Perpetua, imagine how Hildegard Von Bingen, who created great beauty in spite of struggling with migraines and feelings of being an outsider, might call young people to find beauty and meaning in their own uniqueness. St. Francis of Assisi was born into great privilege, yet he saw the danger of complicity with that privilege with surprising clarity. Francis’ witness, to leave

¹³ Salisbury P. 5

¹⁴ Ibid., 62-70

¹⁵ Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion : The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman*, 10-12.

¹⁶ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints : Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, 40.

¹⁷ Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich : Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation*, 51.

¹⁸ Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion : The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman*, 89.

¹⁹ Ibid., 91.

²⁰ Ibid., 87.

²¹ Ibid., 51.

his privilege and live in mystical communion with all of nature is more relevant today than ever in the face of the destructive anti-environmental forces of global conspicuous consumption. The further inclusion of “protestant saints” can enhance these possibilities further. More familiar to many Protestants is how compelling many young people find the conspiratorial resistance of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the daring courage of Harriet Tubman and the dynamic public leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. So, why don’t liberal Protestants engage such a generative resource?

Section 3: The Reformers, the Saints and Liberal Protestantism

Walk into any Catholic or Orthodox Church in the world today, and you will be reminded that to many the saints are by no means an obsolete resource. However, many Protestant denominations have never known this resource. In fact, in my own writing of this paper I have been met by constant suspicion and protest. The Protestant faith inherited a legacy of suspicion of the saints that has historically prevented most of us from exploring the possible advantages of sharing these dynamic figures. The ground for Protestant rejection of the saints occurs fairly early in the Reformation. Luther, who expressed love for many saints and their stories, was expressing his concern about the saints as early as 1516.²² While Luther could be incredibly scathing in his critique and dismissal of the saints²³, behind the surface rhetoric was a simpler and more pointed critique. Namely, he protested against the saints for distracting from the true source of Christian encouragement, the word alone. He was further concerned that any practice that assigned supernatural, superstitious or perhaps worst of all salvific power to the saints distracted from trust in God and real care of neighbor.²⁴

Luther’s closest partner in German reform, Phillip Melancthon, in similar fashion sought to doggedly defend Christ as the sole mediator of divine human relations. He however, left space in the Augsburg Confession itself for its “adherents” to recognize the saints: in giving them honor, in edifying their own faith through their witness and in imitating them in good works and in faithfulness to vocation²⁵. Seemingly out of Melancthon’s more generous conserving of the saints, Ludwig Rabus, a student of Luther and Melancthon at Wittenberg, would offer one of the earliest Protestant martyrology books of the Reformation age. Rabus would re-construct the martyrs along Lutheran lines explicitly including those who professed pure doctrine, and even including early reformers such as Jan Hus and Jon Wycliffe as saints.

While this certainly requires a further examination than I can offer here, it does appear that Luther’s logic holds the lasting impact over emerging Protestant thought. John Calvin in *The Institutes* again stresses, though to a lesser degree, a concern over superstition and more so that stress be placed on Christ as the sole

²² Robert Kolb, *For All the Saints : Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 12.

²³ See for example The Smalcald Articles of 1537.

²⁴ Kolb, *For All the Saints : Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation*, 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

mediator²⁶. Calvin does grant that the saints pray “for us”²⁷ and that they “prayed as we ought”²⁸. With the exception of Melancthon we see a historical line of thought put in motion and passed on. It is my hope to encourage most liberal Protestants to claim a renewed, imaginative engagement with the saints.

Section 4: Methods for Engaging Protestant Emerging Adults with the Saints

I wish here to offer briefly some practical suggestions based on all that has been said for rousing theological imagination in youth ministry through the saints. Opening the saints to youth requires that the educator make intentional and careful connection between the dominant culture of the saints’ day and that of the young people in order to rightly draw out the saints’ stories in edifying ways. I suggest that creativity within multiple medium will enhance the imaginative learning that occurs. Art, photos of important sites and, where applicable, music will draw the saints closer to the learners in ways that can support theological imagination.

Many saints bear witness to their own spiritual disciplines, often producing beautiful and moving writings. Highlighting, for example, the spiritual practices of Julian of Norwich or the writings of Catherine of Siena in my experience can be surprisingly moving for young people. I would even suggest that liberal Protestant youth ministry could confidently encourage youth to pick a patron saint to live with by mimicking their spiritual practices²⁹, carrying a saint token or keeping a saint’s art in a key place. Ultimately, teaching the saints must be done with care and intentionality so as to stress the courage, risk and creativity of the saints, rather than encouraging religious fanaticism or even masochism. In its best practice this will be a communal experience of imagination.

Conclusion

In closing I wish to suggest a final overarching metaphor for the saints in liberal Protestant religious education. Friedrich Schleiermacher suggested that the perfect end of Christian faith is redemption; that is, perfectly potent and uninterrupted God consciousness³⁰. All religious practice ought in turn to rouse the religious affection in order to move toward this potent God consciousness³¹. Schleiermacher’s understanding of the Christian faith offer a systematic understanding for all that I have proposed here. The saints can be reclaimed as those who concretely embodied the reality of potent and uninterrupted God-

²⁶ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., *The Library of Christian Classics*, (Philadelphia,: Westminster Press, 1960), 877, 80.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 883.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 885.

²⁹ Here care must certainly be taken, as some practices of the mystics would not at all be edifying. Julian of Norwich for example engaged in extreme fasting that could cause extreme religious damage in the life of those struggling with an eating disorder.

³⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, H. R. Mackintosh, and James Stuart Stewart, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh,: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 476.

³¹ Friedrich Schleiermacher and Terrence N. Tice, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study : Revised Translation of the 1811 and 1830 Editions*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 98-99.

consciousness; bearing external witness to this through their historical witness. As such the saints can be utilized as an educative resource that generates theological imagination as it rouses religious affections further contributing to redemptive community among young people.

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The Unresolved Battle Over Revelation in American Protestantism

Abstract

The unresolved battle over revelation in American Protestantism crystalizes in the debate between Harrison Elliott and James Smart in the 1940s and 1950s. This paper engages the arguments of Elliott in his book, Can Religious Education Be Christian? and Smart's The Teaching Ministry of the Church concerning their views on scripture and revelation. Their ideas of revelation are brought into conversation with religious educator Gabriel Moran. Moran imagines an alternative understanding of revelation that offers a fundamental critique to both Elliott and Smart. This alternative understanding creates opportunities for reshaping a solution to this conflict through the creative tensions and connectivity of teaching/learning. The implications for inter-religious, theological and church education are profound.

Introduction

The conflict concerning revelation has a deep impact in American Protestantism. The work of Harrison Elliott and James Smart from the 1940s and 1950s exemplifies the nature of the divide. The conflict is shaped by different understandings of revelation but also by revelation's relationship to education. This paper places revelation in an educational, rather than a theological framework in order to better understand how the relationship between revelation and education shapes the debate. In today's pluralistic world, even among Christians, it is difficult to find common ground to converse across diverse meanings of revelations and sacred texts. The focus of the paper centers on an educational question of how we might teach, learn and preach about revelation more effectively and across barriers that normally divide religious communities.

In 1940, Harrison Elliott, published a book titled Can Religious Education Be Christian? His argument is a seminal work on the relationship between progressive education and liberal theology. While Elliott answered the question of his title in the affirmative, in many ways his book was the last stand of liberal theology in religious education. Neo-orthodoxy became the dominant theological view in American Protestantism, particularly in the works of H. Shelton Smith and James Smart. Smart was instrumental in writing Christian Faith and Life Curriculum for the Presbyterian Church. Smart's book The Teaching Ministry of the Church suggested a religious education that could only be exclusively Christian.

While both Smart and Elliott embrace historical critical methods of interpreting the Bible, they have very different ideas about the foundational relationship between revelation and education. This contrast heightened the pitch of the debate in their time and created a fissure in church education and religious education at large that has never been bridged, despite many valiant efforts.

An alternative meaning of revelation, as proposed by Gabriel Moran, suggests possibilities for creating connective pedagogies for inter-religious and intra-religious learning today. The implications of the work of Elliott and Smart offer important creative insights into

the educational and theological landscape today that can help religious educators imagine a relationship between revelation and education as one that unites rather than divides.

Harrison Elliott

Born in Ohio in 1882, Harrison Elliott had the heart of an educator. He trained as a public school teacher, but he soon flourished in his own graduate study at Union Theological Seminary and Teacher's College in New York City (Cram, 2014, 1). He had a lifelong interest in psychology and group process that was the foundation for his work. Elliott was already a prominent faculty member at Union Theological Seminary when he completed his doctoral work at Yale and published Can Religious Education be Christian? in 1940.

This book was a firm and passionate articulation of the aging liberal movement's idea of educational process and its relationship to revelation. Elliott critiqued neo-orthodoxy, while reshaping the powerful dynamic between revelation and education in a new way. A more Christianized religious education evolving out of neo-orthodox theology would soon pervade the religious education movement. Reconsideration of Elliott's articulation of the relationship between education and revelation holds potential for the current reshaping of religious education.

The religious education movement which began in 1903 strongly embraced both theology and education. Each had to be held in tension without giving emphasis to one over the other. The emergence of the social sciences in the conversation, especially education, began to challenge the purpose of the methodology that was encountered in religious education. Of equal importance, Enlightenment thinking would value the authority of reason and the human experience. Religious education began working within an educative framework which challenged the status quo of teaching for a particular purpose. Sunday schools were built around Herbartian methods that began with the anticipated outcome and built aims toward that outcome (Elliott, 1940, 39). Educators like Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Dewey were significant for the religious education movement. Their methods, which developed into a more child-centered and experience based method of education (Elliott, 1940, 41), expressed a parallel to liberal theology's understanding of various expressions of Christianity throughout history (Elliott, 1940, 67).

Critics of the religious education movement suggested that education had been given too dominant a role. The human suffering and evil that manifested itself in World War I created a moment which demanded a theological response. Neo-orthodoxy arose and gained importance as political and economic trends moved Europe and the United States toward World War II. By the 1930s, the Democratic ideals of the Enlightenment that shaped the Religious Education Association were being challenged to consider more fully the role of theology. Liberal theology was considered vague and humanistic, and there was a sense in which people were calling for a theology that addressed human sinfulness more fully. Bower put it succinctly, when he suggested that religious education needed to articulate a theology "without theologizing our movement" (in Schmidt, 1983, 118). This articulation was a task which would prove to be immensely challenging.

For Elliott, the process of religious education can be Christian, but it need not be exclusively so. Elliott's understanding of religious education is deeply tied to his meaning of revelation. God is revealed through the educational process for Elliott. The issue is not just revelation but how revelation becomes known, so he asserts "both revelation and the interpretation are direct acts of God" (1940, 115). Revelation in this framework is shaped by

human experience in the world, and yet is anchored in history and the stories of those experiences through time, leading not to one authoritative revelation but a reshaping of revelation through time and the educational process. Because the Christian identity is constantly progressing toward a “fullness of meaning” (1940, 311), he cannot perceive a way that education and revelation are not linked to their particular cultural situation (1940, 307). Neither education nor revelation is a singular or one-time experience, process or method.

Elliott connected his understanding of education with Christianity’s inclusive and unique formation of various expressions of faith, including the creative jolt experienced in the Reformation. In this way, authority, history, and experience work in tandem in Elliott’s understanding of religious education. These various aspects molded together allow for education and revelation to have a dynamic and dependent relationship. Elliott’s religious education can be Christian but it cannot be Christianized. For him, “a true educational process is denied as soon as education is made the servant of any dogmatism, whether in religion or any other area” (1940, 318-319). Elliott’s argument is that education and revelation must continually reshape each other in a dynamic relationship.

Life and Times of James Smart

James Smart was born in Ontario, Canada in 1906. Smart found his passion in the study of the Old Testament and he went to Germany for post-graduate study. Upon returning to North America, Smart pastored a number of congregations in Canada for over a decade, during which time he published a book titled What Man Can Believe (Atkinson, 2014, 1).

It was this book that attracted the attention of the Presbyterian curriculum development team in the United States who were creating a new Presbyterian curriculum titled, *Christian Life and Faith: A Program for Church and Home*. At that time, the higher criticism of biblical study was still struggling for credibility, at least among lay people in congregations and in Sunday School. Liberal theology’s shortcomings around social issues and authority of God were coming under more scrutiny. *Christian Life and Faith* attempted to address both of these issues, by embracing higher criticism of the Bible, and by shifting the theological foundations of the curriculum toward neo-orthodoxy’s core values. This shift emphasized God’s transcendence, human sinfulness, and equated scripture with revelation.

Smart’s curriculum work in the 1940s led him back to pastoral ministry with a particular focus on the role of the church in Christian education. In his book, The Teaching Ministry of the Church, Smart presents his theological framework for the importance of scripture and revelation in the role of the church. His understanding of revelation and scripture is dynamic. He writes, “revelation and response belong together and are inseparable because it is never an abstract truth about God or man that is revealed but rather, God himself in relation to man and man in relation with God” (1964, 13). The necessity and activity of the reader and the reader’s response is both how Smart pulls revelation through time and how he embraces historical criticism so fully. He equates the whole meaning of revelation with biblical revelation. Although Smart understands revelation as having a present reality, it is a present reality that cannot have shape beyond the confines of scripture.

Smart felt that the field of education had been “invaded” by humanism, in particular, by the educational methods of John Dewey (1954, 188). He felt education had become a product of the culture, a culture which he felt was distinctively not Christian (1954, 194). Smart was

troubled by this difference and separation, largely because he understood the role of the church as specifically linked to revelation. For Smart, "the church is the human instrument called into being by God's revelation of himself in his Word." In this way "the revelation of God creates the church" (1954, 24- 25).

Inasmuch as the Religious Education movement was impacted by H. Shelton Smith's argument in his book Faith and Nurture, that religious education must consider neo-orthodox theology, Smart translated neo-orthodox theology into church life and curriculum design with vigor. Smart's understanding of religious education needing theology in a more significant way was also embraced by many. Christian Education became the new rubric for the field. Smart's contribution to the conversations about the role of the church, the place of scripture and revelation were deeply significant for the trajectory of the re-directed Christian education movement. It was the tipping point for the movement to go in another direction. Some would claim it has not recovered from this road taken to this day.

Transforming the Relationship between Revelation and Education

Elliot and Smart both center their arguments on the relationship between revelation and education. For Smart, revelation is equated with scriptures and education relates to church as a tool or method for responding to revelation. For Elliott, revelation and education form a dynamic dialogue whereby human experience and a variety of expression of Christian traditions through history encourage participation in all generations in the present understanding of revelation. The foundations and structure of their thinking could not be more different. Yet Elliott and Smart represent significant voices in the religious and Christian education movements, respectively. They also represent voices in their respective movements that mark a divide that if bridged, could offer significant impact on the current work of religious and Christian education. An educational process/practice gives this conflict a potentially different perspective and encourages possible ways to bridge the divide; that process/practice can be found in the work of religious educator Gabriel Moran.

Gabriel Moran's influence in the field of religious education has been deep and wide in his writings, especially his attention to educational forms, teaching and listening. For Moran, revelation is religious experience: "at the heart of each tradition is the act of believing in God who reveals" (2009, 107). It is the religious dimension of human experience.

In his book, Both Sides: The Story of Revelation, Moran argues for a meaning of revelation as "a present relation" (2002, 11). The relational aspect of revelation is vital. Moran notes that the metaphor of call and response is the dominant metaphor for conceptualizing the divine human relationship. God reveals God's self and people respond. Faith traditions are formed around the "act of believing in a God who reveals" (Moran, 2009, 107). Revelation is the religious dimension of human experience. It comes at the depths of our deepest human experience and in all our relations.

Moran's idea of revelation is also rooted deeply in an understanding of time. Revelation is not "*also* in the present," revelation is *only* in the present. He suggests that what is needed for a deeper and richer understanding of revelation is a reshaping of our understanding of time. In Moran's image, the present is not a point with past points to its left and future points to its right; but in fact, "the present is not a point, nor does the present exclude the past" (2002, 12). This image of revelation as present is relational, and it also acknowledges the "powerful influence" of

the past on the present, without allowing the present to be swallowed up in the past (Moran, 2002, 12). The future is the openings and possibilities in the present.

Moran's idea of revelation understands the Bible as a possible source of revelation, but not as container for revelation. The Bible is a record of revelatory experiences; the revelatory potential of the Bible is dependent on the response of those who are hearing its words in the present.

While concepts of revelation and education may vary, a potential link for healthy dialogue resides in the articulation of the diversity of understandings in both revelation and educational process. Revelation and education have a dynamic relationship. It not necessary to agree on exactly how that relationship is shaped. In recognizing how that relationship is molded for ourselves and others, we can learn from various theological discourse and pedagogical practices what the strengths and weaknesses of each are.

Conclusion

Historically, the debate between Elliott and Smart's schools of thought was heated and divisive. If Elliott's book Can Religious Education Be Christian? critiqued neo-orthodoxy's influence on Religious Education, Shelden H. Smith's Faith and Nurture was a bitter counter-attack on liberal theology and progressive education. Smart's writing The Teaching Ministry of the Church, almost a decade later, furthers the voice of neo-orthodoxy and connects it even more deeply to the church and the Christian Education movement. He is reshaping the religious education movement to be exclusively Christian and to limit the role of education to teaching as telling what one should believe.

Moran's understanding of revelation and education afford us a window through which a deeper and significant conversation about revelation can happen. Moran suggests an understanding of the relationship between revelation and education that embraces pluralistic viewpoints and allows for a role for history that is neither superior nor inferior. The concept of revelation being present and recognizing that it has always been so, recasts dialogue with other traditions, especially Judaism and Islam. The Bible can hold a vital role in Christian tradition and in dialogue with other traditions, but that role need not be exclusive or authoritarian.

Moran's understanding of revelation is that it fully embraces its pedagogical process and allows for discourse between those who hold a variety of positions about revelation and education, even as contrasting as Elliott and Smart. The discourse is not to persuade the other but to distinguish in order to relate. In this way, a variety of expressions of revelation can be involved in the conversation. But the heart of the discourse is the present time pointing toward the mystery of revelation: the openness that a relational and present understanding of revelation is worth exploring, among Christians with differing understandings of revelation and within different faith traditions.

Further, exploration is needed around the similarities of today's late modern views on historical criticism of the Bible. Educational theories have also developed rapidly in recent decades and those methods warrant discussion with their theological counterparts in order to consider how the meaning of revelation impacts everything in the life-long and life-wide learning. Elliott and Smart both offer important starting points to understanding the tensions in the debate. They remind religious educators that the debate over revelation is not one reserved for philosophers and theologians, but for educators, religious educators, Biblical scholars,

historians, artists, and any persons who want to create deeper and richer relation among each other and with the divine. Exploring and distinguishing core concepts of revelation and education helps us consider how religious education might approach both revelation and education in new ways in today's pluralistic world.

However, as this study has sought to show if the unresolved battle over revelation in American Protestantism is to be resolved, our exploration of the relationship between revelation and education should include Elliott and Smart at the table, with Moran as a vital conversation partner, as we are lured to a diversity of understandings of revelation and education.

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Imagining Complex Adaptive Religions: Science as Disruptive/Transformative Raconteur

Abstract. A rough outline of the science of complex adaptive systems is offered here as an imaginative lens through which to see religions and religious education afresh. Three religious education problems are posed. For each, a story from complexity science is offered as a pathway to a solution. The conversation is then flipped so that the science story offers a lens for seeing religions as complex adaptive systems. This lens invites two imaginative reconceptions of how a religion might be organized to more effectively respond to the challenges of the contemporary world.

A raconteur is one who tells interesting stories. I have been intrigued by the stories of science since high school, but I wasn't sufficiently motivated by the outcomes of those stories to pursue creating new scientific stories. It was the process that unfolded in the sciences stories that I found compelling.

When I finally found a story-ending that motivated me, the story being told was about religious education and visual art. But even when I was moving from exams to dissertation proposal, the stories of a particular new realm of science were disrupting/transforming my thinking. Building a bridge between the two story worlds of religion and science seemed quixotic in those days so I moved the science to the deep background of my thinking and focused on religious education and art. Now I am beginning to build the bridge.

The realm of science that has been the liveliest stimulus to my religious education imagination in recent years is the new interdisciplinary science of complex adaptive systems. The question that drives this scientific endeavor is whether complexity observed in seemingly disparate systems has common properties whereby an explanation for a complex phenomenon in one field (e.g., chemical bonding) offers a framework or model or template to understand a complex phenomenon in another field (e.g., financial market behavior) (See e.g., Goo, Yik Wen et al. 2009).

A complex adaptive system is comprised of many components or agents, which are interactive, self-organizing, and adaptive, and because of those behaviors, the system exhibits emergence and hard-to-predict dynamics in non-linear ways. Emergence in this usage means that agents are able to self-organize, they can communicate and behave in a

coordinated response to external stimuli in a way that no individual agent could. The field started as a dialogue among physicists, economists, and computational mathematicians. It has grown to include social scientists, cultural anthropologists, neuroscientists, evolutionary biologists, strategists, urban planners, public policy experts, and many others.

As I have discovered myriad stories emerging from this new science, my thinking about religious education has been repeatedly disrupted. This complexity story-world has had such an impact on me that how I see religions and thus how I frame the problems in the field of religious education has been transformed.

Some of the smaller disruptions are simply new ways to think about traditional problems. What if we could optimize curriculum redesign as if we had done hundreds of generations worth of trial and error testing? What if we could distill the teaching about the Golden Rule into a handful of elements demonstrated to result in people actually living that basic teaching? What if innovation and adaptability were skills and dispositions included in a religion curriculum? CAS science and mathematics may offer tools for addressing these questions.

But some of the questions are more fundamental. What if a religion could reflect on its own operating structure, as that structure has emerged, grown, morphed, and calcified over thousands of years, and decide that a different structure would be more responsive to the present environment? What if the religions could learn how to cooperate within and among themselves in such a way that they could show nation states and markets how to likewise overcome their polarities and work toward a shared good? These questions invite a new way of understanding the identity of a religion and thus the task of religious education.

Complexity Science as a Tool for Religious Education

The first two questions asked above focus on optimizing curricula. This outcome is especially important in the context of formal religious education programs where teacher interaction with the learners lasts only an hour and a half per week and only during the academic year. In some of the religious traditions, for example, there are debates between emphasizing catechetical content and emphasizing reflective or experiential integration with the learner's worldview. Usually, each side of such a debate has some compelling arguments.

What if religious educators could optimize curriculum redesign as if it had done hundreds of generations' worth of trial-and-error testing? In computation science, an iterative optimization technique has been developed that mimics such a repeated trial-and-error process. Assume that you start with hundreds of elements in a curriculum including knowledge content, skill building, and disposition cultivation – in other words, elements from both sides of the debate. Assume further that you know something of the effect each of these elements has on religious learners. Suppose that you want to optimize certain life-long outcomes and can identify the optimization goals.

That data could be processed using what is known in the world of computing as a genetic algorithm. A genetic algorithm first identifies a certain number (say 100) of possible

combinations of the curriculum elements, weeds out the worst of them, combines elements of the best and offers another generation of results. Again the worst are eliminated and the best are combined for yet another generation of results. This process is repeated many times until an optimized curriculum format is identified (See e.g., Busch-Vishniac, et al, 2011).

What if we could distill all of the teaching about the Golden Rule into a handful of elements that were proven to result in people actually choosing that basic teaching? Science has been exploring prosocial behavior in a number of ways but the one that continues to disrupt my thinking is the cooperation work being done with a game called the Prisoner's Dilemma. It is easy to love the neighbor when to do so doesn't conflict with any other interests. But what happens in the face of a conflict between pro-social and pro-self choices? What will the decision be? It is at this edge that I think religious education has something to learn.

The Prisoner's Dilemma imagines that you and your friend are arrested – here we will imagine it is because of a social justice protest event. If you and your friend don't talk, you will both get equal short sentences. If one of you talks, that one gets a light sentence and the other one gets a long sentence. If both of you talk you get equal medium or long sentences. Talking is called defecting, remaining silent is called cooperation. Both people remaining silent is the decision that results in the lowest total sentence for your society, that is you and your friend. Repeated versions of this game model have been shown to model social cooperation (Axelrod & Hamilton 1981).¹ It can serve as a metaphor for what it means to love one's neighbor and oneself at the same time, even if there is risk to you when you cooperate. Has religious education identified the rewards and costs of choosing neighbor and self versus choosing self first? Does hell need to be discussed again? And how do we teach this kind of decision making as a habit, cultivate it as a virtue, rather than simply presenting the Golden Rule as a good idea? These questions impact the kind of teaching that needs to occur around the environment and intractable racism.

Innovation and adaptability are teachable.² What if innovation and adaptability were included in a religion curriculum? I have mentioned to a few people working in the sciences that I am exploring religion as a complex adaptive system. Several have laughed, "complex maybe, but not adaptable." Most of these people did grow up with some religious education but they learned that their religion does not and should not change. What if young people emerged from a religious education program not only psyched to solve the problems of the world, but also already practiced in bringing creativity, innovation, and religious sensibilities to the problems of markets and governance? What if they were also skilled in using the tools of science, mathematics, and the humanities? Pope Francis' (2015) recent climate encyclical, *Laudato Si*, identifies complex environmental and economic problems but doesn't offer much by way of solutions. He urges further conversation but where are the innovative conversants?

¹ There is an extensive body of literature on iterated Prisoner's Dilemma games and prosocial behavior following Axelrod & Hamilton (1981). Subtle aspects of the influences on cooperative behavior are still being explored (see e.g., Vilone, et al., 2014)

² A peer-reviewed journal from Elsevier is devoted to the subject: *Thinking Skills and Creativity*.

These three problems of curriculum redesign, lived learning for the common good, and cultivating innovation as intimately linked to religion focus on how the science might be applied to specific problems in religious education. This is similar to medieval monasteries using architecture to facilitate the monks securely living their spiritual priorities in a constructed space. The science of CAS also offers potential solutions for a number of contemporary religious communications issues through web algorithms, crowdsourcing schemes, and gaming. It would also be interesting to explore whether work in the realm of immunology offers religious educators any models that would help immunize a religion against extremism.

Complexity Science as a Lens on Religions and Religious Education

The field of complexity studies takes a course-grained look at whole systems looking for patterns, patterns missed when focusing on the fine grain, the details within a system. In other words, the old proverb cautions one not to miss the forest for the trees; complexity science suggests adjusting the lens so as to focus somewhere between the forest as a whole and the trees as individual components. Between those extremes, one can see patterns that are significant to the ongoing life of the forest but that an observer wouldn't notice if zooming in too closely on a tree or too widely on the forest in its context. Complexity science posits that those forest patterns can be compared with similar patterns from other biomes (e.g., from savannas or estuaries) or compared with the patterns found in complex systems that aren't biomes (e.g., cities or financial networks) and the life of the forest can be better understood and perhaps enhanced or improved.³

This mid-range lens can be focused on a religion. Patterns are thus clearly visible. Adherents have usually organized themselves into hierarchies and institutions; adherents engage in ritual and artistic behavior individually and collectively, usually at regular time intervals; the originating stories or other wisdom of a religious tradition offer adherents behavioral guidance in relation to fellow adherents and others in the world, guidance that is honored or not to varying degrees; and the wisdom traditions offer a framework or perspective for adherents' meaning making vis-à-vis the universe, human existence, and the purpose of life.

This is where meta-questions about religions and religious education begin. CAS science would say that the patterns just identified emerged from the self-organizing behavior of a religion's adherents over a span of time (millennia in the case of the major world religions). The patterns, structures, and institutions that emerged served the ends of the religion at the time they emerged. Some such patterns and structures fell by the wayside in the intervening years. Most of the patterns can be linked to the sacred stories of the religion but few are inscribed in those stories. The adherents of religions (agents as they would be called in CAS) are themselves complex adaptive systems who are intelligent and self-reflexive.

³ The forest example relates to a commonly understood idiom but for an in-depth consideration of how patterns in a system can be modeled and improved, see the example of the rice cultivation system Bali described in Stephen Lansing's (2006) *Perfect Order: Recognizing Complexity in Bali*.

Could the adherents of a religion examine the new science and make informed choices about what patterns would work best in the environment(s) in which the religions now find themselves? In other words, could the religions reorganize themselves into patterns and structures that are better suited to a world facing climate change, globalization, Moore's Law, Wright's Law, the volatility of global economies, the potential for nuclear destruction, the anticipated population increase, and the ever-increasing inequality of wealth distribution?

The hierarchical structure of Christian religious organizations, for example, emerged in the context of late-Roman imperialism. It was affirmed and refined in the Medieval European feudal hierarchical context. Given the ubiquitous presence of hierarchical ordering in human organizations, such an ordering pattern in a religion is not even questioned.

What if, instead of a hierarchical ordering principle, religions were able to choose an alternative structure? For example, could a religion choose to reorganize itself by learning the religious equivalent of the kinds of behaviors exhibited in a murmuration of starlings, that undulating, cooperative flock of flying responsiveness to wind, food, threats, and each other that has captivated observers and spawned viral videos.⁴ How do they do it? Could religious educators teach that kind of cooperation and responsiveness to the members of their communities so that the religious community could better navigate rapidly changing social ecologies of interdependent organisms?

Or what if the human body were taken more seriously as a model for religious organization? The Body of Christ image is one of the earliest metaphors for the Christian Church (1 Cor. 12:12-27) but what if that image were explored in dialogue with the contemporary understanding of the human body as a complex interaction of the circulatory system, the digestive system including all of the microorganisms that live in the gut, the immune system, the nervous system and its tree-like network of information processing mechanisms, and the reproductive system – cellular and otherwise (see e.g., West 2012). None of these systems is independent of the others and none is in competition with the others. Without their intricate cooperation, the human person dies. Yet the religions are not exhibiting this kind of cooperation or interdependence. Could they learn to in such a way as to set an example for the economies and for nation states? Religions critique these secular institutions but offer little modeling of how to live differently.

The questions for religious education that flow from a deeper identification with the body imagery are rich. How is energy (e.g., faith, hope, love, joy, justice) circulated in a religious system? How is energy absorbed (metabolized) and redirected in a religious system? Does religious metabolism require the presence of other organisms? What kind? How does the religious system immunize itself against threats in its environment? What is the information processing (nervous) system in a religion? How does a religious system reproduce itself and what is the role of religious education in that process? With these questions come questions of resilience, flexibility, waste processing, energy sources, and interactions with other social systems.

⁴ The Clive & Smith (2012) video has been watched more than 7 million times.

Religions tend to understand themselves as offering identities and worldviews superior to those of consumerism, materialism, and science. Yet the lived realities of the world religions in recent years do not seem to bear fruit that is dramatically different than that which emerges from secular society.⁵ If the religions know better how to deal with cooperation, conflict, and the dignity of each human being than the secular society, then why are they not demonstrating the efficacy of those methods in how they operate? What if the religions could learn how to cooperate within and among themselves in such a way that they could show nation states and markets how to likewise overcome their polarities and work toward a shared good? Perhaps if the religions were organized differently than other social systems, that task would be easier.

Manifesting the Imaginative

The last comprehensive flowering of religious imagination in the Christian world occurred in the 14th through 16th centuries in Europe. This resulted in fragmentation and an emphasis on difference that endures. Imagine a Christianity that respected its internal differences (as blood cells don't try to be neurons, which don't try to convert endocrine cells) but committed its combined missional energy to an agreed vision of a shared social good.

Among the conditions for such a dramatic reimagining of any religion is that it remain in dialogue with its core texts and traditions. One might fairly ask whether such a dialogue is possible without some shared metaphysical ground. Does an engagement between religions and the science of complex systems require deeper engagement with process thought? If so, does one have to explore and hash out the philosophical and theological ground before one can engage in the practical dialogue? Systematic theology (see e.g., Kaufman, 2007) and religious studies (see e.g., Sosis & Kiper, 2014) are certainly engaging in a conversation with CAS but I would argue that that practical theologians and religious educators do not have to wait for those conversations to reach some sort of finality before the practical engagement can begin.

The problem is fairly urgent. No religion can exist long without energy and information transfer. That means that no religion can maintain an isolationist position from the food production and transportation system, a system that converts fuel into heat or electricity, and a communications network – even a simple one like a villager walking to the local monastery for worship and instruction. Likewise, even in the developing world, the simplest of food, energy or communications systems are interconnected with larger economic, urban, and environmental systems.

The question is how might a religion interact with those systems. For centuries in the West, religions have surrendered control of the energy and communications systems to the world of science. Religious education has taught the texts and traditions of the religion with little attention to teaching innovation, creativity, or imagination as those might be practiced with links to and roots in religion. It is surprising when a good scientist or a good artist also evidences an

⁵ For example the Catholic clergy sex-abuse handling, the Buddhist violence against Muslims in Myanmar (Burma), the Muslim on Muslim violence in the Middle East, the near-schismatic disputes in the Anglican and Lutheran contexts, and corruption scandals in various religions.

advanced stage of faith development – too often religious education doesn't continue after an interest is expressed in art or science.

Will the religions risk this kind of religious education? If not, where will the religions find raconteurs to tell provocative stories?

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The Mimetic-Poetic Imagination: How Recent Neuroscientific and Cognitive Psychological Research Suggests a Narrativ-Developmental Approach to Identity

Abstract: This essay embarks upon an exploratory journey, a survey of the depths of the human mind from both an evolutionary and a developmental perspective, in search of the *human imagination as a function of the narrativ consciousness*. By way of examining the theories of Donald and Nelson, the human imagination is shown to be best defined in terms of *narrativity*. Narrativity describes the essential character of the human consciousness, and as such it has concrete effects on both anatomical brain structure and human culture. A neologism inspired by Paul Ricoeur, *mimesis-poesis*, is then introduced as a way to more definitively describe imagination in terms of this narrativity. This is followed by a brief preliminary overview as to how narrativity drives identity-development, and then by a suggestion as to why understanding this might be of benefit to religious educators.

Ever since Stephen Crites and others first alerted religious educators, theologians, and social scientists to the “narrative quality of experience,”¹ there has been an impulse among researchers within these various fields to better understand this uniquely human characteristic, that is at once intuitive and yet elusive to grasp. In the case of developmental psychology, the so-called “narrative turn” has in recent decades become mainstream within the field, even as its most prominent figures have primarily focused upon research over and against any attempts at a comprehensive theory of narrative development. Katherine Nelson’s *Young Minds in Social Worlds* (2007) is a notable exception.² In it she brings her own research, along with that of her peers, into conversation with the sweeping evolutionary psychological theory of Merlin Donald,³ whose own work offers a resilient defense of the human consciousness—and by extension, the capacity for imagination—within evolutionary neuroscience.⁴ In exploring both researchers’

¹ See Stephen Crites, “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39/3, 291–311; republished in Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 65–88.

² Katherine Nelson, *Young Minds in Social Worlds: Experience, Meaning and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2007). Nelson describes the primary goal of her book as “the need to put *development* back into developmental psychology, where it has slipped away from much of the theorizing and empirical research of the field...” (*Young Minds*, 11, emphasis in text). She goes on to demonstrate the importance of narrative to her proposed developmental model.

³ As portrayed first in Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1991), and later refined and expanded in Donald, *A Mind So Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness* (New York: Norton, 2002).

⁴ Many if not most neuroscientists tend to reduce brain studies to the finding of the regions of the brain that are responsible for specific functions (Donald, *Origins*, 361-363). This is elsewhere referred to as the localizationist

theories, the hope of the following pages is that doing so will yield insight into the so-called “narrativity” of life (the locus of human creativity) and what role it plays in human becoming.

I. Gaining a Hybrid Mind: The Evolution/Development of the Creative Consciousness

Donald utilizes a historical, evolutionary lens in order to approach the depths of human consciousness in ways that cannot be measured in laboratories. Such an approach is not only more in-line with well-established evolutionary biological processes than his reductionist counterparts;⁵ it also takes more seriously the inherently social and cultural character of human nature. Donald goes so far as to say that “our brains coevolved with culture and are specifically adapted for living in culture...”⁶ and that culture, the creative product of consciousness, in turn actually shapes brain structures.⁷ He thus describes brains dialectically, the “hybrid products of a brain-culture symbiosis.”⁸ This ongoing dialectic is the very means by which humans have biologically evolved, a claim Donald supports with both archaeological and neurological evidence. Human evolution, he attempts to demonstrate, has always depended upon humankind’s ever-emergent creativity.⁹

Donald paints a picture of the human “hybrid mind,” that has undergone three major transitional phases within its evolutionary history. In each transition a new form of consciousness emerges, along with corresponding cognitive structural changes, as well as changes in social sharing and cultural outputs:

- The first transition, from *Episodic* to *Mimetic Culture* (between two million to 400 thousand years ago) marks the evolution from primate self-awareness and momentary event perception, to early hominid capacities for pre-linguistic, pre-symbolic social structures: mime, play, simple games, gesture, toolmaking, etc.¹⁰ The self-awareness necessary to mimic others, and to consciously rehearse and model skills via audial and bodily expressions, is what makes these new forms of interaction and cultural expression possible;¹¹ it marks the beginning of non-sensation-dependent forms of memory, as well as the *possibility for genuine creativity*.¹²

view of the brain, see e.g. Sophie A. de Beaune, “Technical Invention in the Palaeolithic: What If the Explanation Comes From the Cognitive and Neuropsychological Sciences?” in *Cognitive Archaeology and Human Evolution*, Sophie A. de Beaune, Frederick L Coolidge, and Thomas Wynn, eds. (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 2009), 10-11. Some go so far as to undermine, or dismiss altogether, the notion of a consciousness, as an illusory vestige of Cartesian dualism, an unnecessary complication of sensory-based human cognition (Donald calls these “hardliners”; see *A Mind So Rare*, 7, 28-45).

⁵ Donald, *Origins*, 5.

⁶ As quoted in Nelson, *Young Minds*, 237.

⁷ Donald, *Origins*, 11.

⁸ As quoted in Nelson, *Young Minds*, 267.

⁹ It must be noted here that from a social-constructivist view, there is hardly any distinction between “imagination” and “creativity,” except to emphasize the internal aspects of the process with the former, whereas the latter term incorporates both the internal and external ends of the inseparable dialectic. The next section illuminates this near-equivalency further, by defining narrativity in terms of *mimesis-poesis*.

¹⁰ Donald, *A Mind so Rare*, 260; *Origins*, 193; see 198.

¹¹ Donald, *Origins*, 174.

¹² Neurologically speaking, there is evidence for a pre-linguistic “central mimetic controller” woven into the brain that integrates various thoughts, movements, feelings, etc. (Donald, *Origins*, 186.) Such activities are difficult to uncritically pin down to a specific brain region, see Donald, *Origins*, 186-196.

- The second transition, from *Mimetic* to *Mythic Culture* (between half a million years ago to the present) denotes how hominid mimetic event representation evolved into the uniquely human capacity for symbolic representation, enabling the onset of linguistic ability and the consequent arising of *narrative thought*, as well as new oral/bodily forms of creative cultural expression: languages, oral tradition, ritual, social myth sharing, etc.¹³ Language, present in every culture, developed through social interactions, collective creative efforts towards discourse and symbols that would enable the construction and sharing of worlds that served to explain reality and make meaning out of life—i.e., myths.¹⁴
- The third transition from *Mythic* to *Theoretic Culture* (from the emergence of external symbols forty thousand years ago to the present)¹⁵ is unique in that the structural shift is from internal to external symbolic memory storage—pictures, pictographs, written language, etc.¹⁶ These cultural forms enable new external networks of personal and social memory to supplement biological memory, and the composition of narratives with even greater permanence and transferability between contexts than oral stories. It also led to the arrival of analytic and theoretical forms, such as arguments, taxonomies, verification systems, logic, measurement, etc., the culmination of all these being the employ of integrative *theories*, systems of thought with explanatory power.¹⁷

The evolution of the human's prefrontal cortex through evolution, known as “encephalization,”¹⁸ was therefore the process of the first two transitional shifts; these three layers (supplemented by a fourth, mostly external “layer”) together constitute Donald's hybrid mind, a “mosaic structure of cognitive vestiges from earlier stages of human emergence.”¹⁹

¹³ Donald, *A Mind so Rare*, 260

¹⁴ Donald, *Origins*, 213-216. Coordinated advancements in speech, auditory, and memory point to a “linguistic controller” system that integrates these mental structures (Donald, *Origins*, 259; see 236-267). Other researchers have suggested a link between the onset of ritualistic group behaviors and shared experiences, along with a sense of the spiritual, with an increased capacity for keeping attention and the advancement of working memory; see e.g. Matt J. Rossano, “The Archaeology of Consciousness,” in *Cognitive Archaeology and Human Evolution*, 30-34. Note that ritual is a cognitive and social advancement beyond rehearsal activities, that naturally involves mythologizing and other forms of story-telling.

¹⁵ Donald, *Origins*, 276.

¹⁶ Donald, *Origins*, 273.

¹⁷ Donald, *Origins*, 273-274. These externalizations have had effects upon the modern human mind, namely in terms of how learning has become increasingly visual and literacy-based (since the written word became more ubiquitous in Western culture) and how memories are developed and stored as it works with “external symbolic storage” networks (see *Origins*, 312-314; 331). Yet while modern thought cannot be understood apart from this mind-culture interaction, these are not structural changes upon the mind, in the sense of a new cortical layer (the external quality of theoretic culture making such a layer unnecessary). It is philosophically, and even ethically, important that the culmination of the evolution of humanity-as-such is understood to be the mind's capacity to explain the world and to share meanings with one another, and not in its capacity to theorize and systematize, or to read and write.

¹⁸ Donald, *Origins*, 7. Cognitive archaeological research suggests that the evolutionary growth of the prefrontal cortex was correlated with increased analogical capacity and creativity, and that this in turn led to an increase in the capacities of the human memory; see de Beaune, “Technical Invention in the Palaeolithic,” 6-7; 12-14.

¹⁹ Donald, *Origins*, 2; see 355-356.

Ancient layers continue to exist, and they enable new layers, even as these new layers incorporate earlier-gained capacities into higher-order functions.²⁰ It is this notion of “hybrid mind” that Katherine Nelson finds particularly concurrent with her narrative-centered, socioculturally-constructive views on human development.²¹ Moreover she notes the striking resemblance between Donald’s proposed evolutionary process and the developmental patterns of early childhood. Thus Nelson was inspired to craft and research her own comprehensive theory of the emergence of consciousness, by which the hybrid mind is shown to develop according to a process that (as Nelson puts it) “weakly” recapitulates human evolution:²²

- The first two levels of consciousness in development, *basic awareness* and *social*, correspond to the pre-mimetic, episodic culture in Donald that reaches its evolutionary peak in primates. Here the roots of social interactions are formed, eventually reaching a peak moment around the middle to late first year of life, when three-way interactions (between self, other, and object) and shared forms of attention become possible.²³
- This shared attention enables the movement towards a third level, *cognitive* consciousness, marked by the onset of more intentional mimetic learning (like Donald), rehearsal activities that become the primary way the late infant/early toddler discovers the world.²⁴ Such repetition and rehearsal in turn enables the advancement in functional cognitive memory,²⁵ which allows early toddlers to form simple mimetic games, learn songs, and anticipate sequences of behavior routines. As the child thusly develops an inchoate sense of time, she or he learns to locate oneself within these “scripts,” leading to a fourth level of *reflective* consciousness. Self-reference and

²⁰ This echoes Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory; see *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1994). The main difference is that in Kegan, prior “orders” of consciousness are subsumed by the newest, most advanced order (like many “stage theories” in development), whereas here the layers of consciousness continue to exist in their more primitive shapes, and the mind can consequently be imagined as working along various trajectories simultaneously.

²¹ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 23-24. Donald and Nelson’s dialectical and practical approach to development corresponds more so with social constructivist approaches à la Vygotsky, who viewed development as the two-sided process of externalization and internalization, than with Piaget (see Nelson, *Young Minds*, 51-53). Yet Nelson seeks to bring such a social-constructivist view into a kind of synthesis with neurologically-focused, “modular” views, and with recent attempts at an emerging theory of infant development (e.g. dynamic systems theory; see *Young Minds*, 82-84). She thus primarily situates her work in conversation with neo-Vygotskian “biocultural” approaches to developmental psychology, along with others, e.g., the comparative psychological approach of Tomasello (1999) that sought to describe the cultural origins of cognition (Nelson, *Young Minds*, 53-57).

²² Nelson briefly recalls the embattled history of such “recapitulation” hypothesis in psychology, beginning with G. Stanley Hall (1904) and others, noting how thoroughly such theories were debunked by the mid-to-late 20th century. The notion of a “hybrid mind,” however, re-opens the door for a way to attempt to view this interconnection that many have intuited, as in it the developmental process can be viewed as overlapping and operating within multiple consciousness-levels simultaneously. Therefore Nelson can claim that an evolutionary pattern is evident in development without attempting to draw a strict parallel with evolution (Nelson, *Young Minds*, 48-50). This asymmetrical symmetry is in part why (as the reader should note) the bullet points below do not directly correspond to the prior three points regarding Donald.

²³ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 85. The social consciousness Nelson describes, when compared to Donald, would fall somewhere between a purely episodic and a more intentionally mimetic mode of consciousness. See n. 22.

²⁴ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 85-86.

²⁵ Here marks the beginning of explicit forms of memory, although such memories remain relatively short and require proximity to experience (see Nelson, *Young Minds*, 89).

representation here becomes more established, enacted scripts and scenes of action become more sophisticated and elaborate, and social awareness increases. Scripts and play, says Nelson, evince the ways that information is being stored—²⁶ i.e., according to experiences and repeated representations, linked together in temporal sequences. This expansion of “temporal capacity” (from momentary, proximate events to longer, more durable sequences) marks successive advancements in memory, and in turn, the rudimentary *imagination*,²⁷ since now events, objects, etc., can be intentionally represented in new circumstances.

- Even as oral language skills begin to emerge in the prior levels,²⁸ in Nelson’s view the full representational powers of language begin to materialize for the late toddler/young child, in the form of a budding *narrative* consciousness (akin to Donald’s mythic mind). Language mastery enables a child to begin making explicit reference to both the experienced physical world and its more abstract relations.²⁹ The child makes advances in “temporal” and “casual coherence,”³⁰ which are noted by the increased ability at this age (typically between three and five) to follow and tell stories and myths, to report activities, to plan for events, and to enter into dramatic, creative forms of social play.³¹ A sense of the self-in-time, via autobiographical memory, takes shape through these activities.³² This consciousness-form culminates with the so-called “inner narrator,” i.e., the ability to think in language—as well as, notably, with the ability to *imaginatively elaborate* upon the contents of memory.³³ Narrative consciousness is what paves the way for the child to enter into a *cultural* consciousness and into the wider public discourse Nelson calls (echoing Donald) the “community of minds.”³⁴ Herein lies the aim of Nelson’s book: to locate the roots of cultural awareness in the narrative identity development of early childhood, by which hybrid minds come to meaningfully and creatively participate in social-cultural life.³⁵

²⁶ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 89.

²⁷ Central to Nelson’s view of memory is that “the basic function of memory is preparation and support for future action” (Nelson, *Young Minds*, 89), a dialectic negotiated by the consciousness—yet she notes that children at this age cannot yet transfer meanings and objects into new scripts, and have a limited sense of past which in turn limits their view of the future (*Young Minds*, 114-115). Representations are still limited to proximate contexts, the imaginative consciousness’ primary task being the ongoing expansion and integration of scripts and roles within social settings. This prepares the mind for the imaginative capacities that will come with the onset of narrative memory and consciousness.

²⁸ In Donald, mimetic culture enabled language; in Nelson, *pace* most developmental assumptions that root development in language (including herself) she prioritizes mimetic (i.e., social, relational) cognition, even as “oral language is slowly working its way into prominence in the becoming narrative period to follow” (Nelson, *Young Minds*, 88). Yet see also n. 22.

²⁹ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 151-152.

³⁰ These terms are attributed to Tillman Habermas and Susan Bluck; see “Getting a Life: The Emergence of the Life-Story in Adolescence,” *Psychological Bulletin* 126, 748-769. See Nelson, *Young Minds*, 154-157.

³¹ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 149-153; see 177-178.

³² Nelson, *Young Minds*, 184.

³³ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 206.

³⁴ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 210.

³⁵ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 237-238. While Nelson herself does not discuss this, it is this sense of cultural participation that continues to evolve and shape one’s sense of self, thereby enabling various forms of theoretic (meta-narrative) consciousness to emerge and make imaginative social-cultural contributions. This is the fundamental shape of adult learning/development, which continues throughout life.

II. *Mimesis-Poesis: The Narrational Shape of Consciousness Development*

Donald and Nelson's combined perspectives yield three insights into how narrative serves as a hermeneutical key for understanding human consciousness, identity, and development. First, *narrative consciousness epitomizes human meaning-making*. For Donald, the evolution of mythic (narrative) culture corresponds with the arrival of *homo sapiens*, as the foremost mark of distinction from their hominid ancestors. Nelson highlights the role narrative consciousness plays in opening up the doors of society and culture to children, allowing them to participate and create within it.³⁶ Second, the advancement in evolution and development alike from mimetic rehearsal to narrative exchange, from a social constructivist view, appears to be a cognitive-cultural move from a lower (i.e., imitative) to a higher (i.e., creative) kind of imagination at work. This at least suggests that *imagination*, made manifest within an ongoing and productive sociocultural dialectic, *is the very means by which human meaning-making develops*. The lifelong, ever-evolving capacity for creativity can even be referred to as the *narrativity* of the mind, the expression of the inborn, pre-linguistic drive to narrate our lives.³⁷

Third, the brain possesses an inherent *indivisibility and integration across modes of consciousness, a unity that narratives in particular seem to demonstrate, and even reinforce*. In a complex "hybrid mind," multiple systems of meaning-making exist simultaneously.³⁸ Evolutionarily and structurally speaking, vestigial brain systems continue to exist and exert influence—particularly the "episodic mind" as Donald called it, viewed structurally as the modern human brain's emotional and reactive functions that are largely centered within the limbic system.³⁹ Yet research shows the dramatic extent to which the cerebral cortex, the supposed center of human cognition,⁴⁰ also becomes activated in various ways by even the basest of emotions. Per Valerie Hardcastle, this suggests a two-way interrelationship between the hindbrain with which we are born, and the forebrain that continues to evolve in a sociocultural dialectic throughout life.⁴¹ Narratives seem to both uncover and enhance this inherent emotion-

³⁶ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 212; see 172-178.

³⁷ Jerome Bruner and many others have made similar claims regarding narrativity over the years. Per Bruner, "Narrative structure is even inherent in the praxis of social interaction before it achieves linguistic expression... [I]t is a 'push' to construct narrative that determines the order of priority in which grammatical forms are mastered by the young child." Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1990), 77. Donald and Nelson's theories echo this statement, as the mimetic mind and children's rehearsal activities are portrayed as both pre-linguistic and pre-narrative (as in, they provide the scripts that form the basis for narratives).

³⁸ Nelson, *Young Minds*, 23-24. Selfhood is a mixture of both conscious and unconscious processes, per Valerie Hardcastle, in *Constructing the Self* (Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2008), 106. Note also Donald's thesis that the "hybridity" of the mind is made manifest in its "external" as well as its "internal" components, i.e., the sociocultural web of symbols and relations, in dynamic interrelationship with the brain, respectively.

³⁹ See Hardcastle, *Constructing the Self*, 76-78.

⁴⁰ Recall that mimetic, mythic, and theoretic forms of mind-culture are the three transitional phases of encephalization, the evolution of the cortex, that is recapitulated (in an analogous way) in development. Mimetic and mythic systems dominate the cortex, each integrated within themselves via their central controlling mechanisms (Donald, *Origins*, 263-264; see 186-196; 261-267). The theoretic system involves what Donald calls the sociocultural networks of "external symbolic storage" that link up with biological memory systems (see Donald, *Origins*, 308-314).

⁴¹ See Hardcastle, *Constructing the Self*, 78-82. Human frontal lobes are intricately interconnected with the thalamus, hypothalamus, and other parts of the limbic system. "Indeed, evolutionarily speaking, it appears that the cortex is really just overgrown hypothalamic tissue" (*Constructing the Self*, 57). Hardcastle thus hypothesizes, based

cognition interconnection: Psychoanalysts and narrative therapists have long demonstrated how stories help people connect (or re-connect) to deep feelings, thoughts, and memories that cannot otherwise be cognized or put to words. Hardcastle reviews narrative psychologists' research showing the high level of importance of narrative sharing for the identity development of children, emphasizing that story-sharing is our natural "way of caring about ourselves and others. It is a way of *integrating and consolidating our affective reactions to the events around us*, a way of making our life events meaningful, to us and to others."⁴²

In light of this review, the primary suggestion of this paper is that the human consciousness, through the course of evolutionary history and of human development alike, appears to have a decidedly narrational shape throughout. Narrative consciousness marks a certain crescendo in imagination's power and plays a pivotal role in a person's identity-formation, but it remains only one layer within a multilayered consciousness. Yet there is also what can be rightly called the *narrativity of the consciousness*, which cuts across the entire consciousness spectrum, and is the driving force behind the development of each layer. The concept of narrativity offers a way to better understand the lifelong quest to make sense out of lived existence, the uniquely human lifelong pursuit to make life "object," in the sense that Robert Kegan uses the term.⁴³ As Hardcastle emphasizes, this is not just a quest to simply understand oneself or the world, but to actually creatively foster one's interrelatedness within it. Every person naturally seeks to nurture one's own sense of agency, one's sense of belonging in community;⁴⁴ every person eventually attempts to locate oneself in the world and in time, and ultimately, to imaginatively anticipate the future and to act according to a sense of purpose. Every achievement of human culture, as well as that of the developing child (and the ongoing evolution of the learning adult), can be traced back to these longings,⁴⁵ summarized by the great existential question "Who am I?" that can only be answered (even if partially and incompletely) through stories. It is in this narrativity of the

on research and anecdotal evidence, that the "battle" in neuroscience between "cognitive appraisal-like theories" that emphasize cognitive-affective unity, and "basic emotion reductive theorists" who prioritize brain localization and physiological responses is a false one. That is, humans have hard-wired emotional responses, *and* emotions can mature and evolve (and take on culturally-specific and personal flavors) over time; these are not mutually exclusive realities (*Constructing the Self*, 83-84; see also de Beaune, "Technical Invention in the Palaeolithic, 12-13).

⁴² Hardcastle, *Constructing the Self*, 62-63 (emphasis added). This view is supported by one of the most comprehensive works on the subject of neurological emotional development, Allen Schore's *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994). Schore demonstrates how emotional regulation (i.e., an infant/toddler's ability to manage the continuous onslaught of sensory-emotional data) is a product of "the experience-dependent development of the corticolimbic system" (66), a neural network interconnecting the forebrain and hindbrain.

⁴³ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 32-33.

⁴⁴ David Bakan described these first two as the twin yearnings for communion and agency which constitute "the duality of human experience"; see *The Duality of Human Experience* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966). As Robert Kegan elaborates, these are "the yearning to be included, to be a part of, close to, joined with, to be held, admitted, accompanied" and "the yearning...to experience one's distinctness, the self-chosenness of one's directions, one's individual integrity." Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982), 107.

⁴⁵ I summarize these longings as agency, communion (following Bakan; see n.44), spatiotemporal location, and purpose. In the first chapter of my forthcoming dissertation (its main title: *Making Disciples, Constructing Selves*) I argue that these four dimensions all imply questions that are demonstrably narrational in nature, and further, all four play identifiable roles in the social-dialectical meaning-making that drives human learning and development from the start. Therefore they imply a "narrativity" endemic to development, which is driven by the search for meaning.

consciousness, moreover, that the imaginative-creative capacities of humans are located. Imagination is a fundamental quality of human identity.

The inherent mystery of the consciousness remains.⁴⁶ We can, however, continue to press further into understanding the narrativity of consciousness, as that which makes humans creators of culture, who are created by culture. A recently-published article,⁴⁷ first written over two years ago, marked one of my first overt attempts to explore the nature of human narrativity, by beginning with Paul Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutics and his approach to narrative identity, and then correlating it with the constructive developmental theory of Kegan. By way of concluding this present excursion into the consciousness, Ricoeur once again becomes helpful for viewing more precisely *how* all human consciousness has a narrational shape.

Every act of meaning-making for Ricoeur involves what Aristotle called *mimesis praxeos*, the *creative imitation of action*.⁴⁸ Note the difference in the definition of *mimesis* as opposed to Donald: For Ricoeur *every* act of imitation is inherently a *poesis*, an act of creativity. There is no "pure" imagination or novelty apart from any historical or social influence,⁴⁹ as any social constructivist would concur. But neither is there any "pure" imitation apart from some form of creative interpretation—either in the form of what Ricoeur calls a *configuration*, where past and present elements are re-presented in novel ways and in novel contexts, or of a *refiguration*, where such a re-presentation intersects with the lived experience of an observer or listener and thus exerts its own influence within the cultural consciousness.⁵⁰ I therefore use the hyphenated term *mimesis-poesis*⁵¹ to capture Ricoeur's intention, so as to prevent confusion regarding the word *mimesis*, and also to emphasize *the simultaneous and singular presence of both imagination and imitation in every act of social meaning-making*.

Neurologically speaking, *mimesis-poesis* corresponds with the insight of Hofstadter and Sander that every act of human meaning-making is essentially *analogical*, and that "what we typically call 'flexibility' or 'creativity' is the human faculty of extending categories and making

⁴⁶ Metabolic imaging demonstrates that consciousness is related to (if not directly correlated with) the electric impulses of the brain, and that this mental activity (prompted by social-cultural stimuli and the senses) has definitive material effects upon grey matter—as Donald describes it, like a computer that, in the course of being used, adjusts itself by rewriting its own hardware. But as he goes on to say, "brain activity is the end of the line" (Donald, *A Mind so Rare*, 177-178); consciousness *itself* can never be directly observed by science.

⁴⁷ Joshua Lunde-Whitler, "Paul Ricoeur and Robert Kegan in Unlikely Dialogue: Towards a 'Narrative-Developmental' Approach to Human Identity and Its Value for Christian Religious Education." *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 19/1, 2015, 1-25.

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), 34; 45.

⁴⁹ "The work of the imagination does not come from nowhere." Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 25.

⁵⁰ These are the two key moves within Ricoeur's threefold narrative hermeneutic (a "triple mimesis"); for a detailed explanation of the entire process see Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, 45-51; 52-87.

⁵¹ Typically *mimesis* is related to *praxis*, and *muthos* to *poesis*—but Ricoeur's intention, in *Time and Narrative* in particular, is to demonstrate the interrelatedness of these two sets: Every imitation of action has a creative element to it; every myth or story must have demonstrable reference to lived experience. History and fiction, says Ricoeur, are therefore neither equated with each other (*a la* Hayden White) or wholly separated (as implied by Alasdair MacIntyre); see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 158-159. Rather they are two ends of a continuum, their interrelationship indicating the narrational character of meaning-making by which time is humanized (see *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, 77-82).

leaps between them.”⁵² Sophie A. de Beaune similarly views analogical reasoning as a primary clue to the emergence of human/hominid forms of cognition and memory in evolution.⁵³ But the term “analogy,” or the related “metaphor,”⁵⁴ does not capture *the inherently historical and temporal* aspect of the memory, nor the *emotional* contents that are so pivotal to memory’s durability and influence upon cognition, both of which are dimensions of human meaning-making-as-narrativity. Analogical “leaps” are made using symbols and concepts, precisely *because* of those symbols and concepts’ varying degrees of reference to lived and/or narrated experience encoded in memory; in other words, analogies are analogies only to the extent that they draw upon one’s life-stories, and/or the emotions that undergird them.⁵⁵ The most powerful analogic symbols have a metonymic quality to them, by which they open up a lived or remembered story or stories, as an interruption of consciousness—leading to either a more “mimetic” re-treading of the past (e.g. reliving a trauma), or a powerful, more “poetic” interweaving of past and present that shines light upon the future (e.g. how Metz conceived the “dangerous memories” of Judeo-Christian faith as opening up eschatological hope).⁵⁶

III. Imagination in Narrativational-Development: An Overview and a Suggestion

There is far more to say here than space permits. Yet by way of a conclusion I suggest that it is this narrativational, mimetic-poetic imagination that not only activates the consciousness but also stretches it beyond its presumed temporal limits, and is therefore the means by which narrative identity develops throughout the lifespan. Momentary sensations and base emotions (episodic consciousness) gain meaning first from highly mimetic, and then increasingly poetic, social cues from caregivers, which form the basis for pre-linguistic proto-conversations. These open up the opportunity for shared attention and the imitation of named/remembered objects, people, events, etc.; as these elemental interpretants (Peirce) are practiced and therefore remembered within lived contexts, they begin to imitate their order, placement, and temporal sequence as experienced, via rehearsal activities and re-enactments of scripts (i.e., mimetic consciousness). As these become more imaginative, the memory of a script becoming strong enough so as to make it object or import it into new contexts, a child now aided by language begins to inchoately discern, and then imitate, things such as style, form for beginnings and ends, temporal/causal organization, and narrativational evaluation.⁵⁷ These are socially-learned cues that help to tie a litany

⁵² Hofstadter, Douglas and Sander, Emmanuel. *Surfaces and Essences: Analogy as the Fuel and Fire of Thinking* (New York: BasicBooks, 2013), 186.

⁵³ de Beaune, “Technical Invention in the Palaeolithic,” 6-10.

⁵⁴ Ricoeur in his earlier works discusses symbol and metaphor; e.g. *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (Toronto: University Press, 1977). In the preface of his subsequent *Time and Narrative* (Vol. 1., ix-xi), he explains how metaphor and narrative are bound up with each other to the extent that both constitute “one vast poetic sphere” (xi). From my narrativational-developmental view, I suggest metaphorical language to be a pre-narrative form of mimetic-poetic meaning-making, that either works with narrative or tries to dive beneath the narrative consciousness to evoke pre-narrative emotions and senses (e.g. as in poetry).

⁵⁵ That is, the storied quality of human meaning and memory precedes the symbolic (corresponding with Donald), not the other way around where symbols and concepts are viewed as the building-blocks of narratives (à la Piaget and implicit in much of cognitive psychological theory and research).

⁵⁶ Metz, Johann Baptist. *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. ed. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad / Herder & Herder, 2007), 169.

⁵⁷ William Labov’s view of narrative and consequent research emphasizes the importance of these elements, most famously evaluation, in acts of life-narration; see e.g. *The Language of Life and Death: The Transformation of Experience in Oral Narrative* (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 2013), 5; see 5-7.

of sundry (cognitive, emotional, social-cultural) meanings into a whole, a plot-unit that can be both shared and remembered. Such ever-evolving stories form the prefigured (Ricoeur) web of historical and fictive meanings by which one can imaginatively, as Richard Kearney says, “recreate worlds as possible worlds,”⁵⁸ thereby amplifying or refining lived narrative meanings, or launching those meanings towards new, future trajectories.

In other words, consciousness evolves in pre-narrative, proto-narrative, and narrative ways, all of which build upon each other, all of which continue to exist independently of the others throughout life, and all of which evolve in a narrational (mimetic-poetic) way, indicating the innate human drive to tell stories and thus to make meaning out of life. And while it is not the focus of this paper, this so-called “narrational-developmental” process also applies to adolescent and adult development, to the ongoing quest of becoming the narrator of one’s own life (as articulated in the work of Dan McAdams et al.), as well as to that of contending with and negotiating between the “polyphonic” (M. Bakhtin) narratives of mind-culture. That is, consciousness is also “meta-narrative” and “trans-narrative” (corresponding in part with Donald’s theoretic culture, the mind intertwined with external memory fields).⁵⁹ Thus human creativity, as narrativity, can be viewed as the basic unit of evolution and of lifelong development alike.

To simply offer one among many possible points of practical reflection here for religious educators: The claim of Maria Harris that imagination is at the heart of religious education⁶⁰ is modified here, to suggest that the nurture of narrativity, the innate drive to mimetically-poetically narrate life and give meaning to lived existence, is at the heart of what it educate in faith.⁶¹ Dialogical story-sharing epitomizes this, where the so-called dangerous narratives (Metz) of the faith tradition are recalled, which then mimetically-poetically elicit new personal stories, that consequently mimetically-poetically elaborate and expand upon each other in continual reference to faith-stories. Many helpful pedagogical models in religious education suggest this basic “story-sharing” way of being,⁶² but it must be remembered that there is ultimately an inherent irreducibility to the mimetic-poetic imagination within every individual person. No model or curriculum will fit the pedagogical/developmental needs of every person at every moment. Yet story-sharing serves as a good place for educators to start, as the narrative consciousness, the apex of human meaning-making as Donald and Nelson suggest, serves as a conduit to the rest of the hybrid mind, in its various pre-narrative and meta-narrative forms. The goal for religious educators, then, is to encourage kinds of story-sharing (about faith and life) that offers multiple entry points for the imagination, and then to foster the telling of new life-

⁵⁸ Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 131-132.

⁵⁹ In the aforementioned “Ricoeur and Kegan in Unlikely Dialogue” (n.47), I suggest such consciousness layers (summarized as proto-narrative, narrative, and meta-narrative) as a re-interpretation of Kegan’s orders of consciousness; the five consciousness-modes presented here (pre-narrative, proto-narrative, narrative, meta-narrative, trans-narrative) even more closely resemble Kegan (see *In Over Our Heads*, 314-315; Fig. 9.1).

⁶⁰ Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 6.

⁶¹ James Loder spoke of this as the “inner logic” to the human spirit, “its creative drive to construct coherence and remain open to ultimacy, its irrepressible self-transcendence and transformational potential, its revulsion at confusion and its discovery of order in chaos...” Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 9-10.

⁶² E.g., Thomas Groome’s shared praxis model, specifically its second, third, and fourth movements (see *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 188-197; 211-220.

stories that display some sort of life-giving mimetic-poetic move, drawing upon either pre-narrative or meta-narrative meanings. Future research and reflection will be necessary to elaborate upon this claim further.

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Making Good of What is Hidden in Plain Sight: Sebald's *Austerlitz*

Abstract: W. G. Sebald's approach to the Holocaust in *Austerlitz* leads the reader to realize what is hidden in plain sight. Jesus is also a paradigm educator of the obvious. These examples show that imagination becomes possible within a framework of meaning. I consider examples of widespread denial of reality (Shoah, James Cone) to show that imagination can serve to make features of reality freshly visible, linking the possibility of truth to the pursuit of justice. The paper reinforces indirect, parabolic, and round-about religious education that can be effective in postmodern conditions. Educators can appeal to learners' imagination to help learners bring what is hidden but obvious to consciousness.

Sebald's Loaded Tour

The academic and author W. G. Sebald left his native Germany for a teaching assistantship in England in 1966. He claimed that he took up self-imposed exile to protest the pervasive unwillingness of his country to reckon with its Nazi past. Two decades later, a successful academic career underway, he began also to publish a striking type of autobiographical documentary fiction in which readers are invited to overhear a witness about a sojourn, both geographic and psychological.

Sebald's 2001 novel *Austerlitz* is the last novel before his death in an automobile accident. In light of his protest against German surreality, it is also his magnum opus. *Austerlitz* concerns an architectural historian of the same name who arrives at full awareness of the abuse and murder of his Jewish parents at Nazi hands. The protagonist came to Britain as a four-year-old. His parents placed him on a children's evacuation train from Prague to England in 1939. But his early childhood memories are lost or repressed.

The young *Austerlitz* excels at school and launches into an academic career in architectural history. When the Sebald-like narrator begins to hear his story, *Austerlitz* the character is engaged in a synthesis of architectural history so massive that it seems unlikely ever to be completed. So the narrator happens on the protagonist in European cities, making notes and taking pictures of their landmark railway stations, fortresses, spas and national archives.

The reader must learn to read the book. Pages are given to technical expositions of fortresses whose technology had been superseded even as they were completed and whose defensive capability proved to be zero. Or the reader overhears the historian describing Liverpool Street rail and tube station in London. Its platforms are many meters below its concourse. An archeologist tells *Austerlitz* that excavating a nearby taxi rank turned up an ancient cemetery

where, from pressure of an increasing population, not fewer than seven or eight skeletons per cubic meter were found. Liverpool Street station was built on top of centuries of human activity. Sebald's message is that reality is covered in concrete. Europe constructed a new reality, like Leopold II constructed Antwerp railway station. Modelled on the highest expressions of European architecture, the cathedral-like station was intended to affirm the glory of turn-of-the-century Belgium. The narrator points out its Pantheon-like statues of modern gods like Commerce and Industry, plus a verdigris-covered statue of a negro boy. In elliptical fashion Sebald thus leads the reader to see the station as unintentional monument to Leopold's late-Victorian era Congo genocide, known now mainly through Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899) or Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost* (1998). The massive Bibliotheque Nationale de France turns out to have been built on the site of the Austerlitz (again) warehouse repository where, in the early 1940s, confiscated Jewish belongings were elaborately catalogued and which comprised a macabre shopping centre for Nazi officers. Public buildings dominating Europe appear like so much fascist architecture. Architecture is as much to hide as to reveal. The book obliges readers to fill in the blanks. In so doing they realize the significance of apparently bald description.

A picaresque journey to European architectural landmarks becomes a voyage into a sort of silent Dantean Inferno where not people in torment but architecture is forced to tell the tale of woe. The fortress that young Austerlitz erected against the knowledge of his parents' end crumbles. Sebald encapsulates the horrific history of twentieth-century Europe in one individual, a history that cannot be seen straight on. Austerlitz is every European, perhaps every member of a Western society. As readers participate to understand, they join the protagonist's Gothic journey to uncover what of ultimate significance he -- and they -- repress.¹

Jesus, Shocker

The New Testament witness about Jesus is a teacher whose pedagogy also challenges unreal understandings of the world. An example is at Matthew 16:2-3:

When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.
(NRSV)

Jesus' saying depends less on an understanding of nature than a process in time. The vivid sky gives an unmistakable clue to approaching weather. Possibly one might be able to read the way human affairs should be from an orderly creation; certainly the thought is present in Psalm 19, touchstone of natural theology: "The heavens are declaring the glory of God." However, the

¹ W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2014).

thought in Matthew 16:2-3 is that the social or historical situation speaks as loudly and clearly as a red sky, but humans resist uncomfortable truths.

Jesus' anthropology is in a direct line from the prophets. Especially in Jeremiah the word translated as "imagination" (transliterated *shriyruwth*) is negative. The prophet connotes plans and intentions that resist God's ways.² Perhaps the controlling verse is Genesis 6:5 where the writer reports that God saw that "every inclination (*yēšer*) of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually." The word is cognate with the word for forming humans in Genesis 2:7; thus the writer implies at 6:5 that not an originally good human being but those twisted by wrongly acquiring the knowledge of good and evil practice perverted forming.³ The Hebrew Bible frequently links the words with heart (*lev*) meaning the seat of human personality, including will and thought.⁴ The biblical anthropology identifies a human tendency to dress up or redefine sin. Jesus takes a prophetic understanding of human nature for granted when he says, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him" (Mt 7:11, NRSV).

Jesus' anthropology leads to definite pedagogical implications that are visible in the Gospels. In light of his anthropology, no wonder that Jesus' hallmark technique is "slant": the parable. Parables are introduced in Matthew's gospel precisely because they will be veiled to those unwilling to consider any alternative to the status quo. Walter Wink, Jack Sammons, Robert Farrar Capon, and others help one see Jesus' teaching as challenging denials of plain reality. Wink's article, "The Education of the Apostles: Mark's View of Human Transformation," zooms in on the structure of Mark 6-8. Wink shows that Jesus repeats situations to emphasize to chosen followers that his identity demands a response. The gospel writer thus reproduces a way to overcome (reader) resistance to the claim that Jesus is Lord. Sammons's article on parables makes plain that they implicate readers morally. Jesus' stories are not mere Kohlbergian moral dilemmas, to be resolved intellectually as ethical puzzles. Rather, one must make a decision; one must position oneself in relation to the parabolic situation. The parable is thus a language event. Parables are also able to undercut resistance by involving hearers existentially and personally. Capon similarly underlines the paradoxical, upside-down nature of Jesus' Kingdom and its *modus operandi*. Here any who believe they know may well be last to come to true comprehension.⁵

² H. W. F. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 850 translates the word as hardness.

³ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1996), 184.

⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1-15* (Waco Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 144 see Gen 11:6, Deu 29:19, 30:18, 31:21; 1 Chr 28:9; Jer 3:17, 7:24, 9:14, 11:8, 13:10, 16:12; Psa 2:1; Prov 4:23.

⁵ Walter Wink, "The Education of the Apostles: Mark's View of Human Transformation," *Religious Education* 83, no. 2 (1988): 277-90; Jack Sammons, "Parables and Pedagogy," in *Gladly Learn, Gladly Teach: Living Out One's Calling in the Twenty-First Century Academy*, ed. J. M. Dunaway (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2005), 46-66; Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1985).

All of the above cohere with the bleak anthropology of Romans chapter 1. The apostle urges that a knowledge blockage gives rise to a full range of evils. Human beings systematically “hold under” knowledge of God's sovereignty and justice. A close reading of Romans 1 indicates that, as with Matt 16:2-3, not so much is the knowledge of physical reality as of social developments or the pattern of history.⁶ Old and New Testaments see human depravity as blinding. The solution is its call for transformation, change of heart and mind, a *metanoia* from orientation to self to openness to God. Being willing to see what is hidden in plain sight opens up reconciliation with God for forgiveness and freedom.

What is imagination?

The examples above -- Sebald and Jesus -- show that imagination often if not always depends on an inescapable framework of meaning. Perhaps all human knowing calls for an “act of ... creativity and imagination,” as Roger Shinn observed. Since

the mind is part of, sometimes the servant of, a self with appetites and cravings, aspirations and jealousies, loves and fears that have no resemblance to any black tablet ... human comprehension of the world is an activity, mingling responses to given data with imaginative creation of meaning.⁷

Imaginative Picasso refracted Freud and African art. That is, even so counter-rational an art depended on a new way of seeing. While this way of seeing it seems to restrict human imagination to elaborations of a prior created reality, humans are finite creatures in time who depend on languages to make sense of their world. Frameworks are, again, inescapable.

Here we encounter a basic difference of opinion about imagination and its uses. On one hand, Sebald lays bare a reality that is, to him and many others, simply unspeakable. After his character happens into Liverpool Street Station's waiting room, about to be demolished, he realizes how he came to England and the fate of his parents. He suffers a nervous breakdown and is remanded to a modern version of the Bedlam asylum. The frameworks of sense disintegrate from the shock of the horrific injustice. Words fail Austerlitz. Indeed, wordlessness about its real matter is the genius of the book. Architecture is made to speak, as it were. For Sebald, as for Claude Lanzmann, auteur of the massive 1987 imaginative documentary *Shoah*, silence is the only fitting response to the horror.⁸ It takes a certain kind of amnesia to forget that for centuries European culture persisted with a horrific crime as its center. Chorales and hymns were sung about it, music was written about it, and sermons preached about it. Theology was constructed upon it. I refer to the crucifixion of the Son of God, of course. Recently I heard the seventeenth-

⁶ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 105.

⁷ The phrase “inescapable frameworks,” is from Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), chap. 1; R. L. Shinn, “Perception and Belief,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 34, no. 1 (1978): 15.

⁸ Dominick LaCapra, “Lanzmann's ‘Shoah’: ‘Here There Is No Why,’” *Critical Inquiry*, 1997, 231–69.

century violinist Biber's Crucifixion Sonata, where another language than words — instrumental music alone -- attempted to make sense of the epochal event. In the divergence over whether one can speak or not about such a horror as the Holocaust is a basic philosophical difference. For Christians, an adequate response must be contrition, repentance or *metanoia* in response to crushing guilt, and faith. For those for whom suffering cannot possibly be answered by any monotheistic, all-powerful, and therefore guilty God, only silence serves.

In 1964, two years before Sebald's departure from Bavaria for England, Eric Voegelin gave a series of lectures entitled "Hitler and the Germans" in Munich University. An academic who lost his position in the Hitler era, Voegelin ended two decades in America to return and urge a mastering of the German past which was to be also a mastering of the present. Voegelin says that a society-wide loss of spiritual sensitivity and a retreat into language disconnected from reality was responsible for the Hitler disaster. He diagnoses what he terms a "pneumapathology." Talk of collective memory is a cop-out to Voegelin. Always individuals possess memory, and individuals must return to reality. For Voegelin, silence is definitely not a solution, not silence to avoid the topic, not silence to deal with it.⁹

Seen as creative extensions of meaning frameworks, acts of imagination like books, films, visual arts, music, theatre, poetry, and more, are wedges into another world. One could call these systematic creativity except that the phrase seems programmed. As imagination derives from and extends perceptions and beliefs, its public presentation will invite persons to enter their world. Cubist painters virtually invited Americans into fractured modernity at the 1913 Armory Show. The invitation was deeply controversial then exactly because so radical, to many so implausible, inviting mockery. Jesus met a similar reaction. John Lennon's song "Imagine," invited hearers to a rational utopia free of religions. If only we would reason, urged Lennon: "It's easy if you try." His anarchic free-love pacificism in the late 1960s irritated many conservatives. Legal or media clashes in the US such as the Hobby Lobby or the Obergefell decisions, or the Duck Dynasty cancellation and reinstatement, may be skirmishes in a broader war of imagination. Imagination subverts taken-for-granted worlds.

Imagination is not only an aesthetic invitation to a new world. Imagination is a moral category. James Cone points out that lack of imagination can be culpable. In *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Cone points out that renowned Christian ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr as a young pastor in Detroit did nothing to bring blacks into his white church and spoke little or nothing of racial reconciliation. Bourgeois white status quo was fine for Niebuhr then. Later in his career he urged that churches and societies cannot be pushed too hard for change. Contrast Niebuhr with fellow ethicist Dietrich Bonhoeffer who attended Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem during his 1930-

⁹ Eric Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, ed. D. Clemens and B. Purcell, vol. 31, *Collected Works* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

31 New York stay, and toured the American south, thus identifying with Jesus' poor. Niebuhr's gospel imagination failed him. Bonhoeffer wins credit for a commendable moral imagination.¹⁰

The call for the conference directs us to address "the contemporary environmental crisis, and the persistence of racism, sexism, and classism, as challenges of the religious educational imagination." Historical examples of transformative Christian social imagination are many. One could identify care for the poor, hospitals or even insane asylums, schooling for children of both sexes, penitentiaries rather than prisons, perhaps the seed of recognition of women's inherent dignity, all historical innovations. While any of these claims to social justice are controverted and depend on the assessor's perspective, Hart or Cochrane or Hill would affirm these as stemming from the Christian revolution in Constantine's or Theodosius's Rome.¹¹ An able response to contemporary multiple crises requires a renewal of Jesus' message. Comprehensive theological reflection must characterize the religious educational imagination.

Imagination may be visual or performed invitations to a world, or enacted social practices. Both meet Emily Dickinson's famous criterion:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant --
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind --¹²

Imagination, I said above, invites into a world. Success is to have others accept the invitation and enter the new world. Since Christian faith claims to describe reality, adherence ends unreality (in principle) and commences lived reality (in principle). Persons experiencing conversion as coming to themselves; converts often use the terms. When imagination is seen as expression and extension of linguistic-cultural reality, the line between it and what we term "faith" becomes faint.

Sebal's transformation is less than world-affirming. But his puzzle-laden guide to the built environment is a model for more powerful invitations than didacticism ever imagined.

¹⁰ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2013).

¹¹ David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957); Jonathan Hill, *What Has Christianity Ever Done for Us?: How It Shaped the Modern World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

¹² Emily Dickinson, "Tell All the Truth but Tell It Slant," in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, vol. 2, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955).

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Sacred Encounters: Fostering the Religious Imagination through Literature

Abstract

Literature can be a powerful lens through which we can encounter the sacred, inviting us to experience mystery, opening our awareness to deeper meaning in the midst of the ordinary, and beckoning us to a sense of greater inter-connectedness with the world we live in. In a word, literature can speak the language of the religious imagination. Using examples from the works of Flannery O'Connor, Alice Walker, and TS Eliot, this paper explores the potential of literature for fostering the religious imagination.

Introduction

Literature can be a window into the imagination which invites wonder-filled journeying toward mystery, profound revelation of the numinous, and ardent yearning for connection to the mystical insofar as it embodies the human search for meaning, encounter, and wholeness. Literary critic Edward Hirsch suggests, there is an “aura of sacred practice that accompanies true poetic creation,” which “honors” both the rational and the more than rational, carrying “the burden of mystery” and illuminating “an experience that takes us to the very heart of being.”¹ In effect, literature can be an invitation to the religious imagination, to see, as Richard Cote points out, “the sacred is in the profane” as “an in-depth reserve of meaning” in human experience, making us aware of its “transcendent character.”²

In this paper, I argue that literature can be a catalyst for fostering the religious imagination, offering new ways of seeing through different angles of vision and inviting new ways of imagining through different lenses of viewing. This paper explores how literature can cultivate the analogical imagination which sees through the lens of sacrament, grace, and mystery as exemplified by Flannery O'Connor's short story “A Good Man is Hard to Find.” It examines the potential of literature to unmask illusions through the dialectical imagination which looks through the critical lens of resistance, suspicion, and the recovery of dangerous memory as found in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Finally, it looks at how literature can break-open the prophetic imagination which incorporates the dialectical yet sees beyond it through both the critical and constructive lenses of truthful criticizing and hopeful energizing as represented by T.S. Eliot's poem *The Wasteland*. Thus, this paper suggests that literature can be religiously educative, inviting us to wrestle with the language of mystery, paradox, and ambiguity.

¹ Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem: And Fall in Love with Poetry* (NY: Harcourt, 1999), xiii.

² Richard Cote, *Lazarus! Come Out!: Why Faith Needs Imagination* (Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, 2003), 89.

Methodology

This study employs the methodologies of literary criticism and philosophical hermeneutics to investigate the meaning of literary texts and their significance for religious education. As such, this study offers a humanistic inquiry into the religious meaning of literature and its implications for cultivating the religious imagination. The study engages the literary critical method of close reading. As Francine Prose notes, close reading allows the reader to “trace patterns” and “make connections” by paying close attention to the words and phrases authors use in constructing their texts.³ Close reading allows for breaking open the meaning of texts through the analysis of language. At the same time, philosophical hermeneutics invites what Gadamer calls “a fusion of horizons” between the horizon of the reader and that of the author, opening up further meaning of the text and its implications for present circumstances.⁴ Together, these literature-based methodologies allow an investigation of literary texts that invites an exploration of their religious and educational significance for fostering the religious imagination.

The Sacramental Imagination of Flannery O’Connor

The short fiction of Flannery O’Connor provides a window into what David Tracy calls the “analogical imagination,” offering a sacramental vision of the world.⁵ O’Connor finds grace in the midst of the ordinary, the outrageous, and even the grotesque. As Tracy points out, it is precisely from within the concrete and the particular that the analogical imagination operates, reaching both deep down within and beyond our own particularity through analogy, symbol, and metaphor to encounter the other’s “hard concreteness.”⁶ It is in the encounter with this “hard concreteness” that mystery is revealed, mediating divine presence and uncovering the depths of meaning from within human experience. We encounter the mystery of God in openness to the other if we can imagine analogically, revealing new ways of seeing that allow us to discover the “graced reality” of the world metaphorically, symbolically, and sacramentally.

Deborah Lynn Thornton argues that O’Connor sees through a “hermeneutics of the incarnation” in which “grace is extended through the unwitting encounter and the unlikely character.”⁷ Such is the hermeneutic of “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” about a well-meaning yet manipulative grandmother who unwittingly leads her family to their deaths at the hands of an escaped convict. Here, O’Connor presents what Judith Wynne calls a “sacramental irony” where O’Connor uses who we think we ought to be to reveal who we really are. It is in this irony that grace is revealed as an invitation to encounter the divine where “shocking encounters with grace are the result of characters being themselves in full force,” where “the core and the surface

³ Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer* (NY: Harper, 2006), 6.

⁴ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (NY: Continuum, 2004), 301.

⁵ See David Tracy, “Presidential Address: The Catholic Analogical Imagination,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 32 (1977), 234-244.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Debra Lynn Thornton, “The Incarnational Art of Flannery O’Connor: Grace and the Body in “A Good Man is Hard to Find” (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico, 1999), 1-4.

merge” as “a character is briefly transfigured, and altered forever.”⁸ As Tracy insists, “Grace comes as both gift and threat. As gift, grace can turn one completely around into a transformed life of freedom. Yet, grace can also come as threat by casting a harsh light on what we have done to ourselves and our willingness to destroy any reality, even Ultimate reality, if we cannot master it.”⁹ For O’Connor, grace, is both gift and threat, inviting a response not only on the part of the characters who inhabit the imaginative landscape of her fiction, but also on the part of readers who imaginatively enter into that landscape and encounter their own humanity, only to have it revealed back to them in all its “hard concreteness.”

In “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” this “hard concreteness” appears in the form of an escaped convict simply and namelessly designated as “the Misfit” who stops to “rescue” the also nameless “grandmother” and her family after their car falls into a ditch during a road-trip as the result of an accident of which ironically she herself was the catalyst. This “sacramental irony” is furthered by the fact that both the Misfit and the grandmother seem to suffer from what John Shea calls a “fettered imagination,”¹⁰ an image of reality based in the self-preoccupied fantasy of tolerable fictions, seeing the other as an extension of self and not truly as other, and viewing external reality as an object to be manipulated through the narrow focus of rational certainty.

For both the grandmother and the Misfit, the world is expected to conform to their own narrowly confined expectations of certitude, leaving little room for wonder, mystery, and grace. For the grandmother, the world is neatly divided into certain types of people: “good” people and “common” people. She sees herself among the good people and dresses the part accordingly complete with white gloves, dress, and hat, ironically to make sure that “In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady.”¹¹ From her standpoint the world of appearance, manners, and other people’s perception is the “real world,” the world of her fettered imagination which accepts convention, appearance, and “good breeding” as the mark of “good people.” Even as her family is systematically being killed in the woods by the Misfits’ accomplices, the grandmother carries on an almost surreal conversation with the Misfit in which she repeatedly tells him “I know you’re a good man... You’re not a bit common.” She cannot or will not imagine a world beyond her own narrow categories. She persists in her self-righteousness and manipulation which cannot admit the reality around her, telling the Misfit “You’ve got good blood! I know you wouldn’t shoot a lady! I know you come from nice people.”¹²

Yet, like the grandmother, the Misfit also has a fettered imagination which locks him into a narrow way of seeing. He is a prisoner, even out of jail. “Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead. . . If He did what He said then it’s nothing for you do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn’t, then it’s nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you

⁸ Judith Wynne, “The Sacramental Irony of Flannery O’Connor,” *The Southern Literary Journal* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1975), 35.

⁹ David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity* (NY: Harper Row, 1987), 75.

¹⁰ John Shea, *Finding God Again: Spirituality for Adults* (NY: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 10-11.

¹¹ Flannery O’Connor, “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” in *The Complete Stories of Flannery O’Connor* (NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 118.

¹² *Ibid.*, 128

got left the best way you can-by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him.”¹³

The Misfit cannot tolerate ambiguity beyond the narrow categories of his own fettered imagination which limits God to the dichotomous categories of either/or. When the grandmother timidly suggests “Maybe He didn’t raise the dead,” the Misfit responds with the full force of his fettered imagination: “‘I wasn’t there so I can’t say He didn’t...I wish’t I had of been there,’ he said hitting the ground with his fist. ‘It ain’t right I wasn’t there because if I had of been there I would of known.’”¹⁴ Here, Richard Giannone suggests the Misfit’s imagination is “manacled to unbelief.” It is “unbelief born of pure reason” which “boxes him in,” leaving him frozen, unable “to move beyond a maddening, disabling rationality.”¹⁵

For O’Connor, it is at this moment that grace is extended in the encounter with the “hard concreteness” of the other. Both the Misfit and the grandmother become agents of grace for one another in a sacramental moment of confession. For the grandmother, the encounter with the other transforms her, allowing her to see the other as other for the first time. As the Misfit’s “twisted face” came “close to her own as if he were going to cry. She murmured ‘Why, you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my own children.’” In a profoundly sacramental gesture of blessing, healing, and forgiveness “She reached out and touched him on the shoulder” just before he shot her.¹⁶ As Giannone observes, for O’Connor, “the body is a place of God’s acting in us, where God’s action is revealed.” On the one hand, “physical dread” when faced with her own bodily death “teaches the grandmother’s soul how to be free, free to love” even amidst the grotesque, the twisted, and the darkness. On the other hand, “her hand of mercy points the way out of the walls sealing the Misfit in the dark of self-hatred and unbelief.” Here, grace is still both gift and threat whereby the grandmother’s “benevolence exposes her captor’s inability to say yes to her yes.”¹⁷ Thus, O’Connor underscores that while grace is always offered it is not always received, reminding us of the profound role that human freedom plays in the midst of “shocking encounters with grace” through the unexpected, the outrageous, and even the grotesque.

The Dialectical Imagination of Alice Walker in *The Color Purple*

In her novel *The Color Purple* Alice Walker adopts a “hermeneutics of suspicion” which offers a mode of questioning resistance. Here, Walker represents what David Tracy calls the “dialectical imagination” which seeks to “unmask illusions,” challenge all certitudes, and “be suspicious of all claims to a vision of the whole.”¹⁸ Through a series of letters to God, the protagonist Celie struggles to find her own voice as an African-American woman, living in a sub-culture dominated by African-American males within a wider culture of male domination.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ O’Connor, 131-132.

¹⁵ Richard Giannone, “Dark Night, Dark Faith: Hazel Motes, The Misfit, and Francis Marion Tarwater,” in *Dark Faith: New Essays on Flannery O’Connor’s The Violent Bear it Away*, ed. Susan Srigley (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 18.

¹⁶ O’Connor, 132.

¹⁷ Giannone, 18-19.

¹⁸ Tracy, “Presidential Address,” 237.

As Carolyn Williams suggests these letters represent Celie's attempt to find her own language, her own "narrative authority," beyond "the patriarchal chain of authorization."¹⁹

Beginning to question inherited, patriarchal categories, Celie engages the dialectics of race and gender. In an epistolary shift, she begins to address her sister Nettie instead of God with the realization that "the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful, and lowdown."²⁰ As she comes to question her past and an abusive relationship with her stepfather, she begins to re-imagine God. Through her relationship with blues singer Shug Avery, Celie comes to a different understanding of who God might be. As a blues singer, Shug represents what Ralph Ellison calls the "art of ambiguity," that is an "impulse" to keep painful memory alive, while "squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism" that lets one transcend it without forgetfulness.²¹ Here, Diane Scholl argues Walker's revisionist theology presents a "womanist Gospel" that derives its power not only from African-American folklore with its "heightened sense of paradox and of a subversive dialectic" of dangerous memory, but also from Gospel parables "punctuated by ironic reversals and rife with a subversive principle of contradiction and mystery."²²

This dialectic opens up new imaginative space for Celie, who, by the end of the novel, comes to the realization that God is beyond the limited categorizations she has inherited: "Dear God, Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God."²³ This imaginative breakthrough represents the dynamics of the dialectical imagination in all its liberating power. As Maxine Greene notes, "by finding her imagination Celie has found a way out of oppression. She is beginning to look through her own eyes, name in her own voice her lived world."²⁴ Claiming the power of her own imagination, Celie claims her own power. Finding the power to ask her own questions, she claims her own voice. And, trusting in the power of her own narrative, she reclaims herself.

The Prophetic Imagination in T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*

T.S. Eliot's poem *The Wasteland* also fosters the religious imagination through the lens of the prophetic imagination which holds in creative tension both the critical lens of the dialectical imagination with its hermeneutics of suspicion and the re-constructive lens of prophetic re-imagining with its hermeneutics of retrieval. As Walter Brueggemann notes, the prophetic imagination involves both a criticizing pathos and an energizing hope. Brueggemann emphasizes, "the task of the prophetic imagination is to cut through the numbness" by offering "symbols that are adequate to confront the horror and massiveness of the experience that evokes numbness and requires denial."²⁵ It brings "public expression" to the collective experience of

¹⁹ Carolyn Williams, "Trying to do without God: The Revision of Epistolary Address in *The Color Purple*," in *Modern Critical Interpretations: The Color Purple*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2000), 88.

²⁰ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1982), 164.

²¹ Quoted in Sharon Welch, *Sweet Dreams in America* (NY: Routledge, 1999), 43.

²² Diane Scholl, "With Ears to Hear and Eyes to See: Alice Walker's Parable *The Color Purple*," in *Modern Critical Interpretations: The Color Purple*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2000), 115.

²³ Walker, 242.

²⁴ Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1995), 25.

²⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 59.

terror, grief, and fear. And it speaks “metaphorically but concretely about the real deathliness that hovers over us” as the result of structures of power, domination, and control.²⁶

The Wasteland speaks the language of the prophetic imagination, confronting the “horror and massiveness of the experience” of numbness which shaped modern consciousness after the First World War, bringing “public expression” to the terror, grief, and fear that gripped the modern imagination, and speaking “metaphorically but concretely” about the “deathliness” that still hangs over the modern and even postmodern world.²⁷ *The Wasteland* offers a prophetic lens through which to see the world anew. It is poetry which is intended to disturb, to unsettle, or in Maria Harris’ words, “to shake the moorings from and de-familiarize the old.”²⁸ It is poetry made to shock our sensibilities. As Edward Hirsch notes, it is “a poem without a fixed center,” containing fragmented “scenes and vignettes from a wide variety of times and places: agitated scraps of conversations, parodies, inter-textual allusions, unattributed and often broken quotations, a medley of radically shifting languages,” and “a disturbing cacophony of voices.”²⁹ In *The Wasteland*, Eliot adopts a poetic style of resistance that resists style itself to invite us into the landscape of the unfamiliar, the unimagined, and the unreal:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.³⁰

Here, Eliot speaks the language of lament, which as Brueggemann points out, is the language of the prophet who speaks “with the candor born of anguish and passion.” It is language that signals that “the end of the royal fantasy is very near,” a disturbing pathos that upsets the “royal consciousness” of those in power who seek to maintain the status quo.³¹ Eliot laments the “numbness” of the modern condition, giving voice to the deep grief of those who are its victims, and speaking of the “deathliness” that leads to this condition. Like the Hebrew prophets, Eliot walks us through the “stony rubbish” of the unreal city, to deeply lament over the destructive power and alienation that the “royal program” can bring, fed by a “management mentality,” a mentality that ultimately leads to the barrenness and emptiness of the modern wasteland.³²

Yet, also like the Hebrew prophets, in the midst of destruction, Eliot offers a message of hope, giving voice to the yearning for renewal, restoration, and relief. In the last section, entitled “What the Thunder said,” Eliot evokes the image from Ezekiel of the valley of dry bones as a metaphor for the barrenness of the wasteland; but also, like Ezekiel, he brings a prophetic vision of restoration which, for him, is imaged through the life-giving power of water. Here, Eliot

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Michael North (NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 23.

²⁸ Maria Harris, “Art and Religious Education: A Conversation,” *Religious Education* 83, no. 3 (1988), 458.

²⁹ Hirsch, 141.

³⁰ T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, lines 61-63.

³¹ Brueggemann, 45.

³² *Ibid.*

brings what Walter Brueggemann calls “the language of hope and the ethos of amazement,”³³ offering symbols of hope that allow us to see the world in a renewed way. It is a deeply spiritual quest, where the modern wasteland thirsts for refreshment and renewal. Eliot uses images of the sacred to evoke this sense, including the sacred river Ganges, a line from the Upanishad’s “Fable of the Thunder,” and the legend of the Fisher King who will restore the barren land and who serves as a symbol of divine life with both Christian and pre-Christian associations.³⁴ Thus, Eliot offers a language of “amazement,” where the old is made new through both a retrieval of sacred memory and a prophetic re-imagining through symbol, image, and metaphor.

Conclusion

In many ways, literature can foster the religious imagination by inviting sacred encounters. Whether through the sacramental fiction of Flannery O’Connor, the subversive dialectics of Alice Walker, or the disturbingly prophetic poetry of T.S. Eliot, literature can open up new ways of seeing, new ways of thinking, and new ways of imagining through the eyes of the other. Such encounters often challenge, disturb, and move us in ways that break open the religious imagination. Using literature in the context of teaching religion can invite what Kieran Scott calls “prophetic education,” which requires “posing and opening up new perspectives.”³⁵ It is an education not only comfortable with, but that encourages wrestling with paradox, mystery, and ambiguity. And, ultimately, it is an education that fosters new perspectives that challenge us to see more analogically, to think more dialectically, and to imagine more prophetically. Such is the challenge that literature can offer, thus opening up new imaginative spaces for sacred encounters with the other.

³³ Brueggemann, 65.

³⁴ *The Wasteland*, Norton Critical Edition, 25.

³⁵ Kieran Scott, “Continuity and Change in Religious Education: Building on the Past, Re-Imagining the Future,” in *Critical Issues in Religious Education*, ed. Oliver Brennan (Dublin: Veritas, 2005), 88.

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“Interreligious Dialogue at a Momentous Anniversary: Religious Educators Re-Imagining *Nostra Aetate* in Connecting, Disrupting, and Transforming Ways”

Abstract

The fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* challenges religious educators to examine the signs of the times and to imagine how this document is best taught in the face of interreligious bigotry, violence, ignorance, and indifference. Examining the postmodern landscape, this paper discusses ways to connect with the seminal points of this historic document while exploring new trajectories especially relevant for today.

Introduction

Celebrating its 50th anniversary this fall, Vatican II’s historic document, *Nostra Aetate*, ushered in a “Copernican revolution” in Jewish-Christian relations.¹ The “teaching of contempt,” which shaped the first 19 centuries of Jewish-Christian relations held the Jews responsible for Jesus’ death, justified persecution and hatred of Jews, and planted a fertile ground for the tragic consequences of the Holocaust. *Nostra Aetate* (NA) repudiated this “teaching of contempt,” and in its par. 4 replaced it authoritatively with three critical tenets: 1) Christians may in no way accuse Jews of deicide; 2) the covenant that God has with the Jews continues and was never revoked even though Jews do not believe in the divinity of Jesus; 3) Christians who seek to know and to understand Jesus need to learn about his Jewishness. These three fundamental points led John Pawlikowski to describe the impact of NA as a complete shift in the Church’s theological self-understanding.² Setting the stage for these critical reversals, NA reflects in par. 2 an inclusive and welcoming tone as it discusses the Church’s relationships with all non-Christian religions: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men and women.”³

Fast forward to 2015 and one recognizes that NA’s “sincere reverence” of non-Christian religions and, even more, the painful history of a Christian “teaching of contempt” of Jews is to a

¹ Gilbert S. Rosenthal, ed., *A Jubilee for All Time: The Copernican Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick) 2014.

² John T. Pawlikowski, “Vatican II’s *Nostra Aetate*,” in Gilbert S. Rosenthal, ed., *A Jubilee for All Time: The Copernican Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations*, 21-33.

³ Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*,
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html, 1965

great extent unknown to many college and graduate students of today. For this reason, as David Rosen notes, “the significance of the transformation is not fully grasped.”⁴ Elena Procario-Foley shows that while the 1974 *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration “Nostra Aetate”* calls for religious education promoting a deeper understanding of Judaism, this mandate seems to have been largely ignored in Catholic secondary school curricula.⁵ At best, ecumenical and interreligious issues are presented as a final, elective option in documents such as the USCCB’s 2008 *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School*.

Given both this scant attention to NA in ecclesial education curricula and also a large scale ignorance of the significance of NA in Jewish-Christian relations, and in interreligious dialogue as a whole, the role of religious education in the jubilee year of this document becomes quite formidable. Added to this reality are two contributing factors that shape the teaching of NA. One, religious violence often perpetrated by extremists of diverse backgrounds is on the rise; Jews, Christians, and Muslims, among others, are the victims of increasingly frequent violent hate crimes. With daily news reporting on religious-based hatred, the notion of progress in interreligious relations seems incredulous to many and certainly to the undergraduates, primarily first year students I teach. The Pew Forum (2014) noted that global hostilities involving religion reached a 6 year high in 2012, involving one-third of all countries and three-quarters of the world’s population.⁶ A second key phenomenon, paling in nature and gravity to the above-mentioned religious hatred, is the reality of the “Spiritual But Not Religious,” the fastest growing religious sensibility, according to Linda Mercadante⁷ and the Pew Forum.⁸ This seemingly ubiquitous self-identification, especially among young adults, has experienced a rapid burgeoning to the extent that, as Mercadante claims, “unbelief” in America exceeds Protestantism and, on a global level, constitutes the third largest religion in the world.

Meeting Young People Where They Are

The threefold scenario of ignorance of history, religious violence, and indifference towards/rejection of religion challenges the imagination of the religious educator who is confident that the teaching of NA is both relevant and significant “in our time.” With these three obstacles noted, insights of contemporary religious educators can help provide a trajectory that

⁴ David Rosen, “Fifty Years Since the Second Vatican Council,” in Gilbert S. Rosenthal, ed., *A Jubilee for All Time: The Copernican Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations*, 3.

⁵ Elena Procario-Foley, “Teaching, Learning, and Relationships: *Nostra Aetate* and Education,” in Gilbert S. Rosenthal, ed., *A Jubilee for All Time: The Copernican Revolution in Jewish-Christian Relations*, 189-206.

⁶ Pew Forum Newsletter, www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/

⁷ Linda Mercadante, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* (New York: Oxford University Press) 2014, 2.

⁸ Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012. “*Nones*” on the rise. Pew Research Center.

may prove useful in the teaching of NA. Noting what has become almost a rigid binary between religion and spirituality Kieran Scott argues that educators must “meet young people where they are,” while at the same time must “lead them out to where they can become.”⁹ How might the notion of meeting young people where they are help religious educators teach NA?

Complexity of Youth Voice

That very task of meeting students where they are, simple though it may seem, is rife with complexity. In their interviewing and analysis of “youth finding and claiming religious voice,” Mary Elizabeth Moore and Joseph Kyser speak to many factors of difference – personality, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, ability, social class, gender identification, and sexual orientation – that shape how youth might associate themselves within the larger religious sphere.¹⁰ These factors provide diverse lens by which youth might “come out religiously” in the pluralistic world in which they live. Their study speaks to the value of youth giving voice to how difference shapes who they are, the way they see the world and what they value deeply. These insights help to identify “the rich textures” and to provide the context – muddy as it may be - in which religious educators find themselves teaching NA now 50 years after its promulgation.

While young people may not be aware of the centuries of persecution Jews experienced at the hands of Christians, they can reflect on the bullying they may have experienced in their lives and that may have been provoked by their religion, class, disability or any number of factors. In addition young people are inevitably familiar with anti-bullying campaigns common to primary, middle and secondary schools. In no way do I suggest here that individual experiences of bullying can be compared to the attempt of the Nazis to annihilate a people, a religion, a culture, and a way of life. At the same time in meeting young people where they are, it is important to register with their assumptive worlds so that as educators one can open their minds and hearts to understand others. With this in mind, religious educators might imagine and devise pedagogical tools that push young people to name difference; these may include digital/written autobiographies, personal journals, or small group testimonies. These exercises might serve as catalysts for a deeper appreciation of the generations of contempt that Jews suffered and religious minorities continue to experience at the hands of extremists and bigots.

Provocative Cultural Symbols

Another strategy to meet young people where they are in the teaching of NA is to identify unitive and provocative cultural symbols that capture the students’ contemporary horizons of meaning. Patrick Manning notes that “between the extremes of lazy pluralism and exclusivism,” symbols can spur the imagination and foster new insight.¹¹ Drawing from David Tracy’s

⁹ Kieran Scott, “Inviting Young Adults to Come Out Religiously, Institutionally, and Traditionally,” in *Journal of Religious Education*, 109/4, 2014, 471.

¹⁰ Mary Elizabeth Moore and Joseph Kyser, “Youth Finding and Claiming Religious Voice: Coming Out Religiously in an Interreligious Multivalent World,” in *Journal of Religious Education*, 109/4, 2014, 455-468.

¹¹ Patrick R. Manning, “Engaging Our Symbols, Sharing Our World: Forming Young People Around Symbols for Participation in the Public Sphere,” in *Journal of Religious Education*, 109/4, 2014, 442.

insights about the symbols that have become “religious classics,” Manning emphasizes how symbols which are life and death matters can elicit profound meaning. Noting this evocative power, Manning also shares Paul Knitter’s claim that symbols, much more than doctrine, can bring people together.¹² Examples of classic symbols in Christianity are the cross and the altar table which, for the Christian, both point to the love and sacrifice as hallmarks of the faith. On the other hand, negative symbols of the swastika and the Confederate flag evoke the hatred and violence perpetrated by the Nazi party and the painful history of racism in the United States.

In teaching at a New York, Catholic college I am keenly aware of the event of 9/11/01 as a powerful symbol of the suffering and destruction that can be unleashed by bigotry and violence. It is not uncommon that one of my students is the son/daughter or niece/nephew of a fire fighter or World Trade Center employee who died that tragic day. My teaching of NA often falls within a week or so of 9/11. One strategy I have employed to “meet students where they are” and to provide a somewhat contemporary perspective on the context and importance of NA is to view “Divided We Fall,” a documentary produced by human rights lawyer activist Valerie Kaur, a Sikh woman, who details the violence done unto her people in the weeks and months following 9/11.¹³ The film demonstrates how Sikhs were singled out because of their turbans, some physically assaulted and taunted, and some murdered. When viewed in this light, this film helps to disrupt the popular image of 9/11 as a source of unity in the face of terrorism. While potentially raising up personal wounds that students have suffered in diverse ways, discussion of this subject helps to give focused attention to NA and particularly its concern for the contempt and discrimination Jews experienced.

Pedagogy of Dangerous Memory

Another religious educator whose insights help us consider ways to teach NA is Russell Butkus, who laments an amnesia common to contemporary, middle class U.S. Catholics and Protestants forgetful of their heritage as poor immigrants or religious refugees, suffering humiliation and discrimination.¹⁴ Writing before the emergence of the contemporary SBNR phenomenon, Butkus employs the language of theologian, Johann Baptist Metz, whose notion of “dangerous memory” captures the reality of Christian, post-Holocaust Europe¹⁵. Calling for a pedagogy of “dangerous memory,” Butkus advocates for a process of critical reflection on how people suffered to exercise the freedom to practice their religion in this country. Butkus believes that a conspicuous lack of reflection on the early Catholic and

¹² Ibid, 445.

¹³ Valerie Kaur, writer, and Sharat Raju, director, *Divided We Fall* (Milwaukee, Wn: New Moon Productions) 2006.

¹⁴ Russell A. Butkus, “Dangerous Memories: Toward a Pedagogy of Social Transformation,” in *Religious Education as Social Transformation*, edited by Allen J. Moore (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press) 1989, 201-233.

¹⁵ See Johann Baptiste Metz, *The Emergent Church, the Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World* (New York: Crossroads) 1981.

Protestant social justice and labor efforts constitutes a significant gap in theological and seminary education.¹⁶

Butkus' pedagogy of "dangerous memory" involves the second and third movements of Thomas Groome's shared praxis model.¹⁷ Groome's second movement consists of critical reflection on the current and past influences that shape an individual's assumptive world. During this stage, one considers prevailing myths and cultural influences in order to, as Butkus claims, "uncover the controlling interests and ideologies that constitute one's present situation."¹⁸ Inquiry into personal and family heritage of suffering and discrimination, Butkus suggests, may be effective exercises in this second stage.¹⁹ The discussion above on bullying and the complexity of youth voices addresses the concerns of the second stage of Groome's pedagogy as employed by Butkus.

In Groome's third movement of shared praxis, participants reflect on the Story/Vision of the tradition. As utilized in Butkus's justice education model, this movement engages participants in critical analysis and "remembrance" of subversive elements of the Christian story of suffering and freedom, including biblical narratives, theological approaches to justice, and social/historical periods of discrimination. In this section, the scholarship of Mary Boys, John Pawlikowski, and Philip Cunningham, among others, can help to unpack the "teaching of contempt."²⁰ In discussing this "contempt" Boys elaborates on the long history of the Christian decide charge against Jews and the rampant supersessionism that is reflected in the writings of bishops and theologians such as St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, and Martin Luther.²¹ This notion of supersessionism, the belief that the New Testament negates any validity and significance of the Old Testament, is clearly depicted in medieval art such as the Christian iconography renderings of Synagoga and Ecclesia, the latter conquering and defeating the former.²² "If God has more than one blessing," Boys writes, "we need to fashion new images of Synagoga and Ecclesia." She continues to say, "The image of Jews and Christians as partners in witness and work is a new vision. It reverses nearly two thousand years of church teaching and popular religiosity." As students reflect on the Story/Vision of the tradition, as proposed by

¹⁶ Butkus, 206.

¹⁷ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers) 1991, 220-227.

¹⁸ Butkus, 222.

¹⁹ Ibid, 226.

²⁰ See Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston) 1964.

²¹ Mary Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York: Paulist Press, Stimulus) 1999.

²² Ibid, 6.

Groome and Butkus, serious attention needs to be dedicated to the literature of Jewish-Christian dialogue that uncovers the subversive history of repression and discrimination against Jews.

The final component of this third movement Butkus calls “field experience,” which challenges participants to “an experience of contrast” involving personal interaction with people who experience suffering and injustice.²³ Butkus claims that the classroom alone is not enough to challenge students to the reflection and action required to effect social transformation. In my own teaching of NA, I often begin with a story about my first interaction with a holocaust survivor, a hospital patient I met as a Clinical Pastoral Education student. In recovery from an aortic valve replacement, Helena spoke about her interactions with the Nazis as if they happened yesterday. “The Nazis,” she said, “they were swines.” She shared with me that her family was killed at the camps and then, complimenting me for being kind and attentive to her, she questioned with an intent eye and raspy whisper what made some people good and others evil. Now almost thirty years later my conversation with Helena and her sincere inquiry into this fundamental question of theodicy remains with me and beckons me to ask that same question with her while the victims of the holocaust are very much part of my consciousness.

For me that “field experience” was truly “an experience of contrast” in which my assumptive world was thoroughly challenged and, in that discomfort, I was compelled to imagine the life perspective of someone who suffered the Holocaust. I would propose as well that through academic service-learning similar types of field experiences can be made available to students and, if structured well, can help students ask important questions and take action against injustice. In many parts of the world students have little access to interaction with Jews. However, this is not the case in many of the large cities of the United States. In these settings, there are opportunities to engage oral history projects through nursing homes and community centers. Such service-learning experiences with elderly Jews can especially enlighten contemporary students, unfamiliar with history of contempt and perhaps rarely exposed to people faithful their whole lives to a religious tradition. Furthermore, such direct interaction with Jews fulfills an intention of NA, that in order to understand Jesus people need to appreciate Judaism in its depth and practice.

Leading Young People to Where They Can Become

A key emphasis in this paper has been to “meet young people where they are,” but an education in the truest sense of the word must “lead people out,” and, as Scott says, “lead them out to where they can become.”²⁴ Groome’s “shared praxis” model and Butkus’ “dangerous memory” pedagogy conclude with invitations for thoughtful and active praxis in the world. As Groome says, “Whatever the form or level of response invited, the practical intent of the dialogue in movement 5 is to enable participants – by God’s grace working through their own discernment and volition – to make historical choices about the praxis of Christian faith in the world.”²⁵ Groome and Butkus propose then an education that produces reflective action. To

²³ Butkus, 228

²⁴ Scott, 471.

²⁵ Groome, 148/

relate this notion to our teaching of NA in a postmodern context, Leonard Sweet's *Postmodern Pilgrims* (2000) also provides some helpful context.²⁶ Noting that many educators are schooled in modernity and thus trained in historical-critical methods of textual analysis, Sweet says, "Western Christianity went to sleep in a modern world governed by the gods of reason and observation. It is awakening to a postmodern world open to revelation and hungry for experience."²⁷ He thus names postmodernity an EPIC culture that is experiential, participatory, image-driven, and connected. Mirroring Sweet, Mercadante's findings from her extensive interviews with people who identify as SBNR also show that people seek out spiritual connectedness and experiential understanding of how transcendence effects their daily lives.²⁸

Given Mercadante's research and Sweet's challenge to embrace a culture that is EPIC, it is fitting then that experiential pedagogies might be applied in the process of teaching NA. Service-learning has been touched upon as a method of learning within this school of experiential pedagogy. Another pedagogy could involve students re-writing NA for the current time period. Such an activity challenges students to understand the spirit and intent of NA, "discern the signs of the times,"²⁹ and to engage in a creative work aware of the social, religious, and theological tensions. To re-write NA forces students to face up to the current issues of religious violence that certainly affects all of the monotheistic religions "of the Book," but extends to just about every religious tradition in the globe. This exercise also can trigger a serious evaluation of what "sincere reverence" of diverse religious traditions really means and how one can embrace one's own religious tradition while appreciating the "ray of Truth" in another. This assignment may help students gain a new appreciation of the unity of spirituality and religion and perhaps shed the tendency to separate the two. Scott proposes that the spiritual and the religious are inextricably intertwined and that the SBNR refrain might be reframed into another "mantra" that says "I'm spiritually religious and religiously spiritual"³⁰ Re-writing NA for the current time might help students appreciate more clearly both the distinctions and connections between religion and spirituality.

Conclusion

Too often the church is deemed irrelevant to the lives of young people and out of touch with their experience. For many young people its teachings are often seen as unchangeable and archaic so much so that one can easily be skeptical about the future of the church. Studying *Nostra Aetate* in creative and imaginative ways can help to disrupt a pre-conceived notion of church and reveal a church instrumental in transforming the relationships between Christians and Jews. Fostering critical understanding and hopefulness such teaching of *Nostra Aetate* can help to equip young people with a depth and appreciation necessary to embrace the complexity of interreligious dialogue in a fractured world.

²⁶ Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims* (Nashville, Tn: B&H Publishing Group) 2000.

²⁷ Ibid, 28.

²⁸ Mercadante, 72-73

²⁹ Pope Paul, VI. *Gaudium et Spes*. (Vatican City) 1965, par. 4.

³⁰ Scott, 476.

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Pluralizing Catholic Identit(y/ies)

Abstract

I examine the claims of two prominent Catholic educational thinkers regarding the state of Catholic culture and identity in North American Catholic schools. In an age where Catholic school distinctiveness is perceived to be eroding because of the pressures of secularism and lack of religious commitment among the Catholic laity, Timothy Cook (2001) proposes that Catholic educational leaders become “architects of Catholic culture,” and Richard Rymarz (2013) perceives several challenges to the permeation of Catholic identity in Canada’s Catholic schools. Interestingly, though, neither author conceptually explores what Catholic culture or identity mean in today’s context, and simply refer to them in untroubled singular terms. I contend that any proposal concerning Catholic school culture and identity is at best limited unless a *plurality of Catholic identities* is acknowledged; moreover, I propose that a social-ecclesial mechanism needs to be established for including and coordinating this plurality in the school.

Introduction

The “Catholic identity” of Catholic schools has received much attention in recent years, and in this paper I focus on how two influential Catholic educational theorists have treated it. First, Timothy Cook directs his book *Architects of Catholic Culture* (2001) toward responding to a perceived decline in Catholic identity that he sees concurrently with a downward trend in the number of clergy and vowed religious staffing Catholic schools since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Second, Richard Rymarz (2013) posits that declining identity is due to a perceived lack of religious commitment among the lay teachers, parents, and students in these schools (19). In response Cook places much emphasis on the leader’s role. Even though he acknowledges good teachers are essential for a school’s Catholicity (2001, 86), for Cook the obligation to create identity nonetheless always falls back to the leader as a prior facilitator. Rymarz offers a different response. At the end of his article he remarks that a top-down imposition of identity will not likely be wise, and hence a grassroots revival from teachers and the community might be preferred (2013, 19). All of this discussion is interesting, but remarkably takes place without first defining Catholic culture and identity. So while both authors make insightful contributions to conversations about Catholic schools, they also share a limited conception of Catholic culture and identity in singular terms that does not recognize its diversity. This assumption has implications that impede a comprehensive discussion of this subject. It also raises the question of what the existence of multiple Catholic identities means to the school’s political-ecclesial organization. The purpose of this paper is therefore to argue that

Catholic educational theory should acknowledge multiple Catholic identities, and from here consider how a school could respond to this fact.

I begin this argument by demonstrating the existence of multiple Catholic identities through a triangulation of sources from theology (Dulles, 1974/2002), sociology (Dillon 1999; Greeley, 2004); and educational theory (Feinberg 2006; Casson, 2013; McDonough 2015 in press). Against this backdrop I then demonstrate that the presumption of a singular Catholic identity is a key feature of the selections from Cook's and Rymarz's work. The third section discusses the implications of relying on this theoretical basis, while the fourth points toward the question of what political-ecclesial mechanism would be required to explicitly conceive of the school as a convergence of multiple Catholic identities.

Multiple Identities

Avery Dulles' book *Models of the Church* (1974/2002) provides a normatively aligned theological demonstration of multiple ecclesial identities. This book's first edition was published in the years immediately following Vatican II, and so it amplifies that council's acknowledgment that Catholic identity cannot be reduced to its institutional features like "visible structures [and] especially the rights and powers of its officers" (2002, 27), which prevailed in the pre-conciliar era. To wit, in articulating how the Church is a complex entity that cannot be adequately understood exclusively through one model (2002: 10, 20-21, & 24), Dulles does not erase the institutional model, but rather returns it to a humble standing along other valid expressions. So while he identifies the institutional model with providing "a strong sense of corporate identity (2002, 35), Dulles also warns against an inflated *institutionalism* that tends toward "clericalism, juridicism, and triumphalism" (2002, 31). The implication for Catholic schools, therefore, is to be mindful that any overemphasis of Catholicism's external features can preclude other equally important dimensions.

The other models he relates are the church as "sacrament," "herald," "servant," and "mystical communion," and "community of disciples". Among these, the "mystical communion" model shows that ecclesial membership cannot be restricted to external behaviours and can also be seen in its spiritual and organic sense of the informal relationship one has with the community of believers, and the prayerful relationship one has with God (2002, 49-50). Dulles also proposes the "community of disciples" model as approaching an integration of institutional structures and relational features, where the biblical basis for discipleship shows a "contrast society" (2002, 200) of Christians united through their shared belief, discipline, and service (2002: 200-203). Each of these models is an irreducible expression of Church, and so for any person or community, Catholic identity can be found through the several permutations of integrating and emphasizing them.

The sociological literature also provides evidence of diverse Catholic identities. Andrew Greeley shows that Church teachings on sexual ethics have not received anything close to worldwide assent (2004, 92), and that there is likewise divergent views about the "essential elements of Catholic identity" (2004, 112; based on Hoge et al 2001, 201). A significant number also remains Catholic while disagreeing with the teaching that restricts ordination to men

(Greeley 2004, 96). He concludes that those who disagree with Church teaching but remain in the Church do so because of their powerful sense of “Catholic imagination” and that their love for the sacraments trumps their ethical dissent (2004: 76, 111-13). Similarly, Michele Dillon (1999) presents a detailed ethnography of how American Catholic groups that support women’s ordination, the rights of non-heterosexuals in the Church, and free choice on abortion construct Catholic identities that sustain their connection to the very institution that excludes them from full participation. Identity variations are not limited to any “progressive” quarters, either, as Michael Cuneo (1999) demonstrates in his description of Catholics whose identity is based upon countering what they see as a loss of doctrinal rigor within normative orthodoxy, and in some cases attempting to resuscitate it from the errors they perceive within Vatican II. All these cases illustrate that one’s identity as being Catholic and constituting the Church is irreducible to one kind.

Finally, educational institutions reflect identity variations. Walter Feinberg’s (2006) ethnographic study identifies four kinds of American Catholic school by the stances they take relative to orthodoxy. The traditional school “stress[es] the fixed nature of doctrine,” the modernist school emphasizes more “the role of individual conscience in deciding moral issues,” while schools based on feminist and liberation theology “view doctrine as flexible and open ended, and use the interpretive opportunities it presents to develop a personal transformation and a commitment to aid the poor and oppressed” (2006, 47). As each school displays its approach publicly through curricular and institutional norms, it follows that there is substantial support for each of these identity kinds that cannot be dismissed as merely isolated incidents. Moreover, Graham McDonough’s work on the laity (2015, in press) and Ann Casson’s (2103) work on “fragmented catholicity” shows that even within the prevailing ideology of a single school there exist varying views on Church teaching and what it means to be Catholic. And ideological diversity even reaches the papacy, which currently demonstrates shifting away from Benedict XVI’s reported preference for a smaller, more doctrinally pure Church toward Francis’ message of greater inclusion and de-emphasis (not change) of Church teachings on abortion and homosexuality (Montagne & Poggioli 2013). It appears more accurate to speak of Catholic *identities* rather than *identity*.

Cook’s and Rymarz’s Presentations

Given the above demonstration it is surprising to find Cook and Rymarz present Catholic identity as an unproblematic concept, rather than one of Catholicism’s complex features. Cook provides little in the way of defining what he means by Catholic “culture” or the identity that ostensibly would accompany it (2001, 3). A reading of his book with a view toward finding out what kind of Catholic “culture” or “identity” he hopes for finds that it is apparently linked to reconstituting an institutional strength equal to what he perceives was present before Vatican II. His identification of and response to this apparent problem is based on a decline and fall narrative for culture and identity that he perceives occurring in parallel with the post-conciliar decline of clergy and vowed religious teaching and administering in Catholic schools. As lay persons stepped into these roles, he maintains, so too did Catholic school identity apparently erode (2001, 1 & 73). Throughout his book he loosely links “culture” and “identity” to the kinds of externally observable features in an institutional ecclesiology, although there is no further

treatment of identity in any ecclesiological or sociological sense. So Cook's assumptions are unfortunately not historicized fully in terms of the ecclesiological changes Dulles reflects during and in the years following Vatican II. Hence his concern for a declining institutional identity in Catholic schools suffers both from excluding multiple ecclesiologies that do not easily reduce to external institutional measures, and overlooking the limitations of the institutional model of church.

Cook's narrow view of Catholic culture continues through his conflation of "organizational culture" with "Catholic culture" (2001, 5-6ff). So where a secular organizational culture based on liberalism might encompass many relatively smaller constituent cultures, a Catholic equivalent would be an institution where multiple approaches to Catholicism are present. And of course, any explicit or tacit promotion of a dominant Catholic identity that claims normative superiority over other kinds would threaten to undermine this plurality. On this count Cook is noticeably silent. It is laudable that he speaks elsewhere of accommodating diversity, but unfortunately these discussions are limited to race and so elide internally ecclesiological and ideological diversity (2001, 8). Cook only constructs Catholic school identity in terms of the sum of "academic excellence," "religious mission," and "globalness/multiculturalism"; notably, even these component terms are not defined or analyzed (2001, 12). His identification of key themes in Catholic school identity like "liberty and charity," "Christian vision of the world," "knowledge illumined by faith," (among others) (2001, 12), and his admonition that Catholic educational leaders promote a "Gospel Culture," "Faith Community," "Relationships," (12-16) and "gospel values" (19) in Catholic schools, unfortunately, because it does not recognize the intra-Catholic diversity that these terms imply, only raise more questions about whose conception of them will prevail.

The purpose of Rymarz's (2013) article is to examine the challenges presented when contemporary Canadian Catholic schools attempt to actualize a permeation ideology (2013, 16). Rymarz claims that a decisive factor in the identity of a school is the level of commitment held by "teachers, parents, and students who make up the school community," and that the main threats to identity are low commitment, privatized spirituality, and secularization (17). To counter these apparent threats Rymarz states: "For a permeation of Catholic identity in schools to be realized significant numbers within the school community must be prepared to animate its Catholic identity" (17). All this discussion takes place without any ecclesiological or sociological exploration into what identity means, and so when Rymarz raises James Provost's claim that teacher identity should mean "Catholics in full communion" (18), without any discussion of what "full communion" means or whether it is a contested concept in light of Catholicism's internal diversity, there is evidence here that identity is being constructed as a singular entity against which persons are measured *by degrees of adherence* rather than *kinds of commitment*. There is also no way to state with certainty that what Rymarz names as "privatized spirituality" is really a deficiency, since instead it may indicate a lack of satisfaction with of the prevailing institutional norms that remains unexpressed for lack of recognition or support.¹ In other words, if identity and commitment are conceived as narrow standards and then measured

¹ Bibby (2004) reports that 56% of Catholic adults and 46% of Catholic adolescents would increase their involvement with the Church "if [they] found it to be more worthwhile" (2004, 47; cf. Bibby 2002, 50)

by degrees, one practical consequence could be enabling the conditions where silent resistance, exercised through withholding *any* strong form of religious presentation, and with the intent to avoid conflict, becomes the norm.

Surprisingly, Rymarz concludes that rather than focusing on philosophy or theology, his “paper has focused ... on the human element that is pivotal if the goals of permeation are to be realized in Catholic schools” (2013, 19). Notably this “human element” omits the sociological reality of multiple “thick” identities and the impact they feel from the dominant institutionalism. Interestingly, Rymarz’s positing that rather than being imposed from above, Catholic identity needs to be generated from the grassroots (19), raises questions of how such a phenomenon is possible given that all normative epistemic, moral, and ecclesial power for officially Catholic action is invested hierarchically. For instance, those who measure Catholic identity “by degrees” of a singular norm might respond that anything else is not “thick” but rather deficient – in some cases referred to colloquially as “cafeteria Catholicism.” This view, however, aside from overlooking of the theological basis for dissent within Catholicism (see McDonough, 2012), also reflects a consequence of institutional non-recognition and non-cultivation of multiple identities, since it places those for whom they are appropriate at a disadvantage for lack of formal curricular support.

In summary, Cook’s and Rymarz’s assumption of identity in singular terms thus defaults to being their last word, rather than the first, on what should be a more comprehensive topic. Theorists like Terence McLaughlin (1996, 138) and Sean Whittle (2014, 85ff) have expressed disappointment with this kind of conceptual looseness within Catholic educational theory, stating that it reflects a kind of vague “edu-babble” employed to the author’s advantage by obliquely promoting his or her idea of “piety and faith commitment” (Whittle 2014, 85). I do not raise this point as a harsh criticism, but rather to wonder what could be gained by reconsidering Cook’s and Rymarz’s works in terms that acknowledge multiple Catholic identities. All these observations point to the question of what it means to imagine Catholic identity: is it a prior, authorized uniform concept that leaders and the laity need to implement, or does it exist in multiple conceptions to be found within a community, and their overlap to be discovered and negotiated within some kind of social-ecclesial framework?

Implications

The commonly found way of discussing Catholic school identity is found when there are calls like Cook’s and Rymarz’s to insert a positive expression into a negative space where it has diminished. The evidence above, however, shows that this evaluation by degrees has major limitations; moreover, it also assumes that persons who identify by these different kinds are willing to accept this negative assessment and are receptively permeable to “remediation” by the prevailing kind. To be fair it is important to note that in procedural and instrumental terms both Cook and Rymarz do attempt to avoid alienation by imposition. The positive side of Cook’s reliance on “edu-babble” allows him some latitude to remain remarkably vague on precisely what constitutes identity – for illustrative purposes his “architects” model could apply to both pre-conciliar sympathies and liberation theology – and Rymarz recommends that identity be nurtured from the grassroots rather than imposed from above. In these ways both theorists

demonstrate sensitivity and openness to an inclusive catholicity that aims to avoid an ideological split between the governors and the governed. However, given that what is considered normative is already defined by the hierarchy, without any further explicit theoretical discussion taking place what is likely to emerge from the grassroots and into formal implementation will likely privilege those whose idea of Catholic identity aligns best with that of their local bishop's.

Practical problems may also result. Assuming that a school's teaching staff is internally diverse, some frustration may result if certain ideological commitments prevail at the expense of others. And even a staff with its own uniform conception of Catholic identity might still find itself non-aligned with the community it serves. However, discussing Catholic identity beyond what prevails officially is risky for educators because it concerns their perceived credibility in the community, and ultimately their job security. To address the limitations of this situation and explicitly open the concepts of Catholic culture and identity to greater acknowledgment and inclusion of salient differences – the ecclesial elephant in the room – may provide the room for greater participation for all persons in the school. Reading Cook and Rymarz within a framework of promoting a fuller discovery and nurturing of identities, and creation of an institutional identity that reflects the ecclesial will to discover their intersection and coordination while acknowledging differences, seems to be a more promising way of bringing about an inclusive and possibly even flourishing catholicity to Catholic schools.

What Mechanism Can Coordinate Multiple Identities?

The ecclesiological question of coordinating multiple identities inevitably becomes a pedagogical question insofar as the school must confront the issues of how to organize itself and teach in light of diverse perspectives. Raising the subject of greater lay involvement allows that, even though the laity is not directly involved in decision making in the same way that the clergy is (Nilson 2000: 402 & 405), a model that admits multiple Catholic identities would at the very least afford direct lay consultation toward informing an institutional response to internal diversity. It might also mean a re-thinking of the educational leader's role in terms that point away from suggestions that they are guardians of a singular identity, and seeing them instead as the coordinators of an overlapping consensus among identities.

An inherent concern might be that this “overlapping consensus” language too closely resembles a Rawlsian political liberalism superimposed onto Catholic institutions. This framework might have some initial practical advantages toward greater inclusivity, but be vulnerable to criticisms that it overlooks the particularities that make an institution Catholic and not liberal. This is a valid concern, but it need not undermine all responses to plurality. The normative baseline for inclusion would of course depend upon a Catholic epistemology, and even though the boundaries of this are controversial (McDonough 2012), they would not nearly extend as far as what secular liberalism admits. Developing some form of egalitarian, Catholic communitarian decision-making process would provide a preferable model that does not risk losing contact with its normative thought and practice. The role of the school would thus be to nurture these divergences and their coordination, placing the aim of Catholic education more into the domain of academically supporting ecclesial roles for their Catholic students. Developing such a mechanism would in itself constitute building Catholic culture and identity.

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DIS/ABLING CHURCH

Imagination, Intellectual Disability, & the Baptist Distinctive of the Priesthood of all Believers

ABSTRACT

The last century saw the birth of theologies that moved away from the center. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, while it did not halt discrimination within churches, brought the experiences of the disabled into public view. In relation to this, many in our churches who are intellectually disabled continue to find themselves marginalized. One possible way forward, within the context of Baptist churches, lies in imaginatively engaging with the Baptist distinctive of the priesthood of all believers as a catalyst for religious educators to begin the process of “dis/abling” church.

THEORIA

Imagination

It could be said that community health is defined by an ability to maintain some semblance of uniformity/homogeneity. Any community that attempts to order itself without some kind of system of shared beliefs and activities faces great difficulty in that, without anything to make a group of people in some way distinct, there would be little to hold them together. Though, it is not as if this uniformity has to be completely rigid. A community can be defined by a set of shared practices and beliefs without those things necessarily manifesting themselves as unbreakable rules, though that is not always the case. Perhaps, then, a balance can be struck. A community that is defined by a set of shared practices and beliefs also wields a certain level of imagination in interpretation and implementation of shared practices and beliefs.

The history of Baptists is one marked by imagination, by a hope to faithfully follow the movement of God in Scripture and community, no matter how out of the norm it may initially appear. It was the first Baptists who, in believing that claiming to be a follower of Jesus was not something that someone can have forced upon them, sought out a baptism by immersion. In that same vein, it was other early Baptists who shunned Creeds because they close off communities where God does not; Scripture and the community’s shared experience of it was sufficient. Later in the 19th century United States it was Baptist of the Triennial Convention who, despite a clear lack of Scriptural declaration against it, made the move to cease allowing slave owners to be sent as missionaries. From their inception as a movement, Baptists have been a people defined by imagination, even driven by it.

Drawing from the example of various Baptist communities, I wish to argue that an imaginative religious community is one that openly embraces difference, especially as it relates to experiences of the world. This does not mean to say that these communities necessarily have the easiest time holding to this vision of imagination - by no means. The ideal which is striven for, open embrace of difference, is one that is an imperative within the Baptist ethos because of the high premium placed on individual experience of the divine as it relates to the rest of the community.

Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes exemplifies this embrace of difference in critiquing the modern West’s desire for “normality,” impressing on those who are most unlike “us,” who are

usually “black, female, unemployed and disabled”¹ that they must be more like “us.” As the world changes and new experiences are had, the Church must engage accordingly. This engagement does not mean answering new questions with old answers, but imaginatively seeking out new answers. This engagement with the “other” and the new experiences that come along with that encounter is accomplished by showing what Baptist theologian Curtis Freeman calls “receptive generosity.”² Just as Christ is encountered as a stranger by the disciples,³ so too today followers of Jesus must be open to encountering the strangeness of Jesus in those whom they interact with. It is to the encounters with the “strangers” that are the intellectually disabled that we must now turn.

Intellectual Disability

Turning towards the phenomenon of intellectual disability,⁴ it must initially be admitted that intellectual disability has posed a significant challenge to many of our churches because of both the reality of diverse and not always homogenous experiences, as well as the history of mistreatment within the Christian tradition. As Eric J. Kyle clearly summarizes, there are three common reasons given within the Christian West for disabilities existing: divine punishment for sin, test of faith, and mysterious but beneficial reasons.⁵ All three maintain negative perceptions of those who are disabled, despite the fact that such reasons are extremely culturally-based and more grounded in preconceived notions of humanity and utility than any real thought on the phenomenon of disability.

The reality that those who are differently-abled are not coming to our churches, but are already here, forces Christian communities to dig into the sometimes-difficult questions such a reality brings into focus. How will churches welcome/integrate/include the intellectually disabled? How do people become open to caring/receiving care? These questions, potentially more than anything else, deal with the “heart of what it means to be human and to live in human community.”⁶ The phenomenon of intellectual disability, then, most move beyond the place of being a special perspective and move to the forefront of the enterprises of practical and systematic theology.

The Church’s attempt to make amends for the mistreatment of the intellectually disabled means shifting frames of references regarding disability away from conflating sin and disability, testing, and disability as a form of mysterious, beneficial suffering. It is going to mean moving the intellectually disabled from the margins of vision and thought, to the center; the norm for theory and practice must include the experiences of the intellectually disabled. To disregard these experiences will, as Nancy Eiesland writes, “squander the considerable theological and practical

¹ Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 26.

² Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 44.

³ Luke 24.13-32. NRSV (All Scripture quotations will come from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted).

⁴ For the sake of brevity, the phrase “intellectual disability” will be used throughout this paper. Alternatively, phrases such as “differently-abled,” “other-abled,” and “temporarily-abled” will be used for the sake of causing cognitive dissonance for the reader in an attempt to bring attention to the importance of language within disability discourse.

⁵ Eric J. Kyle, “Re-Envisioning Religious Education in Light of Persons with Disabilities,” *Religious Education* 108, no. 5 (2013): 518.

⁶ Naomi H. Annandale and Erik W. Carter, “Disability and Theological Education: A North American Study,” *Theological Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 83.

energies of persons with disabilities who, like other minority groups, call the church to repentance and transformation.”⁷

From the outset, a primary issue facing Christian communities is that of how both individuals and communities relate to and interact with the intellectually disabled. A common phenomenon is for churches to organize special classes in an attempt to “include.” The glaring issue facing such attempts at “inclusion” lies in the reality that these attempts to welcome and include, in fact, work to further ostracize people who may already find themselves extremely marginalized in the public sphere. The various facets of Church life (pastoral ministry, worship, missions, religious education) must be rethought if the local church is going to be able to move beyond thin attempts to “include,” and instead begin to fully integrate all members of the community into one body.

Moving forward, it seems that the healthiest course of actions for religious communities in general, and Baptist communities in particular, is to begin to be open to imagining and reimagining new ways of doing religious education in light of the often diverse experiences of those with intellectual disabilities. Relying heavily on this idea of integration instead of inclusion, it would seem that while Baptist churches will necessarily have religious educational programs in place, they must be open to modifying and even replacing curriculum and programming for the benefit of all the members of the body. The theoretical groundwork for such a proposition lies in the Baptist distinctive of the priesthood of all believers.

Priesthood of all Believers

Historically, much of the literature concerning the Baptist distinctive of the priesthood of all believers⁸ has been primarily tied to the concept of soul competence and religious liberty. Priesthood of all believers, then, is firstly a theological concept pertaining to access to the divine, and then a description of the church’s social practices. For many, this idea begins with one’s orientation to Scripture. The Bible is to be interpreted both individually and corporately, the two holding one another in a dialectical tension. Individual and communal interpretations work to temper one another.⁹

While Baptists, like every Christian group, have been complicit with the oppression of the intellectually disabled, there also runs throughout Baptist history a strain of thought and praxis oriented towards the fight for justice. In 1947, Baptist minister Carlyle Marney wrote that, while Baptists themselves have faced significant oppression by the establishment in the past, it is now their turn to fight for the rights of those who find themselves under the “yoke of oppression.”¹⁰ Marney was writing in explicit reference to race relations in the United States at the time, but his admonition to fight for the oppressed is easily applicable to the intellectually disabled.

Furthermore, Marney’s insistence on the priority of the priesthood of all believers moved beyond the call for racial justice to a conception of the ministry of the Church that placed it right in the midst of the laity. For Marney, the people in the pews were not an extension of the paid

⁷ Nancy, Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 75.

⁸ “Priesthood of all Believers” may alternatively be referred to as “universal priesthood” for the sake of brevity.

⁹ Ronnie Prevost, *A Distinctively Baptist Church: Renewing Your Church in Practice* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2008), 52.

¹⁰ Curtis W. Freeman, “All the Sons of the Earth: Carlyle Marney and the Fight Against Prejudice,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 44, no. 2 (2009): 72.

staff of a church, but the very “ministry of the Church in the world.”¹¹ Marney’s vision for a lay-involved ministry included all facets of Church life, but most importantly for our current discussion, education.

Bearing in mind how this distinctive relates to how individual members of a Baptist church relate to one another, the concept of a universal priesthood opens up the various ministries of the church, especially the educational ministry, to all members of the body. While there are definitely some who are called to some facet of pastoral ministry within Baptist churches, this particular calling does not preclude others from functioning in a variety of pastoral and ministerial modes. Historically for Baptists, the emphasis here is that there is no formal or informal hierarchy when it comes to ministry; all Christians are considered co-ministers and function within the Church as a radical democracy.

J. L. Dagg, a nineteenth-century Southern Baptist theologian, wrote of the idea of the priesthood of all believers as being a doctrine that declared all within the Church to be the body of Christ.¹² The Church, then, is not a means of access to the Divine, but a place where participation with God takes place. Understanding universal priesthood, as such, means maintaining that all voices within the Church are equal. Through the movement of the Holy Spirit within the community of believers, the multiple and sometimes differing voices are held in harmony as they submit to and are open to one another.

I want to develop an image of the priesthood of all believers being a praxis that focuses on ministry being to/alongside/from all. This radically egalitarian and democratic form of Church life carries with it an insistence that God’s movement and direction flows into the Church, via the Holy Spirit, and penetrates all its members. There are none who have privileged access to God and therefore none who have a more important role when it comes to the teaching ministry of the Church. As this relates to intellectual disability, this conception of the priesthood of all believers opens up to the radical notion that, not only will those with various intellectual disabilities be ministered to, but they will also act as ministers and co-ministers.

Extending the task of the teaching ministry of the Church to all within its walls will quite likely mean re-imagining what religious education looks like. As men and women are incorporated into the body of Christ, their functions as parts of the body are realized, which contributes to the “overall health and accomplishment of the Church as the body of Christ.”¹³ St. Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth is especially informative here. In chapter 12, Paul writes both of the nature of spiritual gifts¹⁴ and the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ.¹⁵ In reference to the latter, Paul writes that a body is made up of many members, all of whom are integral and have their purpose in the work of the whole. Furthermore, he states that it is especially important that each member must be able to act on his or her particular calling, or else the whole will not be able to function properly. Finally, it is in fact the “weaker” members of the body who are most important and deserving of the highest honor. It is to the practical integration of these “weaker” members into the Church’s teaching ministry that we now turn.

¹¹ Carlyle Marney, *Priests to Each Other* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1974), 13.

¹² J. Terry Young, “Baptists and the Priesthood of Believers,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 20, no. 2 (1993): 138.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 12.4-11.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 12.12-31.

PRAXIS

Beginning to Synthesize

Moving beyond theoretical, conceptual analysis of intellectual disability to a praxis-oriented vision for religious education proves difficult because of the fact that much of disability literature relies heavily on the perspectives of observers and caretakers. Disability theory, though linked to liberation thought, finds itself having to seek out new ways to conceive of the task of liberation because so much of that movement relies heavily on a kind of self-definition and self-knowledge that may be unintelligible within the experiences of the intellectually disabled.¹⁶ Therefore, while proponents of more radical forms of pedagogy may maintain that self-knowledge and self-actualization lay at the center of the educational endeavor, there must nonetheless be room for the intellectually disabled.

Synthesizing these three concepts of imagination, intellectual disability, and universal priesthood will mean that each individual community must seek out what these concepts will look like within their own community. Rural and urban churches will practically engage with intellectual disability in religious education in different ways – the same can be said for different ethnic, economic, and generations in communities. While there should definitely be certain norms in place, hopefully informed by many of the aforementioned perspectives, the Baptist distinctive of universal priesthood dictates that the local experiences should be an utmost priority.

Diagnosing and Critiquing Ableism in Religious Education

Pertaining to the subconscious ableism frequently encountered in Baptist churches, it frequently manifests itself via language and programming. People with intellectual disabilities are often passively included within narratives concerning diseases that need to be “cured” or shuffled to the margin of the church community in special classes. As Jason Reimer Greig so clearly puts it, “People with cognitive impairments thus reside in a liminal space, vulnerable to patronizing platitudes at best, congregational neglect and disappearance at worst.”¹⁷

Marney is again helpful here in offering a Baptist perspective on countering forces of oppression in the local church. Much of the ableism in the Church can be tied to an individualism that does not see one’s connection to others in the community. Issues of access and integration are not **addressed** because “they” are not “my problem.” For Marney, this individualism that denies interdependence is not a “virtue to be celebrated, but a vice to be overcome.”¹⁸ Many religious educational endeavors in local Baptist churches manifest themselves in curriculum that is primarily taught and read by participants. Ableism is blatantly apparent in that, a) not every member of the body processes information in the same way, and b) the potential of frequent disruptions by other-abled members frequently precludes them from involvement at all.

Thomas Reynolds writes of how quite often, attempts at inclusion are often hinged on some concept of “sameness,” which usually in turn means disregarding difference. Instead of an attempt to include, Reynolds suggests shifting towards a kind of “deep access” for all those involved. This “deep access” can also be understood as the full integration of all those involved.

¹⁶ Medi Ann Volpe, “Irresponsible Love: Rethinking Intellectual Disability, Humanity and the Church,” *Modern Theology* 25, no. 3 (2009): 493.

¹⁷ Jason Francis Reimer Greig, “Shalom Made Strange: A Peace Church Theology for and with People with Intellectual Disabilities,” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 32, no. 1 (2014): 28.

¹⁸ Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, 199.

Integration, then, "...is not so much a matter of welcoming so you can be a part of us on our terms, but rather so you can be with and augment us differently, on your terms as well."¹⁹

Full integration within the Church hinges on a commitment to mutual submission within the body of believers. Ideas of hierarchy must be abandoned if all members of the Church are able to fully integrate. The goal is that all parties involved are able to fully embrace the "other" in the other, knowing one another.²⁰ The shift from independence to interdependence that is essential to seeing this idea of integration actualized finds much support in the Baptist distinctive of a universal priesthood. In opening up to one another and being willing to learn from the experiences of others, we act as servant priests to each other. The burden is on all in that "Each of us is to serve and be served, love and be loved, teach and be taught."²¹

The localized praxis of religious education must be a central aspect of a church in the process of dis/abling. There cannot be a "one size fits all" approach, because individual experiences are novel to each community, a reality that is especially true for those with intellectual disabilities and their families. In an attempt to begin this process, Paulo Freire's "culture circles" can be an informative image. Freire describes these circles as such: "Instead of a teacher, we had a coordinator; instead of lectures, dialogue; instead of pupils, group participants; instead of alienating syllabi, compact programs that were 'broken down' and 'codified' into learning units."²²

Religious Education and the Dis/abled Baptist Church

Practically applying this desire for integration will by necessity look different in every individual Church community. As it relates to religious education, it is important to note the importance of active as well as passive education that operates for/from/alongside those with intellectual disabilities. The active educational endeavors are initially self-apparent – integration into Christian education activities such as classes, vacation Bible schools, retreats, etc. are incredibly important. More passive modes of religious education, particularly actions and language can be just as, if not more important, than more active ones. The two ordinances of Baptist faith and practice, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are two integral places where education happens.

How this relates to Baptism will have to be worked out corporately within Baptist communities because of the significance Baptists place on Baptism as an act which "believers" participate in. What constitutes belief? Is the "belief" which is required for believer's Baptism one grounded in a cognitive ascent to a proposition, or something else? While many Baptists require Baptism to be withheld until after an "age of accountability," perhaps this concept must, too, be critiqued, disabled, and replaced with something more holistic and hospitable to members of the community whose brains do not function like others. A theology, which is no longer dependent on modern notions of rationality, may be the only way forward.²³

The Lord's Supper,²⁴ while not something usually withheld from individuals in Baptist life, remains a formative act that must remain open to all. The dis/abled Baptist Church, one that is moving away from ableism and towards Reynold's "deep access," will seek out ways to

¹⁹ Thomas E. Reynolds, "Invoking Deep Access: Disability Beyond Inclusion in the Church," *Dialog* 51, no. 3 (2012): 218.

²⁰ Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983), 8.

²¹ Prevost, 55.

²² Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 40.

²³ Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, 87.

²⁴ Alternatively and interchangeably known as the Eucharist or Communion.

include the intellectually disabled in the serving and receiving of the Lord's Supper. Eiesland writes of how including the disabled in the regular administration of the Lord's Supper acts as a "bodily mediation of justice,"²⁵ a way for the movement and presence of God to be experienced in all the members of the community.

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²⁵ Eiesland, 112.



**Inside the Mirror:
Five Domains of Theopoetic Critique on Theological Education**

Beginning with an overview of the emerging literature on theopoetics, this paper considers the implications of a theopoetic critique across five domains of theological education: reading, writing, research methods, pedagogy, and publication. It argues that the theopoetic impulse to value embodiment and aesthetics asks more of current religious education practices than they currently provide. Suggestions are made for areas of growth that support a theological imaginary that is more fully incarnational and prophetic.

A mirror with an inside is a liar. The mirror must be absent from itself...
Instead of the I, the impersonal “one.” One sees, one observes, one
concludes. Who?

Nobody.

Everybody...

It happened, however, that my mirror got tired of
this boring function of always repeating what is outside, and started having
its own ideas. Instead of faithful reflections it began showing images for
which there was no corresponding reality outside...

And

as I did it, another of my credentials as a respectable teacher was lost. I was
no longer a mirror which could be trusted...¹

– Rubem Alves

While its academic origins begin in the late 1960s with work at the intersection of theology, literary criticism, and Heideggerian hermeneutics, conversation around “theopoetics” has recently seen a significant growth in attention. With a notable presence in an increasing number of articles and books (eg Catherine Keller’s *Cloud of the Impossible*, Paul Scott Wilson’s *Preaching as Poetry*, John Caputo’s *The Insistence of God*, Gabriel Vahanian’s *Theopoetics of the Word*, etc.) theopoetics continues to rise in citation and use by both theologians and continental philosophers of religion. Given this increasing attention, the inspiring question of this paper pertains to the ways in which this emerging topic is related to embodied practices, particularly those which comprise the activities of formal theological education.

Here we briefly take up the question of what theopoetics is before moving into the claim that there are five domains of theopoetic critique that can be made at the levels of reading, writing, researching, teaching, and publication. The challenge in each of these domains is detailed and the paper closes with a reflection on the potential of the theopoetic perspective for Theological Education, including some suggestions for integration moving forward.

Though there have now been thousands of pages devoted to reflection on theopoetics and how it challenges attempts at “pure” rationalism and propositional methods, this paper is the first to claim that there is a fairly consistent – and broad – critique that theopoetic methods suggest across multiple domains within theological education. Inspired by the work of Rubem Alves, we wonder here with him if the time has come for the mirrors of theological education to “start having their own ideas.”

1 Alves, *The Poet, The Warrior, The Prophet*, 5.

So, What is Theopoetics, Exactly?

Literature on theopoetics takes seriously the claim that containers change content, and looks not only to the *substance* of theological arguments, but the genre, style, context, and aesthetics from which they emerge and in which they are embedded. J. Denny Weaver offers a succinct description.²

A non-poet's definition of theopoetics might be that it is a hybrid of poetry and theology... But to call it that misses the mark. It is an entire way of thinking. From the side of poetry, it shows that ideas are more than abstractions. They have form – verbal, visual, sensual – and are thus experienced as least as much as they are thought . . . What one learns from the theology side [is that] theology is more than an abstraction. It is a way of thinking, visualizing, and sensing images of God.³

As a term, theopoetics originates in the religious and theological scholarship of Stanley Hopper and his work around hermeneutics, religion, and literature in the 1960s. Indeed, Hopper was the co-founder of the first graduate program in Theology and Literature in the United States.⁴ His focus was highly philosophical and academic in tone, with his own description of theopoetics containing the following:

If I am going to talk about God, I must recognize this mythopoetic, metaphorical nature of the language I use. What... *theopoiesis* does is to effect disclosure [of Being] through the crucial nexus of event, thereby making the crux of knowing, both morally and aesthetically, radically decisive in time.⁵

Since the 1960s though, writing about theopoetics has continued to grow.⁶ Theopoetics often focuses on the intersection of theology with one or more of the following, often with several lenses being in place at once: aesthetics, literary criticism, embodiment, philosophies of the imagination, process-relational thought, hermeneutics, and post- and de-colonizing pedagogy.

What theopoetics brings to the conversation is not all that novel compared to critical theory in the wake of Derrida and some of the insights around colonized and patriarchal

2 For additional definitions see <http://theopoetics.net/what-is-theopoetics/definitions>

3 J. Denny Weaver

4 David Miller, "Stanley Hopper and Mythopoetics."

5 Hopper, 3.

6 See Google N-Gram in attachments.

language from liberation theologies, feminism, and womanism. That is, many now acknowledge that *how* we say things influences the content of *what* we say; what theopoetics uniquely does is bring the aesthetic dimension of these insights to the forefront,⁷ pressing on theorists and practitioners alike to consider and adjust given that ideas “have form – verbal, visual, sensual – and are thus experienced as least as much as they are thought.”

Five Critiques

While theopoetics work often challenges the status quo in theological and religious education we note that sometimes it unintentionally re-inscribes and reinforces dominating language.⁸ In this piece we want to gesture to where we feel the theopoetics conversation must be headed: to a means-and-ends consistency that takes seriously the challenges that earlier theopoetics work has issued to the domains of reading and writing and bring that critique through into research, pedagogy, and publication as well.

Resisting domination, patriarchy, oppressing others.
Playing into the spirit of the word to address the community
Sometimes accepting the prescribed bibliography,
But – embodying those who were not present.
Or – at times, or should we say “in places,” theopoetics is the powers that be,
Expressed with new fervor, moving through new bodies.
Theopoetics in this generation, humbly resists;
Considering which tropes to continue, disrupt, and deconstruct.
Always challenged by language, choosing new sources –
“evolución, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción,”
translating to “*un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir.*”⁹

Theopoetics gestures beyond content. It is process: engendering a new language for expressing and relating the divine encounter. A language that turns back on itself, projects creatively ahead, or, and most important for religious educators, accepts those sources of inspiration, knowledge(s) of authority, practices of value, and bodies previously rendered invisible.

Reading

- 7 We are grateful to Katheryn Common for this insight.
- 8 For example, a 2015 writing conference focusing on theopoetics, the importance of allowing “non-standard” discourse to have authority, and the centrality of the body to thinking and faith has no people of color among its seven presenters and workshop facilitators.
- 9 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: the new mestiza / la Frontera*. 3rd. edition. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007), 77.

Theopoetics invites us to consider that text is more than just a container for data. It can be said that theology is the content of theological texts. Theopoetics says, “Yes, and... the texts themselves *are theology*.” What M. Craig Barnes says of pastors and scripture we say also of theology.

[Pastors] train their souls for their high calling by constantly moving beyond the rationalistic means of handling Scripture and congregations. They don’t ignore these necessary exegetical and analytical tools, which provide a critical introduction to the text of the Bible and the organization that they serve, but as poets they know that when all that work is done, they still have miles to go before they sleep.¹⁰

Theopoetics encourages people to give up thinking that “understanding” Scripture or theology is something that can be done and completed as a finished act. We resist seeing Augustine’s “faith seeking understanding” as a model where people of faith are on some safari hunt for meaning with Reason as their gun, encouraging instead a broader, immersive and self-transformative experience. We watch out not just for the elusive “prey” of understanding, but also for the other wildlife present: awe, frustration, joy, and the feeling in the body as we enter the text. We read not to master the material but so that it “can really be made to speak to us,”¹¹ cascading over and breaking through our certainties.

Writing

Theopoetics suggests that writing itself is a form of theology enacted. How a thing is said is part of the theological project just as much as the thing itself. Maybe *more* since we don’t have direct access to the thing in itself except through language. Whether I use citations or not; whether my voice is formal, technical, or colloquial; my use of pronouns; the presence of typographical errors; half-hearted attempts at textual humor; full-hearted attempts to describe real contexts and real hearts... these are all part of what theology is. Texts are not just the vehicle of theology. They *are* theology. Or, at least, that’s what theopoetics suggests. If we take this suggestion seriously it means that we must not only read with greater attention to context, but also *write* with an awareness of genre and bodies and breath.

The flattening effect of disembodied, I-less, academic language regularly comes under interrogation by theopoetics thinkers. Discussing his time of U.S. doctoral work in theology while simultaneously in exile from Brazil, Rubem Alves writes as follows.

10 Barnes, *The Pastor as Minor Poet*, 109.

11 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 358.

The doctorate required that each one of us mastered the field of our chosen segment of learning: “to dominate the field” was “scholarship.” I was dreaming, however, of a world that I had lost. And I was amazed with the questions students had chosen, to which they would be dedicating four or five years of their lives. They were fantastic abstractions to me, which I was unable to connect with anything. I remember the famous colloquia with the doctoral students in ethics. The most painful questions, of life and death, were transformed into trapezes where intellectual virtuositities were performed. What was at stake was neither life nor politics, but analytical exercises in which an intellectual skill was exhibited.

Theopoetics suggests that the insistence of a certain type of semantic patterning and style to demonstrate legitimacy is hardly coincidental: the mandated trapeze-ing of much theological scholarship has significant repercussions. Many of these are powerfully articulated in Willie Jennings’s *The Christian Imagination*.

Christian theology is trapped in the revised universalism that feigns the legitimization processes of ancient orthodoxy while being deeply committed to the literary supremacy and ‘universal human genius’ of the languages of the central literary powers—French, English, Italian, German (and sometimes Spanish).

Those theologians who think from within the revised universalism of the world literary powers are concerned with questions of orthodoxy... this is an important, well-intentioned concern. But it is a concern buried inside the hierarchy of languages in world literary space....[a] style generated inside the historic advent of whiteness and the racialized world it has produced.¹²

The contours of our language shape the ideas that the language carries forth. And the ideas that language suppresses.

Research

As a (re)emerging field of discourse, theopoetics invites practitioners to imagine new ways in which to do and report research. While the early practitioners of the 1960s and 70s were almost exclusively focused on writing, contemporary work has pressed out of that boundary. Theopoetic researchers are not only paying attention to the “how” of writing, but also to “who” is writing, to “where” one writes, and in “what body,” – both fleshly and communally – one writes. This is not a novel concept in research, as religious educators have long pointed out the insights provided

12 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 232-233.

through participant observation and critical theory informed sociological, ethnographic, and indigenous research methods.

Looking at writers such as Melanie Duguid-May in *A Body Knows*, or Rubem Alves in *Tomorrow's Child* and *The Poet, the Warrior, the Prophet*, they are naming the flesh and the theological insights inscribed in its contours: "In my language, 'saber' – to know, and 'sabor' – taste. Eating and knowing have the same origin. To know something is to feel its taste, what it does to my body."¹³

Building on this embodied writing, there are those who are researching and sharing research in a theopoetic mode. They are representative of the new locations from which theopoetics is emerging, such as Shelly Rambo (trauma studies and theology), Ashley Theuring (sites of public tragedy),¹⁴ Callid Keefe-Perry (inclusive invitation to new writers of authority),¹⁵ Patrick Reyes (decolonizing those dominating practices of theopoetics),¹⁶ Matt Guynn (the public square),¹⁷ James Hill Jr. and Jon Gill (hip-hop),¹⁸ and Mayra Rivera (poetics of the flesh).¹⁹ Through theopoetics, scholars and practitioners are starting to reimagine the "power" of the theopoetic researcher. Researchers in theopoetics are working to investigate, name, and look for those codes, themes, utterances, and insights that have been subjugated and ancillary to the language of academic research. Theopoetic research methods are seeing, hearing, and actively participating in the call for healing and restoration, for hope and beauty, and allowing for the expression of those themes to emerge outside of traditional registers of academic discourse.

Pedagogy

Like reading, writing, and research methods, theopoetics also challenges religious educators to begin to imagine new possibilities for our academic and congregational pedagogy. This imagination is embodied, performative, populist, engaged with the tradition but wary of traditionalism, interreligious, inclusive, and constantly invitational to a dialogue between learning and unlearning. Theopoetics engenders experiments with new ways of being in the academy together and performing our research findings.

13 Alves, *The Poet*, 122.

14 Theuring, "Holding Hope and Doubt: An Interreligious Theopoetic Response to Public Tragedies," *CrossCurrents*, Dec 2014, Vol. 64, 4 (549-565).

15 Callid Keefe-Perry, "Flesh to Mind: Whetstone to Thought," *CrossCurrents*, Dec 2014, Vol. 64, 4 (489-495).

16 Patrick B. Reyes, "Alisal: Theopoetics and Emancipatory Politics," *Theopoetics* 2, 2.

17 Matt Guynn, "Theopoetics and social change," *CrossCurrents*. 60.1 (2010): 105-114.

18 Gill's (as Gilead7) process philosophy hip hop record, "Advent: A Modern Bible" and Hill's forthcoming "The Tunes Written in Our Flesh: Theopoetics from an Ontologically Hip-Hop Perspective"

19 Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh*.

Pedagogy, as the bell hooks names it, is the art of education. While theopoetics lends itself to the activity of critical pedagogies – the local, contextual, liberating educational movements by way of pedagogues such as Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, Joe Kinchloe, etc. – it challenges religious educators to see beyond the limitation of the classroom experience. Returning to Alves in *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture* (1972), he addresses religious education in particular. He names explicitly that “the community of faith ... gains flesh and bones. In this community the future takes on space in the time still present: it is the ‘objectification of the Spirit,’ *the place where the creative insight and the creative intention become creative power.*”²⁰ Theopoetics informs pedagogy in that its principal posturing is towards *poïesis*, to create. How can we make our classrooms and communities of faith places where multiple ways of knowing (and showing that you know) can take place?

If we accept the creative theopoetic critique, gatherings of scholars and practitioners will look towards the margins, making room at the table not just for marginalized perspectives and ideas but also for marginalized bodies and methods. It will take seriously the emerging research that

the lecture is not generic or neutral, but a specific cultural form that favors some people while discriminating against others, including women, minorities and low-income and first-generation college students. This is not a matter of instructor bias; it is the lecture format itself... that offers unfair advantages to an already privileged population.”²¹

How a thing is communicated – its aesthetics – can alter the thing itself. Neutrality in communication is unattainable.

This is resonant with Courtney Goto’s notion of play and imagination: “some body stories are difficult to express in words, especially for bodies that have been wounded, silenced, or excluded, but giving space for these stories to be revealed can be transformative for both persons and communities.”²² A theopoetic pedagogy is one that makes space for variety in expression of knowledge and in the bibliography: in the authority of texts – both written in word and in the body.

“We are palimpsests, writing on writing, forgotten, erased, but indelibly engraved in the tissue, ready to arise again, if the correct spell is pronounced. Within each body lives a

20 Alves, *Tomorrow's Child*, 198.

21 Paul, Are College Lectures Unfair?, *The New York Times*, 9/12/2015.

22 Goto, “Pretending to be Japanese,” 454.

writing. Story. Or rather: writings, stories... in dreams they appear, small fragments of torn paper.”²³

Publication

We are thinking here of “publication” both in the sense of the systems and pipelines by which theology and education are made accessible via journals and books, but also the ways in which ideas are made available through other means: publication as “making public.” With its attention to media, a theopoetic critique asks if the means by which we are sharing our ideas is effective. Are journals, books, and academic conferences working as such? What does “working” mean in this context? How is the form and aesthetic of the various media we use to communicate shaping what gets to be said and who gets to say it? Might we be better served – or perhaps, serve better – by using YouTube and podcasting instead of a journal? What are we after?

For example, when the planning committee for the first theopoetics conference²⁴ was working on design concept for the event we struggled. We considered bringing in “big names” to give lectures that might make the event more appealing to those who might travel. However, *this is exactly the opposite of how our thinking should proceed given our commitments!* Ultimately we felt like having an event committed to exploring theopoetics meant that the event itself had to be reflective of that commitment: instead of keynote speakers and experts on display we have organized it around circles of dialogue, including the opportunity for interaction and content that is not just linguistic or formally academic. We also have asked that all participants provide us with a brief statement of interest and a picture: when you click on “Who’s Coming?” on the conference website you don’t just see two or three “big names” that will hopefully entice you to come. You see everyone who is coming and can read about each of their passions and commitments.

Paying attention to style and form yields perspectives that can be missed if content is the only thing considered: from words on the page to who gets time on a stage.

Beyond Reflection

Religious education invests in imagination, because to live into the divine mystery is not only the work of the Spirit, but also the community of believers. We read Daniel Schipani:

The challenge to be met is how to develop awareness of the free movement of the creative and liberating divine will, in tune with the eschatological view of the gospel of

23 Rubem Alves, as cited in Jacobsen, Enieda (Ed.) *Public Theology in Brazil: Social and Cultural Challenges*, 140.

24 March 18-19, 2016 at Boston University. See <http://TheopoeticsConference.org/>

the reign of God. The educational program and process must thus affirm hope and expectance in the face of mystery.²⁵

Religious education cultivates a sense of the divine in others, empowering those to feel and bear witness to the divine encounter, and to live into the divine entanglement that is God's creation. Put another way, "religious education activity is a deliberate attending to the transcendent dimension of life by which a conscious relationship to an ultimate ground of being is promoted and enable to come to expression."²⁶ Taking on the theopoetic charge, religious education can examine the divine Word in a new hue and think about impact of the canvas and frame.

We feel like extending an invitation to other religious educators. If your work writes on the "boundary line" of theology and poetics, if your bibliography explores beauty, if your research leans over into the void of research and is resurrecting bodies as opposed to reporting the dead, if your pedagogy is embodied in the flesh, or if you are interested in community publication as opposed to self-aggrandizement in publishing, we encourage you consider theopoetics.

Lose some of your "credentials as a respectable teacher," and become a mirror that reflects, yes... and also shows images for which there is not yet any corresponding reality. Or one that dances itself off the wall. Or sings the love songs your mother sang to you. We would love for you to get to know those who are already dancing in among theopoetics' definitions and we would invite you to come play with us in that space.

25 Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*, 193.

26 Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, 22.

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Re-Imagining Morality on the Web

Abstract

Recent sociological studies suggest that many young people today lack a sense of socio-moral commitment and responsibility. Drawing insight from C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), this research study asks: How do Catholic young adult websites contribute to the creation and performance of a storied identity that encourages the development of a sociological imagination, towards a sense of shared moral responsibility among young adults in an increasingly pluralistic age? This study explores at how religious organizations are using new media to communicate moral content to young adults and critiques the websites' conceptions of young adult development and morality in light of Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory. Guided by Kegan's theory, the study explores how the websites function as a holding environment for young adult moral development by exploring how they provide confirmation, challenge, and continuity.

Introduction

The advances of social and cultural globalization raised new issues in the fields of morality and religious ethics. Online search engines provide almost unlimited access to information and remain the most popular way to access information on the internet, next to email.¹ The phrase "Google it" has, for many, replaced phrases like "look it up," or "research it."² The Internet and new media expose contemporary young adults to multiple points of view, competing truth claims, and diverse ways of knowing. The immense amount of information from one search can be overwhelming. In regards to this "information overload," Pijpers remarks that an overabundance of information "makes it very hard to distinguish crucial information from noise."³

The problem of information overload is not new. In fact, sociologist C. Wright Mills described this problem in the mid twentieth century. He pointed out that as people "feel they cannot cope with the larger worlds with which they are so suddenly confronted," they often disconnect from their social and historical surrounds,⁴ adding:

¹Kristen Purcell, Joanna Brenner, and Lee Rainie, "Search Engine Use 2012." *Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project* (Washington, D.C., March 9, 2012) <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Search-Engine-Use-2012.aspx> (accessed Oct 5, 2014).

²Kristen Purcell et al., "How Teens Do Research in the Digital World," Nov 1. (Washington, D.C., 2012) <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Student-Research> (accessed Aug 14, 2015).

³Guus Pijpers, *Information Overload: A System for Better Managing Everyday Data*, Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley and Sons, 2010.

⁴C. Wright. Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 4-5.

What they need, and what they feel they need, is a quality of mind that will help them use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves.⁵

Mills calls this quality of mind *The Sociological Imagination*. He states the more information people are faced with, the more it “dominates their attention and overwhelms their capacity to assimilate it.”⁶ When people feel overwhelmed by society they often have a difficult time developing capacities for socio-moral commitment and responsibility. That is, they have difficulty understanding and making sense of the moral demands placed upon them within society. Developing a sociological imagination is, therefore, a necessary prerequisite for developing a sense of socio-moral responsibility.

Recent sociological studies suggest that many young people today lack a sense of sociological imagination and corresponding senses of socio-moral commitment and responsibility. Instead, they tend to reduce morality to personal choice or opinion. For instance, *The National Study of Youth and Religion* (NSYR) reported that sixty percent of the young adults interviewed in the United States feel that “morality is a personal choice, entirely a matter of individual decision.”⁷ Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks state that moral individualism gives rise to a sort of “cynicism” that leaves “little imagination of a collective will, of shared participation and belonging.”⁸ The world is viewed less often today in terms of universal concepts of right and wrong and more and more in terms of relative and ambiguous perceptions of morality. Overall, with the surplus of information available through new media, and a diminished capacity for sociological imagining, contemporary young adults may be losing a sense of a shared moral responsibility for the betterment of others and the world we inhabit.

Reliance on information technology has led many young adults to search online, often indiscriminately, for answers of general information, including religious and moral questions, over the internet.⁹ However, in striving to address contemporary young adults’ diminished capacities for sociological imagining and shared moral responsibility, religious educators and pastoral ministers can begin with the young adult practice of searching online for information. Specifically, Heidi Campbell explores how religious institutions and practitioners shape and *are* shaped by information technology and new media. In describing what she calls a “networked religion,” Campbell states¹⁰ “that religion online functions within a network of interactions, in which social relationships, structures, and patterns of belief become highly malleable, global, and interconnected.”¹¹ Campbell lists five characteristics of networked religion, including: “networked community, storied identity, shifting authority, convergent practice, and multisite reality.”¹² Hence, the development of new media provides religious educators with new

⁵ Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Christian Smith et al., *Lost in Transition: the Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21.

⁸ Laurent A. Daloz et al., *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 12.

⁹ Purcell, “Search Engine Use 2012.” And Elana Larsen, “CyberFaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online,” Pew Research Internet and Public Life (Washington, D.C. December 23, 2001).

¹⁰ Heidi A. Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (March 2012): 65.

¹¹ Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship,” 67-68.

¹² Ibid., 68.

opportunities to explore young adult moral development beyond traditional physical environments and to consider how young adults construct and develop a moral identity online and, as Campbell states, “affirm an individual’s ability to use the internet as a tool to assemble religious identities.”¹³ This paper explores specifically the experience and development of a “storied identity” as it relates to moral development, and also describes the shifting nature of religious authority through the internet.

To understand how young adults can evolve the quality of mind needed for sociological imagining in a networked religion, this study explores Robert Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory of human personhood.¹⁴ Kegan’s theory provides a framework for religious educators to reexamine the role of new media to enable young adults to meet the mental and social demands of a sociological imagination and support a vision of maturity with openness beyond those demands. This study asks: How do Catholic young adult websites contribute to the creation and performance of a storied identity that encourages the development of a sociological imagination, towards a sense of shared moral responsibility among young adults in an increasingly pluralistic age?¹⁵

Kegan’s Constructive-Developmental Theory of Morality

Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory of human personhood and moral development provides a psychological framework for understanding how the sociological imagination can be nurtured in young adults. Mills suggests that the full realization of a *sociological imagination* requires a more complex “quality of mind”¹⁶ or, to use Kegan’s language “a qualitative change in the complexity of our minds.”¹⁷ According to Kegan, when we move beyond the Traditional/Socialized (third level) ways of knowing, towards the Modern/Self-Authoring, (fourth level) ways of knowing we are able to step outside the emotional connection to our relationships to see the broader context of meaning as we discover that we are our own authority, “guided by our own visions” and ideologies.¹⁸ As we grow in our ability to perceive the larger societal impact of our individual moral decisions, we begin to evolve the quality of mind needed for *sociological imagining*. As a result, our moral awareness comes from our own internal sense of integrity, or moral identity.¹⁹ Through extensive research and interviews, Kegan and his associates have reported that nearly one half to two-thirds of the adult population are still

¹³ Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship,” 73.

¹⁴ Kegan, *The Evolving Self* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹⁵ While social media pages; such as, Facebook and Twitter, are among the most commonly accessed media outlets by young adults, this study looks at how religious organizations are using new media to communicate moral content to young adults.

¹⁶ Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 5.

¹⁷ Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 6.

¹⁸ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 172-173.

¹⁹ While this paper selects the two levels of knowing that relate most to the young adults years, it is important to note that, according to Kegan, society encourages and nurtures the further development of mental capacity beyond mid life (fourth level) by challenging people to grow beyond modern ways of knowing and to adapt to postmodern/Self-Transforming, or a fifth level of knowing. Websites can embrace a self-transforming, or dialectical vision of moral maturity by helping people develop the capacity to incorporate conflicting or alternative ways of knowing into our sense of self, showing us we are not autonomous and complete, but that we can and *want* to incorporate the moral sensibilities of the other into our sense of self (see Kegan, 1994, 322).

functioning at the Socialized, or third level of knowing, and *not* operating fully in the fourth, Self-Authoring way of knowing.²⁰

Developmentally, many young adults are struggling to carve out a new way of making sense of the world as they transition from adolescence towards third level knowing common to young adulthood and adulthood.²¹ The early young adult years (around age 18) often mark the beginning of a slow transition towards the third level of mental complexity, and few will evolve past the third order of consciousness before leaving college.²² The shifting nature of religion authority through the internet has further complicated the development towards self authorship and sociological imagining. Campbell states:

...the internet represents a sphere for the renegotiation and canonization of accepted sources of authority...It is recognized that the structure of web sites and discussion forums offers a platform of influence often not available to users offline, as they become interpreters of religious belief and culture online.²³

Kegan states the way our holding environments, or social surrounds, support our development will have an impact on our ability for more complex thinking, or sociological imagining.

Websites as “Holding Environments”

According to Kegan’s theory, we construct and build on our developing sense of self within the context of our relationship to our social environment, and the characteristics of our social environments, or “holding environments,” are important for healthy growth and development.²⁴ Campbell also states that in the networked religion, “religious identity is not simply absorbed through internet engagement...Identity is both constructed and performed, as internet users draw on multiple resources available online.”²⁵ With the increased use and reliance on new media, the internet has also become a type of holding environment where young adults construct and develop their moral identity both online and offline.

Kegan indicates three important functions of a holding environment: “It must hold on. It must let go. And it must stick around so that it can be reintegrated.”²⁶ Kegan describes these functions as *confirmation* (holding on), *contradiction* (letting go), and *continuity* (remaining in place). This section explores the conception of morality and moral development presented on the websites that were reviewed in terms of how they function as supportive, yet challenging environments in the ways they *confirm*, *contradict*, and *endure over time*.²⁷ The websites chosen for this study were selected by criterion sampling based on popularity, religious orientation, audience, and authorship or sponsorship. The criteria for website selection are that they be designed specifically for Catholic young adults and created or authored by an

²⁰ Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 191.

²¹ Kegan outlines five stages or “balances” we grow in and out of through out life. For the purposes of this paper, the stages that correspond most to young adulthood and the *Sociological Imagination* (levels three and four) will be described in more detail.

²² Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 37.

²³ Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship, 2012, 74.

²⁴ Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 113.

²⁵ Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship,” 71.

²⁶ Kegan, *The Evolving Self*, 121.

²⁷ Ibid.

organization/person other than a diocese or parish. Of the several hundred thousand²⁸ websites referencing young adult morality found using “catholic young adult” on *Google.com* and that meet the selection criteria for how morality is presented to Catholic young adults, the top two that were selected for careful review are: *Bustedhalo.com* and *Catholicsoncall.com*.²⁹

Using Gadamer’s hermeneutic method³⁰ of textual interpretation, the information gathered from the selected websites on morality and the moral education of young adults is summarized, analyzed, and brought into dialogue with the researcher’s perspective. This section presents a horizon of inquiry for understanding by exploring how each website presupposes young adult’s think of morality and the type of moral reasoning the websites expect young adults to have.³¹ Next, this section explores how attuned the websites are to constructive developmental theory and examines their role as holding environments for young adult moral development and the construction and performance of a storied identity.

Confirming

From a religious educational and ministerial perspective, a positive holding environment *confirms* young adult development by trusting, acknowledging, and supporting where young adults are in the movement of life. For Kegan, *confirmation* supports young adults by showing them we take them seriously and recognize how *they* want to be seen.³² At this level of knowing we affirm and follow the moral truths established by a trusted authority outside of us. This section provides a brief description of each website, a survey of the moral content on the site, and examines how well each website acknowledges the collaborative nature of third order knowing. That is, this study asks: How does each site *confirm* the young adult need for inclusion, specifically the need to feel acknowledged and supported by the moral teaching of the Church?

Bustedhalo.com

Busted Halo[®] is described as an “Online magazine for spiritual seekers” sponsored by the Paulist Fathers. The director of the website, Fr. Dave Dwyer, CSP, writes “Busted Halo[®] Ministries helps young adults explore their spirituality, listen to and encourage one another, discover (or re-discover) the rich depths of Catholic tradition. . .” *Bustedhalo.com* “repackages”

²⁸ Google.com shows an estimate of 1,440,000 search results, however; by the nature of the Internet, this number changes weekly.

²⁹ While two websites are explored in this paper, a third website, *Youngadultholics-blog.com*, meets the research criteria. *Youngadultholics-blog.com* is self-titled as a “progressive” website affiliated with the group *Call to Action* (CTA 20/30), designed to support Catholic young adults in their 20s and 30s. The site brings in multiple perspectives on moral issues, often challenging the traditional moral teaching of the Church in light of contemporary experiences.

³⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd ed.). Translated by J. W. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 301.

³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 271. Gadamer states, when using the Hermeneutic Circle to interpret texts, “the important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings” (271-272). In selecting articles and summarizing their content, the researcher was aware of the interpretation she brought to the text as she determined what is relevant to a research project on contemporary moral development. The content that is included and excluded in the summaries of each article reflect the researcher’s predisposition towards constructive-developmental theory and the transitional nature of contemporary young adult morality.

³² Kegan, *Evolving Self*, 194.

the Catholic faith using new marketing strategies to communicate the moral teachings of the Church, to more fully overcome the secularism, individualism, and relativism of society.³³

Busted Halo[®] confirms Catholic young adults in the third level of knowing by affirming the moral tradition of the Church. The posts and podcasts have a question and answer structure similar to the Baltimore Catechism. On the Busted Halo[®] radio show (prerecorded and turned into a podcast for the website) callers phone in with questions about church teaching and Dwyer provides answers on air.³⁴ In supporting young adults who base their moral decisions on the moral authority of the church, Busted Halo[®] helps young adults fully embrace third level knowing by addressing moral issues from the perspective of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, or the *National Directory for Catechesis*.

Catholics on Call

The Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union created the website *Catholics on Call: Direction for Your Life* as an online vocational outreach program for young adults. *Catholics on Call* has the specific purpose of helping young adults recognize a vocational call to service in the Church (from lay ministers to ordained clergy). Writers for the website begin with the premise that there are objective moral truths to be held, but the challenges of contemporary society have made these truths harder to identify and understand.

Catholics on Call confirms third order knowing by presenting the official position of the church on moral issues. Rather than challenging church teaching, the website provides alternative viewpoints to consider apart from the moral tradition of the Church. One post on sexuality³⁵ for example, provides information about the Church's stance on premarital sex. The author then follows up with examples of how many *young adults* perceive that teaching, and provides multiple perspectives on the topics raised. Overall, *Catholics on Call* provides confirmation by suggesting in many posts that young adults pray for discernment when faced with challenging moral issues and "reflect on God's call in their life."³⁶

Contradiction

Websites can provide *contraction* for young adult moral development by helping young adults raise questions about how they reason morally and begin to explore a sociological imagination. Developmentally, websites *contradict* or "let go" of the moral authority of the Church as ultimate and provide space for the development of the inner moral voice of those who use the sites. Mills states that the values we hold are "often unconsciously acquired habits rather than choices,"³⁷ and by providing *contradiction* we are helping young adults reflect and evaluate

³³ Dave Dwyer, "Young Adults and the New Evangelization," *National Leadership Forum on Young Adult Ministry*. (Orlando: National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association, 2012).

³⁴ For example, one young adult called in and asked, "What does the Church say about transgendered people?"³⁴ The radio show responded with an answer from Church Tradition. On the radio show, the dialogue takes place between various members of the radio show, but there is no continued conversation between the members and the callers.

³⁵ Beth Knobbe, "Sexuality: Encouraging a healthy, holy love life," "Catholics On Call" entry posted August 27, 2007 <http://www.catholicsoncall.org/node/1037> (accessed March 10, 2015)

³⁶ "Catholics on Call: Direction for Your Life, "About Us" <http://www.catholicsoncall.org/about-us> (accessed March 15, 2015).

³⁷ Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 194.

why they hold the morals they do. For example, do the sites ask young adults to make their own conscious decisions, to act on their moral reflections, or imagine and design their own moral solutions? Do the websites offer space and guidance for young adults to examine how they reason morally in terms of their experiences?³⁸ Holding environments provide contradiction, or “let go,” when they encourage moral maturity by “raising questions about the adequacy of confirmation.”³⁹ Websites that contradict challenge third order knowing by exploring the limits of moral authority through counterfactual moral reasoning and imagination; by seeing the “gap between person and world, things as they ‘might’ be and things as they ‘are.’”⁴⁰ Stated differently, providing *contradiction* helps young adults develop a sociological imagination.

Busted Halo[®] contradicts *second* order knowing, or preconventional morality, by helping adolescents see how their moral choices affect others, not just themselves.⁴¹ The questions posted on the site do not contradict the limits of third order knowing through analysis or evaluation, but ask, instead, for points of clarification and understanding. The site supports conventional morality by offering direct moral formation, but it does not raise fully questions about the limits of the moral tradition of the Church.

Catholics on Call provides contradiction by challenging third order knowing through reflections that explore the meaning behind the church’s moral position, rather than accepting it at face value, and blogs that engage in multiple perspectives.⁴² The reflections on the website “introduce[s] contradictory ideas”⁴³ and calls into question the adequacy of moral authority. The site provides the moral position of the Church, but raises questions about moral teachings and encourages young adults to think about their own moral voice; “a skill essential to the strengthening of formal reasoning”⁴⁴ and sociological imagining.

Continuity

Constructive developmental theory⁴⁵ states that as we develop and widen our perception to include more complex ways of knowing and embrace the sociological imagination, we transition through unsettling periods of relativism. We feel a sense of loss and anxiety when we begin questioning what we once held as true. As we shift how we construct our experience, we become vulnerable and often do not know where to turn. We rely less on the authority we once identified with, but have not yet formed a new way of making meaning.

³⁸ See Mills, 196.

³⁹ Laurent Daloz, *Effective Teaching and Mentoring* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986) 193.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ When we let go of second order knowing, we no longer make moral choices based on our needs and wants, we become a part of something larger than ourselves, and feel “nourished in the private rituals and customs that enact and enforce the [community’s] deepest idiosyncratic beliefs of what life is really about.” (Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, 267).

⁴² For example, an article by Robin Ryan on the Vatican’s statement against homosexuals in the priesthood, explores how challenging it may be for many to accept this instruction. He states, “Some will undoubtedly feel that it awakens painful memories of unjust discrimination. Others may argue that this teaching is opposed to the Catholic affirmation of the inherent dignity of persons with a homosexual affirmation.” See Robin Ryan, CP, “A Reflection on the Vatican Statement about Homosexuality and the Priesthood,” “Catholics on Call: Direction for Your Life,” entry posted April 17, 2007 (accessed March 12, 2015).

⁴³ Daloz, *Effective Teaching*, 213.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 224.

⁴⁵ Kegan, *The Evolving Self*.

Evaluating how effectively the websites reviewed “stick around” is challenging due to the nature of a website as a holding environment. People can “stick around” as young adults grow, transition, and struggle to reshape their relationships with them. How do websites accomplish this? This study suggests websites can provide *continuity* through the written dialogue on the sites. Websites can offer readers a place to comment (or call into a podcast) and reflect on the articles or blog posts, and authors or editors can follow up on questions or clarify information. These written dialogues were explored for the ways in which they provide “vision;”⁴⁶ that is, how they provide opportunities for self-reflection, and model a vision of moral maturity. This section explores how each site recognizes the transitional nature of young adult morality.⁴⁷

Both websites incorporate some sense of dialogue, either through online chats, callers phoning into a recorded podcast, or blogs with room to add reader’s comments. *Busted Halo.com* has a pre-recorded radio show where listeners can write or call in with questions about morality and church teaching. The answers are recorded through the podcasts, but there are no follow up questions on the show.⁴⁸ Eighty-seven percent of the posts do not provide *continuity* or space where “the old self and the new” can enter into dialogue through self-reflection.⁴⁹

Catholics on Call has a section for comments after every post; however, possibly due to low website popularity, there are no comments posted under any of the seven reflections on morality. There are five comments posted by readers throughout the whole site, thanking the author, or affirming an aspect of the blog the reader identifies with, but there are no follow up comments from anyone affiliated with *Catholics on Call*. In providing *continuity*, the website offers opportunities for young adults to share their reactions to the articles, but the site does not provide an effective forum for internal self reflection as there are no responses to the articles on morality.

Conclusion

The shifting and “malleable” nature of a networked religion⁵⁰ has created a new holding environment for young adult development. If religious organizations can frame their online presence as a holding environment that provides *confirmation*, *contradiction*, and *continuity* for young adult moral development, then a networked religion can enable young adults to reflect critically on how they understand morality in light of their changing experiences.⁵¹ New media can become a platform for religious educators and organizations by providing young adults with space to reflect on their own individual sense of morality and the interconnectedness between themselves and the larger society to transform the quality of mind needed to imagine creative

⁴⁶ Daloz, *Effective Teaching*, 213.

⁴⁷ Kegan *The Evolving Self*, 121, 129.

⁴⁸ Busted Halo® offers bog posts about the podcasts on its website; however, only two of the fifteen posts under *Morality and Social Teaching* provide space for posting comments on the corresponding podcast.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁵⁰ Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship.”

⁵¹ By using new media as a repository for young adult moral formation, and failing to provide multiple perspectives on moral issues, websites like Busted Halo® do not encourage sociological imagining and may be discouraging young adults from establishing a shared sense of moral responsibility. *Catholics on Call* offers a vision of moral maturity beyond third level knowing, but it is ranked ninth out of the top ten websites for Catholic young adults.

solutions to private and public issues of morality towards a shared sense of moral responsibility in the world.

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Reimagining Ecological Models for Religious Education

Sallie McFague’s metaphorical theology challenges religious educators to live into the question: How can we reimagine ecological models for religious education? In this paper I will explore a range of responses, comparing the educational implications of the theological work of Sallie McFague and Norman Wirzba, and considering Sharon Parks’ metaphorical and ecological re-imagining of James Fowler’s faith development theory. I will conclude by proposing “Sabbath friendship” as a healing metaphor for re-imagining an ecological model for religious education.

Reimagining Ecological Models for Religious Education

What will it take to awaken us to a planet in crisis? Even the Weather Channel risks political controversy to sound cries of alarm. *Climate 25* is an online video production of the Weather Channel in which twenty-five leaders in diverse fields warn about the impact of climate disruption on health, security, energy, and peace (Weather Channel 2015).

Every field of human endeavor has a healing role to play in responding to this crisis. A needed response by the field of religious education is to reimagine ecological models of religious education. This reimagining project has much to contribute to a larger conversation about the reinvention of education with “earth in mind” (Orr 2004).

In this paper I draw upon Sallie McFague’s metaphorical theology (1975, 1976, 1982, 1987, 2008, 2013) to identify possible paths for reimagining both our theology and our pedagogy, both our models of the God-world relationship and our related models of education, in light of emerging ecological sensibilities. Beyond this paper further concretization is needed to flesh out these pathways.

Metaphoric Process and Responsible Imagining

Sallie McFague’s “metaphorical theology” has much to teach us about the role of imagination in shaping life on this planet. She largely affirms the postmodern claim that we humans collectively construct our lived reality through imagination’s vehicles of metaphor and story. However, she argues that listening to the voice of pain, especially the voice of the poor and of the earth, helps us discern boundaries to limit the play of the imagination (1987, 20).

The exercise of a responsible imagination, urges McFague, involves a call to critical awareness of metaphors that harm and to creative re-imagining of metaphors that heal, a creative “metaphoric process” I propose pulses at the heart of learning process (Johnston 1997). McFague urges us to see that theology deeply matters because in our search for knowledge and meaning we each hold metaphorically constructed images of ultimate reality -- the God-World relationship -- that implicitly shape our values, attitudes and actions (McFague 2008, 5).

As a theologian responding to the environmental crisis and to the present-day ecological and evolutionary sciences and sensibilities, McFague sets about re-imagining metaphorically rooted models for the God-World relationship that are in keeping with her Christian tradition but appropriate for our times. Her project is to replace “patriarchal, imperialistic, and triumphalist metaphors” that promote harmful modes of hierarchical relationships. Her quest is to offer ecological metaphors that potentially restore more interdependent, organic relationships (1987).

McFague’s search for ecological metaphors grows not only from her commitment to speak relevantly in an ecological age but also from her theological roots in a covenantal biblical tradition. Her mentor H. Richard Niebuhr’s (1954, 1978) responsibility metaphor for moral agency is rooted in that covenantal tradition, a tradition that emphasizes relationality and

interdependence much like the emerging ecological understanding of existence. Niebuhr's responsibility model of the moral agent as caring friend emphasizes the fundamental value of "presence" – the I-Thou relationship in every encounter with the other – that enables one to respond with respect and care for the other who is distinct from yet related to ourselves (1989, 46-62).

In keeping with the biblical covenantal tradition and Niebuhr's responsibility model of moral agency, McFague asks us to consider the healing possibilities in imagining the world as God's body instead of seeing the world as God's kingdom. She writes:

What this experiment with the world as God's body comes to, finally, is an awareness, both chilling and breathtaking, that we as worldly, bodily beings are in God's presence. It is the basis of a revived sacramentalism, that is, a perception of the divine as visible, as present, palpably present in our world... The world is a (vulnerable) body that must be carefully tended, that must be nurtured, protected, guided, loved and befriended both as valuable in itself -- for like us, it is an expression of God -- and as necessary to the continuation of life. (1987, 77)

Her vision expands Niebuhr's covenantal view of human responsibility for "the other" to include our sacred relationship with the earth itself. Her goal is to do her part as a theologian to awaken hearts to see the sacramental depths of the natural world that our covenant-keeping God steadfastly loves and inhabits.

The Call to Educate with Earth in Mind

In her most recent book on the practice of restraint, McFague (2013) responds to the lead article in the 2010 edition of *The State of the World: Transforming Cultures from Consumerism to Sustainability*. This annual environmental report opens by calling upon the religions of the world to play a more radical role in responding to the environmental crisis. Religious instruction, the article asserts, is failing to address the intrinsic connection between ecology and economy. Religions are called to offer alternatives to the "culture of consumerism" by providing leadership in "a wholesale transformation of dominant cultural patterns" (McFague 2013, X).

The Pope's encyclical on the environment, *On Care for Our Common Home* (2015), also takes up the call to link ecology and economy, arguing that justice for the poor is intrinsically related to care of the earth. The Pope concludes his encyclical with a chapter titled, "Ecological Education and Spirituality." He acknowledges that the environmental crisis is a spiritual crisis at heart and that religious education must play a key role in changing hearts and minds.

I propose that in order to play a role in "transforming a culture of consumerism" and to respond to the spiritual heart of our economic/ecological crisis, we must reimagine our models for both education and theology in light of emerging ecological sensibilities. Developing an ecological model for religious education becomes an extension of McFague's theological project of imagining what it might mean to see the world as God's body.

Critical awareness of earth-destroying metaphors for education is needed. Orr's (2004) work in rethinking higher education through an ecological lens offers insight. He argues in *Earth in Mind*

that education in Western cultures has been shaped by the “industrial mind.” Education envisioned through this Newtonian mechanization lens is “education that alienates us from life in the name of human domination, fragments instead of unifies, overemphasizes success and careers, separates feeling from intellect and the practical from the theoretical, and unleashes on the world minds ignorant of their own ignorance” (2004, 17).

Orr calls for critical awareness of the way the prevailing cultural lens can disorder imagination, values, and thought. Responding to our planetary crisis requires freeing the imagination from the industrial mind in order to “educate citizens of the biotic community” (16). This requires a thorough ecological redesign of education by all institutions of learning (2-3).

I believe reimagining ecological models for religious education can help recover the fundamentally religious character of the entire educational enterprise. For ultimately the educational process is rooted in an ongoing conversation between myth and science, between our mythic/metaphoric pictures of reality and our human quest to learn from experience. Engaging this conversation intentionally and doing it well involves what I claim McFague’s project illustrates as “metaphoric process” as well as what Brelsford suggests with his notion of a “mythical realist” goal of religious education (Brelsford 2007). As such, religious educators’ faithful imagining has much to contribute to redesigning twenty-first century education with “earth in mind.”

Metaphoric Imagination and the Learning Process

McFague’s metaphorical theology is rooted in an appreciation of metaphor that emerged in the last half of the twentieth century (Black 1962; Ricouer 1966; Kuhn 1970; Barbour 1974; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Widespread attention to the pervasiveness of metaphor in language challenged the logical positivist view of language. The insight emerged that metaphors not only convey meaning that cannot be reduced to literal, verifiable truth but also that metaphors create and recreate experience.

McFague’s technical definition of metaphor is this:

A metaphor is an assertion or judgment of similarity and difference between two thoughts in permanent tension with one another, which redescribes reality in an open-ended way but has structural as well as affective power. (1982, 42)

Here we especially notice Ricouer’s influence on McFague’s understanding of metaphor. He emphasizes the tentative, open-ended way metaphor redefines reality due to the simultaneously true and false claim of similarity between two fields of meaning within a metaphor (Ricouer 1966, 1981).

The tentativeness of metaphorical assertions of truth, in the interactive view of metaphor, suggests a more open-ended view of truth and reality than the literal-truth paradigm of positivism. Metaphoric truth includes both the truth and the lie, both what we can know and what remains mystery. Metaphor, thus, is language and thought that is able to respect the presence of mystery within every claim of truth (Johnston 1994, 207).

Ricoeur also helps McFague attend to the affective power of metaphor. He theorizes that imagination, always active in the metaphoric leap of creating similarity between two dissimilar subjects, is deeply linked to bodily affections (1966, 257-258). In a metaphor, we think, in an imaginative way, through the vehicle of images. Images, unlike concepts, evoke memories of concrete embodied experiences. Images trigger responses of the very muscles of the body and the rush of attendant feelings associated with embodied memories of the concrete experience captured within the image. Therefore the work of images and imagination in metaphorical thinking creates the affective power of metaphor. As Ricoeur says, the feelings evoked by the image of the metaphor serve to make the meaning of the metaphor “ours,” interiorizing thought as a “felt participation” that is part of the complete meaning of the metaphor (1981, 243-244).

Thus McFague invites us to recognize that metaphoric truth claims help us create new possibilities for seeing, feeling, valuing, and doing. To begin to see the world as God’s body, for example, is to create the possibility of a new experience of the world and new ways of relating to the earth and each other. Wonder, delight, awe, and reverence flow as we see the cosmos, planet, and every creature alive with sacred presence. Consequently we are drawn to new ways of living, including new ways of educating, that are profoundly religious and whole.

McFague’s notion of metaphor leads her to observe the role of imagination and metaphor in human learning. McFague argues, “from the time we are infants we construct our world through metaphor” (1982, 15). She summarizes postmodern insights from a broad range of human inquiry (philosophy, sciences, religion, art, social sciences) that insist on the primacy of metaphor: “It is being asserted that metaphor is indigenous to all human learning from the simplest to the most complex” (1982, 32).

McFague connects metaphorical thinking with Piaget’s notion of accommodation. She writes: “What we discover is an anomaly; the old framework no longer can encompass our experience and only metaphor – which connects both with what we already know and with what we are groping to know – provides the movement that is the distinctive mark of learning” (1982, 199). I comment elsewhere that:

Much like Piaget’s genetic epistemology, which emphasizes the continuity between human learning and adaptive biological processes in other living organisms, McFague emphasizes the role of the body in human learning. For both Piaget and McFague, this kind of adaptive, body informed learning is a natural process that usually proceeds unconsciously, joining body and mind through the creative and adaptive work of the imagination. (Johnston 1994, 237)

Though she sees metaphorical learning as an almost biological process, McFague’s project of metaphorical theology invites us to return to this natural way of learning in a more critically conscious way. For McFague believes that this natural way of metaphorical learning has not been welcomed or respected by our educational institutions – in places like the church and the school. Here education typically reinforces established metaphoric truth and provides little room for heuristic learning in response to learner’s own religious quest for wholeness and meaning in the face of mystery (McFague 1976). And so this natural, whole-person and communal way of learning, this underground process of human becoming, is not welcomed in most classrooms.

Metaphoric Process as an Ecological Metaphor for Learning Process

I have proposed in my dissertation, *Metaphoric Process and the Agency of Embodied Learners*, that McFague's metaphorical theology involves a method of inquiry we might label "metaphoric process" and that we can fruitfully reimagine learning process as a creative, healing process of metaphoric critique and reconstruction. I argue in my dissertation that my proposal to reimagine learning process as metaphoric process is in keeping with McFague's own insights about the educational implications of metaphorical theology.

Seeing learning process as metaphoric process becomes one candidate, based on McFague's metaphorical theology, for reimagining ecological models for religious education. Fleshing out the implications of this model for learning go beyond the scope of this paper. I have proposed elsewhere that creating educational environments to host learning process as metaphoric process would at least require: 1) nurturing covenantal, learning-community ecologies for education that are place-based; 2) using body-inclusive teaching-learning strategies; 3) designing embodied curriculum that integrates content and form by matching subject matter with curriculum design; 4) grounding learning in mystery focused through questions essential to the learners; 5) welcoming open-ended and emergent learning outcomes rather than seeking efficient control of imposed outcomes (Johnston 1994, 298-311).

Engaging in metaphoric process as learning process charts a pathway for the field of Religious Education to pursue a transformative role in addressing our planetary crisis. This pathway helps us respond faithfully to the ecology of embodied learners, whole persons within whole communities, who listen to and think with the earth in the communal, healing process of learning.

Paths for Re-Imagining Ecological Models of Religious Education

While imagining learning process as metaphoric process offers a basic path for reimagining ecological models of religious education, other theological paths add to that picture. Norman Wirzba's (2006) construct of "Sabbath Creation" offers a metaphor for the God-world relationship that complements McFague's metaphor of the world as God's body.

While his explicit theological method differs from McFague's, Wirzba's implicit method reveals similarities. Explicitly he revisits Christian scriptures using an ecological lens to mine biblical resources needed in our times. This illumines for him the ontological centrality of Sabbath and covenant for understanding human identity and vocation. These biblical metaphors convey a very ecological perspective on human relationships of interdependency with the created order, relationships reflecting unity through distinctiveness within the life of God. Implicitly Wirzba uses an ecological lens to imagine anew the significance of seeing the world as God's Sabbath Creation, his central metaphor for the God-world relationship.

Wirzba's conviction is that our rapid paced culture of earth-exhausting consumers direly needs a recovery of Sabbath teaching. For him the way of Sabbath living offers a "rich potential to

transform a complete life” (15). He argues that: “The key to Sabbath observance is that we participate regularly in the delight that marked God’s own response to a creation wonderfully made” (15). In *Living the Sabbath* he explores practical implications of a Sabbath Creation for imagining Sabbath Economics, Sabbath Education, Sabbath Environmentalism, etc. In all areas of life we are invited to engage in practices that imitate God’s own practices as a covenantal God who immerses within and restfully delights in a Sabbath Creation.

For Wirzba Sabbath Education (129-141) has to do with the education of desire, education for wholeness, and education in relationship to particular local communities and habitats. About Sabbath Education he writes:

Our most important educational task is to discover and take our fitting place within God’s continuing life, so that our joy together can be made complete. Only then will we recognize the marks of well-educated persons to be not how many degrees they have or how much wealth and status they have acquired, but rather how well they contribute to the health and conviviality of our social and biological neighborhoods.” (132)

Wirzba’s attention to Sabbath practices of delight echoes the sensibility McFague seeks in imagining the world as God’s body. McFague writes: “An aesthetic sensibility toward the cosmos is one that values what is unselfishly, with a sense of delight in others for their own sakes. Such appreciation and delight are a necessary step in turning from an anthropocentric to an ecological sensibility” (McFague 1987, 11).

Wirzba’s concern to transform our 24/7 consumer culture through Sabbath practices also echoes Sharon Parks’ (2003) focus on practices in her ecological reimagining of human development. Correcting Fowler’s (1991) developmental paradigm that has been dominated by the imagination of “venturing” through stages of growth, Parks proposes a more complete picture of “the tidal rhythm of our becoming” that includes practices of “abiding.” For Parks human becoming can be imagined as movement between the developmental praxis of venturing and the centering practices of abiding.

Park’s metaphor of “abiding” involves a spiritual centeredness found by recovering the power of place that can be pursued through “practices” such as walking and learning, eating and meeting, and resting and dreaming as we engage fully in particular landscapes and recover a sense of place. She explains: “Practices are ways of life, things we do with and for one another to make and keep life human” (72). And further: “a consciousness of place, most profoundly understood, is the gift of a relationship between the human and the more-than-human world” (63).

I offer a glimpse of one additional pathway for reimagining education that draws together insights of McFague, Wirzba, and Parks. “Sabbath friendship” holds rich potential as a metaphor to reimagine an ecological model of education. This is way of learning and living I have been exploring experientially for decades in covenant with a friend and colleague (Johnston and Sutherland 2015).

According to this model, a covenant community of Sabbath Friends can hold in tension both the venturing and abiding, the exploratory praxis and the grounding practices, that teachers and learners engage together as they seek to imagine and live their way into a world of flourishing,

peace, and abundance that God imagines for all creation. A Sabbath friends model brings together learners and teachers as a community of learning partners. These learners covenant with each other to study the Sabbath and to support each other's sacred journey to wholeness in relationship with each other, local habitats, and the biosphere. This journey of learning involves growing not only a fuller *understanding* but also a fuller *practice* of both Sabbath and friendship, learning what it means to live and learn in covenant with others and the earth.

Sabbath and friendship are first of all God's practices into which we are invited to live and grow and flourish. Therefore the ecological educational model of Sabbath Friendship is a path that protects space and time for creative, sacramental living in today's world in imitation of God. The pathway of Sabbath friendship is a way of resistance to our earth-destroying consumer culture that leads to spiritual and practical resilience. It is the journey of yoking our lives with the One who leads us to life. Practicing Sabbath friendship, in partnership with God's Sabbath friendship towards all creation, patiently teaches us a liberating way of life and vocation that runs counter to today's 24/7 culture.

I introduce Sabbath friendship as a covenantal and ecological pathway for imagining education. I believe this path for imagining new possibilities can help religious educators break out of Western models for education that participate in established triumphalist and industrial paradigms harming the earth. Only in covenants of mutuality with others, in both formal and informal education, can people of faith respond to the spiritual heart of the environmental crisis, drawing upon our rich religious heritage to reimagine and recreate life on God's beloved earth.

Conclusion

In this article I have explored different theological pathways to introduce the specific metaphors of "metaphoric process" and "Sabbath Friendship" as potentially fruitful metaphors for reimagining ecological models for religious education. Models are "metaphors with staying power" (McFague 1987, 34). This means that these proposed metaphors will require much more experimentation and elaboration before they become practical models. But imagining learning process as "metaphoric process" and ecological education as "Sabbath friendship" can help us begin to respond educationally and religiously to our planetary crisis. I offer these metaphors as an appeal to religious educators to take up our call to reimagine education with earth in mind.

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Imagine Social Sustainable Global Citizenship with Worldview Education

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Abstract

In this paper the authors briefly present what their theoretical reflections and empirical research has yielded till now in respect to citizenship education and religious education. Then they scrutinize in an imaginative way the theoretical as well as political and practical question of the relationship of global citizenship and worldview education. The main focus is on the issue whether there is or could be a connection between the concepts of ‘worldview education’ and ‘global citizenship education’ from the point of view of inclusivity in respect to both concepts. It turned out that Jürgen Habermas’ distinction between the two concepts of democratic state citizenship and global or cosmopolitan citizenship is conceptually helpful. The authors also take into account the question whether there is a certain educational, political or religious necessity on a national as well as global level to deal with this possible relationship as viewed through the lenses of social sustainability.

Introduction

In several publications we have paid attention to the relationship that exist between citizenship education and religious or worldview education in schools (Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2008; Miedema, 2012), and quite recently we have related it to human rights education (Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2014). Reflecting further upon the notion of citizenship that we used in our work, we realize that we conceptualized that concept mostly in terms of our own country, the Netherlands, or in the context of the EC-funded empirical REDCo research project (see Jackson, Miedema, Weisse, & Williame, 2007). So, a kind of particularistic conception of the concept of ‘citizenship’ strongly related to the nation state or to West-Europe – even in a more or less sophisticated form – was presupposed in our analysis

combined with a plea for and reference to contextuality. Taking into account several developments on a global scale we think it necessary to broaden the scope now to make it more inclusive and should try to imagine what a notion like ‘global citizenship’ might mean related to the inclusive concept of worldview education.

In this essay we will first briefly present what our theoretical reflections and empirical research has yielded till now in respect to citizenship education and religious education. Then we scrutinize in an imaginative way the theoretical as well as political and practical question of the relationship of global citizenship and worldview education. Thus, the main focus is on the issue whether there is or could be a connection between the concepts of ‘worldview education’ and the very notion of ‘global citizenship education’, and to scrutinize the question whether there is a certain educational, political or religious necessity to imagine this possible relationship with an eye on the perspective of social sustainability.

Citizenship Education and Worldview Education

We are strongly in favor of the concept of ‘maximal citizenship education’ as outlined by the late Terrence McLaughlin (see Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2014; Miedema, 2014a), because it offers “a substantial notion of ‘education for citizenship’ in the context of the diversity of a pluralistic democratic society”, a notion ...’thick’ or substantial enough *to satisfy the communal demands of citizenship, yet compatible with liberal demands concerning the development of critical rationality by citizens and satisfaction of the demands of justice relating to diversity*” (McLaughlin 1992, p. 235, authors’ italics). The child’s personhood formation is highly important and is interpreted as a dynamic continuing development. The concept of maximal citizenship education offers the possibility to include religious content or aspects of worldviews to the value basis of different curriculum components of the educational program. This is fully compatible with what has been elsewhere claimed to be the aim of education in schools for a transformative pedagogy, that is that every child and youngster in every school should be able to develop her or his personal identity or personhood (Biesta & Miedema, 2002; Miedema, 2014b). Thus, maximal citizenship education can include and also should imply the fostering of the religious and/or worldview component of the child’s personhood formation.

We already used the term ‘worldview’ instead of the concept of ‘religion’. The reason for this preference is that not everyone is an adherent of a religious view on life, the world and humanity, thus acknowledging the presence of transcendence. We use the concept ‘worldview’ with ‘religion’ as a sub-concept of it, and define it as the system, which is always subjected to changes, of implicit and explicit views and feelings of an individual in relation to human life. ‘Views and feelings in relation to human life’ can refer to everything with which people can be occupied with and what can be important to them. In empirical research with students we use a short ‘stipulative definition’ namely: “A worldview is the way one looks at life” (Bertram-Troost, De Roos & Miedema, 2006, 311). The use of the concept of ‘worldview’ may help to avoid strong secularist approaches that direct themselves against religion. In these views religions and worldviews are strictly separated from the public and the social domain and positioned in the private realm of the family and/or religious communities, and should be completely left out of the curriculum of the school. However, everyone has at least a personal worldview that is a view on life, the world and humanity that provides answers to existential questions. Such personal worldviews are sometimes but not always directly influenced by an organized worldview, and this should be pedagogically taken into account as we have claimed elsewhere (see Van der Kooij, De Ruyter, & Miedema 2013). The inclusive concept of ‘worldview’ can also prevent from exclusivist claims leading, for example, to preferential argumentation in paying attention to one religion only, for instance the Christian one, or to one worldview the liberal-democrat one.

During the first decade of the 21st century the Council of Europe has given a strong impetus to paying attention to democratic citizenship education in the member states, for example in the 2010 *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education* (Council of Europe, 2010). This has steadily be done in relationship to (inter)religious education combined with intercultural education. The aim for this pedagogical, educational, as well political program was to strengthen the potentialities of strong, open and inclusive thinking of children and youngsters regarding religion and worldview, and to tackle the dangers of religions and worldviews within the setting of the schools (see Jackson, Miedema, Weisse, & Willaime, 2007). Schools, being embryonic societies as John Dewey has characterized them (Dewey, 1897/1972; 1916; 1927), should embody and practice themselves the constituent elements of real participative and deliberative democracies. Schools have their own *sui generis* place. So, from a societal as well as pedagogical point of view, all schools should be willing – and in our opinion should be

obliged – to aim for fostering democratic citizenship education, interreligious or inter-worldview education, and human rights education. Thereby bringing about mutual respect and understanding and stimulating the development of democratic citizenship formation, worldview citizenship formation, and human rights formation, and thus stimulating global and sustainable dynamics.

On the basis of a special issue of the Dutch academic journal *Pedagogiek*, edited by the present authors together with Wiel Veugelers (see Miedema, Bertram-Troost and Veugelers (2013) we can make up the balance sheet of how worldview education is broadly favored and practiced nowadays in schools in France, England, the Netherlands, Belgium and in particular parts of Germany. Just to limit ourselves to the Netherlands here: all schools, that is denominational as well as public schools are invited by the government to relate citizenship education to worldview education. For the more orthodox protestant and roman-catholic schools this creates the challenge to really deal in the schools with religious and worldview diversity instead of taking an exclusive mono-religious stance. It challenges public schools to deal with the diversity of worldviews and religions in an active pedagogical way. So, instead of acknowledging that there is worldview diversity in the school, the teachers should take this up in their pedagogical and didactical practices. Core issue is that in these schools the pupils' self responsible self-determination regarding worldview and religions (Miedema, 2014a, 371) should be seen as the main pedagogical aim of a values-based curriculum.

Broadening the Scope with the Notions of Global Citizenship and Social Sustainability

We notice that there are some worldwide problems related also but fortunately not exclusively to religions and worldviews that we have to face today. Just to mention here, for example, the recent attacks in Paris on Charlie Hebdo, the travel of jihadists from the West to Syria and Iraq as well as the problems associated with returnees from these countries and jihadists that still stay in their own countries. These problems do not ask for exclusive particularistic approaches or for an exclusive focus on national or even regional identities. On the contrary, these problems do concern every human being, mankind and humanity in its broadest global sense. The current global constellation is, in our view, triggering off the question of the necessity to think and act more globally in religious education and worldview education in order to prevent, for example, the development of narrow minded or radicalized

children and young people. For that reason it is necessary to imagine how democratic state citizenship education and global citizenship education could form a continuum.

These issues also immediately relate to the very concept of social sustainability. They present some of the great challenges of our time, are part and parcel of every nation in the world, do concern every human being, mankind and humanity in general and on a global scale, they have to do with the human shaping of the world by means of globalisation, and connect at least also to political and social learning processes due to their intercultural and transcultural nature (see Brunold, 2015).

It is our view that the role and function of human rights education might be of great help here to broaden the perspective on citizenship to global citizenship. If a government should take the responsibility for an inclusive concept of citizenship education seriously, it should mean that without any preference per se at the side of the government itself for a particular worldview or religion, each government could take what we characterize as the political-pedagogical responsibility to stimulate the policy of and practice in schools to foster religious or worldview education as part of an integral citizenship education (see Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2008). Adding to this political-pedagogical responsibility, the responsibility for human rights education as an integral part of this, should imply that the state should feel obliged to stimulate in schools the building and defense of a universal culture of human rights in society and globally, with a view on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in a societal and/or global way.

We will provide an example from our own country, the Netherlands, to show why stressing the universality of human rights and children's rights is an ongoing need. Right wing parties but also liberal democrats and Christian democrats are time and again trying to particularize – or in our view even to provincialize or to nationalize – the interpretation of human and children's' right in respect to strangers. Here we have the tension between open universality on a national and local level versus segregated or closed particularity. Or to put it differently: the tension is here between thick constitutionalism including transnational focus on human rights and especially the position of the individual versus thin constitutionalism with a national focus on the national context, particularly in terms of heritage and culture in tense relationship with human rights (see Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2014).

What might be very helpful here is the way Jürgen Habermas already in 1992 has dealt with these tensions between particularistic versus global notions of citizenship (see also

Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2008). He observed that in the eighties and early nineties of the twentieth century most prosperous countries in West-Europe were confronted with a growing stream of immigrants and refugees from poor and/or turbulent areas of South and East Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Talking about citizenship and national identity was primarily reinforced by the fear that the state of affluence or the welfare states of these prosperous countries were threatened by the incoming masses. Habermas has so adequately characterized this mechanism as the 'chauvinism of affluence' (Habermas, 1996, p. 507). He introduced a distinction between two conceptions of the concept of 'citizenship': a classical-liberal view stressing private citizenship and the sovereignty of the nation state, and a democratic-liberal view pointing to social citizenship in line with the welfare state interpretations at the level of the state. In respect with these two conceptions Habermas stated:

The identity of the political community, which also must not be violated by immigration, depends primarily on the legal principles anchored in the political culture and not on an ethnic-cultural form of life as a whole. It follows that one must expect only that immigrants willingly engage in the political culture of their new home, without necessarily abandoning the cultural life specific to their country of origin. The political acculturation demanded of them does not extend to the whole of their socialization. Rather, by importing new forms of life, immigrants can expand or multiply the perspectives from which the shared political constitution must be interpreted (Habermas, 1996, pp. 513-514).

Habermas takes a stance against any exclusive particularistic interpretation of citizenship in terms of a specific ethnic-cultural identity, and is in favour of a political or intersubjective meaning of citizenship. The argument for that option was and still is that the identity of a political community is primarily embedded in the principle of the political culture, and not in a specific ethnic-cultural way of life. Cultural and political claims are, however, not completely separable. They overlap each other and influence each other's territory. Such a conception of democratic or social citizenship offers the possibility and can pave the way for a global citizenship. The worldwide nature of problems we have to face does not ask for an exclusive particularistic formulation of the problem, not even for an exclusive focus on national identity. Those problems do also concern every human being. For that reason it is necessary that democratic state citizenship and global citizenship should form a continuum (Miedema & Bertram-Troost, 2008).

From the perspective of the relationship of democratic state citizenship and global citizenship it is useful to refer here to the highly insightful debate between Martha Nussbaum and Charles Taylor already in the midst of the 90s of the last century, because that discussion makes clear that the two notions respectively of democratic state citizenship and global citizenship should not be separated (see *in extenso* Papastephanou, 2013 who pointed us to this debate).

In her article patriotism and cosmopolitanism were conceptualized by Nussbaum as mutually exclusive concepts, and she clearly states that she is in favour of the latter concept and this to the detriment of the first one due to the risks of fanaticism that easily come with patriotism (Nussbaum, 1994). In his reaction to this article Taylor (1996) is criticizing this drastic choice for cosmopolitanism and states that we need both in the modern world, because “modern democratic states are extremely exigent common enterprises in self-rule. They require a great deal of their members, demanding much greater solidarity towards compatriots than towards humanity in general. We cannot make a success of these enterprises without strong common identification” (Taylor, 1996, p. 119). Taylor wants to fight for the kind of patriotism which is open to universal solidarities against other, more closed kinds (see Papastephanou, 2013, p. 176). In her later writings Nussbaum’s view converges, however, strongly with Taylor’s conviction when she, for instance, asserts that she envisages a complicated dialogue between local attachments and loyalty to humanity (Papastephanou, 2013, p. 167).

Using the concept of ‘worldview’ as an embracing concept in respect to ‘religion’ and making it all inclusive that way due to its broadened denotation, the same could analytically be said regarding democratic state citizenship and global citizenship. The latter one is the broadened more embracing or inclusive one but always also linked to the first form of citizenship.

But we also want to broaden our scope by intertwining a strong relationship of worldview education, citizenship education and human rights education with social sustainability positioned on a national as well as a global level. Elements of a what might be coined as a pedagogy of social sustainability could strengthen our transformative pedagogical approach (Miedema, 2014b), thus helping pupils to see how the world could be shaped locally and globally with a strong concern for every human being, mankind and humanity in

general and on a global scale and making them sensitive for the political and social, that is intercultural, transcultural and interreligious components of these processes and practises.

Conclusion

In sum, in this contribution we have articulated our preference for the notion ‘worldview’ due to the inclusivity of the denotation of this concept, and because it can pedagogically speaking stimulate dialogue, encounter and participation, thus participatory democracy in a Deweyan sense (Dewey, 1916, pp. 86-88). The world-wide problems we have to face today related also but not exclusively to religion and worldview, next to ecological issues, urges us in our view to broaden the range of citizenship and to make it a more inclusive concept by means of the concept of ‘global citizenship’ just like ‘worldview education’ is a broader term than ‘religious education’.

We have argued that human rights education can also foster a universal and global stance as an antidote against exclusive particularistic interpretations of citizenship and in favour of an intersubjective interpretation of citizenship. Democratic state citizenship education combined with global citizenship education can strengthen such learning processes. This can be practiced in schools in combination with an inclusive stance to religions and worldviews. Combined with social sustainability this might help pupils to see how the world could be shaped locally and globally with a strong concern for every human being, mankind and humanity in general and on a global scale. These are the challenges of global citizenship for worldview education but also the challenges of worldview education for global citizenship from a social sustainable perspective.

Finally, there are some social sustainable institutional pre-conditions necessary for concretizing the embracing pedagogy implicated in our plea. First, all stakeholders (ministry of education, politicians, school leaders, teachers and parents) should be convinced that edification or *Bildung* is the main aim of what is going on in schools instead of only the so-called ‘core subjects’ such as reading, writing and mathematics or the preparation for the knowledge-based economy in terms of employability. It also presupposes school administrators with a pedagogical vision which they are able to communicate and share with their staff in order to build transformative practices. We also need teacher colleges where teachers *in statu nascendi* can develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes and who can

become pedagogical professionals who are able to realize transformative pedagogical situations and relations in their schools together with their colleagues.

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**The power of imagination,
Dreams of founders and principals of the first Islamic schools for primary education in
the Netherlands.**

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Abstract

In this presentation we focus on the ‘imagination’ of founders and principals of Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands. Key persons of the first two Islamic schools and today’s board members and principals were interviewed about their ideals and dreams and present days’ school identity, respectively. The first founders and principals dreamed about a school teaching and learning into Islam like the Madrasa or the Imam Hatip schools: priority should be given to Islamic subjects like Qur’an recitation and the teaching of Hadith. This dream however could not be concretized. They developed a new type of Islamic school in the Netherlands. We present the process from ‘imagination’ to the ‘reality’ of a Dutch school based on the Islamic tradition, and the most important aspects in this development.

Keywords: Imagination, Identity development, Islamic school, historical context, plurality, the Netherlands

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1. Introduction

Images of 'good' education are central in the concretization of 'good' schools. In our presentation we focus on the images of the founders and principals of Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands 25 years ago, and the realization of these images in the years thereafter.

From the eighties of the last century onwards Islamic families of migrant workers and their descendants settled down in the Netherlands (Van de Werf, 1998). Nowadays approximately 850,000 Muslims live in the Netherlands in 2015, this is about five percent of the Dutch population. Islam for many Muslims is important in their life (Budak & El Bouyadi-van de Wetering, 2012). For many Muslims some of the activities of Dutch primary schools conflicted with their religious background. During the discussions about these problems Muslims discovered the possibilities of article 23. Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution allows the Muslim community, like any other religious group, to fund schools according to their religious life orientation (Avest, Bakker, Bertram-Troost, & Miedema, 2007; Bronneman-Helmers, 2011; Grondwet, 2012; Onderwijsraad, 2012). All schools are controlled according to basic educational standards (Bakker, 2011). The first two Islamic primary schools were founded in 1988 (Berglund, 2015; Ginjaar-Maas, 1989; Landman, 1992; Wagtendonk, 1991). Currently there are 46 primary schools and 1 secondary school (ISBO, 2015).

We focus in this article on the imaginative power of the founders and principals of the first Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands. They dreamed in different ways about what an Islamic school might be in the Netherlands. The question we wish to answer in our presentation is 'What kind of images were central in the minds of founders and principals of the first two Islamic primary schools, and how can these images be traced in today's school identity of Islamic primary schools, and what are the images of the future?'

2. 25 years Islamic education in the Netherlands: from imagination to reality

The Al-Ghazali School in Rotterdam and the Tariq Ibn Ziyad school in Eindhoven opened their doors in 1988. These two schools were the first schools founded in accordance with Article 23 of the Dutch Constitution. The founders aimed to provide education for children based on Qur'an and Sunna (Wagtendonk, 1991).

From an earlier study on the conviction, establishment and organization of the first two Islamic primary schools, we learn about the role of imagination, resulting in two different types of schools. The first type of school is based on *Madrassa*, a type of school where only Islam related courses are educated, such as Qur'an Recitation, *Hadith*, *Sira*, and *Aqida*. The second type of school, resulting from the imagination of the founders was a school like the *Imam Hatip* school in Turkey. The *Imam Hatip* school is a school preparing students to become imams and preachers in Turkey. In this type of school not only subjects related to Qur'an and Hadith are taught, but also other subjects such as math, linguistics and biology. (Budak, 2014)

The two types of school, as they were represented in the imagination of the initiators, however, could not be realised due to the funding preconditions. One of the funding preconditions is that the Dutch language is used in all communication in the school. Despite

these funding limitations, the initiators continued the process of establishing their school, and build and furnish their school, in Rotterdam as well as in Eindhoven (Budak, 2014). In the course of time, a third type of school has been developed. This third type of school we call 'The Dutch primary school with an Islamic foundation' briefly 'Dutch Islamic Primary School' (DIPS). The DIPS were not similar to a *Madrasa* or an *Imam Hatip* school. The DIPS school has its own unique character, its own identity. The imagination regarding DIPS had their starting point in the *Madrasa* and the *Imam Hatip* school.

However, soon after the start of the first two schools the chairman's and principals of these first two DIPS noticed that not everyone had the same images and expectations of what an Islamic school in the Dutch context could be. In the course of time board members, parents and staff discover that each of them has their own images and wishes of an Islamic school, and by consequence what has to be done in everyday practice to construct an identity of a DIPS the different groups can agree upon (Budak, 2013).

The initiators imagined and more or less expected that there would be no discussion about Islamic values and regulations and that all pupils would accordingly adhere to the Islamic rules in school. The initiators were of the opinion that the situation at home would match the situation at school, resulting in pupils' good performance in school and by consequence pupils would have good learning results. Sometimes there were conflicts due to these different expectations. We noticed that the construction of the identity of an Islamic school is a dynamic process in which the imagination of the participants is recognizable in every day practice. Earlier we noted that this is a matter of adaptation and recognition (Budak, 2014).

Various approaches play a role during the process of adapting and recognizing in the construction of the identity of the first two Islamic schools. We have articulated the following approaches:

- Approaches of conservation and further developing their own Islamic identity,
- Approaches taking their starting point in the Turkish education system,
- Approaches rooted in persons' biographical narrative,
- Approaches based on the need to solve every day's practical issues
- Approaches from a pedagogical perspective (Budak, 2014).

These approaches influenced the development in the processes from imagination to reality.

It has been over 25 years since the first two DIPS were founded. We describe in this paper the developments of the schools according to the experiences of the board members and principals and we focus on the images they had in mind for the positions of these schools in the Dutch plural society.

3. Method

For the description of the development from imagination to reality, in our qualitative research we did two rounds of interviews. In the first round the pioneers were interviewed: the first two chairs of the first boards of de schools (the founding fathers) and the principals of the two schools. In the second round we did 12 semi-structured retrospective interviews. (Baarda, Goede, & Teunissen, 2000, pp. 130-137)

From the first round of interviews we learned about the imaginations with regard to an Islamic school identity. These imaginations were presented in 4 qualitative interviews - two with the founders and two with the principals of the first two DIPS.

In a subsequent round of interviews we interviewed six principals and six board's members, selected from schools that started at least twenty five years ago. The second criterion was to choose a principal and a board member whom worked at least ten years at an Islamic primary school. Ten of the interviews are recorded. All the recorded interviews are transcribed. Two of the respondents did not allow recording the interview. These interviews were written down at the time of interview. The average duration of the interviews was 75 minutes. However, the interviews with the two respondents who did not permit to record the interview took 120 minutes. Of each interview a verbatim was made.

The interviews are labelled according to statements relating to 'past', 'present' and 'future'. In a second reading similar labels are clustered. Labels as well as clusters are noted in terms and language as this is uttered by the respondents. If necessary, we choose a new term covering the content of the respective parts of the text. At the third stage, we analyse the interview on the basis of concepts 'imagination' and 'development', concepts that are central in our research question. Our method is based on 'close reading' as described by Rubin & Rubin (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; see also Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013).

4. Results

In this section, we present the main results of our analysis of the interview texts and focus on the development as these are experienced by the board members and the principals regarding identity development of DIPS, concerning imagination and reality.

When they established the two first Islamic primary schools the 'founding fathers' had two type of schools in their mind: the *Madrasa* and the *Imam Hatip* school. They could not realize these types of schools due to the restrictions in the Dutch law. They established a school responding to the Dutch educational system. This resulted in a new, third type of school coined as 'the Dutch Islamic Primary school' (DIPS). This type of school included in the curriculum Islamic religious instruction including prayer during school hours, celebration of Muslim festivals, and separated sports and swimming activities for boys and girls. Subjects like music, biology and sexual education are adapted to the Islamic value orientation. The schools developed their own vision and policy documents in the past 25 years. In their interviews the board members and principals mentioned six important developments in the process from imagination to reality.

4.1. Housing related developments

At the beginning of the establishment the schools were housed in old buildings, with a lot of maintenance still to be done. We observe from the interviews that some new schools were build or are on the drawing board taking into account characteristics that reflect the Islamic identity of the school. We note a growing trend to leave old buildings and go for new buildings with a unique look reflecting the Islamic identity of the school. We also see that some Islamic schools are housed in one building with schools with a different identity (for example a Christian and/or a public identity).

4.2. Staff related developments

The first schools started with non-Muslim principals and non-Muslim teachers. We note a development from schools with almost 100 % non-Muslim teachers towards schools with 100 % Muslim teachers. There are also schools that deliberately and for integration-related reasons opt for a mix of Muslim and non-Muslim teachers. Board members however in these cases emphasize that the principal should be a Muslim in order to express and guarantee the Islamic identity of the school. Respondents are not always satisfied with the contribution of Muslim teachers regarding identity related subjects.

4.3. Religious Education (RE) related developments

Developments related to religious education we distinguish in

- a) the religious beliefs of the teachers of RE and
- b) the method for RE for the pupils

Teachers of RE

The first schools started with imams, as volunteers taking care of the RE classes. This was achieved with great difficulty. These imams were not proficient in the Dutch language. They did not follow the curriculum and often used physical punishments to keep pupils in the classroom under control. In recent years schools have employed professional teachers for RE. These teachers speak Dutch and have in some cases a Dutch teacher training background and are graduated from the teacher training course for Islamic religion in the Netherlands.

The method for RE

At the start of the schools, there were no methods for Islamic RE available. Teachers themselves had to develop all the material to be used. We see a development from cutting and pasting from a variety of RE methods from countries such as Turkey, Morocco or Egypt, to a development of various colourful RE methods, developed by teachers in close cooperation with experts in pedagogy and didactics.

4.4. Board members related developments

The first board members did not master the Dutch language and had no experience with regard to managing a school. We note a development from inexperienced board members to a clear shift to young college or university trained board members. In the first years the board members were volunteers and run only one school. Most foundations now have several schools with a professional chairman as well as an executive board of professionals. Additionally to the member of the board we see that members of the supervisory board are college or university trained as well.

4.5. Media related developments

The establishment of Islamic schools started with a lot of media attention. The respondents experienced the media attention in the first years in a negative way. Board members these days have changed their attitude concerning the attention of and communication with the media. Board members who used to take away from the media nowadays take the initiative themselves to inform the media about innovative developments, or interesting festivals or competitions that take place in their school.

4.6. Quality related developments

The quality of education is frequently mentioned by respondents as an important aspect of development. Some of the board members give the quality of the school priority to de identity of the school. According to the respondents a school with poor learning results can not be a good Islamic school. There were schools with poor results. According to several recent studies most Islamic schools in general are of good quality and in some subjects they even do better than ordinary Dutch schools with a similar pupil population. There are two schools nominated as an excellent school by the inspection of ministry of education. These two schools are seen as excellent schools and are 'examples of good practice' of Islamic education in the Netherlands.

5. Conclusion and discussion

After 25 years of Islamic education, we conclude that board members and principals point to six major developments. This development we summarize as follows;

- a development from old buildings to newly build accommodation with a unique look reflecting the Islamic identity of the school
- a development from almost no Muslim staff to some schools with 100% Muslim staff,
- a development from no method for RE to a variety of methods
- a development from voluntary teachers, imams who hardly spoke Dutch and were not trained in pedagogical competencies for RE, to teachers who have completed a Dutch teacher training program
- a development from voluntary board members who hardly spoke any Dutch and who had no experience in school management, to a professional management with a Dutch college or university background
- a development toward a positive attitude to the media instead of avoiding the media
- a positive development regarding the quality of teaching and learning in Islamic schools

Board members and principals continue to imagine the future of their school. Images of the future of Islamic schools centre around the following aspects:

Housing

Respondents indicate that in the future they will build more new schools. An estimate is made of 100 Islamic primary schools in the near future. The board members also indicated to start more secondary schools. Some of the older school buildings are replaced by new buildings. Architects have to prepare themselves to think about schools with a characteristic Islamic

image. The schools in the Netherlands can profile themselves internationally with this new born architectural design.

Staff

In the past 25 years there are many more Muslim teachers employed compared with 25 years ago. However, the schools should take care regarding the way these teachers are committed to the Islamic identity of the school. The teachers have completed the teacher training program but many of them do not necessarily have good/enough knowledge of Islam. School boards in the future have to invest in the necessary knowledge and how to stimulate a positive engagement of the staff to the Islamic identity of the school. In the future training programs will be developed to include the staff in the concretization of the identity of the school in everyday life, like that is the case for other denominations in the Netherlands. As an example the Christian schools used to ask the teachers beside their diploma of teacher training program the qualification for the Religious Training Program DCBO (Diploma Christelijk Basis Onderwijs). Islamic schools will have to develop their own qualification requirements. The InHolland University for Applied Sciences has developed the DIO (Diploma Islamitisch Onderwijs).

Religious Education

The requirements for teachers for RE are not determined by law. Board members face the fact that they sometimes employ teachers whose pedagogical and didactical competences do not have the required level. We see a shift from voluntary 'employed' imams to professional teachers with the required competences. Despite this development, some of the boards are not satisfied with the pedagogical and didactic qualities of some of their teachers. This problem is still subject of discussion by board members and principals of Islamic schools. In the future we expect that the board of Islamic schools and also the inspection of education will become more strict in the application of these requirements. The teacher training program of the InHolland University currently educates teachers for Islamic RE.

Board

The shift from voluntary board members who did not master the Dutch language, to university educated young board members creates better opportunities for constructive communication with the context (municipality, neighborhood, and media).

Instead of a list about what is forbidden and what is permissible, as this was made by the first board members, today's board members develop a policy in which they show how to give way to teachers to construct the Islamic identity in school's everyday practice.

Media

According to the board members attention of the media in the early years was only negative. Islamic schools were subject of discussion in relation to integration and poor teaching and learning results. The Islamic schools today seem to be accepted as one of the possible types of schools in the Netherlands, like schools with an other religion of life orientation related identity. Board members are looking for the media to show and share what they do.

Quality

The inspectorate monitors the quality of Islamic schools like they do for all other schools. From the beginning there have been several studies on the quality of these schools compared with other schools with a similar pupil population. The studies indicate that Islamic schools don't score worse and in some cases even better than other schools. School boards are focused to perform even better than they do now. This may result in even more excellent Islamic schools in the future.

From this research we conclude that the power of imagination resulted in several developments and has added to the Dutch pillarized educational system a new and these days highly respected pillar.

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Imagining in Fractures: Adult Christian Education with Trauma in View

This paper claims that the experience of trauma is both woefully unacknowledged and that wherever it is present its influence is profound. Consequently, it asks how adult Religious Educators can best proceed given the realities of trauma and its effects. How can we facilitate deepening a person's relationship with God and others when trauma has damaged a person's capacity to relate? Suggestions are made for future work by integrating trauma analysis from Judith Herman and Bessel van der Kolk with theological insight from Mary Elizabeth Moore and Rebecca Chopp.

The heart of religious education could be understood as a quest to know and respond to God. And at its heart, this quest is a search to be in relationship with God.¹

– Mary Elizabeth Moore

Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging.
Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms.
Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her.
Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity.²

– Judith Herman

This paper asks how Christian educators called to work in situations of adult Christian education (ACE)³ can best proceed given the often unacknowledged realities of trauma and its effects. In short, how can we facilitate deepening a person's relationship with God when the very fabric of that person's relationality has been rent by the effects of trauma? While the terms “holistic” and “integrated” currently have significant cachet, to focus on these as goals of ACE may inadvertently discourage those who have been affected by trauma and its fracturing wake. Rather than focus on the formation of a particular kind of “unified and whole” person we suggest that ACE may be served by concerning itself more with the development of imaginative practices of connection and courageous risking-taking, the presence of which would be beneficial to all and particularly to those grappling with trauma. We wish to explore these issues to reinvigorate our collective attention on an important opportunity. In so doing we hope to find others who share our commitment that together we might move forward.⁴

1 Moore, 1994, 23.

2 Herman, 1992, 214.

3 We follow Jeff Astley's position in that while “Christian Education” can mean education “about Christianity” or “education in a Christian context,” our use of it here is in the sense that it “marks out those educational processes through which people learn to become Christian and to be more Christian” (Astley, 2000, 2).

4 As far as we have been able to discern, the *only* piece of published literature explicitly addressing adult Christian education and the long-term effects of trauma is S. Niranjana Rodrigo's 2009 dissertation from

Trauma and Relationality

Stress is a part of our lives. Most stress experienced in daily life is managed through familiar coping responses. Stress affects a person's mood, cognition, and behavior, usually resulting in outcomes that deviate from the normal base-lines for that person. Two people will not necessarily respond to the same stressor in the same way. Following this, trauma is most easily understood as an instance where the levels of stress generated overwhelm a person's normal functioning. Such a traumatic instance could be acute, like a car accident or robbery, or emerge from persistent and/or inescapable circumstances like spousal abuse or racial profiling. The threat of harm can be just as traumatic as an actual violent event, and in both cases the repercussions can be profound psychologically and physiologically.

Discussing trauma and adult learning, psychiatrist Bruce Perry suggests that nearly "one-third of the adult population bring to their classroom a history of abuse, neglect, developmental chaos, or violence that influences their capacity to learn."⁵ The symptoms generated by trauma can range from the neurotic to the somatic,⁶ but in this paper we will focus on the ways in which trauma can impede the ability of the survivor to develop new relationships, both with people and ideas.

In *Haunting Legacies*, Schwab writes that "trauma disrupts relationality... [it is] an attack on the capacity for linking."⁷ Similarly, Judith Herman writes that "the core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others."⁸ Theorists suggest this is because the effects of trauma are not merely due to the precipitating event – or series of events – but because of the ways in which those events are not integrable into the healthy psyche. Supporting this claim, Cathy Caruth argues that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather, in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on."⁹ Relatedly, Judith Herman writes that "traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning."¹⁰ Having overwhelmed a person's systems of meaning-making and responsivity, trauma leaves the survivor not only wounded but also less able to communicate to others the extent and nature of that wound. That is, "language falters in the abyss; it fractures at the site of trauma."¹¹ Indeed, the challenge – and sometimes inability – to communicate the experiences of trauma is often itself a wounding experience.

In the wake of trauma, survivors often find it hard to articulate how the trauma has affected them. In some cases this is due to how trauma can override a person's cognition for language altogether, and in such cases, talk-based therapies can fail to facilitate life-giving reflection. When language *is* available, a traumatized person may struggle to find words that

Fordham: *How Religious Education and Christian Spirituality Can Restore Lost Trust and Foster Interdependent Relationships Among Adult Children of Alcoholics*. We would love to learn if additional work has addressed this topic.

5 Perry, 21.

6 Herman, 187; van der Kolk, xxi; Beste 43; et al.

7 Schwab, 2.

8 Herman, 133.

9 Caruth, 4.

10 Herman, 33.

11 Rambo, 164.

meaningfully articulate his/her experience. It is to this point that trauma researcher Bessel van der Kolk questions talk-based therapeutic models.

“To my mind, healing from trauma starts with noticing yourself and coming to terms with the sensations in your body... This doesn’t mean that language is not helpful. The function of language is to be able to articulate your internal experience for yourself and for the people around you, and to establish a bond between you and other people. You cannot share your reality with somebody else until you put it into words... But it has less to do with exposing people than helping them to know what they know and feel what they feel.”¹²

While ACE is not the place for therapy, it *is* a place to “establish a bond.” Indeed, Mary Elizabeth Moore suggests that task of RE itself is to facilitate a series of such bonds. She identifies five types of “meetings” at the heart of the practice: (1) meeting the Spirit, (2) meeting other persons, other cultures, and other parts of the environment, (3) meeting texts, (4) meeting oneself, (5) meeting pain and conflict.¹³ If creating bonds and engendering “meetings” is sought after, van der Kolk suggests we pay attention both to language *and* to our bodies.

Since trauma re-writes a person’s expectations for self and others, sharing stories of trauma requires courageous risking-taking from speaker, hearer, and the community that holds them both.¹⁴ In spite of the devastation that trauma can wreak, it does not necessarily have the final word, and current research suggests that there are factors that can contribute to “post-traumatic growth.”¹⁵ Here we find new possibilities for application and development within the ACE context.

Trauma and Religious Education

For Moore, ACE’s goal is “encouraging people to know themselves and to relate with the world around them with depth and integrity... It has to do with knowing our own bodies, with their rhythms; it has to do with knowing our passions, hopes, and fears.”¹⁶ Following from Moore’s position, ACE must be responsive to the world, be sensitive to individual interiority, and be relational to its core. It is less about the development of a certain type of virtuous person or faith and more about the ability of an individual to be responsive to ever-changing contexts.

Education thus needs another kind of commitment, namely to embrace chaos, to risk destabilization, and to teach skills for living with the instability that emerges in the natural flow of life or in the intentional disruptions aimed at reshaping a stable but

12 van der Kolk, “Interview,” 520

13 Moore, 1994, 1-23

14 See: Brian Arao & Kristi Clemens. “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces.” We prefer the use of “brave space” over “safe space” specifically because of the ways in which “safety” is can be an often illusive feeling for someone struggling with trauma. They can, perhaps, more readily seek out bravery and courageous risk-taking in the face of feeling the effects of trauma. See:

15 Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Pargament, Desai, McConnell, 2006

16 Moore, 1997, 240

destructive situation. Such education will involve discerning, analyzing, and even provoking destabilization, while teaching knowledge and skills, that help people to engage unstable social institutions with courage and wisdom, and to imagine new futures.¹⁷

Given Moore's sense that part of RE can be developing the “skills for living with the instability,” we see two primary ways in which the effects of trauma can play out in the ACE setting. First, when participants struggle with aspects of the programming as a result of trauma, such that the RE situations are “provoking destabilization” without “teaching the knowledge and skills” to flourish in that instability. Second, when, as a result of trauma, possible participants opt out of programming to avoid potentially “unwanted” situations. That is, just because there “don't seem to be any issues” with trauma does not mean that its effects are not operative. We ask the following questions in preparing for ACE.

1. How is my pedagogy encouraging an environment where thriving might happen?
2. How is my pedagogy excluding to some?

Sometimes – perhaps many times – you can be simultaneously encouraging to some and excluding others. These are healthy questions to be asking generally, but they have particular ramifications when trauma is in view.

Consider, for example, that it has often been noted that “women who have survived trauma have done so because of their strength and the positive aspects in their life, however limited and few and far between those positive aspects may be,” and that as a result of this fact, it is important “to teach to that strength,” being “careful not to connect to shame and humiliation that forms part of abuse.”¹⁸ In this context, imagine the implications of references to John 3:30: “He must increase, but I must decrease” or Philippians 2:3 “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.” Given such instances, how do we support an environment that neither dismisses suffering nor denies the possibility of growth and transformation?

Although many argue that learners who have experienced trauma should “heal” elsewhere through counseling, there are major problems with the attitude that learners can go away and heal and then come back and learn. There is no pure place to retreat for healing; nor should we tilt at windmills trying to create an RE environment free from human suffering. Even learners who have sought out therapy still bring their trauma issues along when they come to “class.”¹⁹

According to Perry, the key to understanding the long-term effects of trauma on an adult learner is to recall that “he or she is often, at baseline, in a state of low level fear... [thus] the major challenge to the educator working with highly stressed or traumatized adults is to furnish the structure, predictability, and sense of safety that can help them begin to feel safe enough to learn.”²⁰ Superficially, this seems like common sense, but if part of RE entails the need “to

17 Moore 2005, 200

18 Horsman, 184-5

19 Horsman, 75

20 Perry, 25

embrace chaos” and to “risk destabilization,” RE itself might be intrinsically *unpredictable*. In a trauma-informed approach, the ACE facilitator must attempt to “furnish the structure” while simultaneously engendering an environment that is conducive to connection and courageous risking-taking in the face of the potentially fearful prospect of entering into a fuller and unpredictable relationship with God.

A Trauma-Informed Approach to ACE

While we do see the wide-spread and dis-connective effects of trauma impacting the practice and goals of ACE, we believe this can be seen as an opportunity. Rather than framing the situation as one in which the religious educator has yet *another* obstacle to overcome to facilitate effective programming, we envision ACE as one place where deepening connection – and re-connection – can be encouraged for everyone present.

This shift in articulation potentially places the ACE facilitator at the front of the curve in which serious attention and supportive responses are generated in the context of Christian congregations. While liturgies and preaching often bear the weight of denominational and traditional expectation, it is generally the case that what happens in ACE is able to proceed with greater freedom. As such, we see those facilitating ACE as possessing a great gift: the opportunity to seriously reflect on the effects of trauma *and take actual steps to* support healing and re-connection. While there is much work to be done to develop concrete ACE curricula that acknowledges trauma, we offer a recommendation of a possible approach that could be productive for such development.

In her essay “Theology and the Poetics of Testimony” Rebecca Chopp unpacks the ways in which the social, psychological, and epistemological silences around trauma might be broken with a notion of “poetic testimony.” She notes that clear, discursive accounts of traumatic events are insufficient to communicate the – sometimes personhood shattering – effects of trauma. She argues that an overemphasis on rationalism inherently suppresses the expression of experiences wherein one’s very sense of self is violated, ruptured, or damaged. As a corrective, she suggests that a form or style of discourse that takes seriously the roles aesthetics and language play in mediating experience.

[Poetics] is an invention, for it must create language, forms, images to speak in what in some way has been ruled unspeakable or at least not valid or credible to modern reason. Compared to rhetoric poetics does not seek so much to argue as to prefigure, to reimagine and refashion the world. Poetics is a discourse that reshapes, fashions in new ways, enlarges and calls into question the ordering of discourse.²¹

Resonant with van der Kolk’s emphasis on the body, Chopp is skeptical of the capacity of rational language to capture the entirety of knowledge or experience. She advocates for a creative and poetic discourse that may be able to communicate something more. Language arts, for example, emphasize the generative power of our words to create new understandings by breaking language from its moorings as ordinary and immediately correlational. In the wake of

²¹ Chopp, 1998, 6.

this fracture, the world to which the old language referred is reconfigured as well, and new ways of seeing, doing, and being can emerge.

I believe that poetics is essential to the work of theology. The poetics of theological discourse is about the conversion of the imaginary, which works not only by stirring “up the sedimented universe of conventional ideas,” but also by shaking “up the order of persuasion,” thus generating convictions as much as settling or ruling over controversies... theology must refigure and reimagine the social imaginary.²²

Chopp advocates for the use of the poetic and the literary precisely because it shakes us up and offers us – through our fusion with its horizons – a strange world. Or the “normal” world but seen with new eyes. A world where the voices of those impacted by trauma are affirmed instead of denied and marginalized. Not only is this a beneficial move educationally, but also has significant positive theological ramifications as well.

While the tendency might be to focus on scripture, theology, and/or doctrinal tradition as the primary content areas of ACE, there is an argument to be made that the personal narratives of individual participants are equally relevant places to explore, especially when trauma is being considered. The interpretive and pneumatological work of Shelly Rambo is especially useful here in that she reads the Johannine Gospel's account as one in which the Holy Spirit serves as a kind of “witness to the emergence of life out of death.”²³ That is, in the clearing of space and place for traumatized voices to speak – should they wish to – the ACE facilitator models God's witness in the Holy Spirit. This would suggest a turn from the ACE facilitator as an “epistemic agent”²⁴ who hands over some piece of knowledge or scripture that “makes everything better” to an “agentic witness”²⁵ where the action is a ministry of holy listening and acknowledgement. The presence of this listening itself may be transformative.

Our ability to know God will actually be nurtured, formed, and re-formed as we engage in talk that matters – in other words, in discourse that contributes to emancipating and transforming the world. In short, our discourses *with* God and our discourses *about* God go together and affect one another. The questing to know God includes both.²⁶

By turning to practices that have a greater emphasis on embodiment as well as the aesthetic and imaginative, the ACE facilitator does not lose time that could have been used on other content: she gains open space in which connections and courageous risk-taking can be imagined as worth attempting. The move toward practices like “agentic witnessing” and “poetic testimony,” demonstrates our willingness to hold such space and model such courageous and creative risk-taking, inviting others to be present and participate with greater humanness.

Our hope is that just as attention has been slowly turning to the necessity for greater training and reflection on the value of cultural competency in faith communities, so too will conversation pertaining to trauma begin to make in-roads into our places of worship. The

22 Chopp, 1998, 9-10

23 Rambo, 44

24 Hope & Eriksen, 110.

25 Ibid.

26 Moore, 237.

importance of relationality to RE is profound, and trauma's capacity to fracture relationships equally so. The task as we see it is to explore best practices for nurturing a space in which participants courageously imagine that – for the sake of connection and relationship – some risks are worth taking.

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“The Sacraments Reappropriated: Imagination Embodied”

Abstract

Focusing on our theme, *The Power of Imagining* (“the life giving possibilities of education in faith”), this paper reexamines our sacramental religious education.

Paul Tillich has cautioned us: “The relationship of man to the ultimate undergoes changes. Contents of ultimate concern vanish or are replaced by others... *Symbols* which for a certain period, or in a certain place, expressed the truth of faith for a certain group now only remind of the faith of the past. They have lost their truths...”

Our present understanding of the cosmos and the human has radically challenged our religious education of these symbols/sacraments, not dissimilar to how our biblical education over the last half century has challenged our interpretations of the ancient traditions that have shaped these symbols.

This paper takes up two challenges to sacramental education: 1) focusing imaginal education in the body and 2) encountering the changes/challenges to traditional conception of the symbols that have effected the sacraments.

Main points –

1. The nature of imaginative knowing: an examination of the epistemological role of the imagination in relationship to the intellect, with distinctive emphasis on embodied knowing, i.e., visceral knowing in contrast to rational knowing.
2. A look at selected problems which reshape contemporary “ultimate concerns” and challenge our traditional symbols for the Divine and our relationship to the Divine.
3. Sacraments as related to the energy of the body in the archetypal events of human development and contemporary ultimate concerns. This section, the core of the paper, proposes an understanding of each of the traditional Christian seven sacraments as they relate to the vital developmental centers of the body. Further it relates the tasks of these developmental centers – forming community, entering into intimate relationships, forging a vocation to serve others, practicing reconciliation, surrendering (to the will of God) to contemporary issues which challenge each of these tasks: racism, terrorism, social liberation, etc.
4. Educational strategies both which address the contemporary practice of the sacraments. This section will focus on practices of the sacraments flowing out of their bodily understanding and their relationship to contemporary issues. It is a practical synthesis of contemporary imaginal education effecting a renewal of a sacramental encounter with the tradition.
5. Conclusion

Due to the 3,000 word limitation parts 3, 4 and 5 are not presented here. They will briefly presented in my session at the REA Atlanta in November.

1. The Nature of Imaginative Knowing

James Carroll in his recently published, Christ Actually sets this thesis of the nature of imaginative knowing:

... Humans are set apart from other sentient beings by the act of knowing. That capacity depends on utterly material circumstances, like chemical interactions in the brain and the wiring of neurons, yet it opens into the immaterial world of consciousness.... This double knowing – knowing that we know – points beyond itself to an experience for which there are no intellectual or linguistic categories, but which humans have nevertheless constantly stretched to express. Brain cells may generate this realm of mind, but they fall short of explaining it. The mind by definition leaps from gray matter to enlightenment.

The exquisite subtlety of human consciousness ... can account for everything but itself. Following, in effect, a three stage movement, *knowing* (i) opens into *knowing that we know* (ii) which can open, in turn into *knowing that we are known* (iii). Consciousness lends toward some kind of... primal consciousness that includes all consciousness in itself. Religion puts the name of God on that transcendent knower whom Jesus recognizes as “Father.”

Let me parse the elements of this thesis from his text.

1. The act of knowing as it has developed in self-conscious human beings is the gift or grace of the capacity to relate beyond the created evolutionary stage which they have attained.
 - a. This capacity arises from the physical material – brain cells in the mind – and its processes of which they are constituted – chemical interactions and the wiring of neurons.
 - b. Yet, this capacity transcends their human nature – to an experience of an “immaterial world of consciousness.”
 - c. Yet, this experience – since it is transcendent is beyond human linguistic categories.
 - d. Carroll says, “. . . but which humans have constantly stretched to express.” He describes this stretching in distinguishing the human brain from the mind and describing the mind as mediator to enlightenment.
 - e. We go from knowing to “knowing that we are known.”
2. This “stretching to express” is what in the Christian tradition we know as sacraments.

Let’s re-examine our common understanding of sacrament derived from the Christian tradition in light of this thesis on imaginative knowing. A sacrament is a ritual event expressing the connection of the self-conscious (finite) human to the infinite (transcendent) God. Sacraments are human means of communication with the Divine. It must be said that since the Divine transcends human consciousness the experience that calls forth this communication is initiated by the Divine. This is what is meant in the Christian tradition which says that Jesus is the primal sacrament. A bit more on that later.

To try to illustrate the “stretch” that goes on in sacramental communication between the human and divine consider the mechanical firing of an automobile spark plug. It bridges or

connects energy between its two points. Electrical energy (current) cannot flow between the gap of the two points (electrodes) on the spark plug until the voltage generated in the ignition of the automobile rises and begins to change the structure of the gases – the air and fuel between the electrodes. The gases become ionized – their structure changes and electrons flow across the gap. To put it more simply, a spark plug is the setting for a bolt of lightning between its two points. This spark ignites the fuel (air and gasoline) and produces the energy to drive the pistons which drive the automobile.

Sacraments, then to follow the quote from Carroll, begin “as chemical interactions in the brain and the wiring of neurons” opening the human act of knowing “into the immaterial world of consciousness.” This knowing points “beyond itself to an experience... which humans have... constantly stretched to express.” This knowing is an active imagination known as symbolic knowing.

Let’s take a look at this keyword in imagination epistemology, “symbol.” The word symbol is derived from the Greek σύμβολον (sýmbolon) with the root words συν- (syn-) meaning “together” and βολή (bolē) “hurl.” Symbol has the approximate meaning of “to hurl together” two contrasting things. Interestingly enough, the opposite derivative is “diabolic” (diabolon), from which comes the word devil, and it means to push apart¹.

The Oxford English Dictionary says this about imagination as a way of knowing: 1. the faculty or action of forming new ideas, or images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses; 2. the ability of the mind to be creative or resourceful; 3. the part of the mind that imagines things. “Imagination is not only a way of knowing, but also a way of finding the known².”

Memory plays a key role in imagination and certainly in our very definition of sacraments – “do this in memory of me³.” This quote from Augustine is quite profound on the role of memory in the knowing that comes through imagination.

The wide plains of my memory and its innumerable caverns and hollows are full beyond measure of countless things of all kinds. Material things are there by means of their images; knowledge is there of itself; emotions are there in the form of ideas or impressions of some kind, for the memory retains them even while the mind does not experience them, although whatever is in the memory must also be in the mind. My mind has the freedom of them all. I can glide from one to the other. I can probe deep into them and never find the end of them. This is the power of memory! This is the great force of life in living man, mortal though he is!⁴

Imagination puts flesh/clothes on the energies of mystery. Imagination lies at a kind of crux where perception, memory, idea generation, emotion, metaphor, and no doubt other labelled

¹ Cf. Marianne Sawicki, The Gospel in History: Portrait of a Teaching Church: The Origins of Christian Education. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988.

² This intriguing quote comes from a very nice PowerPoint presentation exploring the complexities of imagination. <https://prezi.com/omcikqrkiuad/tok-imagination-as-a-way-of-knowing/>

³ Luke 22:19

⁴ St Augustine, Confessions - Book X

features of our lives, intersect and interact⁵. Imagination is the bridge from the everyday to the mystery.

The function of sacraments (as symbols), then, is to point beyond to something else and further to engage the reality to which they point. Sacraments tie together the *transcendent* (the unseen) and the *immanent* (the seen) binding spirit and matter—body and soul, revealing the reality that overlaps these two worlds. Through this "sacramental" connection the mysterious becomes apparent in matter (e.g. bread) and form (e.g. the ritual words of consecration). Sacraments accomplish a spiritual effect (i.e. evoked deeper consciousness) when the transcendent (the unseen) appears to our awareness as present – so much so that our finite condition is likely to experience transformation (e.g. we love our neighbor). In this way, the whole cosmos, human beings, and the enfleshed Jesus Christ act as material realities that are means for personal communication from and to the triune God. Sacramental ritual is able to reveal a level of reality that is otherwise inaccessible to the self-understanding of ordinary human experience—it holds a mirror in which we catch a glimpse of the soul (created in the image of God).

According to Christian theology, Jesus is the sacrament or the physical presence of God⁶; the church “the body of Christ” is the sacrament or physical presence of Jesus; and the people of God's church celebrate sacraments, or enact the finite expression of God's presence. This Christological view of the sacraments is essential to a Christian grasping of sacramental reality. In the words of Barbara Fiand: "The life of Christ was the ‘presenceing’ of God. Ours is called to be that as well, as we embrace the fullness of our humanity....”⁷ The sacraments then are both our encounter with Christ and our transformation in Christ.

In the third section of this paper I will go on to further develop its thrust of sacraments/imagination as embodied knowing, visceral knowing in comparison to rational knowing. Moving to the second part of my paper I wish to touch base with my opening quote from Paul Tillich which says “The relationship of man to the ultimate undergoes changes;” that the symbols or sacraments are refashioned when our context pushes our ultimate concern deeper.

Thus in re-appropriating the sacraments we look to two sources – not just psychological insights about the operation of our imagination but also our social context that defines more clearly that ultimate concern, “the reign of God.”

2. Contemporary Ultimate Concerns

Focus on the sacraments and particularly this paper's focus on the sacraments as spiritual development can run the danger of individualism, a focus on one's personal psychological development, leaving the social out of the spiritual. But the sacraments as developed rituals in the church were expression of the presence of Jesus as an expression of his resurrection. This presence of Jesus was always communal – “For where two or three are gathered in my name,

⁵ Imagination in Teaching and Learning (Introduction) Kieran Egan <https://www.sfu.ca/~egan/ITLIntro.html>

⁶ For more in-depth discussion of this see Keenan Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World* chapters 4 and 5: – Jesus and Primordality and The Church as Foundational Sacrament

⁷ Fiand, B.: Awe Filled Wonder the Interface of Science and Spirituality, New Jersey: Paulist Press. p. 69.

there am I among them⁸.” In line with this I want to take heed of Paul Tillich’s comment that our relationship to the ultimate undergoes change. “**Symbols** which for a certain period, or in a certain place, expressed the truth of faith for a certain group now only remind of the faith of the past. They have lost their truths...”⁹ Our present understanding of the cosmos and the human has radically challenged our religious education of these symbols/sacraments, not dissimilar to how our biblical education over the last half century has challenged our interpretations of the ancient traditions that have shaped these symbols. Human life and human relations are under assault as they never have been before by political, cultural, technological economic and environmental factors that favor power and self-interest over the innocent and imperiled: migrants washing up on the shores of an amoral capitalism, the planet laid waste, wives trapped by the rules that tie them to abusive husbands, the evident connection between gender equality and justice for all and the fact that we have to be reminded “black lives matter.” These concerns require the reinterpretation of traditional symbols of beliefs.

Pope Francis captures the way in which symbols have the power to confuse truth. In his apostolic exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (“The Joy of the Gospel”), he writes that the “worship of the ancient golden calf has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money.” In commenting on “trickle-down economics,” he says, the rich are “stealing” if they do not share their wealth with the poor. In his encyclical, “*Laudato Si*” (“Praise Be to You”), he writes that the throwaway society with its profit-before-all-else economics is destroying the planet. He is telling us that this assault will succeed unless we are open to Christ’s example of sacrificial love.

Francis serves us well in helping us to get underneath and clear away the clutter that tarnishes the ultimate concern that the sacraments point to when he speaks of the consumerist society and free-market capitalism that underpins the American economy and its “unfettered pursuit of money” and that what is underneath that is an intolerable economic system that requires structural change. As a Latin American he describes the economic and cultural dominance of Argentina’s bigger neighbor.

This reference reminds me of the journey in the late 1980s that I was on with several United Methodist field educators in Cuernavaca Mexico. We were guests at the mass of a base community and during the interactive homily one gentleman, who was our host, spoke similarly, after expressing his apologies to us. The text of the gospel was “behold him who takes away the sin of the world.” The priest had raised the question for discussion – “what is the sin of the world?” Our host then said, “Los Estados Unidos es el pecado del mundo.”

The symbol of the city on the hill which “in a certain time, expressed the faith for a certain group now only reminds us of the faith of the past.” Winthrop’s 1630 sermon gave rise to the widespread belief that the United States of America is “God’s country” because metaphorically it is a “Shining City upon a Hill.” We know this today as American exceptionalism.

I’ll stay with Pope Francis in relating these contextual issues to our spiritual development. In an address to clerical members of the Roman Curia before Christmas 2014 he led an examination of conscience in preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation listing “spiritual diseases,”

⁸ Matthew 18:20

⁹ Paul Tillich. *Dynamics of Faith*, p. 111

including self-importance, lust for power, and lack of empathy for others . Among these were the disease of feeling 'immortal' or 'essential 'turn[ing] into masters and feel superior to everyone rather than in the service of all people'. The disease of 'Spiritual Alzheimer's': a 'progressive decline of spiritual faculties' which 'causes severe disadvantages to people', making them live in a 'state of absolute dependence on imagined, views'. 'Existential schizophrenia' of who live 'a double life, a result of advancing spiritual emptiness, 'abandon[ing] the pastoral service and limit[ing] activities to bureaucracy, losing touch with reality and real people'. Indifference to others: When each one thinks only of themselves and loses the truthfulness and warmth of human relationships. Hoarding: filling an existential void in the heart by hoarding material possessions only to feel secure. Worldly profit and exhibitionism: 'When the apostle turns his service into power, and his power into a commodity to gain worldly profits, or even more powers. He described this as a disease that 'badly hurts the Body because it leads people to justify the use of any means in order to fulfill their aim, often in the name of transparency and justice!'

3. Sacraments as Related to the Energy Centers of the Body and Contemporary Ultimate Concerns

This section, the core of the paper, proposes an understanding of each of the traditional Christian seven sacraments as they relate developmentally to the vital/energy centers of the body. Further it relates the tasks of these centers – forming community, entering into intimate relationships, forging a vocation to serve others, practicing reconciliation, surrendering (to the will of God) to contemporary issues which challenge each of these tasks: racism, terrorism, social liberation, etc. as mentioned above.

TABLE 1 Sacraments: the Bodily Flow of Energy to Transcendent Consciousness
Chart of Correspondence of the Sacraments with the Body's Energy Centers and Classic Stages of Human Developmental

Sacrament and Sacramental Graces	Energy Center in the Body	Development Stage/Task	Virtue/Sin Archetype
1. BAPTISM – Belonging	Root: The Base of the Spine The Sciatic Plexus (the center of our power to connect with the earth) The Adrenal Gland	Birth and Infancy The Rebirth of the Self for a Journey through Deeper Consciousness of Life with God Acceptance/ Affirmation Physical Survival Groundedness Trust vs. Mistrust (Hope)	Prudence/Sloth Mother/Victim
2. EUCHARIST – Presence	Sacral: The Pelvic Region/The Gut The Pelvic Plexus (the center of relational energy) The Gonad Gland	Childhood The Rebirth of the Emotional Self Intimacy/Connection Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt Pleasure/Sexuality Autonomy vs. Shame (Will) Initiative vs. Guilt (Purpose)	Temperance/Greed Emperor(press)/Martyr
3. CONFIRMATION – Gifts of the Holy Spirit	Mid Abdomen The Solar Plexus (the center of personal power) The Pancreas Gland	Adolescence The Rebirth of the Conceptual, Intellectual Self Self Esteem/Altruism Intention/Will Industry vs. Inferiority (Competency)	Justice/Wrath Warrior/Servant
4. MARRIAGE – Bonding	The Heart/The Chest Region The Cardiac Plexus (the center of love) The Thymus Gland	Young Adult The Birth of the Relational Self Relationship Physical and Spiritual Connection/Generativity Identity vs. Role Confusion (Fidelity)	Fortitude/Lust Lover/actor
5. RECONCILIATION – Restoration of Relationship	The Throat/The Neck Region The Brachial Plexus (the center for self-expression) The Thyroid Gland	Early Responsible Adulthood The Birth of the Mature Personality Truth Telling/Will Power Communication/Voice/Self-Expression Intimacy vs. Isolation (Love)	Charity/Gluttony Communicator/Silent Child
6. HOLY ORDERS – Servanthood	The Forehead The Cervical Plexus (the center for the power of wisdom) The Pituitary Gland	Developed Responsible Adulthood The Birth of the Responsible Self Leadership/Vocation Intuition/Imagination Generativity vs. Stagnation (Care)	Hope/Envy Intuitive/Intellectual
7. ANOINTING – Peace	The Crown of the Head The Choroid Plexuses (the center for the power of surrender) The Pineal Gland	Mature Years The Birth of the New Self Letting Go/Surrender/Entering the Mystery Ego Identity vs. Despair (Wisdom)	Faith/Pride Guru/Egotist

In each sacrament we can discern a developmental task that manifests the human's outreach to conform to God's will, or better, God's tug at the human.

In the third column I relate the tasks of spiritual development and Erikson's continuum of what he calls the psychosocial crises that are the growth dynamics of that particular stage of development. The key to all of this is that our development begins in relationship, relational processes through which aspects of the self are stimulated and integrated during particular life stages. The sacraments then, as a whole, are envisioned as rituals of relationship enacting deeper spiritual consciousness.

The seven energy centers are related. Energy flows in the body from these energy centers to each other and to the brain. Similarly we should not think of the sacraments as discrete and closed from each other but consider the energy (grace) distinctive to each of the sacraments flowing through the whole body. For example the energy of connection in Baptism flows through the whole body, relating to the energy of intimacy, to the energy of industry, to the energy of generativity. Thus the movement of sacramental grace/energy is multidirectional and flows to the center of the brain. All seven sacraments/energy centers work together not hierarchically nor in a linear flow fashion - but multidirectional (despite the impression of linear direction given by a two-dimensional chart). It is a mistake to view the sacraments (our development for that fact) as segmented.

I have chosen to order the sacraments in a particular sequence that follows both a positive flow of energy in the chakras and a logical sequence of development followed by most developmental psychologists. This varies a bit from the church order in which the sacrament of reconciliation generally comes earlier in the sequence. Each sacrament points to each stage of human development; whereas respective sacraments and respective stages of development do have major tasks.

Next I will present a summary/outline of these seven energy centers, highlighting the biology, psychology and sociology as well as of theology and ritual of the liturgy related to each of the body's areas along with their relation to the seven Catholic sacraments. This paper should not be seen as a paper attempting to write a theology of sacraments. Its genre is that of seeing the sacraments as symbols of spiritual development.

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Aesthetic Empathy and Imagination: *The Pedagogy of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis with Applications for Religious Educators*

Precís

Building upon the concept of aesthetic empathy, Friedl Dicker-Brandeis devised an art pedagogy that would become the basis for the practice of art therapy. The art courses she conducted for children in the Terezín ghetto during the Holocaust, were meant to free the child's imagination, nurture creative agency and restore a sense of reality in the midst of chaos and deprivation. Using her pedagogical methods, a workshop will be designed to develop aesthetic experiences that will stimulate the imagination and nurture creative responses for at risk youth in a religious context.

As religious educators, we are all too aware of the challenges that confront the children and youth we serve. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, “Each year more than ten million children in the United States endure the trauma of abuse, violence, natural disasters and adverse events.” (NCTSN) Violent home and community environments, random gun crimes, worldwide conflict and instability significantly contribute to the fostering of insecurity and uncertainty in the lives of our young people. Crippling socio-economic conditions, fear for personal safety and physical and/or emotional abuse in the daily lives of children and youth have the potential to adversely affect their ability to engender empathy toward others. This lack of empathy creates the potential for causing harm to the child or youth and contributes to the continual cycle of violence in the surrounding community. “Treating other people as if they were just objects is one of the worst things you can do to another human being, to ignore their subjectivity, their thoughts and feelings.” (Baron-Cohen 2001, 7-8) The consequences that are devastating.

The path forward requires a myriad of responses from the religious community. Chief among them is the task of fostering the imagination and providing aesthetic experiences that can engender empathy. “An aesthetic experience involves both thought and feeling, the mind as well as the senses. The intellectual appreciation of the artistic work coupled with its emotional ability to move us gives rise to a complex mix of feeling, thought, insight and beauty.” (Howe 2013, 8) Empathetic imagination allows the child or youth to imagine being in another’s situation or to imagine being another in that other’s situation. This creates possibilities for transformation and healing rather than a perpetuation of a destructive cycle of negativity and damage. “When two people relate to each other authentically and humanly, God is the electricity that surges between them.” (Buber 1958,) Empathetic imagination engenders the possibility for the presence of the divine. “The purpose of relation is the relation itself - touching the You. For as soon as we touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life.” (Buber 1958,) In this context we are facilitating the possibility for healing and divine surprise.

Being intrinsically affected by another’s emotional experience or entering into feelings brought about by an aesthetic experience involves being able to imagine. Sacred texts can serve as the foundation of aesthetic experiences that have the ability to foster empathy in our children and youth. “There are many everyday opportunities to develop and maintain empathy. Indeed, empathy is promoted whenever we reflect on the human experience, read a novel, act in a play or watch a movie. The recognition that a strong empathic sensibility, whether emotionally or cognitively inspired, tends to make us more moral, pro-social and community minded and has encouraged many people to seek its promotion in both children and adults.” (Hume 2013,160) Using art, music, drama, poetry, rap, film and movement offers the opportunity for a child or youth to dare to imagine. Entering into the creative process using the sacred text grounds the experience and offers a synthesis between Story and art. This allows the child or youth to affirm the creative spark that is within.

Facilitating the creative process provides the groundwork for developing empathy. The emphasis is to be placed upon the aesthetic process that offers the possibility for transformation. The incorporation of artistic mediums is not about the final quality of the art produced but centers on the process and its outcome. “This is the eternal origin of art that a human being confronts a form that wants to become a work through him. Not a figment of his soul but something that appears to the soul and demands the soul’s creative power.” (Buber 1958, 9) The creative process brings the child or youth out of an insular or self-absorbed setting and invites her/him to imagine what “the other” is feeling, thinking or doing. It provides the child or youth with the agency to enter into the creative process and bring about a new way of perceiving the world. The child or youth is offered the capacity to move from objectification of the other to a subjective identification with the other. “Love does not cling to the I in such a way as to have the Thou only for its content: its object; but love is between I and Thou.” (Buber 1958, 16) The impetus for empathetic response is in relationship.

The pedagogical framework developed by Friedl Dicker- Brandeis facilitates aesthetic empathy. “Dicker-Brandeis used her teaching to enhance children’s relationships with themselves, to participate sympathetically with the world. It was her way to help the children psychologically survive their experience, whatever, their eventual fate. She felt that empathy, personal meaning and a shared humanity could be found through art.” (Hume 2013, 178) In order to comprehend how she developed and applied her teaching method it is necessary to explore the concept of empathy in her formation.

Empathy as a concept has a relatively recent history. Extremely influential in the philosophical life of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe, it was intrinsically connected to the artistic world in Vienna and in the early Bauhaus movement. Built upon the term *empfindung*, or ‘feeling into’, one is invited to view a work of art beyond a cognitive awareness or comprehension of it. *Empfindung*. requires the perceiver to enter into the work, providing an avenue to form an emotional connection that has transformational potential. “The aesthetic experience is one of empathy, in which the viewer resonates with the work in such a way that he or she sees and feels something of both the thing rendered and the mind of the artist who rendered it. Thus, to be involved in art, either as artist or viewer, is to be part of an empathic experience in which perception, understanding, meaning and interpretation are changed.” (Hume 2013, 177) The potential to bring about a shift in perspective or heighten meaning through the aesthetic experience is integral to the concept.

Dicker-Brandeis was a devoted pupil of Johannes Itten, an artist-philosopher and mystic. She studied with him in Vienna and followed him to the Bauhaus in its formative years. Itten’s work would have a profound impact upon her and she would incorporate his teaching techniques into her pedagogical framework. “Itten’s method of teaching differed radically from others practiced in Vienna in that time. A philosopher himself, he devoted great effort to shaping his pupils’ conceptions, considering this a basis for independent creative activities. At the same time he taught them the intricacies of the liaisons between spiritual teaching and its embodiment in form, colors, materials and the unique analysis of painting.” (Makarova 1990, 10)

Highlighting the importance of developing the body and the mind and integrating the importance of play into his pedagogical framework, he instructed his students to fully develop their personalities and self-awareness as part of their artistic training.

An ardent member of the cult of Mazdaznan, a type of Zoroastrianism, Itten incorporated his theology into his teaching. Reverence for nature, care of the body, and the importance of personal responsibility all informed his art and teaching. “The pedagogical principle on which Itten’s teaching was based can be summarized in a pair of opposites: ‘intuition and method’, or ‘subjective experience and objective recognition’. (Droste 1993, 24) In this way, Itten’s students were able to develop a balanced, integrative worldview that would enhance the way in which they were able to create. The epic battle between the forces of light and darkness underscored his artistic expression. “ In Theresienstadt his “theology” of the battle between the sun of light and the sun of darkness became all too real. Friedl Dicker-Brandeis made practical use of his rhythmic exercises as a device in her battle against the chaos of time and space.” (Makarova 2001, 191-192) She prepared her pupils to engage in the artistic process using breathing exercises and body movement, engendering a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere. Her artistic world provided stability and order where there was none. Like Itten, she avoided the use of personal criticism because of its potential to damage the creative process.

Dicker-Brandeis followed Jacob Itten to the Bauhaus where he formulated its core pedagogy. They would be a part of the community from 1919-1923. “What was probably the most successful and far-reaching school of design began with a vision: the idea of creating a “New Man” from the disaster of World War I. This was to be a creature who, endowed with all the senses and trained by the best artists and architects of the age, would be able to invent the present and the future of a modern century. “ (Fiedler & Feierabend 1999, 8) Building upon ideas of aesthetic empathy and a holistic approach to the practice of art, the Bauhaus was an artistic utopia. “The early Bauhaus years were characterized by a powerful community spirit. An environment fit for ‘new man’ was to be planned, designed and built on the ruins of the old empire. All saw themselves as artists, but artists who would make their contribution to the ‘cathedral of the future’ through craftsmanship or teaching. “ (Droste 1993, 22) The Bauhaus incorporated art, music, weaving, printing, graphic arts, costume design, photography and theatre, among other art forms to provide an integrated approach to artistic life.

At the Bauhaus, the established ways of teaching and shaping young artists were abandoned. Technique was no longer the primary focus and the prior types of artistic instruction were considered impediments to the creative process. The students of the Bauhaus were encouraged to begin with a *tabula rasa*. “The goal of such “unlearning” was to bring the young artist back to a state of innocence beyond the corruption of culture —to a childlike self — from which learning could begin anew.”(Bergdoll,&Dickerman 2009, 17) An emphasis was placed on the integration of art forms, the incorporation of body, mind and spirit and the importance of ‘play’.

During her tenure at the Bauhaus, Dicker-Brandeis was also influenced by the artist, Paul Klee, working with him from 1921-1923. “ Friedl studied with Klee every day, listening to his lectures on the essence of art and childhood imagination and watching him paint.” (Makarova 2001,13) She would leave the Bauhaus with Jacob Itten over artistic differences about its direction. The overarching ethos had dramatically shifted to a new emphasis upon design for mass production. Dicker-Brandeis would go on to Berlin and Vienna practicing art and architecture successfully, until the rise of the Nazi movement. She became an émigré, moving to Prague and “because she felt her place was in Europe, turned down a visa that would have enabled her to enter Palestine”. (Volavkova, 1993, xix) In 1942, she took up residence in the infamous “model prison camp”, Terezin, along with fellow artists, dramatists, writers, musicians and scholars. She perished in Auschwitz- Birkenau in 1944.

When Dicker-Brandeis was preparing to leave for Terezin, she used her suitcase allowance to carry art materials in order to teach the young people incarcerated there. “ In her own study and practice, Dicker had learned how to use art to break with old patterns and to remain spirited in times of despair through clear artistic expression. At the camp she taught children similar lessons. She instructed them in the the skills necessary for giving artistic form to their experiences. Thus did she provide them the means to sustain hope in the face of their own suffering. “ (Wix 2010,123) Dicker-Brandeis had encountered her own personal challenges and endured disappointment and sadness during her life. Her artistic training helped her navigate through the darkness. It would be the impetus for her work in Terezin.

Children and youth in Terezin were housed in quarters that separated them from their parents. Frightened, hungry and locked away from any vestiges of normal life, they were traumatized on a daily basis. They were surrounded by death, disease, hunger and degrading living conditions. “Of the 15,000 children deported from Theresienstadt [Terezin] to Auschwitz, 100 survived—none under the age of fourteen.” (Volavkova 1993, xxi.) The young prisoners were not permitted to be educated but were allowed to practice art, drama and music. Dicker-Brandeis affirmed the humanity of those she worked with through her teaching. “By encouraging them to trust their own imagery and develop their own artistic forms she helped them find inner resources to honor their own sense of reality, creating a psychological space of empowerment, meaning, and freedom in the midst of dreadful oppression and daily horrors.” (Wix, 2010, 19) Dicker-Brandeis sought to bring a sense of order and meaning into the daily context of chaos through art education. She stated that “Aesthetics are the ultimate authority, the moving force, the motor capable of creating production, while defending man from forces over which he has no control.”(Makarova p. 43 FDB) Her teaching environment became a safe haven for children and youth to react to their experiences through art.

Although Dicker-Brandeis had no formal training in pedagogy, the legacy of her own artistic training formed the basis for her teaching. She centered her lessons on the transformative effect of the artistic process. In her essay, “On Children’s Art”, [Terezin,1943] , she asserted that “Art lessons do not intend to turn all children into artists, but try to unlock and preserve for all of them the creative spirit as a source of energy to stimulate imagination and strengthen their own ability to judge and to observe. “ (Wix, 2010, 129) Her classes included the opportunity to work in groups , enabling a supportive and nurturing environment.

She stated that “Through the interdependency something comes about that in later life will play an enormous role; that is, the work of a group becomes not the work of competing individuals but an achievement of all of them.” (Wix 2010,133) Her emphasis on developing a stable community brought children and youth together in a system of support and care. They would discuss and critique each other’s work, learning to see and experience it from the other’s point of view.

Eva Štichová-Beldová, one of her Terezin students recalls, “In what were called the free lessons, no theme was given. The children were not even supposed to think—simply draw, collect themselves, dream, and then draw again, whatever came of it. the goal of these lessons was spontaneous expression, which was supposed to lead to the freeing of the spirit.” (Makarova 2001, 213) Dicker-Brandeis allowed each of her pupils the gift of self-expression patently obvious in their preserved works. Murals created from scrap materials gleaned by the students, pencil drawings of their prior lives, paintings of their daily existence, all were given her personal care and attention. Štichová-Beldová states, “It was not her technique that made the difference; it was the feeling of freedom that she conveyed to the children—her own inner feeling of freedom, not the technical skills.” (Makarova 2001, 214) The facilitation of the creative process would be the ultimate gift given to her pupils.

When Dicker-Brandeis knew her selection for ‘transport’ was imminent, she packed about five thousand drawings in suitcases and concealed them in Terezin before she left. They are now on display in the State Jewish Museum in Prague, bearing witness. These drawings are the silent reminders of the thousands of children and youth who perished, calling us to remember. “If the human species is differentiated from the beasts by the marvel of consciousness, then we enact our humanity and the very authenticity of our being by straining to “know” through awareness the “unthinkable” experience of others.” (Langer, 1995, 15)

Dicker-Brandeis took the initiative to ensure that the artistic legacy of the children and youth of Terezin would survive. Her action was the final step in the artistic process she fostered.

Implementing the essence of the pedagogy of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis does not require that the teacher be an artist or endowed with creative talent. Instead, it demands that the educator is, above all, willing to be empathetic and nurturing. When preparing for facilitating this process be sure the gathering space is inviting, comfortable and welcoming. It should be a secure space that offers the participants a sense of trust and a non-anxious environment. Avoid making value judgments or formulating preconceived outcomes or projections of personal bias upon the reactions of the children or youth. The following four stage process moves from encounter to implementation implementation followed by reflection and resulting in transformative action.

Encounter

When preparing for the encounter, the religious educator should select a scripture reading or prayer as the foundation of the aesthetic experience. Using this as a catalyst, incorporate an artistic medium that illustrates the sacred text, such as a painting, photograph, film clip, or musical selection. Invite students to enter into the realm of the artistic medium. Have them consider how the aesthetic experience made them feel.

Implementation

The implementation stage invites the students to use art, music, collage making, poetry, movement, drama, photography, hip-hop, rap, sculpture, film, etc., as a response to the artistic medium presented. Give the students as many options for expression as possible. Be prepared to offer direction or assistance as needed. Each participant will work at a different pace, some will prefer working in groups, others alone. Stress the importance of the creative process. The outcomes will vary but all will be valued by the teacher and the participants.

Reflection

Each artwork will then be shared with the group. Discussion is to take place in a safe space. Every person is encouraged to participate, inviting reflection on the work in a caring and supportive way. Expressing the feelings the artwork engendered in them is the primary goal. Care for the feelings of each person and respectful listening is integral to the circle of discussion.

Transformative Action

Students are encouraged to consider how the sharing of the creative experience has changed their perceptions of themselves and one another. The empathic response engendered through the experience can offer the students new ways to perceive the world and provide the impetus to bring about change.

The legacy of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis is a gift to be used to restore empathy and sustain hope in a broken world.

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Religious Imagination and the Oppressed Emotion

Reading the Bible with Holistic Action

Abstract

According to social trends, the general population fixates on modern topics for multiple reasons. In the case of Christianity, the concept of “reason” was generated from the Reformation based on the rational trend of Western culture. While Christianity focuses on “reason,” other sides of human beings are devaluated. This research will shed new light on the hidden parts of humans such as imagination, emotion and body.

Imagination enables the reader to overcome their limitations when they use reason, emotion and body in the process of reading the Bible. From these recognitions, this research is reevaluating the possibilities of reading the Bible with body-centered movement as an effective way of religious imagination. This process is able to bring the biblical story to the lives of readers through imagination. Also, this experience is able to lead us liberation from the oppressed emotion with God-consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

People of the postmodern world are more familiar with emotional approaches to experiencing God rather than objectively reading the Bible. Also, the traditional interpretation is not meaningful anymore to postmodern people who focus on individual lives and applicable messages relevant to their situations. They want to know the meaning and the intention of God for their specific lives rather than the general meaning of the Bible. Maria Harris offers the following definition of religion in her book, *Teaching & Religious Imagination*; “Religion, with its ties to creation and feeling, is the cultural vehicle that gives people forms through which to express their relationship to divinity.”¹ Through religion, humans want to know God’s view and intention for their situations and world issues. In this respect, I plan to try a different approach from traditional ways of reading the Bible, namely through body-centered movement based on imagination. In this research, I will focus on the case of the oppressed emotions in Korean women and discuss the effectiveness of imagination with a body-centered approach to the Bible.

This research is connected to three approaches: religious imagination, spiritual-psychology, and holistic education. First, religious imagination is the central issue as one of the fundamental elements of religion. Most religions are based on the presence of the invisible god. Therefore, people must approach their invisible God by imagination. Moreover, imagination is an essential element to understanding religious narratives because these consist of stories that are

¹ Maria Harris, *Teaching & Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1991), 144.

coming from different cultural backgrounds to readers. The main purpose of this research is to discover an efficient method of religious imagination using the wholeness of human beings.

The second approach concentrates on spiritual-psychology as a way of understanding students as spiritual beings, and gives the students the opportunity to reflect on their sub-consciousness level. It is not possible to experience God before we meet ourselves, and transformation is possible when we confront our true selves in our sub-consciousness. Religious educators must consider students' spirituality in order to experience God in their "inner self."²

Finally, the third approach will be to develop a new form of holistic education based on our emotions, bodies and spirituality. When we use our whole sense to approach the truth and God, the limitation will be minimized, and our religious imagination will be maximized through our wholeness.

PART 1: OPPRESSED EMOTION

THE OPPRESSION IN KOREAN SOCIETY

South Korean society allows various oppressions coming from its steady hierarchical and patriarchal culture. Therefore, the Korean language has various expressions for the negative and oppressed emotions such as "*Han*" and "*Wha*." In particular, Korean women suffer from multiple oppressions in their families, social communities, and religions. Moreover, Korean society has undergone rapid changes through several historical events over the short period of one hundred years, such as the Japanese occupation, the Korean War, dictatorship, modernization, enlightenment, and industrialization. During the last one hundred years, Korean women were the greatest victims of these historical events. In World War II, Japanese soldiers forced them to serve as sex slaves, and the Korean War made them powerless along with the rest of the Korean population. Some people say that this is not meaningful to postmodern Koreans. However, the people are still alive with negative emotions caused by these issues; these are still on going in our lives, history and her story. How can religious educators approach these people who fall victim to multifarious sufferings?

OPPRESSED EMOTION AND RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

Sometimes, people meet themselves when they realize that they are oppressed by something or someone because they recognize themselves as a subject by recognition of the object. Like the skin of fruits, people's true selves are covered with their negative emotions caused by oppressions and sufferings. When I did a silent drama in the class of *Theology and Emotions* I realized that there were lots of remaining emotions in my inner self. Our group designed a silent drama about the emotional transition of death and resurrection for the small

² Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation* (New York: HarperOne, 2003); According to Merton, "The inner self is precisely that self which cannot be tricked or manipulate by anyone, even by the devil" (Thomas Merton, 5). Merton provides various explanations about the inner self: "contemplative and spiritual self, the dormant, mysterious, and hidden self, and the self as rooted in God," (Merton, 2) "our inmost 'I' [that] exists in God and God dwells in it." (Merton, 12)

project that was related to the theme of that class. At first, I had a plan to dance with the feelings of sadness, anger, disappointment, surprise and joy. However, when I thought about death, and saw the student who acted the part of death, I started to cry because I remembered my grandmother who died 15 years ago. It was my story, my life, and my emotion at the time, not just drama. Through that drama, I released my remaining emotions with crying out, and I faced myself. I named this kind of remaining emotion, “oppressed emotion.” This refers to unrelieved emotion in the sub-conscious that was caused by past experiences. This emotion is also related to our false mask of true self, a persona that is formed by our social positions and roles. In this respect, it is not only the emotion from past events, but also the feeling of true self.

Moreover, through this drama, I experienced the combination of my current and past remaining emotions, and I could not stop crying even though the drama was already finished. Interestingly, when I cried out, my classmates also cried, and we shared our individual stories related to this drama and sadness. I was surprised that one person’s crying could bring out the audiences’ own stories and oppressed emotions. Jerzy Grotowski states, “The actor who undertakes an act of self-penetration, who reveals himself and sacrifices the innermost part of himself – the most painful, that which is not intended for the eyes of the world – must be able to manifest the least impulse.”³ According to Grotowski, an actor’s body language and expression reveal their inner self behind the persona, and this acting influences the audience to face their inner selves.⁴ From this experience and Grotowski’s statement, I recognized the importance and necessity of reliving our oppressed emotions in our sub-consciousness by body expression and empathy. Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore discusses a similar experience in *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*: “This is what I learned from the student who cried out. With her cries ringing, together with painful cries from history, we analyze the power of remembering the dismembered.”⁵ Likewise, narratives and imagination have power for evoking memories and forming empathy, and this also has the potential to release oppressed emotion. This is the reason why the biblical narrative has the capacity of religious experience, which brings me to the second part: religious imagination and the Bible.

PART 2: RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION AND THE BIBLE

Religion has numerous words to express the invisible god. However, these words can limit our experiences of the ultimate god. For instance, the Bible limits God in the authors’ expression that was formed by their intentions and cultures. Moreover, the authority of the Bible as the canon of Christianity sets a limitation of individual interpretation. For these reasons, when a reader reads the Bible, their understandings are dominated by literal expression or former interpretation that was discussed by the scholars who are also dominated by their specific culture.

In this case, imagination enables the reader to overcome these limitations when they use their holistic senses: reason, emotion, and body in the process of reading the Bible. From these recognitions, the second part of research is reevaluating the possibilities of reading the Bible with body-centered movement as an efficient method of religious imagination. This process is

³ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed., Eugenio Barba (London: A Methuen Dramabook, 1968), 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁵ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 67.

able to bring the biblical story to the life through the reader's imagination. Also, this experience is able to liberate the reader from oppressed emotions.

BODY AND EMOTION

Western culture is familiar with the division between body, mind, and soul. Moreover, the body, especially women's bodies, has been devalued by Western philosophy and Christianity. Sondra Horton Fraleigh writes, "Dualism, which connotes the classic body-soul separation in Western philosophy (principally known as Cartesian dualism), views the body in a negative, mechanistic way and regards the soul as superior."⁶ In addition, Marcia W. Mount Shoop states, "Women as a temptress, as unclean, as lacking in moral capacity, as irrational, and as inadequate to the task of church leadership are just some of the symptoms of how hatred, distrust, and negativity about the body have been particularly heaped onto female bodies."⁷ Likewise, negative perspectives on the human body, especially women's bodies, have lasted for a long time, and this has affected women's oppression in Christianity.

On the other hand, Eastern culture traditionally thought that body, mind and soul are deeply connected. For example, traditional Korean medicine regards physical disease as originating from suffering in mind and soul. Therefore, a Korean traditional doctor might use acupuncture or prescribe herbal medicine to get the spirit flowing that was interrupted by shock. Identified with Eastern traditional medicine, the body and emotion's possibilities are limitless for religious experience in soul. When people use body and emotion in the process of approaching God through imagination, they can experience a more plentiful revelation of God.

The most notable theologian who asserted the positive effect of emotion for God-consciousness was Friedrich Schleiermacher. According to Schleiermacher, emotion is "an original way" to approach God. He states,

In this sense it can indeed be said that God is given to us in feeling in an original way; and if we speak of an original revelation of God to man or in man, the meaning will always be just this, that, along with the absolute dependence which characterizes not only man but all temporal existence, there is given to man also the immediate self-consciousness of it, which becomes a consciousness of God.⁸

For Schleiermacher, reflection on feeling is important for realizing the "consciousness of God" through the "self-consciousness" of human experience with God. His assertion was a transition of recognition for human feeling in the period of the Enlightenment. In this period, people tended to focus on human reason and dogma of religion instead of human emotion and feelings, and people considered emotion to be separated from human reason. According to Elaine Fox, "Historically, cognition and emotion have frequently been considered as separate entities. Contemporary research, however, suggests that the two concepts are actually closely intertwined and interdependent at both neural and psychological levels."⁹ This statement applies not only to social trends but also to Christian culture. Until now, Christianity tended to devalue emotional reflection of religious experience related to a relationship with God. However, as Schleiermacher insists, our feelings and emotions are both important ways to approach our inner experience with

⁶ Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body* (Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 4.

⁷ Marcia W. Mount Shoop, *Let the Bones Dance: Embodiment and the Body of Christ* (Louisville: WJK, 2010), 6.

⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 18.

⁹ Elaine Fox, *Emotion Science: Cognitive and Neuroscientific Approaches to Understanding Human Emotions* (London: Palgrave macmillan, 2008), 10.

God. If we miss the action of our feelings and emotions, we can easily overlook various layers of our inner self and religious experience that is related to God.

BODY-CENTERED MOVEMENT AND THE BIBLE

One of the main roles of religious educators is to provide the opportunity of finding connection between a biblical narrative and the life of a student. Moore asserts, "Reading and biblical exegesis are important skills to learn, but they can easily be disconnected from any meaning in persons' lives."¹⁰ Emotion and imagination can be a proper bridge between a biblical world and students' lives. As I mentioned above, biblical narrative has lots of limitation to understand its context and situation exactly because the writer provided limited information. Moreover, this information was edited by their thought and view that is formed by their cultural backgrounds. Moore states, "Concepts and skills have actually been extracted from narrative contexts in the first place, so placing them back into these contexts is a way of sending them home."¹¹ This is the reason why religious educators have to consider imagination in their pedagogy with the Bible. Human beings have the capacity to access a truth beyond narrative through imagination. This imagination brings the individuals into a different world. Applying readers' whole sense in this process will enlarge imaginative ability to understand a biblical narrative vividly.

For these reasons, body-centered movement can be an exceptional way to approach the biblical world. Body movement is a way to maximize the effect of emotion and thinking in the process of reading the text using the reader's body to engage the biblical world such as motion with some part of the body, touching, dancing, acting, drawing or walking. Generally, we think that our emotions control our bodies according to our situations. However, the opposite direction, changing emotion through body movement, is also possible. The connection between our body and emotion is stronger than most people think, and body movement is a proper way to stimulate people's emotions when they read the Bible. According to Andrew J. Strathern, "Emotions are basically irrational bodily reactions, transient surges of affect quite unrelated to cognition. Reports of an affective experience can be explained entirely in terms of physiological changes and outward bodily movements."¹² This assertion is the foundation of body-centered movement with the Bible. While acting out the biblical narratives, readers can reveal their oppressed emotions through their bodily expressions with the biblical stories and characters because the biblical world is similar to our world, and the character's emotion is related to our emotion. Also, when people are liberated from their oppressions and oppressed emotions by body-centered movement, they are able to confront themselves coming from their deepest inner self: true self and their divine nature in superego. Peter Adam states, "If the Bible is a God-given resource for Christian spirituality, then the use of biblical theology will help us to derive as much spiritual benefit as possible from every part of that Bible."¹³ When we try to read the Bible with body-centered movement, we can realize God's message in our contexts through the hermeneutics of

¹⁰ Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 132.

¹¹ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching from the hearts: Theology and Educational Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 132.

¹² Andrew J. Strathern, *Body Thoughts* (The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 326.

¹³ Peter Adam, *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 42.

the biblical text. This process can be a useful way to retrieve inner experience and to reveal our oppressed emotions within God-consciousness.

CONCLUSION: HOLISTIC EDUCATION FOR LIBERATION

This research concentrated on three themes—religious imagination, emotion, and body—and expands the possibility of these themes in the religious education field by reading the Bible with holistic action, “body-centered movement.” The original meaning of “educate” is a combination of two words, “out,” “lead.” However, much of education still focuses on giving information instead of bringing out the student’s potential. This is the reason why this research discussed the possibility of self-education through imagination, emotion, and body as a way of respecting the individual student as a subject of religious experience. This form of education considers that everyone can produce knowledge coming from an individual experience within God-consciousness. Moore states, “Sacred teaching mediates God’s grace to people who search for God’s Goodness in a world oriented toward lesser goods and despair.”¹⁴ As Moore asserts, a religious educator is like a mediator between God and student rather than teachers, and Jesus was an exemplar of this model. The biblical stories portray Jesus as a liberator of the oppressed, and as an educator who liberated people’s imaginative power using parables and narratives. Religious educators should reconsider his teaching style as a mediator and liberator.

When I came to Boston to study, I was exhausted by the life of an ordained female pastor who suffered from people’s antipathy for female religious leaders caused by the strong patriarchal culture in Korean Christianity. I was a full time pastor of the biggest Methodist church in Korea for six years. There are more than one hundred full-time pastors, thirty part-time pastors and fifty staff members in that church, so the church has a strong hierarchical culture to manage them. Also, this church has a strong masculine culture that does not allow ordained female pastors to preach the sermon or lead Eucharist in public worship. In this hierarchical and patriarchal culture, women pastors are always subordinate to male pastors. One day, I gained an opportunity to pray alone in a small room, and I experienced an outburst of oppressed emotions through bodily prayer. This event was the awakening moment of my life in which I confronted myself behind my oppressed emotions. The enlightenment from this event was the first step of this research. I constantly seek the effect of bodily movement and emotion on religious experience. And while dancing with the biblical narratives that are related to women’s healing and liberation, I found the ability to relieve oppressed emotion through bodily expressions for God-consciousness.

When I started this research, my contextual issue was the oppressed emotions of Korean women. However, this approach can be applied to various contexts of religious education because everyone is oppressed by someone or something, even though they may not recognize their oppressions. I hope that religious imagination and reading the Bible through body-centered movement can be a way of relieving our oppression and oppressed emotions in various hierarchical and patriarchal societies.

¹⁴ Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 3

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Imagining a New Future: Deciding to Hope

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the role of imagination and the decision to hope in the exercise of global citizenship. The first section of the paper is a sketch of the interplay of local and global movements in human history, posing questions about global citizenship. The second section is an introduction to the life narratives of two “world changers,” Sojourner Truth and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Their narratives are marked by themes resonant with the published narratives of global peacemakers and a recent collection of oral histories with just peacemakers; however, those other narratives will be analyzed in a later work. The present paper concludes with a theoretical proposition regarding imagination as a decision to hope, and a discussion of practices by which Sojourner Truth and Abraham Joshua Heschel draw upon imagination as a source for hope and a guide for transformative action.

Almost ten years ago, I wrote a chapter entitled “Imagine Peace: Knowing the Real – Imagining the Impossible” (Moore 2006). I argued that imagination is at the heart of peacemaking. In the past 10 years, the world has become even more violent. The gap between the rich and the poor has increased, and ecological devastation has become direr. Can we still imagine a flourishing future for the human family and the planet? Can we enhance global citizenship in a world that is so fraught with destruction? The central thesis of this paper is that *building a new future depends on imagination and a decision to hope, even in the midst of devastating realities*. Further, the very ability to imagine a new future is intimately tied to the ways we relate to the world in the present; it is related to our ways of knowing and our daily life practices.

This paper begins with contextual analysis and the challenge and possibility of global citizenship, expressed poetically. The heart of the paper follows: the analysis of life narratives to reveal the role of imagination in the lives of world-changers. World changers are often people faced with devastating contextual realities, who still make decisions to hope and to act transformatively, even as they face overwhelming injustice, violence, and ecological destruction. I argue that imagination plays a critical role in these decisions. The paper concludes with a discussion of practices that cultivate imagination for justice and peace.

Pondering Global History and Global Citizenship

In the beginning was wisdom and a world
And wisdom permeated, even created, that world
And the world was filled with wisdom,

But wisdom was flighty and hard to find
It shone in rituals and stories
And every tribe had its own – oh so beautiful – ways
 to sing and dance the wisdom of the ages!
People *evoked* wisdom and they *invoked* the Holy
But people loved their evocations and invocations more than the Holy
And each clan created and clung to its own.

Today we inherit all of those rituals and stories,
 And the clinging and creating.
We have the potential to receive and hallow the rituals and stories of our people
 And the rituals and stories of others –
 To hold these precious gifts of wisdom and to create anew
We have potential to embrace a larger world
 To be global, even cosmic, citizens,
We have communication that connects us
 Complex ideas that weave simplicities into brilliant complexities
 Trade that allows us to share and receive from one another
 Public deliberations that allow us to draw ideas from one another
 And create something new.

But the new we have created is torn with violence
 And with abundance held by a few while the many starve
 And with desecration and desolation of the environment.
Global consciousness has become *globalism*
Conflicts between clans have become global wars
Culture-sharing has become colonialism
Resource sharing has become resource hoarding
Reason has become a sophisticated way to objectify and dominate others
Critical thinking about culture creates justifications for one's own people,
 One's own values, one's own culture as superior to others.
In that milieu, is world loyalty possible?
 Is it even a value to hold
 when it is so easily distorted into dominance and destruction?
One is tempted to retreat to pre-modern worlds,
 But even those were isolated and insulated from one another.
At least the dangers were more contained
 And the simplicities were grounded in more embodied existence –
 Good efforts to hunt or grow food,
 to live in tune with one's people and the land.

But peoples of long ago were perhaps not so isolated as we think;
 Peoples crossed one another in ancient China
 In the lands of the Mediterranean
 In the lands of the Pacific
 In virtually every land.

And when they met, they sometimes warred
 They sometimes traded,
 They sometimes destroyed one another,
 They sometimes kept distance – as much as they were able
But they inevitably met, and when they did
 They reinvented themselves again and again.

Global citizenship is about reimagining and reinvention – meeting a new moment and being thrown into terror, meeting a new moment and choosing hope. Reimagining is dreaming a new world. In India, Mahatma Ghandi envisioned a world in which his people and *all* people were free. Exiled from Tibet, His Holiness the Dalai Lama envisions a world of peace. In the United States, Bill McKibben dreamed 350.org and it grew into a planet-wide organization with 20,000 rallies across the globe. Then he dreamed a movement of resistance to the Keystone Pipeline and a movement for fossil fuel divestment. Every act began with a dream – a glimpse of what was possible. Dreams are the clay from which new shapes are molded. But the dreams are not themselves the full story. If the world is to be made new, we need to draw upon ancient, modern and postmodern wisdom to reinvent a world that does not yet exist.¹

Global citizenship requires imagination, critique, suspicion, and a decision to hope. For this reason, we turn now to human lives, seeking to understand the dynamic narratives of “world-changers,” or people whom others admire as global citizens. Analyzing these narratives will point to possibilities for cultivating human imagination for ecological care, justice, and peace.

Exploring the Lives of World-Changers

In this section, we attend to human lives, focusing on two historical world-changers. This study is preliminary to another one in which I will expand the narratives to include other published narratives and oral histories. Here I invite attention to two people known widely for their global citizenship. Sojourner Truth and Abraham Joshua Heschel, from radically different backgrounds, were strikingly similar in their commitments to live in faith and make the world a better place.

Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth (c1797-1883) was born into slavery in New York as Isabelle Baumfree (Painter 1996).² At age 9, she was sold in auction, followed by a harsh life of daily beatings. She was sold twice more, and then promised freedom by her owner, who was seemingly influenced by the New York abolition movement (1799-1827). Isabelle’s hope for freedom was short-lived, however, and her owner retracted his promise. She immediately began planning her escape, determined not to abandon hope. With her infant daughter, she escaped in 1826. Sometime later, she learned that her 5 year-old son Peter had been illegally sold to a slave owner in Alabama. Isabelle sued for his release, with help of the Van Wagenen family for whom she worked at that time. She won the case (one of the first successful cases of an African American woman against a white man) and Peter was released.

Not long after this legal case was resolved, Isabella Baumfree had a Christian conversion experience. A few years later (1843), she had another religious experience, which inspired her to

change her name to Sojourner Truth. At that time, she dedicated herself to a life of preaching and working for abolition. She also became involved in women's rights, and was invited to speak in the first National Women's Rights Convention in 1850. Shortly after, she moved to Ohio where, in 1851, she delivered her famous "Ain't I a Woman" speech at the Women's Convention in Akron:

And ain't I a woman?
that little man in black there say
a woman can't have as much rights as a man
cause Christ wasn't a woman
Where did your Christ come from?
From God and a woman!

Through the rest of her life, Sojourner Truth continued to advocate for abolition and women's suffrage. In the 1850s, she became a staunch advocate for desegregation – riding on streetcars labeled for whites. She also worked politically to obtain land grants for former slaves, while advocating prison reform and repeal of the death penalty. She was a world-changer, who drew from the lessons of her own life to imagine a world that was better for everyone who had ever been oppressed by slavery, gender, poverty, or entanglement with the legal system.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

We turn now to a man who lived in another century, a different religious heritage and initially on another continent, Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972).³ Heschel's life was deeply grounded in his love of God and family. Born in 1907, he was the youngest of six children and the descendant of prominent European rabbis on both sides of family. As a boy, he had an excellent Yeshiva education, later studying for the Orthodox rabbinate. He then completed a doctoral degree at the University of Berlin and studied at *Hochschule fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, where he later taught Torah and received a second ordination in the liberal tradition. Shortly thereafter, the Gestapo arrested Heschel and sent him to Warsaw, where he taught for almost a year. With encouragement from others, he escaped Warsaw six weeks before the Germans invaded Poland. As the Holocaust unfolded, Heschel's sister was killed in a German bombing, his mother murdered by Nazis, and his two sisters died in concentrations camps.

Shaped by his experience, Heschel emerged as a spiritual mensch in the United States. He became widely known as a public intellectual and teacher, first at Hebrew Union in Cincinnati, Ohio, and then at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. He also wrote bountifully, focusing on the prophets and on the God-human relationships in particular, as represented by *God in Search of Man* and *Man is Not Alone*. In the 1960s, he became absorbed by the Civil Right Movement, marching with Martin Luther King, Jr.

As a teacher, social commentator, and spiritual mentor, Heschel worried that religion was becoming irrelevant and oppressive. His response was to ponder the depths of his own spiritual tradition and offer that wisdom to the larger human community. In so doing, he returned repeatedly to a few key themes: the social-religious significance of prophetic witness, the precious gift of wonder and awe, the power of prayer as communion with God, and the gift of

Sabbath practice to the community and the world. He also made strong connections between his life of prayer and religious observance and his life of public witness. After marching with King and a throng of others, he famously testified, "I felt my feet were praying."

Heschel was ardent in linking deep religion and deep concern for society. He wrote John F. Kennedy a telegram in 1963, saying "We forfeit the right to worship God as long as we continue to humiliate negroes. ... The hour calls for moral grandeur and spiritual audacity." This telegram later influenced the title of a collection of his essays, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity* (1996). In one essay of that book, he explains his involvement in the peace movement:

The more deeply immersed I became in the thinking of the prophets, the more powerfully it became clear to me what the lives of the Prophets sought to convey: that morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings, that indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible (Heschel 1996, 224; originally published in 1973).

Heschel continually made connections between his religious tradition and the issues of his time, as in his speech to the Conference on Religion and Race, 14 January 1963:

- (1) At the first conference on religion and race, the main participants were Pharaoh and Moses [audience laughter and clapping]. Moses' words were: 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, let my people go that they may celebrate a feast to me.' While Pharaoh retorted: 'Who is the Lord, that I should heed this voice and let Israel go?'
- (2) The outcome of that summit meeting has not yet come to an end. Pharaoh is not ready to capitulate. The exodus began, but is far from having been completed. In fact, it was easier for the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea than for a Negro to cross certain university campuses.
- (3) Let us dodge no issues. Let us yield no inch to bigotry, let us make no compromise with callousness.

For Heschel, the connections between religion and global citizenship are obvious and deep.

Rabbi Heschel never ceased his efforts in race relations, and his world-changing efforts later extended to building interreligious relationships. He worked closely on Roman Catholic-Jewish relations with Cardinal Augustin Bea, a German biblical scholar who had witnessed the effects of the Holocaust and who headed the Roman Catholic efforts to reconcile with Jews in the Second Vatican Council. Then, in 1972, Heschel was invited to participate in an interfaith conference that included Muslims. He was in frail health by this time, but he insisted on making a final trip to Rome. He left a profound mark on interfaith relationships, as he had continually made a mark on race relations.

These two brief narratives reveal Sojourner Truth and Abraham Joshua Heschel as survivors of enormous hardships; yet they both found deep meaning and purpose in their faith traditions. These two world-changers reinvented themselves all through their lives, they imagined that the world could be a better place, and they gave themselves fully to those visions, drawing from the wellsprings of their faith traditions and trust in the Holy. These themes are

congruent with those in other narrative accounts of peacebuilders (Gopin 2012; Kiser 2008; High 2014; Lederach 2010). They are also congruent with the oral histories conducted at Boston University with 9 peacemakers – 3 Jewish, 3 Muslims, and 3 Christians.⁴ Each story is unique, but the themes are strikingly similar. How do these stories inform global citizenship and the roles of imagination and hope?

Imagining a New World: Practicing Global Citizenship

These narratives reveal the intimate relationship between imagination and hope, and the relation of both to life practices. The lives of Sojourner Truth and Abraham Joshua Heschel support the original thesis: that *building a new future depends on imagination and a decision to hope, even in the midst of devastating realities*. Both made many decisions to hope over their lifetimes. Sojourner Truth imagined a life beyond slavery, and she escaped with her infant daughter. She imagined the possibility of freeing her son, and she worked with others to bring a law suit, which she won. As a young man in Germany and Poland, Heschel imagined that Jews in different denominations could be friends, and he developed lifelong friendships to reinforce his imagination. Later he imagined that U.S. race relations and human rights could be changed, and he decided to march; he imagined that interreligious relationships could be improved, and he set out to make it so.

Beyond support for the primary thesis, the narratives also affirm the secondary thesis: that *the human ability to imagine a new future is related to our ways of knowing the world and our daily life practices*. Sojourner Truth and Abraham Joshua Heschel did not plan their lives in advance and take unwavering steps toward preconceived goals. Their lives were filled with experiencing, questioning, and wondering. They experienced horrors of this world, haunting existential questions, and the wonders of God. Their practices of knowing were thus rich and complex: remembering, relating, rethinking, repenting, re-envisioning, and reconstructing.⁵ These practices led them to reflect deeply on their own experiences and the fate of their people, and also to imagine and live toward new possibilities.

Remembering – remembering the traditions of one's people and the traditions of others

This paper began with a poetic exploration of the historical and contemporary context; we began with remembering traditions. Both Truth and Heschel were deeply affected by the traditions they inherited and the mystical experiences of the Holy that their traditions opened to them. Their relations with God led them into an ever-expanding range of social consciousness and an ever-expanding range of action. For Sojourner Truth, the preaching of her faith and the advocacy for slaves and women were parts of one whole. As she became increasingly engaged in proclamation and advocacy, her own sense of the issues expanded, and she found herself advocating also for civil rights, desegregation, land reform, and prison reform. Her religious fervor and her social passion were of one piece, propelling her into radical action in the legal system, political debates, and public witness.

Similarly, Heschel was deeply grounded in his tradition, which was the orienting focus of his social passion. He cultivated a sense of wonder in God's presence, and that wonder fed his respect for the religious traditions of others; it also awakened him to the plight of others. This

man who had lost most of his own family in the Holocaust and who knew persecution and exile, allowed his own experience to awaken him to the hurt of others. He could not resist joining the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, and his own religious traditions gave him the insights to interpret that march and all it stood for. Similarly, he built relations with people in other faith traditions because his wonder before the Holy awakened him to the wonder of others.

Relating with self, earth, and human family

A second practice is relating with oneself, with the earth, and with the human family. Violent relationships led Sojourner Truth to walk out of slavery. More positive relationships with another white family helped her to sue for the freedom of her son Peter from slavery. Brief encounters with President Abraham Lincoln allowed her to advocate for abolition with the highest levels of government. She worked for land grants for freed slaves, recognizing that freed slaves needed to build new lives in relation to the land. Sojourner Truth's relationships with diverse peoples expanded her action to include women's suffrage and advocacy against the death penalty. Throughout her life, her practices led to new relationships, which led to new practices.

Similarly, Heschel moved toward ever-expanding relationships within the Jewish community of his childhood, the academic community of his training, the Jewish communities and friendships of his adulthood, civil rights leaders, and people of other faith traditions. Both world-changers were nourished by relationships, which included intimate relationships as well as encounters with others quite different from themselves.

Rethinking the status quo

A third critical practice is rethinking the status quo – dominant ecological and social structures and dominant systems of thought. Truth and Heschel rethought the status quo at every turn. Truth refused to believe that slavery was a necessary or inevitable way of life; Heschel counteracted dominant assumptions about materialist worldviews and the alienation of peoples from one another. Every time they practiced one kind of rethinking, whether about slavery or civil rights, they opened themselves to rethinking something else. Every act of rethinking expanded the range of their concerns, opening them to an ever-expanding perspective on global citizenship, and to the reimagining and reinventing that go with it.

Repenting and mourning – repenting of the destructions by one's people

In the three remaining practices I will be briefer because the seeds of these practices are foreshadowed in the first three. Repenting and mourning are important elements in the practices of Truth and Heschel, and their mourning over abuse, injustice, and destructive social structures motivated all of their actions. Global citizenship not only breeds repentance and mourning, but also humility. We are small creatures in a world of huge need, and we ourselves participate in many of the most dangerous ecological and social problems, with and without our knowledge and with and without our consent. Repentance and mourning are ongoing.

Re-envisioning the future in light of the best of the past

What we see in Truth and Heschel is an ongoing practice of engaging the world, seeing it through sober eyes, and discerning the ancient and modern wisdom that will guide the possibility of new visions for the future. For Sojourner Truth, this was expressed in her preaching and speaking, as in “Ain’t I a Woman?” For Heschel, it was expressed in his voluminous writing, and also in his teaching, speaking, public commentaries, and marching.

Reconstructing the world

What we also see in Truth and Heschel is an *ongoing practice* of reconstructing the world wherever they found themselves. This practice was so important to Heschel that he traveled to an interfaith gathering at the very end of his life. Both of these people engaged in reconstructive practices as long as they lived, and their legacies continue to inspire global citizenship. Truth and Heschel not only imagined a better world, but they decided to hope in the midst of the overwhelming devastations of slavery (Truth) and the Holocaust (Heschel). In so doing, they contributed to actual changes in their worlds. They also stir our imagination and challenge us to decide for hope.

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¹ Some philosophers have placed hope in the emergence of the axial age (roughly 800-200 BCE), which has been described as a liminal period of global history during which civilization-shaping movements took place in religion, culture, and patterns of human thinking (Jaspers 1968; Cobb 2015). The span of the axial age is debated, but most agree that major cultural shifts took place between 600 and 300. Cataclysmic changes took place in the ways people thought about and shaped their civilizations, whether in India, China, or the West. The emergence led to greater awareness of worlds beyond one's own, increased critical analysis of cultures and religion, new understandings of

the Holy as concerned with the whole earth and not just one's own people, and newly emerging ethical norms that responded to the whole known world and not just to one's own tribe. According to Karl Jaspers (1968), and echoed by others, axial civilizations across the globe developed new capacities, grounded in reason. These new capacities generated major cultural developments and inspired humanity in general toward a greater sense of the whole (Salamun 2006; Cobb 2015). We need to recognize, however, that many of these civilizations also developed the capacity to overtake and dominate in empires of impressive grandeur and oppressive destruction.

One can see why some inheritors of axial civilization and religion suspect the inheritance and long for the pre-modern, simpler sensibilities. The pre-modern and post-modern almost touch as the pre-modern images and ideas are dimly discerned and brought into dialogue with postmodern questions.

² Precise footnotes to be added later.

³ Footnotes for this section to be added later.

⁴ These oral histories will form the base for the second phase of narrative analysis, building on the work of this paper.

⁵ This analysis of their ways of knowing bears resemblance to the practices of knowing that I describe in *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Moore 2004). Analyzing these connections is left for a later work.

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Jesus: Pedagogue of Prophetic Imagination

Abstract: If education in faith includes a tutoring of the imagination, then Christian religious education must attend not only to the prophetic content of Jesus' own imagination, but also to the ways in which he kindled such imagination in others. The prophetic task entails both a critique of the dominant "false" consciousness and an animation of a community with an alternative consciousness. In particular, a Christology that centers on Jesus' empowering of his disciples in imagining and practicing the Reign of God prompts us to retrieve from Jesus principles for teaching with and for a prophetic imagination. Religious educators and the institutions in which they function must prioritize marginalized knowledge, engage in practices of communal hope, and afford learners the opportunity to do the same.

In the US, the calls from political consulting firms are coming thick and fast. "Would you be MORE or LESS likely to vote for Jeb Bush if he said that he supports small-business owners?" "Would you approve of Hillary Clinton MORE or LESS if she called for 'middle-class tax cuts'?" There is no outlet for me to ask what "supporting small-business" owners means in practice, or to say that I am willing to trade tax cuts away to enhance the social safety net but not to increase defense spending. My choices are quite limited.

It is a situation akin, says Howard Zinn, to a flawed multiple-choice exam. None of the possible answers "a," "b," "c," or "d" is quite correct, but there is no "e," "f," or "g."¹ The premise that my vote would have to go to the slightly left-of-center party's candidate or the slightly right-of-center party's candidate is unchallengeable. That a third-party candidate might be viable, that drastic cuts in defense spending might be possible, or that the election might hinge on the question of the growing prison-industrial complex or education funding are not reasonable; they are not even part of the conversation.

Whatever choices Americans are offered necessarily rest heavily on a widespread and unspoken consensus that the status quo will remain largely in place. What is missing, then, is the opportunity to critique the prevailing assumptions wholesale and to offer and act upon a vision of different assumptions. By and large, the ability creatively to imagine a different reality has been squeezed out of us.

Walter Brueggemann considers it to be part of the prophetic task to enable and enact this new vision. He calls for us to foster what he calls the prophetic imagination. This paper insists that Jesus not only had a prophetic imagination, but also that he *taught for* a prophetic imagination. Drawing on the prophetic ministry of Jesus, then, this paper asserts that a pedagogy that educates for the development and practice of a prophetic imagination ought to be part of Christian religious education today. I also suggest three principles for our use today in empowering the prophetic imagination, with implications for institutions, educators, and learners.

¹ Howard Zinn, *Passionate Declarations: Essays on War and Justice* (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 2003), 1–8.

² Brueggemann focuses on prophetic speech as generating alternatives to the structures and ideologies that are generally taken for granted in social consciousness. Prophetic action, however, is at least as powerful as the speech.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd Edition, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: FORTRESS PRESS, 2001),

Prophetic Imagination

Taking Moses as the prophetic paradigm, Brueggemann places the alternative consciousness formed among the Hebrews in juxtaposition with the “royal consciousness” of Pharaoh’s empire.² Because so often those structures and ideologies are simply the cultural air that we breathe, envisioning an alternative is an act of imagination. This imaginative vision must look beyond what is typically viewed as “reasonable” and ordinary. For Brueggemann, this taken-for-granted worldview is generally perpetuated by a hegemonic authority, and so the prophetic imagination critiques it.³

The dominant “royal consciousness” against which Moses cultivated an alternative was one that normalized economic exploitation blessed by a triumphalist and domesticated religion. Moses sought to replace the economics of divisive affluence with equality; the politics of oppression with justice; and a religion that domesticated the divine with one that recognized God’s freedom and sovereignty.⁴

Moses’ criticism, his deconstruction of Pharaoh’s regime, began with voicing the genuine grievances of the Hebrews, the pain of the oppression they suffer. It continued, through the Plagues, with the demonstration of the regime’s ultimate impotence: Pharaoh and his magicians cannot do what Yahweh can do. Royal power is de-legitimized.⁵

Deconstruction alone is not sufficient for the prophetic task. What Brueggemann calls the “energizing” element of the prophetic imagination emerges not from lament and de-legitimization but in the proclamation of “amazement” at the new possibilities. This movement in the prophetic task rests on symbols of hope to break through the despair and lament. Giving voice to the people’s real yearnings is the beginning, but tapping into symbols of newness and nourishment is necessary for making the transition from the expression of yearnings to hope for their fulfillment.⁶

Brueggemann sees in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth this same dual dynamic of prophetic imagination – criticism of the dominant order and engendering energizing hope for a new and radically different order. In his ministry and in his teaching, Jesus pronounced judgment on the order of the day, but also announced, with the Kingdom of God, a new (or, rather, a return to an old) vision of sovereignty and order.⁷

Brueggemann’s account of both the judgment and promise of Jesus’ Kingdom ministry deserves supplementation in three ways. First, we see Jesus privileging local knowledge, including the experiences of suffering that need to be voiced. Second, and similarly, we must see how his ministry of the Kingdom of God involved instantiating practices of hope in the future that he was also envisioning. Finally, we ought to consider how Jesus, in the practice of this prophetic aspect of his ministry, empowered his community in their own experiences to discover and to spread hope in newness.

² Brueggemann focuses on prophetic speech as generating alternatives to the structures and ideologies that are generally taken for granted in social consciousness. Prophetic action, however, is at least as powerful as the speech.

³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd Edition, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: FORTRESS PRESS, 2001), x–xi.

⁴ Ibid., 21–37.

⁵ Ibid., 1–14.

⁶ Brueggemann sees other prophets from the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly First Isaiah and Jeremiah, joining this language of lament with the de-legitimization of the dominant regime.⁶ Ibid., 59–79.

⁷ Ibid., 81–114.

Jesus as a Prophet Deconstructing the Given Order

Most of the history of Israel involves the threat or actuality of subjugation by foreign empires. By the first century, Palestine was a restive and troublesome edge of the Roman Empire, best ruled as much as possible by Jewish client-kings. Palestine's Jews expressed discontent over imperial rule, zealously asserting independence from foreign emperors and gods. Often the political, social, economic, and religious dimensions of this subjugation – and protest against it – converged.

Economically, Roman taxation took a heavy toll on the people of Palestine. Of particular concern to Jesus would likely have been the situation in the Galilee. Roman taxation put peasants who were barely operating at the margins of subsistence into debt out of which they could not pay their way, and eventually many lost their land. The land became concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer owners; the rich-poor gap grew. The ready supply of day laborers in the parables of Jesus reflected the reality of the increasingly landless population and the growing underclass.⁸ Religiously, the legitimacy of Herod's hand-picked (and Roman-vetted) high priests, who had not only religious but also political responsibilities, was often a point of contention.⁹

Jesus delegitimized the Roman Empire and its collaborators, the evidence suggests, in many ways, but in ways that would have been recognizable to a constituency predisposed for it. If we too easily hear Jesus' answer to the question about paying taxes to the emperor¹⁰ as supporting our modern separation of church and state, we must listen again, this time with first-century ears. We must consider that Jesus could not safely have said either "Yes" or "No" to the question. However, any good Jew in the crowd would have known what belongs to God, and so what should be rendered unto God: *everything*. Caesar was not God.¹¹

Such critiques, and especially the pronouncements and demonstration against the Temple during the highly-charged Passover festival, set the scene for the ultimate pronouncement against and rejection of Roman (and client) power, the politics of oppression and exclusion, and the economics of inequality: Jesus' crucifixion. In the moment when he said, "Not my will but yours be done," Jesus rejected the notion that the mentality, the system, the people that would execute him had any REAL power over him. He could refuse to answer Pilate's questions,¹² for he refused to recognize the legitimacy of Pilate's authority.

Local Knowledge, Dispersed Power

Part of this critique of the dominant consciousness rested on Jesus' empowering the voices of the marginalized, according respect to their experiences and their knowledge. Jesus expressed compassion for the plight of the poor, but also voiced outrage over an economic system that increased that poverty. Moreover, even granting that there is dispute over just how critical Jesus was of the Law and Temple, it is quite likely that Jesus' relatively "free" attitude

⁸ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 1st Fortress Press ed (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1993), 1–15.

⁹ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*, First Edition (FORTRESS PRESS, 2002), 31–34.

¹⁰ Mark 12:13-17 and parallels

¹¹ Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 306–317.

¹² Matthew 27:14

towards the Law and his critique of the Temple system stemmed from a recognition that they did not always represent the interests of people in the countryside or other marginalized persons.¹³

Jesus certainly felt the weight of that marginalization of local experience and local knowledge when he was rejected as Nazareth precisely because the people all knew him, and so he could not have great wisdom.¹⁴ Jesus, however, valued the knowledge of the marginalized. The parables, for instance, speak not primarily to the experience of court and Temple and scribal authority, but to the agrarian reality that would have been the experience of most of Jesus' audience. Pedagogically, his use of agrarian language and metaphors was not simply so that they would be more comprehensible to that audience; it also emphasized that the knowledge and experience of the agrarian people mattered to God. It *counted* as real knowledge, and it was a source of real wisdom. To his disciples he noted, "Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."¹⁵ The disciples' experience, their knowledge is legitimate, and it is for them a source of power.¹⁶

Jesus as a Prophet Inspiring an Alternative Community Through Practice

In both his teaching and his actions, Jesus described and enacted an alternative vision to the dominant consciousness. It was not a radically new vision in some senses, but a radically conservative one – a return to a recognition of the true sovereignty of God and to covenanted communities of internal solidarity that would allow for resistance to the de-humanizing forces of outside oppressors. It is a vision that asserts a Reality beyond what is readily apparent, a vision that both requires and inspires hope in what was a time of despair for many.

With some variation, there is relatively solid agreement among historians and exegetes as to the basic outlines of key aspects of Jesus' active ministry. Among the actions for which there is general consensus about Jesus' ministry of the Kingdom of God are included healing of various types, an emphasis on the practice of forgiveness, and the radically egalitarian table fellowship that Crossan refers to as *open commensality*.¹⁷

These actions, in concert with Jesus' teachings, are not disparate strands of Jesus' practice. They are part and parcel of a plan and a movement for the renewal of Israel. Egalitarian social relationships were to renew local communities. Instead of hierarchical social and familial relationships, Jesus practiced and taught a radical equality. He rejected political domination and subservience not only in his community of disciples, but also in the community more generally.¹⁸

The mutual forgiveness and reconciliation that were part of this practice served not only as avenues of personal holiness. They renewed communities that were, in this imperial situation, beset by hard times. The enhanced cooperation of these communities would allow them together to withstand the misfortunes and injustices of political and economic domination, while division

¹³ Luke 11:45-54, or also Jesus' critique of a narrow application of the *corban* rules in Mark 7:11-12

¹⁴ Matthew 13:54-8

¹⁵ Matthew 13:17

¹⁶ See Michel Foucault, *Power/knowledge : Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon, 1st American ed.. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 83–106. Foucault addresses the "apparatuses of knowledge" that designate the ways of knowing of those in power as the sources of knowledge that matters.

¹⁷ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus : The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, 1st ed.. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

¹⁸ Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 209-245.

would make losers out of almost all. Forgiveness of debts was not just a metaphor for the forgiveness of sins; it was also quite literal, in the tradition of the Jubilee, and maintained egalitarian and cooperative relations in the villages of the Galilee that were so hard hit by the Roman occupation and were the center of most of Jesus' ministry.¹⁹

Jesus' Prophetic Pedagogy – A Person With a Movement

If there was something not so much new as radically conservative in Jesus, then we must ask why he came to be recognized as Christ. Tilley draws on but modifies the ancient Christological insight that Jesus is the personification of God's Kingdom, *autobasileia*. "Jesus' empowering practices realize the reign of God. Thus, he is *autobasileia*, not alone but in and through his relationships with others who live in and live out God's reign. . . . In this key, Jesus' remembered practices as carried on by his disciples are where the reign of God is."²⁰

Knowing Jesus and his prophetic imagination comes not simply in watching him or reading about him. Following Jesus is a source of understanding Jesus.²¹ In both his proclamation of the Kingdom of God and his denunciation of the "anti-Kingdom," Jesus is known and understood in the imitation. His prophetic imagination, then, is understood also in imitation.

Jesus himself was aware of the importance of this dynamic of understanding in action. Christology for Tilley begins in the "active imagination of the disciples." This imagination requires walking in God's ways and carrying out together the reconciling practices of God's Kingdom. What is essential is that Jesus empowered the disciples to do so, empowered their active imaginations.²² This disciplined imagination is learned. It comes from getting things right in practice.²³

Jesus invited, even commanded, others to do what he himself was doing – heal the sick, feed the hungry, make the lame walk and the blind see.²⁴ In all of the Synoptics he commissions the Twelve to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal.²⁵ Luke adds even more dramatically the Mission of the Seventy-two (10:1-20). This is not a hierarchy – this is a movement growing like a mustard plant. When the commissioned disciples return, they report, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name."²⁶

Jesus' pedagogy empowers his disciples to envision and enact an alternative reality. He teaches with his words. He demonstrates with his actions. He encourages his disciples to perform. There is a constant dialectic between the imagining and the doing. To some extent, the disciples are inspired to act by the envisioned alternative reality, but it seems that the reverse is also true; in their actions, they are able to see and envision a new reality. New possibilities are opened up for them.

¹⁹ Ibid., 247–284.

²⁰ Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus*, 1, emphasis mine.

²¹ Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator: A View from the Victims*, trans. Paul Burns (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 323. "The following of Jesus consists, in the first place, in remaking his life and praxis, and this remaking can bring about 'an inner knowledge' (as the mystics say). . . ."

²² Tilley, *The Disciples' Jesus*, 123.

²³ Ibid., 92–3.

²⁴ John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*, 1st Paperback Edition (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 117–118.

²⁵ Matthew 10:5-15 and parallels

²⁶ Luke 10:18

Pedagogical Insights for Today

Of course, there are many insights we could draw from Jesus' prophetic pedagogy. I propose three.

First, as Jesus not only took seriously the voices of the marginalized but also prodded them to take seriously their own voices, he thematized their pain but also their hopes and yearnings. Religious educators today must do the same, attending to the marginalized, yes, but also asking the marginalized to attend to their own hopes and to nourishing them. The failure of the system to nourish those dreams inspires critique. What is difficult is that, all too often, our dreams have become desiccated. As educators, we can help tutor the imagination with questions, with our own dreams, and by offering options and richer vision.

We cannot ONLY ask students the canned questions of a political marketing survey. We must ask questions that elicit the experience, the joys, the longings of our students, yes, but more, that put them in touch with experiences beyond their own, the experiences of those more marginalized. In the process, we must help them ask and pursue answers to the critical questions -- Who has had the power to define the narrative? Whose voices are not being heard? From this standpoint, then, they are in a position not only to answer questions but also to judge the adequacy of those questions, or of the narrow questions posed by the political consultant on the phone.

We must, then, also put ourselves in positions to hear the voices of the marginalized. As educators, we must nourish the prophetic element of our own imaginations. Imagination has been squeezed out of us no less than out of those with whom we are involved. As Ignacio Ellacuria reminds us, what we see depends on where we stand, and with whom we stand. So, what we see from the foot of the cross is quite different from what we see in the Praetorium. What we see in the parish, on the streets, and among families is different from what we see in the Academy.

The second principle is hardly new but is always worth repeating, and is always a challenge in that our settings so often militate against it: a prophetic imagination is best formed in the process of hopeful practices of reconciliation. In a profession that sometimes asks us to be observers of the world, we must not let our chronicling of history preclude our agency in it. Taking the long view is an essential aspect of a faith with an eschatological edge, but so is agential involvement in a world into which God reveals God's very self. If we want to enliven our own imaginations, we must continually challenge ourselves to undertake actions of Christian discipleship. In this light, religious educators must not only take it upon ourselves to be involved in practices of radical equality, reconciliation, and solidarity, but we ought also to demand of our institutions that we have space and time for these practices. Hence, when we place ourselves at the foot of the cross, we must act in ways that are radically healing, radically forgiving, participating in the building of communities, even communities where our academic or ecclesial status accords us no special value or voice. If we fail to do so, we are stuck with the same vision that limits us, at best, to incremental changes in the status quo.

Finally, of course, education involves action and reflection on that action. The conformity of those actions with a prophetic vision has much to do with the shaping of the imagination that reflects on those actions. As religious educators, then, we must not only perform but also enable others to live into the prophetic imagination. Service learning is the paradigmatic example here, and is no less effective for its being well-tried. We do it best in an environment where our own examples, the values of the wider institutions in which we serve, and the values of our students are in relative consonance. Such an environment is where students become members of a

community of practice,²⁷ a community of practice and imagination that allows them prophetically to critique the status quo and to live into an alternative vision, and an alternative community. So, service learning itself is not sufficient. It should be encouraged and processed with an institutional environment that makes alternative framing of the experience possible. The imagination thus engendered will prompt a chafing at the politics of soundbites and small visions.

²⁷ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice : Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, 1st pbk. ed.. (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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Alternating Currents: Sacramental and Prophetic Imagining and Church Education

Kieran Scott

There are no automatic lifelong members of our churches today. While this may have been true to some degree in the past, today it is mostly self-evident. This raises the urgent need for a vibrant and comprehensive church education. Horace Bushnell, in the early-nineteenth century, opposed a once-and-for-all lifetime conversion. “The child”, he proposed, “is to grow up a Christian and never know himself as being otherwise” (Bushnell, 1979, 4). Bushnell advocated “Christian nurture” as a (developmental) lifelong model of education. It remains the dominant metaphor for education in Protestant congregations. Formation is the corresponding metaphor guiding education in Roman Catholic parishes. Both metaphors are incapable of carrying the richest meaning and diversity of forms and processes of education critically needed in Church education today.

This paper engages the current conversation on the problematic nature of Church education. Edward Farley writes, “the churches hide from themselves the uncomfortable fact that they promote an education that does not educate” (Farley, 1990, 131). They are entrapped, he claims, between ordered learning (academic) and popular piety (religiosity). Church education, he observes, stands within this tragic gap and dualism, operating within a never-never land with little distinctive character. This paper takes up Farley’s analysis as a point of entry into the nature and challenge of contemporary education in our churches. While not fully in accord with Farley’s analysis, the paper frames a constructive alternative response in terms of the dual role of the imagination in congregation/parish life. Paul Tillich, in his well-known essay, “The End of the Protestant Era?” (1948), framed it in terms of the Church combining a “Catholic substance” with a “Protestant principle” – although Tillich did not restrict the substance to the Catholic side nor the principle to the Protestant side. This essay proposes a sacramental and prophetic imagining, held in creative tension, as the life-giving dynamic needed at the center of teaching-learning in our churches.

Alfred North Whitehead (1967, 17) writes: lack of attention to the rhythm of growth and development is the main source of wooden futility in education. This paper offers a rhythm of alternating currents, the sacramental and prophetic, celebration and lament, as an educational back and forth process urgently required to transcend “The Tragic Dilemma of Church Education” (Farley, 1990:131-145) today.

The paper proceeds to paint a portrait of sacramental and prophetic imagining as a unity of conflicting forces in the life of the congregation/parish. A trinity of teaching-learning applications will be drawn out from each alternating side.

Sacramental Imagining

The imagination plays a fundamental role in the cultivation of our vision of the world. Its power opens us to new possibilities, other ways of seeing. It enables us to “look at things as if they could be otherwise” (Maxine Green). Stanley Hauerwas proposes that the central aim of the

Christian life is training in a “truthful vision of the world” (Hauerwas, 1981, 31). The church, he argues, ought to be a training school to help us see for the whole course of our lives. It ought to help us see the world through the gaze of the divine – in contrast to the wider patterns of cultural perception. We can only act within the world we can see (Hauerwas, 30-47).

From a Christian perspective, there are two divergent ways of seeing and naming reality, namely, sacramental and prophetic ways. These two forms of Christian imagination are grounded and united in their commitment to seeing what is ultimately real. They disclose what is beautiful and broken, graced and sinful, in our world. As these two imaginative religious forms tend to go in opposite directions, the task of Church education is to hold them together in a productive tension. What is needed is a paradoxical form of education, namely, a movement toward a unity of conflicting forces at the center of the life of our churches.

The sacramental imagination renews our vision by teaching our eyes to see again. It offers a counter vision to the distorted perception of reality perpetuated by our technologically obsessed and all-consuming cultural practices. It is a distinctive way of seeing the world. It points to the presence of the divine in all things. Matthew Eggemeier writes, “The sacramental imagination views creation as a manifestation of the glory of God.... [It] is grounded in a distinctive relationship between God and creation – while God is transcendent to creation, God is also found in the imminence of creation” (Eggemeier, 8). This paradox is sustained by the analogy of being: God is both other than being and simultaneously present in all being. It affirms the omnipresence of God’s grace in the world.

For Michael Himes, this is synonymous with an experience of the sacramentality of creation. Himes writes, “By sacrament I mean any person, place, thing, or event, any sight, sound, taste, touch, or smell that causes us to notice the love which supports all that exists, that undergirds your being and mine and the being of everything about us. How many such sacraments are there? The number is virtually infinite” (Himes, 99). The world and everything in it are seen as actual or potential carriers of the sacred. This is profound recognition that our relation to God is always mediated by bodily action. We do not need mediating objects or “middleman” between the divine and the human. God can be perceived by our bodily sense of sound, smell, taste, touch. The sacred is mediated through matter –through our bodily experience of the ordinary events and things of this world. We encounter “Mystery through manners” (Flannery O’Connor). For the Christian, the most profound incarnation of the sacramental presence of God is Jesus, the sacrament of God.

Christians, Soren Kierkegaard declared, are “joyful heirs of the finite”. Nothing is profane for those who know how to see. A sacramental imagination offer intimations of eternity, signals of transcendence. It is an enchanted, mythical imagination (Brelsford, 2007:264-278). The miraculous is always present in the quotidian, even if elusively. “The heavens are telling the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). This sacramental religious form attempts to regard nothing in the world as alien or hostile to humanity (Teilhard de Chardin). Its perception is rooted in the goodness of creation. Our work is to transform what is already good into what is holy. What needs doing is re-creation. Sacramental religious practice is “the hallowing of the everyday” (Buber). “The world is charged with the grandeur of God” (Gerard Manly Hopkins). All is gift. All is grace. The sacramental imagination’s response to this gift of creation is a disposition of gratitude, praise, awe and wonder. A sustained schooling and training in this sacramental way of seeing reality can enable us to direct what is already good toward the Holy.

The educational implications of this sacramental perspective and principle are profound and pervasive. I will note three with direct relation to congregation/parish religious education, namely, revelation, teaching and spirituality.

Revelation

A sacramental imagination seeks “God the Lord in all things” (Ignatius of Loyola). All aspects of created being can mediate grace. Anthony Godzieba writes, “It is clear that the key to understanding sacramentality is *mediation*. The crucial claim is that material ‘stuff’ has the potential to be a channel of grace, that creation necessarily mediates the presence of God that enables our participation in divine life, on God’s initiative”(Godzieba, 16). Through the eyes of faith, sacramental imagining “recognizes that the finite can indeed mediate the infinite – that materiality and history together are the means by which God has chosen to reveal God’s self”(Godzieba,16). This perspective raises the question and meaning of revelation. Revelation is the fundamental religious question of our time. The word seeks to capture the divine-human relation. The meaning of revelation can either be a barrier or a bridge between religions, and between religion and science today. In modern times it has been the source of deep conflict. A sacramental vision, on the other hand, with its deepest and richest meaning of revelation could be the path to cooperation, compassion and care with the religious other and non-religious world.

When we make revelation a thing, an object, a set of “revealed” truths beyond human experience but revealed by God or propositional statements of beliefs, creeds, doctrines, it becomes a wedge. When revelation is understood as exclusively in *possession* of and under one group’s control, it is a recipe for division and violence. When some *part* of creation, a book (The Bible), a place (Jerusalem), a person (Jesus), a group (church), is understood to *contain* revelation, we have reified it into something...frequently handed down from the past. When we use the term “Christian revelation”, we are creating insuperable obstacles when speaking to people who are not Christian. Gabriel Moran writes, “There is no thing named ‘Christian revelation’ that Christians possess. There is only one process of revelation within which Christians, Jews, and Muslims are called to respond today” (Moran, 1997a, 159).

“All revelation,” Martin Buber writes, “Is summons and sending” (1958, 115). God calls, the human responds. Revelation is a metaphor for God’s activity to which humans respond. The term points to what is universal but always has particular concrete expressions. With an inclusive meaning of revelation, “every place, every book, and every person can be revelatory, although none is guaranteed to be so... [yet] there is no homogenizing of the revelation, for some things, some events” (Moran, 1997a,161). Although some writings, some persons, some historical events and some practices, hold more revelatory power than others, nothing can be excluded from being Word of God. This directly correlates with a sacramental vision of reality: revelation is the religious dimension of human experience in which all people participate. It is a process of personal relations in which the divine is revealed. God still speaks in our most intense experiences: I – Thou (Buber). The Word of God is always spoken in the present. The one revelation is still available to those who have ears to hear. “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord” (Ps.34, 8). All human bodily senses and all actions of a person are included in divine-human relation.

This sacramental understanding of revelation runs deep within our Christian, Jewish and Islamic traditions. All our sacred texts, beliefs, rituals can be re-understood in light of this

perspective. What structures a religion is people's participation in revelatory experiences. Only if we can hear God's voice today within our respective traditions can religion be a vital response to re-creating the present. Otherwise, it will be a dead weight on our shoulders.

Teaching

For those who know how to see – really see – nothing on earth is profane (Teilhard de Chardin 1960,36). All of human work is capable of being sacrament. This is the sacramental lens Maria Harris brings to the act of teaching in her work, Teaching and Religious Imagination (1987). Our discourse on teaching, Harris claims, is unworthy of us. We think too narrowly, too instrumentally of teaching. We reduce the act to a set of techniques, methods, procedures and exercises. These do have some role in the overall vision of teaching. However, her assumption is: the way we speak about teaching influences what we do when we teach. Harris imagines teaching as a vocation, a calling to re-create persons and their relation to the planet. She writes, “I am convinced our society desperately needs a philosophy of teaching that explores the dimension of depth in teaching, a philosophy that begins not with technique but with the majesty and mystery involved in teaching” (24).

Harris invites us to see teaching as an activity of the religious imagination. Specifically, she sees the act through the lens of the sacramental imagination. When viewed in this manner, “teaching itself becomes a sacrament, a symbolic, ritual form through which the holy is mediated” (22). It is analogous to any work of creation. In specific religious language, she proposes her thesis: Teaching is the incarnation of subject matter in ways that lead to the revelation of subject matter. This embodiment, giving-flesh to subject matter, involves the creation of (a repertoire of) forms. The form is the shape of the content. The process is revelatory. At the heart of this revelation, Harris postulates, is the discovery that human beings are the primary subjects of all teaching. We discover that we are handed back to ourselves with the power and grace to recreate ourselves and the world in which we live.

Teaching is showing someone how to do something, and learning is responding to being shown how (Moran, 1997b). Teaching-learning, Moran proposes, can be viewed as a revelatory process of call and response (Moran, 2009: 151-172). This interpretation gives rise to a starting principle for education in our churches: a revealing God teaches through everyone and everything. Every creature participates in the process of teaching-learning. The church teaching and the church taught becomes obsolete. A dialogical relation in its structure and educational practices emerges throughout the life of the congregation. Education is life-long and life-wide. The foundational life of the community (and its plurality of educational forms) will be the chief educator. While some may have an official designation as teacher or catechist, the teacher is literally everyone and everything. The educational mission of the church should also include a distinct setting and aim that is academic in nature. This schooling process ought to be a sacred space where the church's history and practices can be critically and creatively explored. Our congregations/parishes are in urgent need for this thoroughly sacramental teaching-learning in every form and facet of its life.

Spirituality

There has been a resurgence of interest in spirituality in our time. The term has acquired an all-inclusive meaning that can float into generalities, abstractions and escapism. That is why

spirituality needs the grounding and wise restraints that religion can offer. A sacramental vision and a sacramental spirituality can offer the needed corrective and nurture. The poetic prayerfulness of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the nature mysticism of Annie Dillard or the Hymn of the Universe by the Jesuit paleontologist, Teilhard de Chardin, are exemplary expressions of a sacramental way of seeing. Our Christian traditions house a plurality and rich set of spiritual practices. I note in particular here Celtic spirituality.

Celtic spirituality is part of an ancient stream of contemplative spirituality stretching back to the Wisdom tradition of the Old Testament, St. John the Evangelist in the New Testament, and to the life of the early church in the British Isles. Philip Newell notes, “The feature of Celtic spirituality that is probably most widely recognized, both within and outside the Church, is its creation emphasis...This spirituality lent itself to listening for God at the heart of life” (Newell, 203). The spiritual is seen coming through the physical. God is seen as the Life within all life, the life force in the depths of all creation. We are invited and called to listen within all things for the life and heartbeat of God, and to respond.

Celtic spirituality affirms 1. the essential goodness of creation, 2. good and bad, grace and sin, intermingle in life, and 3. the immediacy of God’s presence in the world. The material realm of creation is shot through with spirit. Even though creation bears the finger prints of God, the world and its inhabitants are held down by forces of darkness. Salvation means liberation from these evil forces so that our essential goodness is set free. There is a sense of God’s immediate presence. No ladder is needed to connect heaven and earth. Heaven is in the midst of earth and earth is crammed with heaven. “So to look to God,” Philip Newell notes, “is not to look away from life but to look into it”(Newell, 48). God and creation are inseparably intertwined in the flow of life – in work and play, in rest and repair of the world. God is “above all and through all and in all” (Ephesians). God is the Being on whom all being rests, the Light within all light, the Good from which all goodness flows. The world is a theater of God’s glory. This sacramental creation-centered spirituality is an invaluable resource for congregation/parish life. It holds the possibility of revitalizing our liturgical practices, catechetical instruction and our service to the suffering people of the world, including our suffering planet.

Sacramental imagining is the life blood of the Christian churches and its set of practices. It gives vitality to our religious lives. It holds before the community the contents of the tradition. Edward Farley’s analysis here is correct. He sees in it (under the canopy of personal piety) the danger of idolatry. It can slip into sentimentality, emotionalism, superstition – where religion and its belief system can become an idol. It is precisely for this reason that an alternating current of education is needed in our Christian Churches. For this complementary opposite, we turn to prophetic imagining.

Prophetic Imagining

Sacramental and prophetic imagining is grounded and united in a commitment to seeing the real (Eggemeier, 13). However, they diverge in how and what they see, and the way they name reality. In sacramental seeing, grace is in abundance. In the prophetic, sin runs amuck. In the former, the world is a beautiful garden. In the latter, it is overrun with weeds. The sacramental is enchanting. The prophetic is catastrophic.

Prophetic imagining emerges out of a different experience of the world. Abraham Joshua Heschel writes, “The painter sees the world in color, the sculptor in form; the musician perceives the world in sound, and the economist in commodities. The prophet is a man who sees the world with the eyes of God, and in the sight of God even things of beauty or acts of ritual are an abomination when associated with injustice” (Heschel, 1969, 211-212). Justice is placed center stage. It is no mere norm or abstract idea. In prophetic imagining, justice is perceived as a mighty stream, a never-ending surging movement, a relentless drive. What ought to be shall be. God is a God of justice.

Prophets are misconceived as marginal people functioning at the outer bounds of society. Rather, they are at its center, deeply in tune with its cries and painful whispers. They rage and grieve, feeling the anguish of their people. History is their preoccupation. What does the present moment demand? In their sensitivity to “reading the signs of the times”, they become “a watchman” (Hos. 9; 8), “an assayer and tester” of people’s ways” (Jer. 6:27), a mouth piece of God (Hag. 1:13). The eyes are directed to the contemporary scene, and from their reading, they are moved by responsibility for society. They: 1. call into question and resist society’s current boundaries, 2. stretch the boundaries to new limits, and 3. seek to restore the covenant.

Matthew Eggemeier notes, “The starting point of prophetic discourse is not, therefore, the contemplation of the splendor of the beauty of creation. Instead, it is rooted in the encounter with the burning flesh and tortured bodies of victims of oppression. From the perspective of the prophetic imagination the world is described as a catastrophe..., a disaster..., or a crucified people..” (Eggemeier, 10). History is a nightmare. The basic problem, Heschel argues, is that our cultural perception is dominated by “conventional seeing”. Walter Brueggemann names this “the dominant royal consciousness” of our time (Brueggemann, 2001). From a prophetic exegesis, this offers a false, illusionary and idolatrous view of reality. This distorted vision takes the established as real, as taken for granted, with a sense of certitude. Heschel writes, “our eyes are witness to the callousness and cruelty of man, but our heart tries to obliterate the memories, to calm the nerves, and to silence our conscience” (1969, 5). This dominant culture is characterized by indifference. But Heschel asserts “All prophesy is one great exclamation: God is not indifferent to evil! He is always concerned. He is personally concerned what man does to man. He is a God of pathos ... The prophet’s great contribution to humanity was the discovery of the evil of indifference” (Heschel, 1972, 92-93).

Prophetic imagining offers rupture to the dominant mode of seeing. It brings a disruptive word. It contests the way of existence imagined by conventional, normative culture. It offers prophetic witness against spiritual smugness, political and social heartlessness, and our economic addiction to profit. It scuttles our illusions of false security, challenges our evasions and exploitations of the poor. In a word, it sees its task as dismantling all idols in its service to the correct ordering of things. Prophetic imagining does not end in negativity. Its moment of critique opens avenues to genuine perception, seeing anew. Its interruption of the taken for granted view of things is rooted in the conviction that genuine change only begins by recognition that there are alternatives to, what Brueggemann calls, “Empire”. Prophetic imagining can be described, then, as an exegesis of society from a divine perspective.

The educational implications of this prophetic perspective and “Protestant principle” are likewise profound and persuasive. I will note three with direct relation to congregation/parish

religious education, namely, the academic and Christian traditions, consuming religion/spirituality, and the suffering of the innocent.

The Academic and Christian Traditions

Edward Farley acknowledges the indispensable need for popular religiosity and piety (what I name sacramental imagining) in the life of our church. "Church education's primary aim is clear", he writes, "that aim must be to transmit, promote and support the popular piety of actual religion" (Farley, 133). The "tragic dilemma of Church education," however, for Farley, is that popular piety (sacramental imagining) has been split and severed from modern intellectual convictions and processes in our local churches. There has been a recurring history of tension and struggle between the academic and popular religiosity in our Christian traditions. However, Farley believes, this tension has mostly collapsed at the local ecclesial level. This lends itself to the formation of idolatrous images, beliefs and claims. Religious emotionalism and superstition runs wild, functioning with a pre-modern cosmology. Farley's critique is on target here. Prophetic education is an invaluable resource needed as a corrective to this flattened out traditionalism and dogmatism. It can be a gift and grace to church education.

Critically reflective academic processes will not be the major form of education in our churches. Communal nurture and formation will be the prevailing forms for passing on the traditions. But when prophetic critique is absent, preaching becomes vacuous, catechesis wooden and ritual practices empty of meaning. Gabriel Daly writes, "Some Christians see their faith as the dogged, and sometimes hearty, affirmation of apparent self-evident truths. They have no time for doubt or hesitation, or indeed for the sort of question which would probe their beliefs...[they]are so taken up with their dogmas that they simply forget that those are no more than halting efforts to say the unsayable. To think that even the most sacred of our doctrines can do more would be like thinking that one can capture the universe in a butterfly net" (Daly,1982,76-77). Prophetic imagining (and its set of educational practices) is needed when we sense the old consensus is breaking down. It is urgent when the old truths have become inert, boring, weary, irrelevant, "the dead faith of the living" (Pelikan, 1984, 65). It brings a hermeneutic of suspicion to the symbols, codes and practices of the tradition: *ecclesia semper reformanda*. It is a purifying process. It resists the absolutizing instinct. No thing is God: no viewpoint, no code, no belief, no rite, no polity, no church. The prophetic educational task here is to prevent the creation of new idols. The prophetic protest, however, is for the emergence of new forms of ecclesial life. It challenges every old truth for the sake of a new and richer truth which is breaking in upon us. This can lead to the revitalization of our religious traditions "a living faith of the dead"(Pelikan,65) and create life-giving forms of social graces in our world. Giving our traditions a living expression, generation to generation, is one of the chief responsibilities of church religious educators today.

Consuming Religion/Spirituality

Abraham Heschel asserts, "The prophet is an iconoclast, challenging the apparently holy, revered, and awesome... the prophet knows that religion could distort what the Lord demanded" (Heschel, 1969, 10-11). The Hebrew prophets exposed the scandalous pretensions of religion, its false aura of institutional sanctity, its degeneration into illusion and mystification. Micah, the prophet, lashes out against religious hypocrisy and selling out:

“Her leaders render judgement for a bribe
 Her priests give decisions for a salary,
 Her prophets divine for money,
 While they rely on the Lord, saying
 ‘Is not the Lord in the midst of us?
 No evil can come upon us!’
 Therefore, because of you,
 Zion shall be plowed like a field (Micah 3:11-12).

Micah saw and condemned the early commercialization of religion. Some contemporary writers have continued this analysis. The all-pervasive commodification in contemporary culture has led to the commodification of religion. Bourgeois religion, Johann Metz claims, has been reduced to the realm of individual piety – with little to do with political, economic, and social life. Religious rituals, symbols and beliefs have been abstracted from their original communal setting and re-used to serve the needs of consumer culture. Vincent Miller adds to this line of critique. Religious traditions, he writes, “are pillaged for their symbolic content, which is repackaged and recontextualized in ways that jettison their communal, ethical, and political consequences” (Miller, 2004, 84. See also Hinton, 2011). In doing so, Miller claims, consumer culture trains parishioners to function as consumers in their religious activities.

Gregory Jones offers a similar scathing critique of some forms of contemporary spirituality. “I am convinced,” Jones writes, “that much of contemporary spirituality is shaped by consumer impulses and captive to a therapeutic culture ... [it] separates spirituality both from theological convictions and practices on the one hand, and social and political realities and commitments on the other”(Jones, 1997,4). Too often, Jones observes, popular spirituality is prone to tailor the spiritual journey to the individual’s privatized needs and desires. The focus is almost exclusively on the self-sufficiency of one’s interior life. It becomes a new commodity to consume. Social and economic political realities and commitment are not addressed. And it has severed itself from centuries of Christian practice. “Thus the disruptive character of Christianity”, Matthew Eggemeier writes, “is silenced and Christian spirituality is repackaged as a soothing therapeutic exercise that serves the needs of a culture committed above all else to the enjoyment of consumer activity” (Eggemeier,xiv).

Prophetic imagining is urgently needed to save religion from itself. Its way of seeing can release religion from its captivity to the logic of the market and re-direct it to the practice of authentic freedom. In this context, Christian spiritual practices teach resistance, to become detached, from those features of our world that separate us from God and free us to cling to the One who alone can satisfy our desires.

The Suffering of the Innocent

“Let justice roll down like waters,
And righteousness like a mighty stream (Amos 5:24).

What is upper most in the prophet’s mind is the presence of oppression and corruption. The urgency for justice was an urgency of aiding and saving the victims of oppression. The prophet speaks on behalf of the other – the neighbor – especially the poor, the oppressed and the marginal other. The prophet is intent on intensifying our responsibility to the suffering of the innocent of the world.

The parable of the Good Samaritan, Matthew Eggemeier writes is “the foundational biblical narrative ...that sees a suffering world and responds to it with compassion and mercy” (129-130). It is a prophetic parable, he notes, in three movements: 1. The encounter with the embodied suffering of the other that makes an ethical demand on the subject, 2. A response to the suffering of the other that moves the subject to relinquish self-interest before the face of the other(kenosis) and, 3. The subject is called to respond with compassion and mercy. Eggemeier notes,” The priest and the Levite who pass by the wounded victim regard ‘it’ as a mere ‘thing’ and soon forget they ever saw ‘it’. By contrast, it is the Samaritan who possesses the eyes to see the wounded victim as a person because the Samaritan looked at the sufferer with attention” (147). Prophetic vision is pedagogy of (real) *presence*. It is a “mysticism of open eyes” (Metz). “It is a mysticism that especially makes visible all invisible and inconvenient suffering, and – convenient or not - pays attention to it and takes responsibility for it” (Eggemeier, 124).

The choice facing our Christian churches today is: Will we see through the eyes of the priest and Levite or through the eyes of the Samaritan? Will we take comfort in forgetfulness (amnesia) or recall the dangerous memory of Jesus, the Christ (an-amnesia)? With the globalization of poverty, the mass of humanity teeming across borders in search of a dignified life, the structural and obscene inequality of the market place, and the current ecological desecration of our common home (Pope Francis, 2015), prophetic witness and interruption will be a characteristic mark of authentic Christianity today. Johann Metz asserts, “The issue today is that we should learn to ‘live differently’, so that others should be able to live at all...it is precisely this change of viewpoint, this kind of interruption, this refusal to allow things to keep on as before – in short this act of resistance toward ourselves and our way of life till now – that is at stake today” (Metz, 1981, 95). Our churches need to offer the marginalized and innocent suffering more than crumbs that fall from the rich man’s table. Prophetic education in our churches ought to direct the innocent suffering to a place at the table. This is precisely the parabolic religious developmental element church education needs today.

The thesis of this paper is that education in our churches needs to live in a productive tension and rhythm of the alternating currents of sacramental (analogical) imagining and prophetic (dialectical) imagining. They cannot simply move on parallel tracks. Each is indispensable to the other. The sacramental without the prophetic falls into sentimentality. The prophetic without the sacramental slips exclusively into negativity. They are two conflicting poles of the religious imagination that need to move toward a unity/synthesis in the life of the congregation/parish. Dermot Lane writes, “What is important about the religious imagination is the dynamic capacity of the human spirit to hold together affirmations and negations in a new

unity of transcendent meaning. In this way the religious imagination is able to perceive the infinite within the finite, the eternal within the temporal, and the divine within the human. Within this activity there is a movement by the spirit from the particular to the universal, from the concrete to the ultimate, from the relative to the absolute, from the part to the whole. The religious imagination dares to picture the ‘unpicturable’, to represent the unrepresentable, and to know the unknowable” (Lane, 2003, 20). It is this dare and risk that is at the heart of education in our Christian churches today.

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Participating in God's Imagination: Classical Pragmatism, Trinitarian Theology, and Religious Education

Abstract: This essay explores how a theology based in Classical Pragmatism might be used to develop pedagogical practices that align human imagination with God's Holy Spirit. Theologically, it depends on the work of Donald Gelpi, SJ. Gelpi used metaphysical categories originally explicated by Charles Sanders Peirce (sc., "Firstness", "Secondness", and "Thirdness") to interpret the economic and immanent Trinity. By using Peirce's semiotics – his theory of sign-making-and-interpretation – to interpret God's Holy Spirit as fundamentally imaginative, creative, and discerning, it suggests that close attention to Scripture, art-making, and data collection may be integral elements for our fuller "participation" in the life of God.

Introduction: Exploring a Theological Hunch

This essay explores possibilities. As an exercise in philosophical inquiry, it explores how Pragmatist categories might describe the connection between human imagination and God's Holy Spirit. As an exercise in pedagogical reflection, it explores how such a description might sharpen the theory and practice of religious education, especially in North American and other Anglophone settings.

Classical Pragmatism can speak cogently in modern-day settings because concepts like scientific inquiry, evolution, and pluralist democracy are part of its intellectual DNA. Classical Pragmatists articulate continuities between matter, habit, and thinking; between scientific method, philosophy, and the arts. For many years, Process theologians (often liberal Protestants) were the principle inheritors of this tradition in theological circles. More recently, Catholic,¹ Anglican,² Pentecostal,³ and Evangelical⁴ theologians have begun turning to Classical Pragmatism to understand Christian experience. Perhaps the most systematic of these has been the Jesuit theologian Donald Gelpi (1934-2011). Gelpi's metaphysical framework leaves behind

¹ Paul D. Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2004).

² Ben Quash, *Found Theology: History, Imagination and the Holy Spirit* (London: T&T Clark, 2013); Andrew Robinson and Christopher Southgate, "Semiotics as a Metaphysical Framework for Christian Theology," *Zygon* 45, no. 3 (2010): 689-712.

³ Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002).

⁴ Crystal Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

concepts like subsistent relation, essence, form, and accident, describing Trinity in terms that are arguably more Biblically resonant and more intelligible in present-day life.⁵

Imagination is the power of creativity – the power to put things together in new and useful ways.⁶ In this essay, I unpack one of Gelpi's key hypotheses: that it makes sense to interpret God's Spirit under the same Pragmatist category that encompasses imagination, creativity, discernment, and mind. I then unpack the pedagogical corollary: that teaching students to participate in God's Holy Spirit means helping them become more imaginative, more creative, and more discerning.

If these hypotheses prove coherent and cogent, the pedagogical and intellectual payoffs could be significant. This reasoning could open up lines of inquiry that link philosophy, theology, religious education, scientific method, and theories of creativity. It could help teachers to frame accounts of spirit and Christian faith formation in ways that make better sense to contemporary minds. And it could strengthen ecumenical dialogue on the basis of shared teaching strategies and practical pneumatologies.

A Pragmatist Account of the Imagination

At its most basic, imagination is the mental leap that connects one image or thought with another. Without it, we could not solve problems, use symbols to communicate, set goals, or teach and learn. The theory of sign-making-and-interpretation ("semiotics") developed by the early Pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) can clarify how imagination relates to mind, to faith, and to moral action.

Peirce argues that signs have a *three-fold* nature. A sign is not merely a signifier + a signified (e.g., "Jerusalem" → that Judahite city); it is always a three-fold relationship (e.g., *Psalm 122* extols *Jerusalem* to the reader).⁷ Acknowledging this three-fold-ness makes context, history, and ethical purpose integral to semiotic analysis. It also gives "semiosis" (sign-making) an *emergent* dimension: a sign is always "something by knowing which we [come to] know something *more*."⁸ For Peirce signs evolve as parts of nature,⁹ and they are fundamental to human thought. In his system, "we have no power of thinking without signs:"¹⁰ to have self-consciousness is to imagine ourselves and our own stories; to reason is to imagine things and symbols in ever more complex ways.

⁵ See especially Donald Gelpi, SJ, *The Gracing of Human Experience: Rethinking the Relationship between Nature and Grace* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007); idem, *Encountering Jesus Christ: Rethinking Christological Faith and Commitment* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009); idem, *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994).

⁶ For a thorough exploration of creativity and imagination, see R. Keith Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*, 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷ Downing, *Changing Signs*, 198-204.

⁸ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 8.332; cited and discussed in Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 28, where Eco calls this "a fundamental principle in Peirce's semiotics."

⁹ For example, "biosemiotics" explores biochemical and biological processes as emergent systems of self-organizing communication. For a suggestive review see Victoria N. Alexander, review of "Essential Readings in Biosemiotics: Anthology and Commentary" by Donald Favareau, *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (2011): 412-414. For a more comprehensive review, see Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, "Review Article: Biosemiotic Scenarios," *Semiótica* 195 (2013): 373-408.

¹⁰ Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5.262; cited in Gelpi, *Gracing of Human Experience*, 140.

Peirce identifies three kinds of human reasoning: the ability to induce, to deduce, and to “abduce.”¹¹ Induction is the most basic: it is the hunch that the $x+1^{th}$ iteration of a certain behavior will follow the pattern that has held for all these x -many times. In deduction, the imagination turns signs and symbols this way and that to work out concepts that are already implied. In “abduction,” the imagination takes flight by proposing plausible scenarios. Abduction scans the context and links disparate pieces of evidence to suggest some emerging pattern or situation that may make actual sense. Of course, human abductions are always fallible. Hence in human problem solving, emotional or cognitive dissonance and a period of (often subconscious) incubation give way to an imaginative insight; a diligent truth-seekers will work out its implications, share it in community, and verify it for real-life applicability.¹²

To experience abduction is to experience mind. Abduction allows us to “read” faith traditions and present experience in light of some (third) interpretation that illuminates future significance. It allows us to move from what we see (or seem to see, or are conditioned to see), to what might be, or could be, or should be the case. Abduction lies at the heart of everyday sense-making, of rigorous inquiry, and of lasting conversion, as several religious educators have pointed out.¹³

“Thirddness” as a Metaphysical Category

Most important for our purposes of trinitarian reflection, Peirce connects abduction with the fundamental metaphysical category of Thirddness. Peirce developed his metaphysics to clarify the nature and function of thinking at the broadest and most comprehensive levels. His analysis of formal logic and phenomenology led him to a grand philosophical abduction: there seem to be three dimensions inherent in all experience, which he called Firstness, Secondness, and Thirddness.¹⁴ Firstness means the quality of an experience (e.g., its smoothness, its attractiveness, the impression it makes as a holistic self). This “particular suchness” of an experience can be relatively simple (e.g., “red”) or simultaneously holistic-yet-complex (e.g., “Jesus,” or “the experience of Mahler’s 5th Symphony”). Firstness suggests quality unbounded by form or by pattern, unstructured potentiality, and freedom; it is the pool from which experience wells forth.

Secondness is the facticity of the experience (there it is, hitting you in the face). Secondness marks some potential suchness as a concrete reality with an impact. It can be a force or image that impinges upon us; it can be a limit that constrains our behavior. Secondness suggests specificity: not anything, but this particular thing.

Thirddness is the tendency of the experience. It suggests emergence, direction, mediation and communication. Thirddness becomes evident when we relate two concepts or images in terms of a common characteristic; it becomes evident as we read qualities and impacts *by means of* the signs we perceive or create. Examples of Thirddness include quantum probability and natural laws, ingrained habits and personal character, life-giving or death-dealing social dynamics,

¹¹ For a succinct summary of Peirce’s three forms of inferential reasoning, see Quash, *Found Theology*, 201-208.

¹² Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity*, 58-70.

¹³ Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: A Way of Religious Education* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 93-95; James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 87-89; Sharon D. Parks, “Imagination: The Power of Adult Faith,” in *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 104-126.

¹⁴ For Peirce’s categories and the rationales and history of their development, see Christopher Hookway, *Peirce* (London: Routledge, 1985), 80-117; Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 64-72.

acquired skills, patterns of healthy development. Thirdness is most fully developed in the habit of semiosis that we speak of as “mind.”

No one can have an experience that lacks Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness; and they are not reducible to each other in any logical way. At the same time, they never exist “by themselves” – they coinhere with each other as the necessary dimensions of every experience. For Peirce, these three categories constitute a metaphysics of experience; we cannot get any more “real” than when speaking of First, Second, and Third.

Thirdness and the Imagination of God

Gelpi’s grand theological abduction is that a metaphysics of experience can also be used to interpret the Trinity: that it can interpret how we experience God’s salvation (the “economic Trinity”), and the way that we understand God’s life in itself (the “immanent Trinity”). In a theology based on this metaphysics, all that there is, is experience. God is the “supreme” experience; that is, God experiences everything: the experiences of human and non-human creatures, plus the experience of God’s unique, inner-trinitarian life. In this way, Gelpi lays out a form of panentheism that seeks to retain meaningful distinctions between God’s life and our creaturely freedom.¹⁵

For Gelpi, the Father is a model of Firstness – loving wellspring of all possible qualities and experiences, the source to which the revelation of Christ and interpretive gist of the Spirit refer.¹⁶ The Son is a model of Secondness – the Word of God (Hebrew: *Dabar*; Greek: *Logos*) who dwells among us as God’s action, decision, and fact. The Son is the concrete self-communication of God’s saving purpose; the particular pointer to who God really is.¹⁷ Rather than identifying *Logos* with God’s perfect mind, Gelpi echoes a more biblical tradition that can be traced through Theophilus, Irenaeus, Basil of Caesarea, and Victorinus: the Word is God’s power, efficacious (Gn 1) and active (Heb 4:12), accomplishing that which God sets out to do (Is 55:10-11).¹⁸

Finally, the Spirit is a model of Thirdness. Spirit is evident when creation blossoms in diverse complexity; when individual gifts and capacities are awakened; when beings communicate; when prophetic insight touches humanity; when disparate people are brought together in like-minded community.¹⁹

Just as Thirdness is spirit and mind among humans, Gelpi suggests that God’s Spirit can be seen as the “mind” of the Godhead who “searches everything, even the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10).²⁰ The Spirit is wisdom and “mind” of the Father: “When [God] marked out the foundations of the earth, then [Wisdom] was beside him, like a master worker” (Prv 8:29-30).

¹⁵ Gelpi, *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 91-101; idem, *Gracing of Human Experience*, 351-352; idem, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 467-471.

¹⁶ For the correlation of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, see Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 474-7; idem, *Divine Mother*, 83-123; Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 91-96.

¹⁷ Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 476.

¹⁸ Gelpi, *Divine Mother*, 60-66; idem, *Committed Worship: A Sacramental Theology for Converting Christians*, vols. 1-2 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press / Michael Glazier, 1993), 1.170-171; Anthony Briggman, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 126-147.

¹⁹ Gelpi, *Divine Mother*, 50-6.

²⁰ Cf. Gelpi, *Encountering Jesus Christ*, 466.

The Spirit is “mind” of the Son: “‘For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). If human consciousness is fallible and easily hobbled by bias and physical limitations, God’s discernment is always on target, attuned and attentive to each emerging dynamic and self in the cosmos: prospering those in line with God’s vision, compassionate to creatures in travail, directing and corrective to the wayward, drawing forth patterns that our own human planning could never anticipate or contrive.²¹

Crossing Theological Red Lines?

While this essay mainly explores the pneumatological dimension of Gelpi’s theology, he also develops a full-fledged Christology and soteriology based on Peirce’s categories and on the scriptural witness. For some, Gelpi’s grand abduction may seem to cross theological red lines. Substance metaphysics has long been at the heart of trinitarian theology (since Nicaea) and of Catholic Eucharistic theology (transubstantiation); is it wise – or even orthodox – to abandon it? Gelpi’s panentheistic leanings can disturb Reformed thinkers especially, who insist on the radical difference between a broken creation and a sovereign, gracious God. The similarities to Process theologies will unsettle others. Many Christians find it hard to recognize the God of the Process philosophers: a deity who is neither fully conscious or personal in Godself, nor sovereignly “in charge” of creation.²²

Those who argue a priori that true Christian faith *requires* a Greek substance metaphysics may be overreaching, in light of the cultural and intellectual diversity of present-day world Christianity. But it is a perfectly Pragmatist question to ask whether Gelpi’s interpretations *ring true* for Christians who are seeking to understand their own faith. One test case, for example, could involve the work of John J. Mueller. Mueller offers a dispassionate account of the reasons why Process Theology has failed to capture the imagination of most Roman Catholic thinkers and believers.²³ If a plausible case could be made that Gelpi’s work addresses the “challenges” that Mueller lists (I think it can), then religious educators in Catholic settings might feel empowered to try on Gelpi’s concepts for fit.²⁴

Participating in God’s Imagination: Four Pedagogical Practices

If imagination, creativity, and discernment all go together; if they are all dimensions of mind and spirit; and if they are integral elements in the trinitarian life; then helping others to participate in God’s imagination is a worthy goal for religious educators. I conclude by suggesting four practices that would characterize such a pedagogy of participation: (1)

²¹ See J. C. Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, *Faith in the Living God: A Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2001), 72-73, 76-77, 96-97; cf. Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 259.

²² For a succinct review of Process Theology, see David L. Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 150-64.

²³ John J. Mueller, “Process Theology and the Catholic Theological Community,” *Theological Studies* 47 (September 1986): 412-427.

²⁴ As Gelpi notes, even if his Pragmatist metaphysics lead to “new theological blunders of its own, ... at least the resulting errors would have the interest of speculative novelty instead of simply rehashing the same tired old heresies” of tritheism and modalism to which substance interpretations of the Trinity are perennially prone. Gelpi, *Gracing of Human Experience*, 165-66.

investigating the Biblical witness; (2) remaining fundamentally open to new data and emergent schemas; (3) cultivating the heart of an artist; and (4) creating strong “holding” environments..

(1) Turning to Scripture to help us identify the characteristics of God’s Thirdness / Holy Spirit can lay the groundwork for inquiry and cooperation that crosses Christian denominational and cultural divides.²⁵ A pedagogy for participating in God’s imagination takes seriously the descriptions of Spirit which emerge from the witness of Scripture.²⁶ Scripture suggests that God’s Spirit is creative (Gn 1:2), life giving (Ez 37:1-14; 1 Cor 15:45), and renewing (Ps 104:30). It suggests that She is prophetic (Is 42:1-4; Jl 2:28); that She liberates and restores broken communities (Jgs 3:7-11, 6:33-35, 11:27-29; 1 Sm 11:6-7); that She stands in judgement against oppressive regimes (1 Kgs 22); that She fosters diversity and orchestrates harmony (Acts 2:1-18). It suggests that She helps us to interpret sacred traditions (Jn 14:26); that She helps us testify to the truth (Mt 10:19-20). She is no “ghost in the machine”:²⁷ She sets things in motion, “driving” (Mk 1:12), “conceiving” (Lk 1:31, 35), “bringing to birth” (Jn 3:5). The pedagogy that I am describing invites students to investigate Scripture rigorously so that they can develop and begin to test their own hypotheses about what God’s Spirit is really up to in the world.

(2) As Ben Quash argues, a theological method that honors the Spirit takes up new findings and new articulations, discerning in retrospect whether and how they may fit in God’s plan.²⁸ A pedagogy for participating in God’s imagination cultivates openness to what is new and emerging. It remains open to unexpected new facts (Secondness), and to emerging interpretations and ethical schemas (Thirdness). “I am about to do a new thing, [says the Lord]; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Is 43:19)

When believers take Secondness seriously, they acknowledge historic realities that once seemed unthinkable, but now attest to God’s glory: for example, the Spirit is poured out upon gentiles (Acts 10-11); abolishing slavery becomes a Christian ideal. They also acknowledge the facts and feelings of their own experience. A pedagogy attuned to God’s Spirit opens up spaces where teachers and students can practice the art of “telling it like it is.” Such a pedagogy cultivates the virtue of *parrhēsia* – “frank and honest speech” – which Scripture portrays as a gift of the Spirit (e.g., Acts 4:31).²⁹ Paulo Freire and other critical educators suggest some ways of

²⁵ This is the contention of Jack Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 201-204, 221-27.

²⁶ For a broad-ranging, textually detailed, and thoughtful reflection on the Scriptural witness concerning spirit / Holy Spirit, see Levison, *Inspired*, and Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994; German original, 1992).

²⁷ “A coherent theology of the Spirit requires us to reconsider the nature of divine agency.” Molly Truman Marshall, “Participating in the Life of God: A Trinitarian Pneumatology,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 149.

²⁸ Quash, *Found Theology*, esp. 18, 27-28, 275-78.

²⁹ Cf. also Acts 9:17 with 28. On *parrhēsia*, see Stanley B. Marrow SJ, “*Parrhēsia* and the New Testament,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1982): 431-446; and further, John P. Falcone, “Do Not Quench the Spirit: Rainbow Ministry and Queer Ritual Practice in Catholic Education and Life,” in Christine Firer Hinze and J. Patrick Hornbeck II, eds., *More than a Monologue: Sexual Diversity in the Catholic Church, Volume I: Voices of Our Times* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 121 and 206-7 n. 7.

shaping this kind of classroom: by loving our students; by practicing education as the critical co-investigation of our shared reality; by speaking openly about race, gender, class, and power.³⁰

When believers take Thirdness seriously, they look out for new schemas that explain data better, and for new models to guide future action. For example, as Willis Jenkins has cogently argued, none of our human traditions are today “morally competent” to tackle climate change, pollution, and global economics: these challenges are more complex, more intergenerational, and more interactive than any tradition has heretofore faced. A pedagogy attuned to God’s Spirit invites learners to take up and re-express religious traditions. Assignments invite students to write, create artworks, and pursue projects that grapple with intractable, real-life problems. Through prayer, mystagogy,³¹ and creative ritual, students call to God’s Spirit to raise up the new lifestyles and new solutions that they and all humans will need to survive.

(3) Just as artists put words, colors or musical timbres together in compelling new ways,³² the Spirit brings different creatures together into wholesome, richer, and unexpected new harmonies.³³ A pedagogy for participating in God’s imagination cultivates sign-making-and-interpretation, and an “artist’s heart.” This means giving students the space and the tools to create “codifications” of their religious, personal, and social experience, codifications which they can then critically explore to make sense of their lives.³⁴ It means making rich materials available and accessible: Scripture and rituals, theological texts, natural objects, and artworks both religious and secular.³⁵

In this pedagogy, assignments and exercises guide students as they explore the possible meanings and the potential affordances that these varied materials provide. Teaching “scaffolds” their writing, artworks, and in-class or service projects; curriculum trains students to express their religious thoughts and commitments in fresh and compelling new ways. Like good artists, students are encouraged periodically to step back and evaluate their compositions (whether

³⁰ For an excellent introduction to the spirit of critical pedagogy, see Peter Mayo, *Echoes from Freire for a Critically Engaged Pedagogy* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

³¹ Mystagogy: prayerful, structured reflection on ritual experience that occurs *after* a ritual has been experienced. See Kathleen Hughes, *Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament* (Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1999).

³² “To compose” a poem, painting, or piece of music: from the Latin *componere*, “to put or place one thing next to another.”

³³ For this section on the pedagogy of artistry, see Maris Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). Two others who see religious education in terms of teaching artistic creativity are Derek Webster (see discussion in Joyce Miller, “Using the Visual Arts in Religious Education: An Analysis and Critical Evaluation,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 25, no. 3 (2003): 200-213), and Heather Walton, *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection* (London: SCM, 2014), esp. Part IV: “Poetics, Theology and Practice,” 131-185.

³⁴ The language of “codification” comes from Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 2007 [original 1968]), 114-24. Freire’s classical method requires teams of visiting and local investigators to create codifications that his students in turn could investigate. The Freire-inspired “Theatre of the Oppressed” provides a model in which the students themselves create and explore their own codifications. See Marie-Claire Picher, “Democratic Process and the Theater of the Oppressed,” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 116 (Winter 2007): 79-88; Toby Emert and Ellie Friedland, eds., “Come Closer”: *Critical Perspectives on Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

³⁵ A pedagogy rooted in God’s imagination fits well with Mary Boys’ view that religious education “makes traditions accessible” and helps students to discover and express those traditions’ transformative power. Mary Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions* (Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press, 1989), 193-218.

privately, in groups, or with expert/teacher input). At the end they are invited to discern (as Quash says) whether their “flight of imagination” has landed “upon a *sanctifying* effect.”³⁶

A good way to learn the skills that are required for good artistic coaching is to undergo basic training in an unfamiliar art medium oneself.³⁷ Learning to express ourselves in even one new medium can teach us how to free up our own creativity; it can teach us how to free up our students.

(4) The psychology of art and play therapy underlines how creativity requires a robust “holding environment,” where freedom and security are in healthy balance. D.W. Winnicott was the first to articulate how such an environment allows for the emergence of play-like processes like art-making and fantasy by avoiding both too much chaos and too much dominating control.³⁸ Attentive grownups³⁹ can establish a good holding environment simply by being present to youngsters in a mature, thoughtful, non-dominant way. Teachers can “hold” the learning environment by articulating expectations or setting formal guidelines; in time these can produce well-worn, healthy habits by which the students learn to “hold” space for themselves.

When tackling fraught issues that cut close to the bone, solid frameworks can sequester anxiety and free up attention so that investigation, abduction, and discernment can take place. These frameworks might consist of prayer and ritual, for example, praying through a series of women’s biblical stories before and after a class session on sexism. They might be highly formalized rubrics of performance, like the skits of Bibliodrama⁴⁰ or the social analysis games and *tableaux vivants* of Theatre of the Oppressed.⁴¹ The more often one employs a good holding framework, the more quickly a group can learn to enter into it, and the more deeply they may be able to work. A pedagogy for participating in God’s imagination can prepare its participants for deep and lasting gestalt shifts, that is, for moments of real conversion.

...

The practices I have described here – close reading; openness to new data and schemas; training for artistry; building holding environments – are good pedagogical tools in themselves. Are they perhaps also integral to a pedagogy of Christian *theosis*?

³⁶ “It might be said that the business of searching (and finding) in the Spirit ... legitimates ‘any flight of imagination’, provided this imagination ultimately alights upon a *sanctifying* effect.” Quash, *Found Theology*, 232, original emphasis.

³⁷ As a religious educator, I have experimented in collage, poetry, liturgics, and drama/performance. In her *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, Harris describes how self-consciously learning to paint, to dance, and to clown can deeply shape the educational sensibilities of teachers and ministers.

³⁸ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). On the holding environment in religious education, see Carol Lakey Hess, “Educating in the Spirit,” *Religious Education* 86, no. 3 (1991): 383-398.

³⁹ In the tradition of Winnicott, these are often described as the “good enough mother” or “good enough parent.”

⁴⁰ Peter A. Pitzele, *Scripture Windows: Toward a Practice of Bibliodrama* (Los Angeles: Torah Aura / Alef Design Group, 1998).

⁴¹ Picher, “Democratic Process.”

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